Land use planning, supermarkets and reciprocated ideologies: the construction and mediation of articulated discourses 1979-1999

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LAND-USE PLANNING, SUPERMARKETS AND RECIPROCATED IDEOLOGIES: THE CONSTRUCTION AND MEDIATION OF ARTICULATED DISCOURSES 1979 - 1999

by

Michael Terence Casselden

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

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ABSTRACT

LAND-USE PLANNING, SUPERMARKETS AND RECIPROCATED IDEOLOGIES: THE CONSTRUCTION AND MEDIATION OF ARTICULATED DISCOURSES 1979 – 1999

Michael Terence Casselden.

A cultural studies approach is applied to an analysis of land-use planning theory and practice to seek a holistic understanding of events struggling in praxis to construct ideologies and paradigms about the supermarket phenomenon, in a post-Fordist age. This links interests shared and contested by Government and key parties as agents of social change, including Sainsbury’s as a typification of the supermarket business and the planners’ professional body. The thesis challenges positivist assumptions embodying tenets of classical economic theory and rationalist, empirical methodology. It focuses on attempts to achieve ideological hegemony by the re-articulation of common sense explanations through everyday events mediated by late industrial capitalism’s commodification process.

The nature of the post-modernist dialectic centred on Capital’s modernisation project favouring a new service economy is explored in relation to an organic interplay between ideas and action, and the linking of planning theory to reification. The nature of ideological code systems in relation to retail land-use planning, as a feature of culture and their discursive role in an ongoing struggle for power and dominance, is evaluated in the deconstruction of historical and contemporary texts. A new concept of dialectical pluralism is offered which acknowledges the dynamic construction of ideologies and paradigms between parties in everyday relational experience.

The methodology offers a wide, topic-based inductive research focus taking the four poles of Government, the planning profession, academia and the business sector at points of apparent harmony and disjuncture, to review the means by which events in time and space are struggled for to establish ideological hegemony. A priority is to compare and contrast assumptions underpinning the training of land-use planners that reward or inhibit vested and less defined interests, including those legitimising and funding professional research projects.

Key words: Land-use planning; Supermarkets; Ideologies; Discourses; Post-modernist; Commodification.
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ABBREVIATIONS

AGM – Annual General Meeting
BRC – British Retail Consortium
CR – Critical Realism
DCPN – Development Control Policy Note
DETR – Department of the Environment & Transportation in the Regions
DOE - Department of the Environment
DOH – Department of Health
DTI – Department of Trade & Industry
EEPTU – Electrical Engineering & Plumbing Trade Union
EMHA – East Midlands Housing Association
ERM - Exchange Rate Mechanism
LPA – Local Planning Authority
LPPEG – Labour Party Planning & Environment Group
MHLG – Ministry of Housing & Local Government
NR – New Realism
OFT – Office of Fair Trading
PFI – Private Finance Initiative
PPG – Planning Policy Guidance
PSBR – Public Sector Borrowing Requirement
RTPI – Royal Town Planning Institute
RWP – Retail Working Party
USDAW – Union of Shop, Distribution & Allied Workers
INTRODUCTION

This thesis comes after many years working in local government as a senior front-line development control officer processing planning applications and confronting policy issues. My experience with the public and the wider decision-making landscape, occupying what Gramsci might have seen as points of disjuncture embracing everyday struggles between Stuart Hall's discursive formations, was special, particularly as, rather unusually, I qualified later in my career. Unlike the more conventional route that qualified chartered town planners take, newly bringing their higher education and training to the job, my everyday experience uniquely influenced both. In return, I had to rethink many of the philosophies and paradigms engaging the profession in the context of my own modified exposure to what planners actually did in everyday culture. Particularly important was the nature of traditional explanations which concentrated on the formal or informal administrative decision making scenarios, perhaps questioning the real ability of planners to effect change, but seldom raising issues about power and control beyond what were normally identified in empirical terms as conventional psychological and political relationships.

As a mature student I obtained an Open University degree in the early 80's and went on to Trent Polytechnic to study Town and Country Planning. Latterly, I became a principal planning officer for Charnwood Borough Council, but early retirement through ill health forced a context in which I could start to confront fundamental questions about the nature and role of town planning as an
ideological discourse in the light of my experience. Thus my research and this thesis might be seen as a culmination of my thoughts about the nature of land-use planning, the philosophies underpinning it and just where power does reside. However, I prefer to see it as a synthesis, not just in terms of my working experience as a chartered planner, but for what I continue to do, partly as a Planning Aid volunteer seeking to engage marginalised groups in the planning process and my future professional role. In focusing on assumptions constructing the planning process and the dynamics of interplay between contesting paradigms, I hope this research will add to a body of knowledge for planners and others seeking a more positive engagement in the processes of land-use regulation to achieve greater social equity, especially in the arena of Planning Aid which engages my attention, principally in the East Midlands.

By using Sainsbury’s as an exemplification, the thesis examines and interprets what may be seen as a struggle in space and time for ideological hegemony over the underlying principles and purposes of the land-use planning system connecting Government and a plurality of interests representing the retail industry, including Sainsbury’s, and the planners’ professional body, the RTPI. The conceptualisation here acknowledges Miliband’s pluralist assembly of Government and State organs of power, including the Civil Service, serving capitalism (1973). Thus the autonomy of power production is held to be a function of political opposition in struggle beyond Parliament (but held potentially vulnerable to a franchise offering possibilities for change through an
agency context) with pressure brought to bear by external groups such as the trade unions. The Government and the State cannot operate as a mere instrument of Capital and in Foucault's terms regimes of power or 'Governmentality' operate through a series of discursive formations in culture, thus according with Gramsci's integrated approach towards the State and Civil society, which will influence the analysis.

Chapter 1 lays a foundation explaining the inspiration for the research that grew from my planning dissertation and introduces key conceptual approaches offering a critique of logical positivism and crude Marxist structuralism. Also, a context is provided by a focus on ideology and postmodernism as a dialectical feature of late capitalism. Cultural studies as a conceptual approach is offered as a new focus for viewing discourses constructing and engaging the planning process as against the shallowness of simplistic pluralist approaches, often adopted as neutral empiricism. Thus the conceptual framework lays emphasis on social behaviour and related culturally originated paradigms rather than seeking psycho-behaviourist explanations, which tend to focus on individual responses to measurable stimuli, devoid of interaction in the context of social, and potentially ideological, roles.

Chapter 2 reviews planning literature and focuses on the nature of the planning system as a series of cultural events linking central Government, market,
professional, political and epistemological discourses. Time-related events during the period under focus are introduced.

Chapter 3 looks at retailing as culture, offering a critique of literature and its symbolic conceptual approaches conventionally reflecting fixed and somewhat ossified social relations of production and consumption, including the obverse 'shopping', constructed in terms of a signified code system. Short histories of the emergence of the supermarket and Sainsbury's are offered as a means of establishing the company as a typification in inductive terms and thus through social agency, to set the context for a deconstruction of key time related events which follow.

Chapter 4 analyses ideological reification and the commodification process by deconstructing key events and documents reflected in planning and retail cum shopping material produced by Government, the retail industry, the planning profession and political parties during two political eras, the 80's and 90's. The 70's, which sets the introductory context, reflects the paradigms and pressures for decentralisation in land-use planning, whilst the 80's adds the deregulatory imperative fostered by the Conservative, Thatcher Government. In contrast, the 90's witness an era of a new centralisation and the quickening of capitalism's modernisation project continued under the New Labour, Blair Government. This falls hard on the heels of the coup d'état which toppled the Thatcher Government and led to John Major's new policy imperative re-establishing centralisation as a
political and spatial focus in favour of urban centres. How the political elements favouring the sectional interests of Capital interact and mediate in a struggle for ideological hegemony, is analysed. Here, and throughout, the capitalised terms ‘Capital’ and ‘Labour’ are used to signify the key interests in the relations of production, used here not so much in a fixed structural context, but as conceptual poles to test the blurred and dynamic nature of antagonisms and shared meanings at points on a continuum, in late capitalist society.

Chapter 5 presents a synthesis putting the nature of the resultant planning paradigms into ideological context favouring market processes and reviews this against questions concerning the nature of the liberal democratic ideal inspiring the research. It discusses how this deals with epistemology in Stuart Hall’s terms as an emancipatory project and a research focus is presented for the future, which uses the newly defined concept of ‘dialectical pluralism’ as a critical conceptual focus. The thesis seeks a dialogue with practising planners, so its underlying analysis of power formations may offer better analytical insights. It has particular relevance for the operation of the RTPI’s Planning Aid Service in pursuit of its wider social objectives.

This has been a complex and demanding project, not just because of the goals I set myself, made difficult during a period of fluctuating illness and recent major surgery, but a learning process I had to initiate, in order to assimilate a whole new way of thinking. For the burdens of coping with that and enduring many tedious,
boring rants, occasional losses of temper and frustrated tantrums, I have to
acknowledge the support of, and thank, the most patient and intellectually
influential person in my life, namely my partner, Lindsay Casselden. As a graduate
of the Open University and a Master’s post-graduate of Loughborough University
she introduced me to cultural studies and associated writings of Stuart Hall and
Foucault, and these seminal influences have been instrumental in the direction my
research has taken.

The key catalyst for the research has been my supervisor, mentor and friend of
long-standing, Dr. David Gillingwater MRTPI. He not only initiated the project
when he met me in a rather depressed state via a casual encounter one day in
Loughborough several years ago, but has provided constant support and effective
encouragement during some very low times. I first met him on an Open University
course many years ago and my success there led him to encourage me to take the
planning diploma at Trent Polytechnic where he was a senior lecturer. He
introduced me to Gramsci and Marx’s incredible insights into the nature of praxis
and a complex process of emerging schisms within the ranks of formal parties in
the political process, via ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire’. Further, I am deeply indebted
to him for all his help and inspiration, and all the wonderfully enjoyable meetings
we have had at the university. I shall certainly miss them and his singularly bright
companionship, which undoubtedly enticed me to this seminal point in my study.
There are many other people who have been so kind and supportive, both within the Civil & Building Engineering department at the University and Pilkington Library and beyond the campus, too numerous to mention. However, I must say a special thanks to my daughter Biddy for her invaluable help and support, partly as a former librarian at the University of Northumberland in Newcastle and now as a lecturer, there. Also, her partner, Paul Greenhalgh, who also lectures there as a chartered surveyor and is a PhD candidate researching urban regeneration, for his help and support. In addition, my son Nial, who has just become a planner in Liverpool. Perhaps he might be persuaded to help and become involved in what has undoubtedly become a lifetime's project; also to his partner, Suzie, for egging me on. I must also record my thanks to Brigitte Williams, Sainsbury's Archivist, especially for the additional Sainsbury documents she found for me, along with some useful reading material and Martin Pope, formerly of Boots, for introducing me to the writing of Joel Garreau. Lastly, George Monbiot of The Guardian for telling me about the Liberal Democratic publication and other sources. All it leaves me to say is that I alone am responsible for what is written here, and for any shortcomings or mistakes.
CHAPTER 1

KEY PROBLEMATIC & ISSUES

At the time of writing up this thesis, critics eagerly await the Competition Commission's report on the monopoly position of the five leading supermarket businesses in the UK. It offers an apparent culmination in the circumstances leading to the general criticism of their position over the last few years, when they have been systematically accused in the press of operating a monopoly, not only against the interests of consumers, but of suppliers. The report is before Ministers and press speculation is rife that the Government may wish to explore the option of changing the land use planning criteria and policy by which planning applications for large retail outlets for selling primarily convenience goods, are considered.

This is particularly timely, as it highlights the key issues and problems confronted here. That is, how retailing is not just a highly ideological activity seeking to defend its corner, and its perceived right to expand, locate and sell more to make profits in favoured locations, but how it struggles to this end by fostering a more receptive climate of opinion. In so doing, how the service industry articulates its cause at many levels within everyday culture, seeking to construct a wider, political hegemony sympathetic to its interests. Indeed, how it seeks to challenge, modify and construct Government policy, as part of its mission to marshal political opinion, whilst actively securing its vested interest by engaging in a wider process to construct processes of consumption. Also, how in turn the competing
ideological and political paradigms advanced by myriad parties such as politicians, the retail service industry, consumers groups and the professions, ostensibly reflecting convoluted interests of Labour and Capital, come to share, dominate and exploit seemingly opposing ideological perspectives, for own their ends. To try and seek answers to these questions, the thesis, at its core, focuses upon the nature of a symbiotic relationship between supermarket interests and the English planning system as interactive components of popular culture, expressed through everyday events embracing people in social relationships.

Until now, conventional land-use planning control 'wisdom', as established (or perhaps consolidated) in 1947 with the first Town and Country Planning Act, and operated in consensus by successive post Second World War Governments, has had as its key focus, the inviolability of an underlying free, competitive capitalist market. As such, the planning process, as tested by challenges to formal decisions via planning appeals and, ultimately, through the courts, has long established the fundamental principle that it should not concern itself with either supply or demand factors held to influence competition between companies. Thus, planning control in urban and rural areas was, and still is, naively viewed as a relatively neutral, technical cum administrative activity, policed by an unbiased profession of qualified chartered town planners, members of The Royal Town Planning Institute, acting dispassionately and rationally for the public good. Alongside elected local (and central) politicians ostensibly making the formal decisions, they largely focus on future, physical outcomes. In reality, of course, the courts
underpin and legitimise this rather formalistic version of events, in the context of central Government policy, highly receptive to the interests of Capital. Thus, land-use control was never intended to decide, for example, how many greengrocers or butchers would operate within a locality. The competitive forces of supply and demand would deal with that, whilst planners and ultimately the courts, would simply embrace non-political, public amenity issues that could be empirically identified, measured and rationally evaluated by decision makers, in the public interest.

As it now transpires, the effect of the Commission’s investigation not only disciplines a key focus upon the constellation of historical circumstances that led to Government intervention. It also raises key questions about the perceived ‘neutrality’ of the retail industry. How in the real world it operates within capitalism in terms of its ongoing relationships to both the world of planning control, seemingly under the direction of central Government, and to the wider society providing its consumers, whilst protecting its business interests. Firstly, how it confronts a seemingly ambiguous political context in which the new Labour Government elected in 1997, with a mission to intervene in society to tackle social exclusion, seeks to prioritise the modernisation of the UK economy to ostensibly confront the ‘realities’ of major global economic and social changes. Secondly, in this scenario, the outcomes and effects of the responses and struggles of the retail sector to protect and advance its competitive position, as one of private capitalist firms simply ‘striving to be the best’. Also thirdly, quite fundamentally, how a
potential monopoly effect within the retail sector, squares with the tenets of our liberal democracy, overtly seeking greater public participation in everyday public life, particularly through the land-use planning process, where most applications are formally determined in the public arena by elected politicians.

Despite this rather simplistically presented, ritualistic formal process, it is enshrined in law and the perceived social advantages of new development and growth are culturally viewed as political gains. Thus, physical development is held to bring not only sources of new wealth and rewards for successful entrepreneurs, commensurate with the synonymous capitalist goals of profit maximisation, but wider, benefits. Within capitalist class society, commercial growth is viewed as the key means by which the allocation of welfare and opportunities for personal development for the masses is allocated, however unfairly, through its ‘trickle-down’ effects, whilst taxation funds a minimum welfare net for the socially deprived.

As the so-called frontiers of the State are rolled back, arguments for and against new development thus achieve greater significance in terms of both wealth creation and pressures for more democratic involvement in everyday affairs of society which impinge upon public welfare. More often than not, the two interests directly clash. The less direct control an elected Government has over the direct provision of goods and services in capitalist society, the more critical seems to become the nature of the liberal democracy on offer, particularly its professed call
for better opportunities for public involvement through elected public office. Thus almost certainly, questions need to be asked about just how much the facade of democratic power is constructed by the combined interests of Capital.

With the end of Thatcher's Government in 1990 after an internal power struggle in the Conservative Party, there was an expectation that monetarist policy favouring privatisation and the creation of an alternative share owning 'democracy' in the wake of Circular 22/80 would subside. This paradigm had envisaged a new consolidation of ideological, political and economic power firmly in the private corporate arena, at the expense of public municipality and the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR). Here, instead, a new residual, and arguably effete and lop-sided, partnership would see slimmed down local councils shedding labour, drawing up and policing contracts placed with the private sector. Thus, not only were the interests of Capital to be moved firmly away from the public to the private arena, but also the effect would be a transfer of accountability from voters to shareholders and the boardroom. Control in the modern age was thus synonymous with the power of private ownership and the municipalised function was to be relegated to the management of legal contracts with the private sector for services rendered, by public appointees, signified by a ceremonial, annual event.

Despite the election of New Labour and a new emphasis on 'best value', the drift to privatisation and the corporatisation of local government has continued during
the latter part of the 90’s, thus raising more questions about the nature of electoral responsibility and political accountability. These issues become even more contentious, particularly for local planning issues, the more public expression is interpreted as demanding greater local public involvement and clear accountability in planning matters. Yet the powers on offer for the elected councillor seem merely to signify, if not less direct public involvement in the political process, then certainly a new kind of administrative function. This appears to necessitate better administrative skills for a new, first tier cabinet structure comprising an elite political leadership, whilst all-party ‘second tier’ councillors principally have a vetting function, rather than fulfilling the more traditional active role of active ‘front-line’ community politicians within a formalised party structure.

All this is part of a key problematic in formalising and defining the extent to which real participation in the planning process is on offer; indeed, if at all ever possible, as a genuine sharing of power. Also, the extent to which an actual decision-making process allied to a particular development process, empirically defined and recorded, truly reflects the full nature of the ideologies at work and how, in real terms, they articulate with other cultural events and processes. For unless this is properly understood and the real nature of the social processes influencing and shaping land-use planning outcomes adequately confronted, there can be no constructive strategy for popular involvement in the process, and for determining which interests are best served and whether they are understood and welcome.
Of course, there have been a variety of opinions expressed about the extent to which development and growth is a good thing. At the local level, a key argument against supermarkets is that they have rationalised the culture of retailing so as to militate against the smaller neighbourhood shop. These have been unable to exploit the same economies of scale, to the disadvantage of all categories of socially marginalised consumers. Particularly, low income communities in towns and the inner city have been especially hit as supermarkets have increased in size and decentralised, undermining investment in older, more centralised shopping areas in towns and traditional neighbourhoods, where corner shops have closed and jobs and services lost. In particular, the out-of-town supermarket has come to characterise a key feature of the modern, suburban process, which has seen the flight of capital away from city and town centres as more skilled and higher paid jobs have been exported and, in consequence, urban prosperity for those remaining has declined.

Private investment in housing has tended to concentrate in the suburbs, to accommodate more mobile, higher waged middle-class groups which have been perceived in historical terms as generally relocating away from town and city centres. Shopping habits have thus changed and bulk buying by car owning customers with changing life-style priorities has become a key feature of modern convenience shopping. Thus, out-of-town supermarkets have been generally presented as following them and perceived as catering for better off groups, regardless of location. It certainly can be argued that they have consistently
exploited that position, for example, encouraging car borne traffic as an integral feature of the supermarket phenomenon and have sought to legitimise it as a customer preference. Historically, this has been presented as a convenience, which inevitably marginalised the concept of public transport. However, more recently the sector has tried to reverse this perception by marketing its support for public transport, i.e., buses, keen to associate itself with prevailing paradigms about environmental sustainability. Historically, the supermarket interest has come to be seen almost as part of a class divide, which has abandoned the poorer, dispossessed and unwaged to the low investment and now environmentally neglected urban centres with poor convenience shopping facilities.

These issues represent the commonplace perceptions of supermarket retailing as it applies to planning and, again, more recently there has been a degree of consensus between Conservative and Labour Governments towards measures to protect older urban centres. This witnessed a shared effort to put a stop to out-of-town shopping policy with new policy initiatives, to be considered in more detail, later. These, of course, rely on physical measures and policy approaches, which continue to treat land use changes as administrative events, or outcomes of a rational decision-making process. Here, that assumption is challenged and the argument is that they are not neutral events, devoid of ideological processes at work. Thus a search for a more holistic understanding and explanation of what motivates and constructs the social interaction between the retail interests and wider society which embrace formal mechanisms for land-use control, suggests that traditional, epistemological
approaches utilising deductive empiricism are largely unhelpful. A key assumption here is that everyday human events are constructed living ideologies formed through their intertextuality with others. By this, it is meant that the concept of 'ideology' should not be seen as a mere abstraction, but in Marxian terms the outcome of dialectical materialism, where human events impinge upon one another as a product of their potentially antagonistic social relationships in time and space.

Through their reciprocated articulations, human actions have the potential to mediate and subvert images or representations carrying symbolic associations, and the capacity to express disparate meanings comprising specific code systems, which are open to deconstruction. Human events in social action and dialogue are living ideologies, thus rather than seek explanations through concepts and models based on nature, favouring individual behaviour and positivist science, the approach here will be to attempt a deconstruction of constructed discourse in which ideology is produced and power relations exercised discursively through everyday events, linking people's real lives. Metaphor thus will openly express associations through the use of a cultural studies approach, as expounded by the culturalist and neo-Marxist, Stuart Hall. He sees the practice of 'cultural studies', not so much as an easily defined, or 'worked' discipline, with clear boundaries and a concise abstract conceptuality. Rather, as a complex and shifting discursive formation, highly influenced in its analysis of symbolic events by linguistics and semiotics. Also, in its focus on and concern with seeking to understand and give
meaning to events dynamically located at points of conflict, it is imbued with contradiction and thus presents immense difficulties for the practitioner:

"The metaphor of the discursive, of textuality, instantiates a necessary delay, a displacement, which I think is always implied in the concept of culture. If you work on culture, or if you've tried to work on some other really important things and you find yourself driven back to culture, if culture happens to be what seizes hold of your soul, you have to recognise that you will always be working in an area of displacement."

(Hall, 1999a, page 105)

Thus, cultural studies cannot be seen as a rigidly structured and 'safe' discipline offering simple solutions, or about to demonstrate comfortable causal links between human events. In encountering the complexity of real, everyday life, constructed through contradictory ideological events, the practitioner stands on uncertain ground in time and space:

"There's always something decentered about the medium of culture, about language, textuality, and signification, which always escapes and evades the attempt to link it, directly and immediately, with other structures. And yet at the same time, the shadow, the imprint, the trace, of those other formations, of the intertextuality of texts in their institutional positions, of texts as sources of power, of textuality as a site of representation and resistance, all of those questions can never be erased from cultural studies."

(Ibid., page 105-6)

Hall's approach, thus, is that of the role of Gramsci's organic intellectual in society, involved in a direct construction of praxis, where epistemology, and in particular cultural studies, acknowledges its inevitable political project: to seek a better understanding of reality for the public good. More specifically, to link up
with those social interests seeking social justice and enabling research outcomes to be available as a political resource for human emancipation. Thus, cultural studies has to be a discursive formation built on the relations of a lived and open praxis structured around an integrated methodology, rather than constituting a segmented, tightly contained and ostensibly ‘neutral’, academic discipline. The difficulties of confronting the seemingly contradictory nature of methodology and real life events, and in attempting to combine what some might see as a ‘biased’ politics with a ‘neutral’ theoretical academic practice, are readily apparent, but essential given the ideological nature of the ‘the project’:

“That is an extremely difficult question to answer because, philosophically, it has always been impossible in the theoretical world of cultural studies - whether it is conceived either in terms of texts and contexts, of intertextuality, or of the historical formations in which cultural practices are lodged - to get anything like an adequate theoretical account of culture's relations and effects. Nevertheless I want to insist that until and unless cultural studies learns to live with this tension, a tension that all textural practices must assume - a tension which (Edward) Said describes as the study of the text in its affiliations with 'institutions, offices, agencies, classes, academies, corporations, groups, ideologically defined parties and professions, nations, races and genders' - it will have renounced its worldly vocation.”

(Ibid., page 106)

Thus, whilst in narrow Foucauldian terms, a discursive formation represents a unique and self contained system of power, derived from its own inherent and formalised structure of cultural practice, for Hall, the difference is clear in that he stands this conception on its head in Gramscian terms. Culture is not structural or reductionist phenomena, the same as ideology or vice-versa in a functional sense; but it comes to represent the living process by which it is formed and sustained, or
modified. So given that epistemology focuses on this state of affairs through the
work of a community of academics engaging in a wider collective of praxis, it can
never be neutral. Indeed, recognition of this political nature to real cultural studies
is vital for Hall, as is the plasticity of the discipline attempting to mirror the
complexity of real life it seeks to understand:

"That is to say, unless and until one respects the necessary
displacement of culture, and yet is always irritated by its failure to
reconcile itself with other questions that matter, with other
questions that cannot and can never be fully covered by critical
textuality in its elaborations, cultural studies as a project, an
intervention, remains incomplete. If you lose hold of the tension,
you can do extremely fine intellectual work, but you have lost
intellectual practice as politics."

(Ibid.)
The Frankfurt School: Commodification and Positivism

Between the twenties and sixties, the Frankfurt school of critical theorists analysed and produced a series of critiques about modern capitalist industrial organisation and its underlying subjugation of human values to the achievement of profit. They analysed what they perceived to be the coercive effects of mass culture and production in late capitalist industrial society. Fordism and global capitalism redefined an exploitative relationship between producers and consumers, resulting in a mediocre, mass culture. A key feature of their approach was to examine the inherent nature of praxis: the relationship of specific ideas within an historical context to particular social outcomes. They rejected the fallacy of positivist, value-free scientific rationality pre-eminent over human values and, therefore, that in Darwinian terms, the future would be a natural, progression of past events. However, as Marxists they accepted both the roles of history and human agency as key interrelated features of the dialectic, where:

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

(Marx & Engels, 1977, page 96)

Thus the past acts as a force which, in a contradictory sense, both constrains yet offers opportunities for social change, mediating the present through our knowledge of social relationships and events, constructed through dialectical materialism:
“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”

(Ibid., page 35)

Human agency is at the heart of political agitation that accompanies revolutionary change, what Marx and Lenin would see as the mission of the combined interests of Labour, to prevent Capital from subverting cultural conditions enabling social change, leading to political and social emancipation of the working class. The dialectic is a key focus in their development of praxis, engaging in an on-going struggle within the sphere of epistemology to reveal the highly political nature of their project, seeking to engage the real world where human relationships are contested and outcomes struggled for. Not for them the ‘safe’ worlds of academia, but as Marx so astutely signifies in his ‘Thesis on Feuerbach’:

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however is to change it.”

(Ibid., page 30)

In this context, despite some differences of emphasis, there was a unifying rationale to their combined approach. Thus, their project sought to:

“...establish a critical social consciousness able to penetrate existing ideology, sustain independent judgement and be capable, as Adorno (Horkheimer) put it, ‘of maintaining its freedom to think things might be different’.”

(Held, 1980, page 38)

Or as the opening quotation by Ramón Fernandez in Walter Benjamin’s address ‘The Author As Producer’, presented to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in
1936 put it in a more ideologically succinct manner, in tune with the prevailing paradigm that sought to reverse the exploited position of Labour:

“... the task is to win over the intellectuals to the working-class by making them aware of their enterprises and of their conditions as producers.”

(Frascina, & Harrison, 1982, page 213)

Despite criticisms of a form of economic elitism levelled at them, this approach takes as a principled strand uniting the writers, the all-pervasive significance of the commodification process at the heart of capitalist social relations of production. This not only defines the context for dominant ideological power relations between producers and consumers manifested through everyday cultural events, but significantly raises issues about the coercive (and highly undemocratic) nature and effects of the ‘production of consumption’:

“...the expansion of commodity production throughout the twentieth century has given rise to a vast accumulation of material culture in the form of consumer goods, as well as the proliferation of sites for purchase and consumption. This is deemed to have resulted in the growing importance of leisure and consumption activities in modern western societies and this in turn is regarded as increasing the capacity for ideological control, domination and the manipulation of the population and thus their separation from an alternative and, indeed, more ‘authentic’ social existence.”

(Du Gay et al, 1997a, page 87)

A focus on the processes of commodification and its manifestation through cultural forms linking the worlds of planning and shopping through mediated articulations, is therefore a key conceptual approach here. Fundamental to this is a rejection of rational empiricism as a method of inquiry and explanation that seeks
to apply perceived notions of order and rationality in nature to cultural events, involving people and their distinct social relationships.
Sainsbury and the Decision Making Process

My thesis considers a fundamental issue, that is the nature of the existence of a symbiotic ideological relationship between the processes of land-use planning control and supermarket retailing in the UK (mostly in England), inextricably bound by a reciprocated culture of commodification constructing consumers and producers. It looks at the extent to which relative ideological power relationships have operated over a specific time period. In particular, it focuses on the myriad and complex social relationships reciprocated between the land-use planning process and the interests of large retailing during the 80’s and 90’s, as typified by Sainsbury, one of the leading four key players (including Tesco, Asda and Safeway) in the UK supermarket retail industry.

These two decades represent an epoch of seismic cultural and political change in post Second World War Britain, culminating in what some might see as the triumphant struggle of Capital over the Welfare State and a consensual liberal democratic interventionist paradigm in the social and economic life of the nation. Thus, the period ushered in major cultural changes seeking to minimise the imperative of the land-use planning control regime, its legal framework and professional practice, as the outcome of a key struggle to establish a new ideological hegemony in favour of an unfettered market affording a more flexible investment regime, favouring the interests of Capital.
Central to this was a concerted effort to challenge the culture (and thus the professional goals and values) of the decision-makers and participants in the development process, which ostensibly ran opposite to expectations of greater public input into the grant of planning permission. This can be viewed as embodying a significant, yet simple problematic: the seemingly irreconcilable clash of vested interests. How to meet those general and consensual expectations for greater popular participation in the planning process whilst prioritising the interests of Capital, inevitably reducing opportunities for public involvement, to achieve non-pecuniary social and political aims. This key contradiction is played out in real life, through real events constructed through specific social relationships and signified by meaning and social expectations. Thus a central feature of the research has attempted to achieve, through deconstruction, a holistic understanding of the context in which critical political decisions and actions were made and/or played out during the two decades following the election of the Thatcher Government in 1979. This initiated a radical cultural change in the established political paradigm, with implications for both the processes of government and wider formal and informal cultural expectations, and the new meanings and cultural values it imparted to the phenomena of supermarket retailing.

This attempt to establish a more honest and open account of the actual relationship operating between the land-use planning system and supermarket interests was inspired by my dissertation for the award of a diploma in Town & Country
Planning, a professional qualification obtained in 1983. It sought to explain the circumstances which finally enabled Sainsbury to gain planning permission for a small supermarket on County Council owned land on the edge of Loughborough Town centre, after several planning application refusals on land-use policy and highway related grounds, which were supported by local objectors. The eventual grant of planning permission which allowed the store, created a catalyst that, in land use terms, some fifteen years later, was to legitimise and give meaning to the emergence of a wider retail park beyond the central core of the town. This not only physically straddled the central business zone and an outlying primarily residential area, originally perceived as warranting different policy approaches to protect their underlying characters and geometry, but historically reflects the outcome of a key struggle between major contradictory planning and political paradigms. That struggle is on-going and usefully serves to illustrate the processes by which the old ways of looking at the urban land use ‘problem’ were culturally constructed and how they come to legitimise ostensibly changing perceptions of planning objectives. Furthermore, how new paradigms come to legitimise (and control) past paradigms by reinterpreting and modifying established professional hegemony. In other words, how the system of land use planning control offers the semblance of continuity of approach (rationality based on centrality), whilst affording itself flexibility to accommodate the elasticity (constructed needs) of investment (reflected in decentralisation) by the interests of Capital.
This short inductive study employed a pluralist approach, empirically identifying components of the identifiable decision-making process as a sequential chain of events, evaluating the success or otherwise of the perceived participation of the actors in the planning process, as a function of assumed class interests. The approach challenged the perceived ‘neutrality’ of the formal development control process by hypothesising simplistic power relationships as a function of their perceived relative ability to control or influence outcomes. Central to this was the use of Stephen Lukes’s three dimensions of power and the significance in the relative ability of groups to apparently control agendas and to succeed in a struggle for ideological and political dominance. Amongst established researchers and writers, he acknowledged what he saw as a ‘one-dimensional’ approach such as that offered by Dahl, (1957) simply focusing on revealed preferences. Also, a second dimension was added by Bachrach and Baratz (1962) identifying the potential control of agendas. Lukes extends this by considering those actions (and non-actions) which come to shape and modify desires and beliefs:

“In consequence, neither revealed preferences nor grievances and inchoate demands will always express them. ....power on this view may encourage and sustain attitudes and expectations that work against people’s ‘welfare interests’ or subvert and thwart their pursuit of their ulterior focal aims, or both.”

(Lukes, 1974, pp 9-10)

Whilst this approach had considerable value as a ‘creature of its time’ by focusing on the components of a specific social process, nevertheless, its underlying conceptual approach can be mainly criticised for a reliance upon positivist,
empiricist social scientific methodology, largely embodying behaviourist analysis. As such, it offered just a partial and somewhat distorted, view of the decision-making context. Underlying this were 'rational' and 'value-free' assumptions about outcomes, which posited normative teleological assumptions about the future. At worst, it employs ideological associations under the guise of epistemological 'neutrality' by insisting on the employment of abstract models (usually irrationally based on nature) as metaphors for verifiable truths. Equally valid as a fundamental criticism of its approach is that the focus of the enquiry artificially 'ring-fences' the arena of enquiry, which in turn structures (and limits) the phenomena (transposed to abstract data) for analysis. It ignores the wider cultural linkages played out through real, potentially antagonistic, social events, inherent in the ordinary human relationships of production and consumption. Also, the means by which these 'ordinary' cultural events with symbolic associations forming code systems, signifying meaning for people through ideology, continuously reproduce and legitimise socially constructed events and meanings through their articulation and mediation of associated ideological discourses. In other words, what Stuart Hall sees as 'discursive formations' (Hall, 1999a, page 98), after Foucault: and what is interpreted here to represent disparate, yet self-contained collections of cultural paradigms, represented by specific and referential, situational conceptualisations.

Yet in Lukes's third dimension there is a tacit acceptance of a cultural process, which sustains, modifies and constructs the attitudes and values of consumers and
producers, albeit positing the somewhat narrowing and limiting notion of a false consciousness. Clearly, it is possible to take Lukes's third dimension further by, firstly, looking at a holistic cultural interplay arising from the interactions of people, not as autonomous individuals, but as social agents with roles defined by specific social relationships. Thus from the construction and mediation of social actions, can be identified a highly complex articulation occurring between every day events, serving to construct and define a panoply of human roles and life chances.

In retrospect thus, the circumstances serve to demonstrate this by highlighting the inadequacy of the specific epistemological approach. The Sainsbury supermarket site was in a 'zone of transition' between the edge of the town's commercial centre and adjacent residential suburbs, comprising redundant gasworks, part of a larger area of land including the former Loughborough Colleges, assembled and owned by the Leicestershire County Council. In market terms, even without planning permission, the land had a high commercial value, reflecting the 'common sense' expectations of the County Council's property department, and in terms of that conventional view, normally expressed as 'hope value', was 'ripe for redevelopment'.

The first draft local plan produced by the Council designated the land for commercial purposes, but there was local pressure to change this to residential to meet a perceived shortfall in local low-cost working class rented housing. The key
supporter for this approach was the East Midlands Housing Association (EMHA) which specialised in meeting working class housing needs in this type of inner town location to complement local authority housing schemes, suffering the effects of the growing privatisation of public investment in housing. They had already developed a similar scheme of flats opposite the site. Such a consistent approach met prevailing planning paradigms of the late 70’s under Callaghan’s Labour administration, although reflecting a continuity of land-use planning policy preferences of successive post second world war Governments, seeking a geometrically compact town centre based primarily on retail land-use. Also, both main political parties supported the active encouragement of the regeneration of this ‘twilight’ residential neighbourhood, in Burgess’s classical terms, a zone of transition, abutting the north side of the town centre. This was initiated by Charnwood Borough Council’s officers, who were professional chartered planners, whilst supported by the neighbourhood community association.

Prior to local government reorganisation in 1974, which merged the Labour controlled town and rural areas, the Conservatives were formerly in political control of the suburban rural corridor between Loughborough and Leicester City and they took control of the new district on Charnwood. Despite party political hostilities, there was a benevolent consensus between the main political parties on this one particular issue. Through its Policy Committee, the ruling Conservative group sanctioned the local plan alterations. That should have given strength to the local planning authority’s position and assisted the EMHA. However, after the
emergence of the Thatcher Government in 1979, circumstances apparently changed along with the prevailing key ideological paradigms. Growing unemployment accompanied economic decline as Tory policies ‘rolling back the frontiers of the State’, started to bite.

As a provincial town equidistant between the successful regional shopping centres of Leicester, Derby and Nottingham, it had always been held as conventional wisdom amongst key local planning and political circles that the attraction of a large, well-known retailer to the town would help reverse its relative declining image. Tesco, Safeways and the Co-op had a foothold, but these operated small supermarkets unsuited to the perceived needs of a growing commuter population within the rural hinterlands, and in due course the Co-op rationalised its grocery presence in the town which disappeared. A shopping ‘status symbol’ was argued for the town and Sainsbury came to represent that in the local party political hegemony, ostensibly vying for the rural fringe, middle class vote.

Thus, Sainsbury earmarked the Green Close site for a supermarket, despite its zoning for housing. The key policy argument against the store was that the uncontrolled enlargement of the central retail core beyond its defined limits would not only weaken the policy to attract and hold retail investment in the town centre, but would dilute the impact of existing retail uses and undermine their investment. Opponents of such a view held that the inflexibility of planning orthodoxy was a barrier to growth and would harm the vitality of the town’s commercial
infrastructure. This was a rhetoric that reflected much of the Thatcherite approach to planning policy and the underlying economic imperative of successive Governments of both Labour and Conservative between the second world war and the run up to the millennium. It became apparent that the County Council’s Land Agent, who formally raised no objection to the various Sainsbury planning applications, despite objections from the County Planning Officer who supported the policy objections of Charnwood Borough Council, had touted the land for sale and possibly approached Sainsbury. A concerted campaign was underway in the local press by supporters of the company, potential customers and consumers who argued that a prestigious Sainsbury supermarket was needed in the town and that planning permission should be granted.

This ‘common sense’ perception of what was best needed for the town was matched by leading Tory councillors mainly from the rural suburbs who identified what they saw as a much needed quality shopping environment for more mobile rural shoppers from the Soar Valley villages. Neither the policy issues, nor immediate, specific environmental concerns such as technical highway objections, were fully addressed. Eventually, after the planning committee with a majority of controlling Conservative councillors maintained its objection, the matter was decided at a full council meeting. Dissident councillors from both main parties broke their formal party whips to vote with their opposition. This reflected the kind of ideological complexities inherent in the shifting class formations operating between the interests of Capital and Labour, schisms astutely identified by Marx in
at full council, a sufficient minority of Labour opposition councillors voted with the majority of the ruling Conservative councillors to grant planning permission, despite a recommendation from the Chief Planning Officer that the previous consistently applied objections should be maintained, and the store was finally permitted.

The study concluded, rather simplistically, that class interests collaborated to identify with the interests of Sainsbury and therefore, in effect, prioritising the commercial investment 'needs' of Capital, over those of the social 'needs' of Labour. In so doing, the achievement of an important community housing need was blocked. As such, in the final analysis the system of public participation did not amount to much more than a crude contest of numbers in the voting lobby where interested parties, and people ostensibly had their say. However, behaviourists would argue that the potential for this merely reflected the vagaries of information publicised and the variable ability of individuals to access and be consciously aware of, and rationally comprehend and respond to, the issues in the public domain affecting the wider community interests. Thus, the study concluded that public participation did not work effectively in the interest of Labour. The formal mechanisms enshrined in law and cultural professional practice were seen to be a fallacy, presenting little more than a public relations exercise. They were little more than a token image of democracy, a paradox of popular involvement in the planning process, enacted ostensibly between the interests of production and
consumption. Also, this was constructed around a downward flow of information, rather than offering active participation in government, whilst real power was exercised elsewhere.

However, the study recognised its inherent limitations and envisaged itself as a prelude to a more complex research project, which would tackle inherent contradictions by focusing on a range of key and subsidiary problematics, to try and isolate just where 'real power' was located and came to be 'played out'. Clearly there were inherent problems in its approach, the most significant ones having already been alluded to, namely its positivistic, empiricist methodology and a narrow boundary on its focus. By this it is meant that it was assumed that the inductive case study would demonstrate elements of proof within the narrow confines of the circumstances identified. There was some truth in that, especially its attempt to look at real events and the sequence of micro relationships between the roles of various actors identified, although clear limitations existed. What was missing was a recognition that the particular events were 'played out' within a specific and wider historical and cultural context that gives primacy to the ideological mechanisms by which everyday situational events come to construct and mediate human relationships. Not through autonomous individual behaviour, but through the roles and contexts in which these are undertaken and played out in actual cultural events. In other words, the myriad social ways all cultural facets of human existence come to construct and mould the opportunities for human agency, as recognised by Gramsci.
Therefore a holistic approach to find just who wields power and how they come to do that can never be seen as an autonomous human act, but a compendium of material events given meaning, or constructed, by unfolding situational relationships. At a simplistic level then, we have a multi-layered society, rather like the construction of plywood where a highly sophisticated series of laminates articulate with and mediate the construction of the whole (a society) within a specific context (historical). Unlike Althusser’s ideological glue which holds the laminates in places, thus fixing and determining the possibilities for social relations and thus outcomes, the totality of the social event played out in real material circumstances affected by wider social relations is the ideology, manifested through human deed and interpretation. At its core, the thought process interprets this through metaphor, itself influenced by human engagement in actual cultural events. Thus the situational context in which the articulation of the relationships of production and consumption manifests an ideological context expressed through the wide culture of retailing, operates as a discursive formation. In turn this links with and is reciprocally mediated by the struggles between, and within, a series of other articulated discursive formations involving the multi-dimensional worlds of planning control and popular cultural expectations. Thus, the constitution of the complex social interaction comes to represent a complex, multi-dimensional configuration rather than a series of simplistic layers.
Land-use Planning and Praxis

State control over the planning system through legislation was incremental and takes its roots from the 'democratisation' of former private estate management, once the exclusive function of landed estates, universities and the church. Victorian municipalisation was founded indirectly on the Court Leet and its successors, town and parish councils, vested with the rudimentary powers of controlling (and protecting) local trading interests: a tradition long established since medieval times with the final emergence of capitalism. As the country's urban population grew rapidly and concentrated with industrialisation and the mechanisation of agriculture, the influence of the established church metamorphosed into civic functions. Boards of local dignitaries were set up to oversee the new civic functions such as policing, education, road maintenance, public health, drainage, libraries, parks and welfare institutions, such as workhouses and cottage hospitals. Some writers rightly identify a coercive state function, such as in the setting up of the public libraries foundation (Casselden, 1991). Certainly, a fragmented, embryonic form of local government may be seen as reflecting a real fear of civil unrest at a time of unparalleled popular agitation for educational and electoral emancipation. Ultimately, this led to a structure of urban corporations and the formation of county councils in 1888, what Foucault, for example, would see as a new discursive formation, exercising regimes of control via its new professional bureaucracies (Ball, 1990, page 15).
Rapid urbanisation, overpopulation and insanitary conditions led to greater state involvement as pressure increased to unite the disparate political and ideological interests coming together to focus on civic change. By the time of the First World War, the central state had a more commanding influence over local government, plus general industrial and morbidity issues arising from the perceived state of the national population's health. Income tax had been established as a means of social construction and redistribution and a rudimentary National Insurance against rising regional unemployment was introduced as early components of the welfare state. A perceived need to house munitions workers to feed the avarice of the war saw the first state housing for industrial workers and a rapid expansion of uncoordinated transport forms blossomed as industrial production and location increased and decentralised.

However, the economic blight of the post-war era offered a field of struggle to lay the foundations for a more progressive development of the welfare state and the bones of a national strategy to tackle the north-south divide. This contrasted the already declining fortunes of the older, primary centres of production in the north and regions peripheral to London and the south-east. In the era leading up to the Second World War, it greatly benefited from a rapid growth in the huge concentration of wealth in the City built around stocks and shares and investments in the empire. The continuing growth in population witnessed a massive surge in the building of homes in the Home Counties and the growth of service industries,
such as Hoover of Perivale and Ford at Dagenham favoured the grossly distorted growth of the south-east and its relative prosperity.

The post war Labour Government introduced the Town & Country Planning Act 1947, hard on the heels of the New Towns Act 1946 and consolidating earlier piecemeal legislation governing housing and urban reconstruction. In effect, this sought to transfer private estate management decisions about changes of use to the State and to nationalise betterment: the enhanced value that arose out of the development process, as a direct consequence of the utility of land as a communal commodity. In other words, it established, firstly, that planning permission would be needed for a material change in the use of land, defined as 'material development', which basically also included classes of other physical development such as building or engineering operations. Also, that the production of development plans would provide a policy context for determining submitted planning applications. Secondly, that new development attained its usefulness, its social meaning and community value through the physical infrastructure, such as roads, shops, hospitals, sewers and schools, etc. In a Marxian sense, therefore, it sought to return a form of 'surplus value' to the community that, through its lived culture and popular investment, not just created it but in turn legitimised the new development.
Also, to enable a key tool for proactively initiating positive development for the good of the wider community, and in line with democratically formulated development policy, a scheme of land compensation was introduced, initially for owners cum farmers who had lost an assumed development right. After the writings of the Italian economist Pareto it was held that in a liberal democracy, as a result of any development for public benefit, landowners should not be any worse off in terms of their material interest than they were before the development went ahead. Thus, an owner forced to sell land for, on the one hand, high value development such as public housing or a road, or on the other a low value use, such as a grass verge, could claim a compensatory payment, to restore the loss. This would be based on the expected, full market value for the best use hypothetically available, regardless of use the land was put to. Without that, the compulsory purchase of the land to meet a public interest at a lower price would transfer the burden of its real cost of acquisition (the loss of an alternative, higher value) solely on the individual owner. However, by substituting the full market price for it, the actual cost would be met by all the (then) ratepayers, including the former owner, and in terms of utility and value (reflected in money terms), no-one would be proportionately disadvantaged as a result. In other words, the acquisition would be an ideal market transaction. The corollary was that where, in the unlikely event that land due to its uselessness would have a nil value, the legislation forced the local planning authority to acquire the freehold, thus absolving the former owner of the responsibility of having to maintain a piece of land without utility.
The twin ambitions of the 1947 legislation were never met and the present basis of land-use planning in the UK rests upon the determination of planning applications, and subsequent appeals to the Secretary of State for the Environment against related decisions, in the context of development plan policy. This is principally reflected through regional plans, county structure plans and local plans. They form the basis of land use allocation and related environmental projects, which have been produced by local planning authorities (LPAs) for a given five or ten year period, as appropriate, and have been subject to public participation and Government approval. Indeed, since the introduction of Section 26 of the Planning & Compensation Act 1991 (Elizabeth II, 1991, page 35), there has been a presumption that planning determinations shall be made in accordance with the development plan “…unless material circumstances indicate otherwise.” This reversed the long established general principle that a development plan was only one of several material circumstances to be taken into account before permission was granted. Even so, the nature of land-use planning control has thus long reflected a close association between the development of policy as expressed through development plans, formulated by local planning authorities, ostensibly through the democratic process, in accordance with procedures and national policies prescribed and enforced by Government.

The main two compartments of the system thus come together as the creation and implementation of a strategic enterprise, designed to achieve stated policy aims, in
the interest of amenity and the public good. Thus, there is a kind of dialectical relationship between the dynamic processes linking the development of normative ideas about the future, through knowledge and understanding of past events, to objective outcomes, through praxis. At its heart, this is a very Marxian concept, which can be seen as a genuine desire to improve the lives of ordinary people. As Engels implies in his letter dated August 5 1890 to Schmidt, Marx thought that even his best wasn’t good enough for the workers (Engels, 1977a, page 680). In his Theses on Feuerbach, Marx underlines the nature of the real political project alluded to earlier, that is to prioritise thought as a prelude to action, rather than an abstract concept on its own (Marx, 1977c, page 30).

Thus for Gramsci the nature of the dialectical method becomes praxis, the historical context in which the human will, represented through culture and the superstructure, relates to and responds to the contradictions inherent in the relationships between the worker and the industrial productive forces, inherent in the economic realm. Thus, true revolutionary action is consistent with the cathartic moment, a chain of synthesis, which result from the evolution of the dialectic and achieves philosophical reality:

“But the ‘theoretical’ significance of this debate seems to me to consist in this: that it marks the ‘logical’ point at which every conception of the world makes the passage to the morality appropriate to it. In other words, it is the point at which the conception of the world, contemplation, philosophy becomes ‘real’, since they now aim to modify the world and to revolutionise praxis. One could say therefore that this is the central nexus of the
philosophy of praxis, the point it becomes actual and lives historically (that is socially and no longer just in the brains of individuals), when it ceases to be arbitrary and becomes necessary - rational - real.”

(Gramsci, 1986, page 369)

During the early part of the 20th century, pressures for the democratisation of Government as part of a political struggle for the two-fold emancipation of the working class and women (not necessarily in harmony), were set against a backcloth of two world wars reflecting supra and international struggles for colonial dominance and revealed significant class schisms through social neglect. The working class was generally unfit, unhealthy, suffered low income and employment opportunities, and endured poor housing, with insecurity of tenure. Victorian Britain through the work of Marx and Engels revealed the extent of urban squalor and suffering and, in response, gave way to the ethics of self-help and philanthropy. The emerging Zeitgeist emulated similar calls in Continental Europe for the construction of a crusading vision to unite peoples, eradicate poverty and build a people's democracy, against the recurrent threat of global warfare. Such was the idealism which spurred on the early pioneers of planning (mostly philanthropist industrialists, architects and surveyors), given hope by the Soviet revolution and to be expressed, and symbolised, in the new machine age of the twenties and thirties. Yet in cultural terms, struggling alongside the new urban vernacular, with roots in the idyllic myths of rural life.

The Second World War became a catalyst for social and political change and, thus, the threefold nature of the new land-use planning system was seen as a key tool for
the reconstruction and modernisation of Britain. The Green Belt was introduced as major constraint to unbridled metropolitan growth, particularly for London having the most significant concentration of population and extreme positions of poverty and affluence, whilst offering a key magnet for growth and prosperity for the better off and urban stagnation and unemployment for others. Since the early demise of primary industry, the northern regions had suffered as the national economy restructured within a global context. A focus on all these conflicting issues, placing inexorable demands on the emerging welfare state, a necessary feature in the civilianisation of the economy in a post war situation enduring Keynesian 'demand' economics pursued by Government, came to rest within the emerging post-war planning system. Although the betterment issue was abandoned, the north-south divide attracted the interest of many Labour politicians with northern and fringe constituencies. Significant redistribution of population occurred under the New Towns Act 1946, albeit aiding the suburbanisation of the Home Counties and the ciphering off of vital investment and semi-skilled jobs from the older city centres. Industrial production was targeted through the qualification of industrial planning applications by the issue of Industrial Development Certificates, and in due course, restructuring towards a service economy was tempered in city centres through the use of Office Development Permits. Much of this was a weak tool to hold the perceived political inconsistencies of the modernisation project of Capital, long been underway since the globalisation of industrialisation in the early part of the nineteenth century and before.
Although land-use planning and control has come along way since then, with new legal initiatives introduced to make planning more responsive to the fluctuating demands of Capital and what might be perceived as its investment needs, much of the core approach remains the same. Underlying the system remains the development plan cum development control nexus. Most other initiatives, besides compensation and compulsory purchase, can be seen as either withdrawing categories of control from the State and returning the development initiative to the private owners of resources, or centralising the key land-use decision functions in Government. This allows the bypassing of Local Planning Authorities where their powers to decide applications are ostensibly vested in locally elected councillors through enabling legislation. Thus, a key focus here is on the underlying praxis operating between land-use planning policy and outcomes, and wider ideological influences.
Conceptual Approaches: Ideology and Postmodernism

In focusing on the role of ideology in the land-use planning process, definitions are necessary. Different meanings are attributed to 'ideology', often presented as an all-embracing descriptive concept, abstract and devoid of context. The concern here is with the word in its specificity, both in terms of its production and use; otherwise, it has little meaning or relevance. In seeking a modern definition, Stuart Hall posits as a base line that:

"An ideology is any cluster or set of beliefs, understandings, definitions, explanations which are used to explain, interpret or produce an understanding of how things work in the social world, and which inform social practice. In that sense, the main function of ideology is cognitive (i.e. it gives us a certain knowledge of the social world). ALL everyday, social practice takes place within ideology."

(Hall, 1988a, page 8)

Thus here, ideology is seen as a thinking term, one that reflects ideas as a precursor to human action, potent and readily powerful:

“When the term 'ideology' becomes entirely descriptive (i.e. 'any set of beliefs'...) it loses all critical edge. Ideology cannot be neutral since knowledge always entails power, and the partiality of knowledge is one of the main sources of the power of ideology. In the definition of ideology here, then, its knowledge function is always limited and circumscribed by its role in maintaining or transforming relations of power."

(Ibid.)

As Lukes, no doubt, would similarly argue, power as a descriptive neutral term without context is equally limiting. Clearly, here ‘knowledge’ implies some potential enabling function, a means by which control may be exerted over the actions of others to obtain a favourable or better power relationship. Thus, we
cannot assume that knowledge alone will always harness an ability to not only act, but also successfully manipulate or influence outcomes against others. Ultimately, it will depend on to what extent people understand the true value of knowledge and just how successful it may be used as a component of ideological struggle.

Hall as a culturalist is clearly deeply influenced by ‘The German Ideology’ by Marx & Engels (1970) and along with other neo-Marxists writers offers a deconstruction of the text to regain non reductionist meanings lost through historical polemic and epistemological misunderstanding. Like other neo-Marxists, Hall avoids simplistic, reductionist explanations for ideology, which is seen as a lived experience, struggled for on many political terrains. Like others, he takes issue with shallow interpretations of Marx’s false consciousness, which fail to fully comprehend the context in which his words and meanings and the manner in which they interpolated each other, has a specific historical and dialectical context. More especially, they take on the way they struggled to engage with wider prevailing debates and discourses, which ‘falsely’ interpreted his magnus opus. Thus in consequence, interpreted a rigid fix between given relations of production and revolutionary behaviour and thought, and the consciousness driving that; none less than with his own developing ideas and arguments within that organic setting:

“The glosses by Engels are immensely fruitful, suggestive and generative. They provide not the solution to the problem of ideology, but the starting-point of all serious reflections on the problem. The simplifications developed, he argued, because Marx was in
contestation with the speculative idealism of his day. They were one-sided distortions, the necessary exaggerations of polemic.”

(Hall, 1996, page 30)

A key feature of their work, of course, was their materialist conception of history and society reflected through dialectical materialism, which contested an Hegelian, idealistic antithesis:

“Marx and Engels argued that in fact ideas were the product of history, and had a materialist not an idealist basis. Men and women could only know the world by producing and transforming it, in the course of which they also produced ideas, conceptions of their practices. Thus ‘Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas etc. - real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its highest forms... Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life’ (Marx and Engels, 1970 edn.). Ideas, for them, are embedded in material conditions. They are ‘the conscious expression - real or illusory - of their real relations and activities, of their production, of their intercourse, of their social and political conduct’. This is the materialist premise in the theory of ideology.”

(Hall, 1988a, page 14)

Thus, ideology is not just cerebral: it is constructed and given meaning in real life situations in terms of a potential to understand what motivates people to act in ways which connect the multi-dimensional facets of human existence in society and outcomes. Hall is similarly influenced by Gramsci whom he argues seeks to establish a version of ideology that is not “one single, unified and coherent ‘dominant ideology’ which pervades everything’, but (in quoting Gramsci) that “’There co-exists many systems and currents of ideological thought.’” so that:

“The object of ideological analysis is, therefore, not the single stream of ‘dominant ideas’ into which everything and everyone has been automatically absorbed, but rather the different discursive currents,
their points of and break, the forms of ideological struggle: in short, an ideological complex, ensemble of discursive formation.”

(Ibid., page 18)

Hall has in mind Gramsci’s contestation to construct hegemony, articulating with conceptions of common sense. He draws on semiotics as a key influence on the notion that ideological elements can be drawn into various discourses whilst signifying different meanings. Code systems operate in language on the basis of particular cultural rules and meaning is constructed through signifying practices. Objects are thus assigned meanings through a process of signification, which is constructed in discourse and different meanings can be applied to the same events, depending upon the “semantic code or signifying system which is used” (Ibid., page 21). Ideology reflects a partial account of the social world, which to an extent reflects the selective character of all meaning systems that construe an interpretation of events and relationships from a particular frame of reference.

For Terry Eagleton, an interpretation of what ideology means is part of an ideological process, itself:

“...ideas are weapons in a field of struggle - that an ‘ideological’ discourse, properly understood, means one which, deciphered and decoded in certain ways, will betray in its limits and emphases, its silences, gaps, and internal contradictions, the imprint of real material conflicts.”

(Eagleton, 1994, page 7)

Thus, ideology is rooted in real behaviour rather than conceptualised written words or formalised language, and thought:
“Ideology, in short, is a matter of *discourse* - of practical communication between historically situated subjects - rather than just of *language* (of the kinds of propositions we utter). And it is not just a matter of discourse which is slanted or prejudiced or partisan, since there is no human discourse which is not.”

(Ibid., page 11)

Discourse, thus, is not just a carrier of ideology but the context in which it is received, born, synthesised and reproduced. Inevitably it emerges as a feature of everyday cultural behaviour in a struggle for the dominance of values and positions of relative power as understood by Gramsci, rather than an overarching and formalised value system:

“Ideology is perhaps best seen as a field of struggle and negotiation between various social groups and classes, not as some world-view intrinsic to each of them”

(Ibid., page 13)

But in the context of historical materialism influencing or shaping the context for everyday events, seen here as expressed in terms of popular culture, ideology becomes the practical means by which communities of people respond to their social and political priorities, their contingencies of struggle. In real terms, thus, how they seek to glorify and defend their corner, or change the world by seeking power and control over others. This is about a lived, relational experience through which, in Gramscian terms, communities struggle to gain hegemonic power over others via a reordering of space and time, and those who are subjugated for the time being in the process become subjects, objects of ideological discourse and encoded as such. The struggle is built upon praxis, hence any study of ideology
focuses upon the construction of discourse and its linkages, as a wider expression of human intentions and failings, so that:

"Theories of ideology are, among other things, attempts to explain why it is that men and women come to hold certain views; and to this extent they examine the relation between thought and social reality."

(Ibid., page 15)

For Eagleton, postmodernism is an ideology itself, "...wary of the concepts of truth" (Ibid., page 17) which it manifestly abhors. Yet as he argues, access to "...falsehood, distortion or deception" (Ibid.) does not necessitate knowledge of fundamental truths, other than to know, for example, that something like apartheid is morally wrong. He holds that questions about ‘consciousness’ of ‘truth’ are diversions from the real everyday political issues and suggests that whilst the Thatcher Government had the support of many people, only a minority accepted its values. He posits other humdrum reasons for the formation of ideology such as the contingencies of everyday life, constructed through discourse. Further, the grand image presented by the postmodernists of ‘the end of ideology’ is a dangerous fallacy. It presents a global fantasy of the end of dissent, where a dominant ideology has been internalised and any attempt at individual struggle would present what psychologists have labelled cognitive dissonance - what he terms as “self-aggression.” This is an overtly psychological phenomenon which he confronts, but he recognises the limitation of the types of postmodernist theories of power such as that offered by Foucault identifying coercive and internalising power mechanisms, without the possibility of consciousness, or oppositional struggle for hegemony, as envisaged by Gramsci. Rightly, he questions this
psychological fantasy and challenges the notion of an all-internalising and coercive, authoritative ideology. Thus 'one-way', omnipotent 'ideology' as a kind of all embracing global propaganda, may work towards sustaining 'unjust situations', but may not be the key, determining factor despite struggling to be so. Thus simplistic answers will seldom be found and postmodernism with its political (and ideological) fatalism is rejected as a denial of the real world (Ibid., page 19).

Alternatively, images and definitions of 'postmodernity' conjure up fractured and disjointed 'realities' in which we are never quite sure whether they, as simulations, or the objects they might parody, are, indeed, real. Indeed, that seems to be the central core of post-modernist thought: that nothing is certain, as a primary response to the lived experience of outmoded historical events that have either imploded due to inherent social contradictions, or simply proved to be catastrophic. Yet as a conceptual approach, clearly 'the post-modern' is a relativist, generic term reflecting an ideology, or rather a cluster of situational events (a discursive formation) which not only come to represent or signify variable, and often contradictory, meanings and values. But also, as discussed above, may through signification, come to assign or encode different meanings for similar events: and thus decoded, as such. For Bhabha, postmodernism reflects the congruence between the post-colonial and the concept, reflected in the manner of the Bengali struggle against British imperialism (Bhabha, 1999, pp 189-208). Semiotics provides the theoretical basis for a multicultural society to contain heterogeneity: what he calls "incommensurability", where there are no shared
“values or projects” within an internal culture and this, he contends, is what postmodernity is (Ibid.).

In ‘Defining the Postmodern’ (1999) Lyotard identifies three key problems and debates implied by and implicated in the term ‘postmodern’ and firstly calls upon architectural history to illustrate Zeitgeist effects in the Titanic clash of the styles between the classical and modernity:

“There is no longer any close link between the architectural project and socio-historical progress in the realisation of human emancipation on the larger scale. Postmodern architecture is condemned to generate a multiplicity of small transformations in the space it inherits, and to give up the project of a last rebuilding of the whole space occupied by humanity. In this sense, a perspective is opened up in the larger landscape.”

(Lyotard, 1999, page 143)

He is likely to be confused here in his reference to competing architectural blocs. More fundamentally, the universal clash was arguably between modernity and the vernacular, struggled for initially at the pan European level. He continues to argue that there is “no longer an horizon of universalization, of general emancipation” and that:

“The disappearance of this idea of progress within rationality and freedom would explain a certain tone, style or modus which are specific to postmodern architecture. I would say a sort of bricolage: the high frequency of quotations of elements from previous styles or periods (classical or modern), giving up the consideration of environment, and so on.”

(Ibid.)
Of course, the contradiction of competing ideological meanings and discourses sharing the same spaces referred to earlier, are thus already in evidence. Particularly as classical Greek architecture and the Modern as exemplified by Le Corbusier (1974) has already been shown to represent the same super-human imagery whilst catering for mere mortals. Even Lyotard throws up a contradiction in the term ‘post’, given that its diachronic function reflects a modernist chronology, belonging to classical logic:

"The idea of modernity is closely bound up with this principle that it is possible and necessary to break with tradition and to begin a new way of living and thinking. Today we can presume that this ‘breaking’ is, rather, a manner of forgetting or repressing the past. That is to say of repeating it. Not overcoming it."

(Ibid.)

His next point concerns the notion of “...decay in the confidence placed by the last two centuries in the idea of progress.” (Ibid.) This rehearses the attacks on logical positivism associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists: that certainly “…the development of the arts, technology, knowledge and liberty would be profitable to mankind as a whole.” (Ibid., page 144). The legitimacy of progress is only achieved in so far as “…enterprises, discoveries and institutions contribute to the emancipation of mankind.” (Ibid.). Lyotard sees signs that the opposite applies. He hits back that all major political systems and ideologies from the last two centuries are just as guilty of crimes against humanity:

“Following Theodore Adorno, I use the name of Auschwitz to point out the irrelevance of empirical matter, the stuff or recent past history, in terms of the modern claim to help mankind emancipate itself. What kind of thought is able to isolate (Aufheben) Auschwitz in a general (either empirical or speculative) process towards a universal
emancipation? So there is a sort of sorrow in the Zeitgeist. This can express itself by reactive or reactionary attitudes or by utopias, but never by a positive orientation offering a new perspective.”

(Ibid.)

Development is not synonymous with improving the human condition, thus challenging the term ‘progress.’ Life becomes more complex and complicated, thrusting humans beyond the right scale and necessary levels of technical simplicity. For his third argument, he posits postmodernism alongside a question of thought. The Avant-garde is a dead concept in the plastic arts as an expression of an “obsolete modernity.” (Ibid.). Yet he praises the ideological inquiry by modernity into modernity, as expressed through painting (post impressionism, symbolism and expressionism implied). This philosophical responsibility must continue, thus the ‘post’ should come to reflect analysis and reflection rather than a mere harking back.

In contrast, Baudrillard (1988) focuses upon consumer objects and sees them as constituting a sign system, in other words the consumer objects are signifiers, offering a kind of symbolism, a hieroglyphical expression that comes from their own particular referential existence. In other words, he focuses on the relationship between objects, or rather commodities, and consumers. In that way, they connect the situational lives of people with the relations of production, whilst acknowledging a self-contained focus on consumption. As a postmodernist, he believes in the end of theory and the integrity of surface effects. He is also presented as an anti-rationalist, yet paradoxically, in his early work sees all action
initiated by humans and links the idea of simulations with a non-reality and without meaning; although this, inevitably, must contradict that position. It is argued that he is no longer a Marxist concerned with contradiction, yet that position may be doubted. If consumer objects are 'terrorists', determining, 'threatening' or at least challenging the fundamental existence of consumers, then that context inevitably sets up a tension, presenting a contradiction between the position of consumers and producers, albeit in a complex series or set of articulations. In other words, simulations and surfaces, or even the 'life' of a commodity, determined by its integral code system, is, nevertheless, an existence articulated somewhere between and within the social relations of production and consumption.

Baudrillard's views thus are important because he focuses on the consumer object with a life 'of its own', constructed in the specific context of commodification, articulated through a complex web of cultural practices assigning signification and expressing the social relations of production and consumption. Thus, in the context of focusing our attention on the intrinsic context in which objects take on their own 'personality', he is asking us to break a rational link with wider structural issues, instead urging us to look at the complex culture of production and its reciprocated articulation with consumption. Also, to its being central to a complex, cultural set comprising the agencies that construct and assign fetishism, i.e., marketing and advertising, where all depend upon simulated references of 'reality'. Thus, in an anti-rationalist way, the use of the metaphor representing the
object and simulated reality presented to us is really a focus upon the complexity of the complex cultural circuits, which in elemental form, articulate with one another producing a new social chemistry influencing all aspects of human life. So what he says about consumer objects, and humans being part of a peripheral referential outcome (in other words human minds are not at the centre of the universe, but commodities are), becomes a huge metaphor for commodification. Therefore, his ideas may be interpreted as challenging us to focus on that intrinsic cultural context and to look for explanations in the not so seemingly irrational. In other words, he acknowledges the possibility of changing images which through the plasticity of meanings, associations and metaphors created through intertextuality, come to articulate seemingly disparate ideas.

Thus the focus must be on searching for those cultural complexities that enable this to happen. Also, in seeking the context in which our roles as consumers are constructed, and which reciprocally articulate with cultural expectations about planning control, and professional and epistemological responses. So, how does Sainsbury and the supermarket ‘practice’ add to the construction of the commodified ‘object’ and, more important, how does it, as a proxy ‘producer’, reciprocally articulate with the land-use planning process, directly and indirectly through complex cultural avenues, to make the consumer captive via a process of commodification? Further, what discourses are constructed to carry and articulate the ideologies in everyday life that come to construct the discursive formation of
‘selling’, and, of course, buying through the act of shopping via supermarkets in its wider manifestation?

In contrast, Frederick Jameson uses postmodernism as a metaphor for late capitalism, which equates with Thatcherite views about ‘the end of society’. Jameson sees it not as a style, a mere surface effect, but as a mode of production and in his terms the third stage of capitalism, a further round of modernisation as a response to Globalism and the prevailing electronically fostered paradigms (Jameson, 1998). Here, therefore, is corporatism at its best, Capital developing new flexibilities: modern methods to improve its investment regime to extract surplus value in new and more productive ways. His thesis is a review of what the concept in its many manifestations means, mostly to eschew the ‘unfair’ criticisms from his enemies wholly “on the left”, who regard him as a postmodernist that has sold out as a Marxist. Not so, he argues. Far from holding that postmodernism is about idiosyncratic plurality and ‘surfaces’ devoid of meaning, or purely referential in their own immediate settings, he cunningly posits a systemic context. Thus postmodernism is indeed an ideology that has to be the outcome of processes in time and space and that is where he significantly scores as a Marxist, which he argues he still is. It is not just the outcome of a wider economic system in place, it is the late capitalist mode of production in dialectical materialism: actual events historically struggled for in ordinary, everyday ways, in the context of the historic age constructed by culture. Thus, he goes well beyond Baudrillard in giving credence to the notion of objects having a life of their own. Jameson is really
arguing that postmodernism is about the potential ‘disintegration’ and rebirth of capitalism in its ceaseless intent to reproduce itself in different ways, in order to survive.

He extols Arrighi (1994) for illuminating the problems of finance capital and poses questions about the nature of land speculation and monetarism as features of late capitalism, using this term in a non deterministic sense as an homage to Ernest Mandel, author of ‘Late Capitalism’ focusing on capitalism’s resilience. He posits a dialectical model of its key historical features connecting mercantile accumulation, industrialisation, production and ‘non-production’ reaching its zenith through the cybernetic revolution. Modernity and Fordism give rise to autonomism whilst postmodernism is not so much an anti-thesis but a logical continuation, a dialectic of late capitalism, in global terms producing the ultimate non-geography. Globalisation constructs “deterritorialization” in that older capitalist code systems are resignified and new fragmented ones created, paper money in Marxian terms inevitably facilitating the replacement of cultures of production with pure speculation, i.e., the phenomenon of finance capital, creating new investment spaces and a new abstract modernity. Making money for its own sake, breaking past cultural continuities and in consequence wrecking people’s lives by disconnecting them with their established community values, sows the potential seeds of its eventual downfall:

“But that is precisely what finance capital brings into being: a play of monetary entities which needs neither production (as capital does) nor consumption (as money does): which supremely, like cyber space, can
live on its own internal metabolisms and circulate without any reference to an older type of content.”

(Ibid., page 161)

Much of this makes sense and in some ways reflects Baudrillard’s autonomy of the commodity, which, indeed, this is now what abstract money has become. It gives lucid explanation to the New Labour project on the modernisation of the UK economy which, as Jameson shows, has a symbiotic relationship with cultural forms and behaviour. Jameson points to the post 2nd World War features of postmodernism although as a generic feature of modernist ideology, it has its roots back to the First World War and beyond. Yet more latterly has become a clear, political project with its own continuity, focused on a mission to foster rapid private cum corporate economic growth and public consumption, certainly exacerbated since the empire came under strains with the rise of US industrialisation and the new American dominated world order. This can be seen via the post Second World War New Deal project linking through with Harold Wilson’s ‘white heat of new technology’ and his financial return tests for public corporations, through to Thatcher's attacks on the PSBR plus privatisation. Then, more recently to New Labour in the 90’s and its hastening of privatisation signified by the introduction of ‘best value’ and public private partnerships as part of the same modernisation project, openly seeking to liberalise the interests of Capital.
Also, through all this we can detect the social democratic thrust that Government intervention is perceived as the main motivator or engine of the modernisation for private enterprise. The rhetoric of classical economic theory continues to hold that individual companies are the prime motivators of economic growth and success through their free competitive positions and associations, reflecting a form of romantic idealism, inherent in ideological paradigms. Government is now likened to a trade association: in Sainsbury terms, creating the context for change and rationalisation of Capital, whilst not inhibiting firms from doing what they know best: making money and profits. Yet in the new military global age, clearly a struggle for competitiveness is now seen as a State function - a direct contradiction between state capitalism - what the former so called communist Governments did - and the corporatist ideas of the new right. Also, rather mixed with internal struggles of the sort exhibited by the UK Tories and manifested in the home politics of former US President Ronald Reagan and Edge City (Garreau, 1992). Fundamentally, what helps to construct the hegemony that makes this populist and legitimising, is the way the pluralist interests of Capital articulate and mediate with wider common sense paradigms about society and the way it is, or should be run. What makes this possible is the weaving of intertextualities through commodification, which can be seen to offer contradictions, yet also offer mutual support for seemingly disparate ideas about society.
Conceptual Approaches: Surfaces & Structures and Social Realism

In their letters, Marx and Engels take issue with two key arguments concerning, firstly, the nature and discourse of social action as a prerequisite to the real, lived social relations of production and distribution, giving rise to specific cultural forms i.e., a superstructure. Secondly, the extent to which these forms are wholly determined by an economic base, rigid in formation and effects. The base and superstructure thesis has come to signify rigidity in Marxist analysis, exemplifying a deterministic outcome, inherent in the idealistic and abstract formation of a set relationship to be anticipated, if not hypothesised and empirically tested. As such, classical Marxism is thus held to be positivist, offering a closed, teleological prescription for future events. Its measure thus becomes seen as a prescription by which social events have been conceptualised in social science as a departure from ‘vulgar’ (and wrongly construed) Marxist theory, rather than utilising its key penetrating insights into the nature of social contradictions, through the deconstruction of real human events. Despite what might be seen as a shared humanism between Marx and Hegel, clearly Marx's materialism is based upon the real, lived social experience of people in human society and not as idealistic ‘individuals’ outside of it, as seems to be the position of Hegel, and more recently, Thatcher. Marx and Engels set out their stall quite clearly in opposing what they perceived to be a deliberate misreading of Marxist theory. Indeed, in his letter of August 5 1890 to Schmidt justifying the use of culture as an alternative focus, Engels loses patience with those accusing him and Marx as being ‘reductionists’. He firmly backs up his argument by restating Marx's position that if this were the
case, he would not regard himself as a Marxist (Engels, 1977a, pp 678-680). In his letter to Bloch on September 21 1890 Engels stresses that:

“...According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if someone twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas - also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.”

(Engels, 1977b, page 682)

Such a humanistic statement about Marx and Engels’s project could not be clearer. Although Engels then proceeds to afford pre-eminence to “...economic assumptions and conditions within which people in society make history” (Ibid.) he goes on to ridicule the notion of political geography being explained by economics, albeit expressing the language of the new segmented and positivist Victorian epistemology. In the “final result” history is made and he gives emphasis to the interaction of all sides on one another and asserts that superstructures could exert real, if secondary effects, on the course of history:

“...in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts made between many individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a host of particular circumstances of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant - the historical event. This may again be viewed as the product of power which works as a whole unconsciously and without volition. For what each individual wills is
obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed”

(Ibid., page 683)

Thus, far from exemplifying an ideological ‘straight jacket’, the opposite seems to apply, almost in what might now be interpreted as a post-modernist way, where a readily identifiable ‘cause and effect’ may not be apparent. Certainly, Marxism is fundamentally presented as a logical means by which the dynamics of human existence is given meaning, albeit that the process of human interaction in culture seems to take a life of its own, rooted in a complicated series of intersected social events, devoid of any tangible conspiracy.

Fundamentally, despite the seemingly deterministic language (or what might seem as such in our time), Engels rhetorically posits the notion that in ‘economic terms’ individuals not attaining their ‘wants’ may logically have become a statistical ‘aggregate’ with an apparent shared zero meaning; but not so, he argues. Such a position fundamentally represents an idealised conceptualisation of society that he and Marx abhorred. The reality is that each individual through their combined and interrelated actions “…contributes to the resultant and is to this extent included in it.” (Ibid.) Real everyday events produce the struggles by which people articulate with and mediate the actions of others, producing dialectical relationships in time and space, made possible and initiated by an historic cultural context for significant social change. They bind and propel people within society (what Marx defines as the product of men’s reciprocal action in his letter to Annenkov

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December 28 1846 (Marx, 1977a, page 659), thus setting a context for either political inertia or revolutionary change. In this cultural setting, people thus act as instruments of seismic historic change, reflected through their social relations of production and consumption, which Marx saw as one and the same. In this context Engels astutely offers Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire as an exemplary inductive primary source, a real life typification for the dynamic social 'theory' on offer. (Engels, 1977b, page 683)

Indeed, on several occasions in correspondence, the connectivity of this primary and mediated systemic theme is pursued and developed further in linking the ideological dimension to the cultural. In his letter to Mehring on July 14 1895, Engels not only stresses the context of their unique methodology (dialectical materialism), which may have led to a misunderstanding of their thesis, but also seeks to clarify the oppositional nature of ideology, as it is given birth and sustained in real social (historical) events, through the agency of people:

"Otherwise only one more point is lacking, which, however, Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. That is to say, we all laid, and were bound to lay, the main emphasis, in the first place, on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these emotions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side - the ways and means by which these notions, etc, come about - for the sake of the content. This has given our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstandings and distortions, of which Paul Barth is a striking example (my italics)."

(Engels, 1977c, page 690)
These key preoccupations have taxed the minds of successive post war Marxists who have utilised the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the celebrated Italian Marxist thinker. A key focus for his thought was based on his analysis of the pre-second world war Italian political situation, which saw the Italian fascists gain popular democratic support by subverting 'common sense' views of society. In the context of Marx's base and superstructure thesis he focussed on the dialectical relationship between the state and civil society and a struggle through praxis to gain ideological hegemony over those 'common sense' perceptions, linked to language forms, now recognised as code systems. In essence, he identified the construction of everyday cultural forms as the means by which this was achieved:

“In what exactly does the merit of what is normally termed “common sense” or “good sense” consist? Not just in the fact that, if only implicitly, common sense identifies the exact cause, simple and to hand, and does not let itself be distracted by fancy quibbles and pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific metaphysical mumbo jumbo. It was natural that “common sense” should have been exalted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when there was a reaction against the principle of authority represented by Aristotle and the Bible. It was discovered indeed that in common sense there was a certain measure of “experimentalism” and direct observation of reality, though empirical and limited. Even today, when a similar state of affairs exists, we find the same favourable judgement on “common sense”, although the situation has in fact changed and the “common sense” of today has a much more limited intrinsic merit.”

(Gramsci, 1986, page 348)

Thus ‘common sense’ implies a vernacular view of the world, ostensibly devoid of a preconceived plan or externally imposed rational order that breaks with tradition, as a spur to action. These real, everyday common events form ideological landscapes, the elements of which have become culturally constructed
spaces and associated code systems, loci and communications systems, both objects and subjects of constant struggles for ideological supremacy. In short, what we might see as features of 'popular culture' articulating with and mediating the lives of the masses through the employment of systematic code systems, akin to propaganda devices, yet potentially open to subversion:

"We have established that philosophy is a conception of the world and that philosophical action is not to be conceived as the "individual" elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular "mentality" and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be "historically true" to the extent that they become concretely - i.e., historically and socially - universal. Given all this, the question of language in general and of languages in the technical sense ¹ must be put to the forefront of our enquiry."

¹ Messages transmitted by means of a common code"

(Ibid. page 348)

At its core, Gramsci’s project concerned the relationship between the State and civil society, which has come to be presented as a critical dualism in many of the debates which proceeded his writings. Indeed much of this has come to symbolise what has been regarded as an inherited inflexibility and categorisation of Marx’s original thesis. Yet Gramsci in understanding the true nature of the symbiosis of Marx’s historical materialism, makes it clear that:

"The ideas of the free trade movement are based on a theoretical error whose practical origin is not hard to identify: they are based on a distinction between political society and civil society, which is made into and presented as an organic one, whereas in fact it is merely methodological. Thus it is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the State must not intervene to regulate it. But
since in actual reality civil society and State are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of State regulation, introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means."

(Gramsci, 1986, pages 159-60)

Of course, it may be argued that in both Marx and Gramsci’s writing the notion of a ‘romantic’ Zeitgeist is at the fore and that this, as an historical device, is potentially misleading. As such, it may construe the notion that events are not only time specific, but that ‘history’ as a concrete whole crudely determines events without human agency. The fallacy here is that time and space are seen as separate elements of human existence, and not as one, inextricably bound in the experience of the other. Indeed, in terms of human experience and relationships each ‘constructs’ the other in symbiosis. Also, this takes place within the human experience mediated and recorded as a product of human action and related thought processes. The key, surely, is that none of this can occur within a vacuum and that society is built around the real social relationships, which occur in time and space, constructed out of real human behaviour. History is thus made by people, as Marx says, not of their choice, but in the context of the wider social relationships already established by real historical events as we come to see and experience them now, ‘in the future’. Yet humans in society not only have the faculty to recognise the historical and cultural events that come to impinge on one another. They can challenge the cultural context, seize the opportunity and ameliorate the obstacles potentially blocking their political struggle to achieve a
better democracy: a fairer and fuller participation in everyday events over the big decisions which are made so as to materially affect their lives.

The challenge for epistemology is thus to develop an academic approach that seeks to give a clearer understanding of these real, everyday events, without subsuming meanings to the nature of an abstracted conceptualisation. Critical Realism (CR) is such a methodology which, according to John Lovering (1989) seeks to relate empirical data, recordable surface effects (what may be seen as the manifest elements of cultural relations of consumption) to deep-seated ideological structures (Marxist social relations of production, manifested through class relations, antagonisms reflected by material interests of Capital and Labour). It is presented as the best of New Realism (NR), a post-modernist paradigm concerned with the cultural logic of surface effects, real, social events which may only be understood within the plurality of their immediate contexts, and ‘Fundamentalist Marxism’ which crudely posits economic determinism, as a function of structure and its causal link to a cultural superstructure (surfaces). Thus, although sharing NR’s rejection of logical positivism, along with Critical Theory, it nevertheless, in contrast, seeks a conceptual basis for evaluating real social actions between people. It acknowledges a causal relationship with deeper ideological processes that give life (support, maintain, reproduce and impart meaning) to these tangible, material events, products of social relationships in struggle that may be empirically recorded, analysed and deconstructed. As such, it establishes a
dialectical approach to epistemology, through praxis, the uniting of theory and practice as a political outcome.

Baudrillard and Foucault, et al, focus solely upon the perceived reality of social events and relationships through a narrow dichotomy of functionalism, ranging across space-time situations as a product of cultural propinquity and historical contexts. No explanation is offered for the dynamic processes, which maintain and support the value-systems constructing the surface cultural relationships over time, other than through the immediate geometry of culture (the surface). Certainly, for Foucault, ideology (capitalism) is not the determining feature of social arrangement, but the reverse, a product of the prevailing bureaucracy of cultural management (Foucault, 1991).

Vulgar Marxism is likewise limiting in that a narrow, economistic mode of exploitation between the interests of Capital and Labour fails to identify the full range of cultural dimensions built upon the core extraction of surplus value, a key feature of the social relations of production. These also manifest within the sphere of consumption (surface effects), constituting other, variegated forms of social and economic exploitation, impacting back on the deeper ideological processes and social relations of production, which in turn relate back via a cyclical articulation and mediation with surface cultural forms. Here, a continuous system of positive and negative impacts is potentially in place, in symbiosis. Thus, Critical Realism (Pratt, 1994) offers a basis for research utilising the humanist Marx as a means of
challenging narrow, positivist social scientific enquiry, whilst retaining the
discipline of structured conceptual analysis, seeking a systemic relationship
between real, everyday events and ideological (class) formations, over time. Thus,
as Gramsci identified, there is a distinct causal relationship between these events
and the reproduction, modification and maintenance of ideological effects which
articulate back and mediate with popular culture.

Therefore, at the deeper, structural ideological level of beliefs, systems of thought,
reflected through class antagonisms and power, and on-going causal relationships,
may be identified. These articulate and mediate with everyday cultural events,
which in turn, reinforce and perpetuate ideologies and the social relations of
production within and between the deeper structural levels. In turn these construct
and shape patterns of consumption that may be directly attributed to deeper
ideological formations that nevertheless, reciprocally articulate and mediate with
other facets and relations of consumption. Neither the individual, systemic
processes of surface and structure remain separate and inviolate, but each forms
part of an interconnected, symbiotic whole, ideologically vulnerable and unequally
responsive to the other. CR enables us to empirically study real events inductively
as a typification to analyse the mutually dynamic and unequal relationships
between the parts, which shape material outcomes as a result of ideological
initiatives and responses.
The geometry of the model reflects a more sophisticated restatement of Marx's structure and superstructure. It recognises that the struggle between ideology and social relationships constructs dynamic cultural forms of social interaction and events, which are played out within and between the social relationships of production and consumption. Thus, credit is afforded to the post-modern focus on the seemingly random and eclectic nature of outcomes, but holds that there is an underlying logic, an ideological process accompanying a power relationship. Such a model thus endeavours to construct a critical conceptualisation of a complex society, sufficiently plastic in the mobile sense and accommodating to embrace both the incidence of seemingly unique and unrelated cultural events (the particular), whilst attempting to place these in the context of global, national and local (macro and micro) cultural formations and frameworks.

The simplest geometric expression is achieved by the lower circle of a figure of '8' embracing the core ideological structures mediated by the social relations of production constructed around class relations reflecting the antagonisms between the interest of Capital and Labour (see Appendix 1). It is part of a dynamic system of interaction penetrating and constituting the top circle, the 'surface' denoting the site of cultural expression and sign-systems. Here, empirical outcomes as a result of struggle create a reciprocal process, which maintains supports and constructs the ideological formations within the deeper structural level. Thus the symbiosis of the figure of '8' reflects a continuous process of reification demonstrating both key causal linkages between the elements of praxis legitimising current actions...
and reproducing future ones. The central structure gives rise to a number of surfaces, which will reflect the issues concerned within the thesis. In other words, there is a plurality of ‘realities’ each denoting an arena for social relations ‘in struggle’. In other words, a number of figures of ‘8’ which cluster several ‘surface’ entities upon the circumference for the structure (see Appendix 2). This will form the basis of the thesis.
The Thesis in Broad Terms: Sainsbury As a Typification

The focus of the enquiry here, thus, is aimed at what might loosely be described as a qualitative understanding of the mechanisms and ideologies fuelling the land-use planning system, as constructed through key everyday events linking vested interests, inductively expressed via a narrow focus on particular retailing and shopping activity. The main assumptions here are thus that in order to understand the nature of ideological interaction and emerging paradigms working on human action in society, what is viewed as a quantitative, empirical method employing abstract conceptualisation segregating and cataloguing seemingly 'value free' data, has little to offer. That is not to say than quantitative social scientific methodology is irrelevant. As a social construct inevitably constituting ideology, it may have a culturally valid use in actually conjoining for review an epistemology that has been previously divided and segregated into the two distinct and separate areas of quantification and qualitative analysis as a cultural imperative. As Frederick Jameson forcefully argues:

"...science and ideology are in other words, not incompatible, but a scientific proposition can at one and the same time be used for ideological purposes, as famously in Kepler or Galileo. Indeed, I want to stress an even more extreme form of this proposition, namely that in a fallen or class society, science, the Utopian, and indeed everything else of value must also and simultaneously function as an ideology"

(Jameson, 1994, page 77)

The physicality of things, organisational and existential, might appear to meet some materialist imperative which by sheer proximity or propinquity, represented through some mathematical and/or geometric symmetry, may be presented as some
fundamental truth. However, that hardly offers an explanation beyond what pure, or rather abstract, representational or signified metaphor reveals; indeed, it may even seek to deny a deeper layer of human intention or subterfuge. Jameson Takes this on board and posits the nature of a discredited ‘truth’ by continuing to offer a valid reason for our reintegration of the quantitative and the qualitative into one ideological context well suited to Stuart Hall’s project:

“There can be no escape from ideology, that is from the rationalisation of the blood guilt of our own positioning and class situation within this society; the moment of truth is rare enough and fleeting – moments of personal anxiety and of social crisis about which it must also be affirmed that they cannot be retained or built on for any secure and durable kind of truth, although they can of course inflect our practice as such. In this society, therefore, in this history, all truths are also at one and the same time ideological, and should be celebrated with the greatest suspicion and vigilance.”

(Ibid.)

Here, thus, the academic project gains epistemological credibility. As ultimately in terms of classical logic, there is nothing that can be proven in concrete terms other than, perhaps, in a limited relational context, that is not the project in hand. The real task pursued here, is to create an understanding of intentions and how these operate in relation to human relations changing in time and space, whilst formed in complex layers of paradoxical meaning constructed through human metaphor and thus open to interpretation.

As such, the study here is inductive and seeks to look at the way human relationships give rise to reciprocated relationships between people and groups in a social context, represented by the formal and informal roles allocated to them

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within late industrial, capitalist, class society. The limitations of space and time inevitably force a somewhat truncated review of the processes at work within an aspect of society, which certain strands of sociology have labelled in generalist terms a pluralist phenomenon. Such an approach inevitably seems to focus upon a micro social context in which the physicality of the social groupings mainly provides the chemistry for the nature of the social interaction. This has tended to posit by default, or perhaps otherwise, the notion of a value free social setting, or alternatively seeks the justification of a neutralism or ideologically free social encounter to obscure by chance, or even a more biased agenda, favouring the interests of Capital. Indeed, in recognition of this, in its micro context the thesis rather than just seeking to provide an alternative anti-thesis, attempts to develop this stance as a form of inherent critique. Not simply to demonstrate just the nature of reciprocated human interaction, but also its ideologically imbued dynamism as a function of contradictory and changing relationships. Thus, it is conscious of stable and changing code-systems during the time period under review and both in literature and primary documentation it seeks to deconstruct meanings, identify paradigms and associate their outcomes in relation to the interests of both Capital and Labour. The blurred articulations between the relations of production and consumption (what Marx sees as one phenomenon) give rise to a panoply of constructed terms such as ‘needs’, ‘wants’ and ‘demands’, ideological devices marshalled in the interest of Capital. In this sense the thesis applies an updated Marxian analysis.
Chapter 2 starts by taking a brief look at the range of paradigms generally presented in contemporary planning literature built around and responding to the State imperative in land-use planning regulation. That approach cannot be avoided as the formalised structure of land-use control not only dictates the organised responses to that, but questions need to be posed about the commodification of the regulatory structures to meet the needs of Capital. Much of this either builds upon classical models of land-use as an end in itself, largely based on traditional economic theory legitimising existing social relations of production, or uses this as a launch-pad to offer, more than likely, a social democratic reformist critique. Meanwhile, the evolution of Government policy and the professional cum commercial interests re-articulate conventional wisdoms about centrality and location in a capitalist society. Much of this offers a traditional approach utilising behavioural methodology criticised here, which posit some form of 'natural' behaviour as the instigator of individual human actions, built upon a segmented epistemology and positivism. There is virtually no evidence of a cultural analysis of the sort offered here in the body of planning related literature surveyed.

Chapter three carries this theme through and considers retailing and shopping as offering different ideological meanings built around the prevailing social relations of production and consumption in time and space. Shopping as a consumer defined activity is presented as a highly manipulative seat of fantasy and ideology, blurring meanings and roles such as work and leisure, whilst legitimising notions of personal fulfilment. Retailing as both a political policy arena and private wealth
creating activity come together to form an ideological landscape of struggle which not only seeks to resolve the narrow conflicts, for example, between employment and profit, but blurs the objectives of parties and power differentials between them. A key arena to be explored is the context in which Government policy re-articulates the perceived ‘objectives’ of consumers and producers to construct policy initiatives as part of an on-going modernisation project as society de-industrialises in a new global order. Sainsbury as a corporate, food retailing monopoly business which grew from a small family firm offers a context in which key family members who as commercial directors provided an ideological bridge, an agency for change linking the interests of production, consumption and Government to the discourse of land-use planning. This becomes a point of disjuncture and constructed consensus, re-articulating the business of town and country planning as a mediated articulation between segmented interests and perceptions of the national economy. It becomes a complex ideological cross-road, a ‘spaghetti junction’ linking the contradictory and complimentary arenas of Government and business, a fertile arena for deconstructing ideologies, paradigms and their associated and somewhat convoluted links with the interests of Capital and Labour.

Thus having put a focus on the segmented elements of land-use planning and retailing cum shopping in terms of academic approaches as principally separate arenas of activity, the two are restored to a focus on a chronology of real-life, everyday events in which praxis is undertaken. Business documents and the
writings of key directors especially David Sainsbury, managing director throughout much of the late 80's and 90's, along with publications by Government, the retail industry, political parties and other commentators provides material for deconstruction forming the basis of chapter 4. Here, the interaction between plural elements is not so much taken as an empirical norm seeking to justify or prove the usefulness of a model of administrative behaviour, but as an everyday illustration of the means by which ideology and paradigms sustaining commodification as a process was made a reality. Only this way may we get closer to the real cultural mechanisms constructing associated power relationships as a marker towards understanding not just the past and present, but potential, future power formations as an outcome of normative actions and policy.

Lastly, chapter 5 provides not so much a conclusion but a synthesis to the deconstruction of events and documentation. It reviews the evidence here as a justification of seeing the planning process typified by the Sainsbury example as a series of cultural events, constructing meanings and a decipherable code system encoded and decoded around the commodification process in late industrial capitalist society. It considers the implications for the nature of the UK's liberal democracy as exercised through municipality and national Government. In the light of this and the lessons to be derived, recommendations are made for future research projects which may improve the quality of popular participation in the planning process, through a recognition of the ideological processes at work and
the competing paradigms concerning public intervention in the cultural life of the nation and its constituent communities.
CHAPTER 2

PLANNING AS CULTURE: STATE AND MARKET DISCOURSES

Much writing about town & country planning in the UK has been spurred by the emergence of planning epistemology since the modern origins of the planning profession early last century and concerns itself with two fundamental features of a liberal democracy. Firstly, that which seeks to understand the nature of everyday events and their pivotal dynamics and secondly, how these might come to be improved for the public good by the formation and adoption of normative policy through the democratic process, linking the political and administrative worlds of local and central government. Of particular concern, as expressed by various reforms of local government and focuses on public participation, has been the notion that the planning system has evolved in an elitist manner, a ‘top down’ decision-making structure, which offers little more than a facade of popular involvement. Thus, objectives and the means by which these may be formulated and met, have been held by some as reflecting the structural necessities of a capitalist society, whilst others have tended to focus upon the nature of its manifest pluralism and administrative complexities.

Either way, the two approaches have, thus, tended to follow a fairly conventional line of thought that can be roughly divided into two empiricist camps. Firstly, that which purports to adopt a structuralist critique of a centralised power structure (arguing for political decentralisation of various forms, whilst retaining capitalism), whilst the other concentrates on the psycho-administrative context of
the empirically defined and recorded decision making process, linking behavioural and technical aspects to organisation. Both approaches have simplistically viewed power relationships as instantly recognisably inherent features of either institutionalised or formal class or organisational relationships, which may be deciphered, or understood through the manifest behaviour of individuals. This section attempts a critique of such simplistic chronologies, premised on the argument that the complexities of ideological discourse constructed through everyday relational events, is better understood through the use of a cultural studies approach.

By deconstructing events and the intertextuality of their social interaction a more fruitful understanding of the nature of power formations and their reciprocated effects between parties is available. In defining the 'State discourse' the analysis here inevitably focuses on the various approaches towards 'Government' ostensibly seen as an autonomous producer of land-use planning outputs, representing an agency of State, amenable to potential change. To a certain extent that is an oversimplification of the role of the State as a visible pluralist assembly of Government and formal organs of power, including the Civil Service, serving capitalism. The use of a cultural studies approach enables a deeper understanding of the processes of power operating and the extent to which apparent alliances and differences may come to represent more complex associations and antagonisms. Thus the use of a cultural studies approach is premised upon the notion that conventional studies of planning policy fail to reveal wider discursive formations.
operating and the nature of their multi-dimensional articulations between local and national interests at different times and places.

The focus here is upon groups in society and the very notion of a ‘top down’ political approach to power formations in the formal land-use planning process implies a test within, at least, the context of the present ‘democratic surface’ of an ineffectual ‘representational’ political system. At its best, this allows a concentration of elitism and power in a Foucauldian sense (which as a culturalist he sees as potentially open to challenge from other potential power bases) or an impenetrable, self-replicating monopoly or oligarchy. Thus much of the writing acknowledges a continuity in the established politico-administrative, decision-making forum, largely based on the formal mechanisms and trappings of power, and in a Weberian sense, amenable to a potentially negotiated order between parties within the identifiable liberal-plural process.

The core approach of the thesis, therefore, is to use a cultural studies analysis for a better understanding of the potency of wider, connecting discursive contexts sustaining such arrangements. Also, to challenge the shallowness of analysis inherent in a narrow focus on simplistic political arrangements. Fundamentally, it reveals the connectivity of relational community life in general and, in particular, the multi-dimensional production and reification of planning policy in wider society.
Planning Literature Review

Literature about land-use planning tends thus to reflect prevailing paradigms and these general schisms that lead to an epistemological struggle of ideas for professional dominance. Traditionally, it has been stereotypically conventional, at its core adopting a mixture of academic stances from the humanities and social science, reflecting the segmented specialisms of writers from the different fields of interest, such as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, history, architecture and both wings of geography, physical and human. Each has its own view of the world and seemingly the more convoluted and contradictory perspectives impinging upon the study of people in society crave an understanding of the human condition whilst offering a prescription for social change in the context of wider popular involvement and support. For its main focus, the planning profession has tended to develop around, firstly, the administrative and legislative imperatives necessitated by Government intervention in the development process, and secondly, the nature of the research focus, first developed and encouraged by local authorities and central Government; and academia. Here, the focus is upon the paradigms linking elements of praxis which emerge within the greater society as that part of the profession's wider struggle to settle on a definition for 'planners' and the corporate goals they seek to achieve. Indeed, as this thesis is being written in the Summer 2000, Sir Richard Rodgers, leader of the Government's Urban Design task force is advocating a merger between the RTPI and the RIBA to secure an integrated paradigm towards adopting better urban design skills (De Castella, 2000).
The early planning profession was not only influenced by the positivism of the natural sciences which placed through empiricism emphasis on physicality, but in contradistinction integrated the concerns of the social sciences seeking sociological explanations for human activity, fuelled by the social and ideological insights provided by Marx and Engels. The combination of physical built solutions and social measures as a response to poverty, deprivation, squalor, and eventually war, first established through the projects of Victorian philanthropists, led to urban clearance, council housing and new towns, and attempts to control the location of the industrial workforce. All are key examples of this twin approach to environmental modernisation, but with a pre- eminent physicality. The determinism of the Chicago school of urban ecologists Burgess and Hoyt (Chinoy, 1967) posited an overtly biological explanation of capitalist city growth and decay over time, reinforcing much of this physicality. Much of this still remains at the heart of British planning in its analysis and policies, despite a more overt interest in political processes and ideology (Cullingworth, and Nadin, 1997, page 281).

‘Remaking Planning’ (Brindley et al, 1996) in contrast, is constructed on the thesis that the post-war consensus on planning practice gave way to a more politicised variety of market oriented approaches under Thatcher in the 80’s. A changing key paradigm favouring market interests came to prominence under the Conservative Government elected in 1979 against a general disillusionment with the broad-brush approach of planning practice in the 70’s and its perceived inability to cope with urban decay and industrial decline. Through an examination of six case
studies, the authors offer a simple, generalised typology of approaches to planning problems, perceived to be associated with particular areas and institutional arrangements, in response to the private market. This depends on a simple dichotomy of attitudes towards planning and the market (and, by implication, the role of the State), identified by the Nuffield Commission of Enquiry, 1986. Opportunities for planning are viewed along a continuum, from a negative reaction to the status quo in ‘non-problem’ areas, to a proactive stance in ‘problem areas’; the level and scope for action being determined by the relative power and ideology of central Government and oppositional groups.

The authors view the majority of the case-studies as evidence of different experiments by central Government with a clear expression of ideology favouring private investment and management of the development process, set against a background of privatisation and public spending cuts. Oppositional ideologies are cast in terms of ‘locals’ versus ‘outsiders’ (although perhaps the Government would say ‘national interests’) and community interests are seen as socialist in origin, defending local needs. A more centralist, market approach seeks to override local planning policy. It is held to lack local accountability, denying a growing pressure for more effective public participation, generally considered by market interests to be parochial, inefficient and obstructive to the desired Thatcherite goal of national economic reconstruction.
The thrust of the thesis, taking as its focus area based events, is inevitably 'physical' in its considerations and distinct administrative 'planning styles' are identified. Clearly, the research methodology limits and constructs the arena for study, which adopts a simplistic view of the relationship between private enterprise and the State. Significantly, this is undefined in terms of structural capitalist ideology and in looking at the social and physical components of the case studies, the study employs an inductive approach, which narrowly identifies and describes single events and institutional arrangements. It reflects a kind of sociogram plotting actors and interests over a period of time. From this, a simplistic description of politics and decision-making is offered along with identified interests; and perceived conflicts/tensions between parties. Thus, general outcomes are deduced giving rise to decision-making models based largely on procedure. This approach is essentially pluralist and 'value free', as indeed acknowledged by the authors, perhaps affording the researchers an image of neutrality. However, also seriously limiting the scope of the research, particularly in its omission of structural political and ideological processes that confer and remove access to power; and may not be easily identified and recorded, except through proxy contexts.

The social arena under scrutiny is inevitably moulded by available physical facts and tangible data (including the expression of ideas and goals) and, therefore, is severely limited in its analysis by a mostly descriptive and conventionally deductive social-scientific approach. This is rather as a theatre critic might
describe the quantitative, seen aspects of a theatrical production on the basis of what is self evident, such as the stage setting, the spoken words and main plot, without cognisance of an holistic view of events, including alternative ideologies and signified meanings. Thus, the planning world is viewed as a simple product of the clash of interests between 'the State', 'the market' and 'the community', in a local geographical context, within a given capitalist liberal democracy. The Authors' concern is with an immediate, short-term analysis of events, without presenting an understanding of the wider and more complex ideological processes that blur traditional concepts of the market and the State, and offer more sophisticated explanations of power relationships between them. Or indeed, at the geographical level, by focusing on wider national and global investment decisions which have direct consequences for individual sites (Massey, 1994).

In essence, the approach appears to reflect similar contemporary pluralist studies of planning under Thatcherism, such as Thornley (1993a), which detect a more centralist form of political hegemony at work, although fail to adequately explore in depth the nature of ideology and power relationships. Thornley's work employs a deductive approach involving a comparative analysis of the British and Swedish planning contexts and goes a stage further in examining the dynamic relationship concerning the schism between traditional liberal conservatism and the emergence of the 'New Right' (Scruton, 1980). However, it takes a traditional view of the concept of ideology and naively uses this merely as a label such as for expressed Government policy as reflected by its political manifesto. Thus it shares a similar
lack of depth in its analysis. 'Remaking Planning', therefore, is based on a fairly narrow interpretation of perceived events rather than potential outcomes, without identifying structural ideologies or, for example, how consent is manufactured through the process of hegemony as argued for by Gramsci (1986). The authors' final plea for the ascendancy of a more oppositional planning paradigm can hardly succeed if, in the first place, their level of enquiry is too parochial and epistemologically constrained. Especially if it fails to examine the wider process of political and cultural hegemony operating so as to construct definitions of planning and expectations of it: what a previous RTPI President has signified as the profession's vision.

If the key intention of the authors was to invoke a debate about the apparent fragmentation of the planning system, then given the limiting political parameters and structures of capitalism which assigns class relationships, ownership rights and privileges, and what they see as the undesirable shift in the cultural balance between the administrative interest of the market and 'the state', to the detriment of 'consumers' (institutional constraints), then perhaps their limited (and limiting) task has been secured. Certainly, they fail to address more fundamental questions about the structural ideological processes at work, such as the way in which ideology is actually constructed and maintained through real, everyday events, rather than constituting Althusser's 'glue' holding objects close (or apart?). Also, these events are reflected in the processes by which they articulate and mediate with one another through dialectical materialism. As such, it fails to acknowledge
the significance of wider actions (and non-actions) leading to wider and long-term cultural gains and loses. Plus, the enduring nature of absolute and monopolistic power, its inception and dynamic plasticity such as that envisaged by Foucault, through the nature of its discursive formation and its implications for planning thought and practice, reflected in Gramsci’s praxis (Ibid.).

A more recent example of an administrative ‘decision-making’ approach is to be seen in an article by Patsy Healey that appeared in The Journal of Property Research (Healey, 1991). She divides models of the development process into four categories, looking at their abilities to ‘understand’ the minutiae of development projects and their conceptualisation of actors and events under different conditions. These are 1. Equilibrium - classical supply and demand theory; 2. Event Sequence – ‘unpacking’ micro events, which resembles a simple flow-chart describing ‘events’; 3. Agency models - actors, roles and interests – decision making charts; and 4. Structural models of a Marxist origin, focusing on relations of production. Healey contrasts 1-3 and 4 (micro versus macro) and largely accepts that 1-3 are descriptive with no real analysis of power dynamics. Also, she argues that 1-3 are too preoccupied with detail and offer no search for a problematic, which is singularly devoid in her own work. Further, that 3 is too much of the meta-narrative which cannot articulate with the minutiae of everyday social events. Here, behaviourism, as with much of the classical planning literature, is the linking thread.
Healey's analysis uses the vocabulary of the empiricist. She challenges the efficacy of the 'supply' and 'demand' approach, only because not all elements of the idealised market assumptions match real behaviour, viewed in some way as less than perfect. Yet in some cases they do, so she seems to accept both the positivist approach of the deductive, rational and positivistic social scientific method, and the given nature of the system under scrutiny. Her criticism is that all the approaches ostensibly only confront capitalist society, as if within a global context, there is another. Also, her approach, whilst castigating the mere descriptive approach presented by the first three models, proceeds to legitimise just that. She welcomes the Marxist attempt to address issues, although fails to explain what this means in terms of seeking an understanding of difference. Her vagueness still harks of the very 'description' she criticises the approaches for. Also, for the variations of 'Marxist' models, which seem to have more in common with classical liberal economic theory, she posits out of hand the inability of social relations of production to articulate with, and mediate, micro events.

Having castigated pluralism in a roundabout way (referring to other writers), she points towards a merging of the micro and the macro, the meta-narrative and real events (praxis, the seat of contested space and ideas). This argues for the best of structure and agency to be brought together, which she undertakes to do in a forthcoming paper, which unfortunately seems never to have materialised. Clearly, she has a sort of vision of the 'problematic' and the potential construction of epistemological praxis, but it remains a kind of parody and nowhere does it
surface. No key questions challenging how development, its stages and actors mutually combine to reproduce outcomes and characteristics, or the ideological processes which create and sustain this. The nearest obtained is a sophisticated attempt to seek detailed descriptions and unravel complex interrelationships, without asking how these mutually contest and sustain the reproduction of the social relations and outcomes. All her attempts to seek questions really come to nought all the way through and it would be fascinating to know what happened or what was the outcome of this ‘groping’ for an approach.
The Profession and Epistemology

Any focus upon the planning profession to understand its inception and widely developing and often ambiguous or contradictory roles, calls, firstly, for an understanding of what the particular activity of planning is about, whose interests it serves and how its key practitioners seek to fulfil that role. Then, secondly, and in particular, just how the profession, through the Institute, views itself, and those particular roles. Thus a good starting point, therefore, is to consider a history of the profession comprising mostly academically trained, chartered town planners, accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), from its own corporate perspective; although this will be but one partial view. Nevertheless, it is a valid one in that contrary views can be adjudged to compete in a context of mutually selective bias. Further, the author being a corporate chartered member of the RTPI, with a background in public service, has to acknowledge his somewhat contradictory role here, within that wider, ambiguous context.

The RTPI, as a professional body, was founded in 1914, arguably as an outcome of idealism associated with the garden city movement established earlier in the century, responses to the products of class antagonisms accompanying the pressures of industrial growth. But more immediately, as a response to the Housing and Town Planning (etc.) Act, 1909. This specifically empowered councils to prepare technical schemes for new development, mostly in the suburbs, regulating layout and density of new housing and reserving land for highway improvements. The new profession arose from a close relationship between the
various skills associated with this public service impetus involving key firms such as the architects and designers, Parker and Unwin, whose work spanned the private and public sectors and formed close collaborations in project work: architecture, engineering, law and surveying. During the First World War there had been a focus by the State on providing homes for workers in the munitions industry in the less prosperous outlying regions, managed by Raymond Unwin. This established a political priority for the provision of public housing to be taken up in the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 which consolidated the earlier planning powers and established council housing, thus significantly bringing housing interests into the professional equation.

By 1989, the 75th anniversary of the inception of the RTPI (1914 - 1989), the Institute, which was chartered to promote the art and science of town planning, had a membership of over 14,500, subject to its codes of conduct laid down by the Privvy Council. The membership, which included students, worked in central and local government, private industry and academia. By 1996 it had grown to 17,220 of which 13,630 were corporate members. The Institute had London offices, a General Secretary and full time staff, serving an elected Council and 14 regional branches throughout the United Kingdom. Its pivotal policing role as professional gatekeeper is aptly set out in the preface to a brochure produced to mark its 75 anniversary: 'Planning For Town and Country - Context and Achievement - 1914-1989':

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"Through its elected Council and Officers, and expert panels of members, it represents town and country planning to the public and to government and other interests. It sets standards of training and qualification for entry to the profession, administers a code of conduct and advises its members on all aspects of planning practice. It also runs a library and a full programme of conferences, seminars and meetings, many of which are arranged by its branch committees. Its publications include expert reports, information leaflets, guides to planning services and a journal, *The Planner.*"

(RTPI, 1989, page 2)

In addition to this, the institute is a charity and it runs its planning aid services administered through its regional branches. This not only recruits volunteers from its ranks to assist and represent people who cannot afford to engage paid consultants, to achieve better participation in the planning process. To meet its obligation to further a better public awareness of the planning system, the service is now developing a new proactive approach targeting socially excluded groups, including the provision of training for elected councillors on local authority planning committees, parish councillors and other community groups.

Besides its policing, advisory, charitable and educational roles, The RTPI has another key role is in relation to planning education. It provides accreditation for numerous full and part-time vocational planning courses for undergraduates and post-graduates, some seeking post graduate diplomas, run at universities and colleges throughout the U.K. There is also a distance learning package involving the Open University and consortia of other universities. It is also involved with higher research programmes and advises Government and research bodies on what
it considers to be research priorities. It offers specialist advice to parliamentary select committees and works in conjunction with planning consultancies providing research facilities to private and public interest groups. In all, its membership works across public and private sectors of society, including fulfilling a quasi-legal function on behalf of the Secretary of State by acting as Inspectors at planning inquiries and in dealing with written submissions and chairing other tribunals. In turn, many corporate members fulfilling these often senior management roles in private industry and Government perform key roles within the Institute, enabling a cross fertilisation between the wider corporate interests. The RTPI, through its membership is thus part of a complex network of shared planning interests that mediate across and between Government bodies, academia and the private sector.

That close association between the Institute and wider society is reflected in the anniversary brochure, which was funded by a grant from Land Securities PLC, a private development company. Also, the RTPI sees itself as a global leader in planning matters, although several countries that were former constituent members of the British Empire have their own Institutes. The document seemingly struggles for several British-centric definitions of planning across several sections of the publication, doubtless reflecting not only competing historical paradigms about perceived professional priorities, but also the discipline's chequered history and close association with incremental political action by successive British Governments:
“Town and country planning this century has become one of the integral features of national political and institutional arrangements. During the post-war years it has perfected three essential practices, the sophistication of which has become the envy of many countries. One is the preparation, revision and updating of plans for the future allocation of land uses; the second is the control of development to accord generally with the provision of those plans; and the third is the positive action undertaken to initiate development, to engage in schemes of improvement and generally to be part of the public sector management of both town and country.”

(Ibid., page 24)

Planning is thus seen essentially a state activity, and planners are the proactive actors within that process, global leaders in a world economy. They have adapted to the modern, post Second World War industrial society, exercising flexibility and stamina to achieve social justice across the social spectrum in town and country, for which their profession played a key role:

“It is interesting that during this period the country's population has become better housed and has been provided with a range of better community facilities, both urban and rural, than ever before. Town planning has played an important part in the expansion and shaping of our towns and cities, and in the protection and enhancement of amenities in the countryside. It has dealt progressively with a whole range of issues of public importance: housing, transport, shopping, employment, recreation and tourism.”

(Ibid.)

Planning as a science and an art has thus established its natural fulcrum within a modern polity. It has moved from being a disinterested, neutral manipulator of physical elements of the human environment, to "getting things done" (Ibid.), implying political imperatives and the exercise of value judgement. Despite competing discourses, the underlying direction of the profession has been singularly focused on a particular methodology: and that is the realisation of
praxis, linking normative ideas about the future to the achievement and prioritisation of outcomes. Yet the rhetoric it employs still bears what cynics might perceive to be a utopian idealism, using a clinically precise language to promise deliverance of all things for all people:

"And so town planning today has many characteristics. It is concerned with getting things done: providing land for housing, community facilities and amenities. It is engaged on the management of day-to-day affairs: co-ordinating action by many people and organisations to ensure that projects are less costly to the public purse, speedier in achievement and more acceptable in result. Planning is concerned with land-use distribution and allocation, ensuring that development is in the right place and at the right time. Planning also stops development prejudicial to the community interest: that which is in the wrong place or in the wrong manner."

(Ibid., page 25)

In this context, one might reasonably rhetorically ask whether is there anything at all that planning and 'the planners' cannot achieve, or determine as being an absolute truth, such as the 'right' way to do things! Certainly, a claim to professional omnipotence, positing absolute human infallibility, is not only decidedly improbable, but also logically impossible, given the frailty of the human condition and the enduring, yet chameleon nature of human power relationships, manifested by vested interests through ideological construct. Indeed, such 'posturing' may be deconstructed as an almost inevitable product of the image that the profession constructs for itself in the face of overwhelming odds. That is, its impotence in the face of interlocking, internal and external political struggles and constraints over its complex and often contradictory myriad self-regulatory and defensive role, within capitalist society.
This subservient role to capitalism is tacitly acknowledged here and makes more sense, given that the prevailing ideological order sets the priorities for new development, expressed in terms of managing investment in land-use and bricks and mortar. Also, to make things happen, bringing human benefits (and conversely, loses), in time and space. The meanings associated with the profession's 'common-sense' priorities expressed through such a shopping list thus become muddled and contradictory, perhaps because the interests of Capital have successfully subverted the institute's terminology and meanings, juxtapositioning, for example, unrelated, neutral technico-environmental objectives and concepts alongside moral issues about social inclusion. Thus planning claims to its side mixed priorities, jumbling the pedestrian along with the vital:

"Furthermore it seeks to enhance everyday lives: prohibiting misplaced advertisements, emphasising higher standards of design, aiming at environmental quality, relating to programmes of social welfare and providing conditions for enterprise and job creation."

(Ibid.)

Yet despite the neutrality of the Institute's presentation of its role in the environmental process, it acknowledges that "in recent times, certain political sympathies have appeared to go against the notion of town planning" (Ibid.). However, despite a lack of reference to the motivating role of profit in the development process, Adam Smith's private market needs a guiding hand, and that becomes the imperative: to foster the skills needed for the development process "and create conditions for the 'good life'”. Trickle down as a key facet of liberal
ideology is alive and well in the prevailing Institute's paradigm in support of market processes and entrepreneurialism. In the modern industrial economy, the harbingers of economic success are clear:

"Town planners initiate development and act as society's enablers, to 'make things happen'. They are trained to be co-ordinators and take a synoptic view of events and projects: their skills are used in many different forms, from assisting in the processes of urban regeneration of local economic development, to participating in multi-professional teams in garden festivals, leisure and tourism schemes and project management of all kinds. Planners feel confident about the future and their activity is positive and purposeful."

(Ibid.)

Such is the prevailing professional paradigm that surfaces in this document and has particular relevance given the historical events in 1989 when it was written. The optimism of the earlier Thatcher years was waning and the UK economy was facing a slump. The S.D.P was formed as a major split in the Labour Party occurred. Neil Kinnock took over from Michael Foot as leader and a major debate was underway about the 'New Times' postmodernist project. Much of this can be seen to signify a key political schism, an argument centred on Post Fordism, juxtapositioned between the oppositional tenets of Keynesian economics (demand led production) and Thatcherite monetarism (supply led consumption). Here, we witness the anguish between the competing strands of capitalist global production, and the clashing strategies of interventionist political paradigms: between the optimists and pessimists of the left and right, who came to strike new ideological bargains as part of a struggle for political power. The RTPI can be seen as part of that political culture rather than a Foucaultian power block, a discursive formation
struggling to compete and dominate as a bureaucratic institution, devoid of a clear role in the convoluted struggles between Capital and Labour.
The Nature of the Period Reflected in Time-Related Events 1979-99

The period of two decades under study, as it was affected by profound political and social changes in the UK, makes particular sense from an historical perspective. They reflected an underlying structural continuity, whilst ostensibly built upon key contradictory schisms: conflicting ideological paradigms operating both within the wider culture and specific political parties and institutions. Significantly, the period starts with the coming to power of the monetarist Thatcher Government, which replaced Jim Callaghan’s centre-right Labour coalition administration in 1979 and spearheaded a focussed assault against the welfare state and the political consensus operating since the Second World War. This destabilisation of prevailing structural political alignments fractured long established political alliances, first within the Labour Party, which led to a major regrouping of the Left, and eventually, perhaps more significantly, of the right within the Conservative Party.

In government, the Thatcherites were eventually deposed by Conservative social democrats and in the 1997 general election, a newly reconstituted ‘New’ Labour Party under Tony Blair which had re-established its social democratic credentials, won an overwhelming majority of seats. In concert, the early part of the period saw certain key Sainsbury family members as company directors engaging in party politics on both sides of the political party divide. Significantly, the then chairman, David Sainsbury, played an active role in the struggle for dominance within the
Labour Party, first leaving to join the newly formed SDP, only later to return as a New Labour Government Minister under Tony Blair. The period ends with what appears to have been the near downfall and potential demise of the Sainsbury supermarket company towards the end of 1999, when speculation was rife that it could be a victim of a take over, or a buy out by venture capitalists. Wal Mart, the ‘stack em high, sell em fast’ American superstore company, had just entered the UK and acquired Asda. A new consortia of venture capitalists headed by the ex-chairman of the Asda Group, a Conservative member of parliament, Archie Norman MP, rumoured to have made £30m in one week converting old firms into new during a period of New Labour economic growth and stability, was supposedly on the prowl for more ailing firms. All this reflects a wider, global political paradigm favouring competition in the market to secure social inclusion through consumerism.

Against these contradictions and paradoxes of the two decades, we can ostensibly identify three political periods. Firstly, the Thatcherite era established by the fall of the centre-right Callaghan Labour Government in 1979, followed, secondly, by Major in 1990, in turn giving way to the New Labour Government of Blair in 1997 running into the new millennium. But that is too simplistic. A deeper analysis must go beyond the easily identifiable political schisms and tensions within and between the key political parties. It must identify the context in which wider ideological and political paradigms constructed new political attitudes and alliances across parties, linking with the wider cultural landscape, to create
structural political continuity out of apparent discord. Equally fascinating is the context in which the aims of Thatcherism to roll back the state and modernise the mobility of capital could have so much resonance with the objectives of its seemingly prime antagonists, New Labour.

The Thatcherites were opposed by a wide ranging coalition of more 'progressive' political interests within and beyond the Conservative party, eager to expose their professed radicalism as little more than a cruel and narrow attempt by the noveau riche to supplant the landed gentry. As such, the paradigm of the anti-Thatcherites became synonymous with modernisation. The ongoing struggle, which divided organised labour, surfaced and labelled traditional labour as outmoded as the Thatcherites. This coalition effect (power struggle) accompanied a 'modernist' reaction within the ranks of Capital, reasserting the values of a more progressive nouveau riche against the traditionally conservative landed pretensions of the Thatcherites (despite their protestations otherwise). This struggle within the conservative party holding political office resulted in a de facto coup d’état which toppled Thatcher and established Major, paving the way for the Blairite New Labour coalition with 'social justice' as its clarion call, to replace 'democratic socialism'.

An overlapping of seemingly contradictory interests here centred on conceptions about 'the market' and its role in a capitalist liberal democracy. Once seemingly diametrically opposed ideas here have apparently united, with those manifested at
the beginning of the period now ostensibly stood on their head, albeit still supreme: a triumph of private capital, where ownership is irrelevant in relation to the power of consumerism. Blair and Thatcher meet ideologically at her Secretary of State for the Environment Nick Ridley’s imagined single council AGM where shareholders make policy for managers to implement. Here, democracy is reconstructed through the noble shareowner who no longer needs the vote - because councils have privatised everything and simply have an effete watching brief, given their key role in devising and monitoring specifications with ineffective powers of policing. How can the two opposing ideas be different yet, at the same time, have similar meanings? What is the real difference, if any? How does the manifestation of this apparently confused ideology construct and maintain itself through planning epistemology and practise, ranging from deregulation (and decentralisation), to even more deregulation, but a new centralisation manifested as a key preoccupation in the retailing and regeneration focuses?

The beginning of the 80’s influenced the micro aspects of the development process relating to the new Sainsbury store in Loughborough. The earlier study focussed on local dynamics using Stephen Lukes’s ‘non-decision making’ model, taking a rather simplistic view of the forces of Capital and Labour ranged against each other in the guise of ‘vested interests’ reflected through the actions of identifiable actors. The current research project now attempts to develop the notion of Sainsbury as a typification, using a conceptual approach seeking wider cultural linkages and potential explanations at the national and global levels. This is
reflected through chains of production and consumption, constructed upon the
collection of ideological discourse and its reciprocated articulation between the
retail profession, the planning profession and the state, powered by the dynamics
of commodification. The central thesis attacks the notion of a positivistic and
rational deductive, scientific methodology and instead, applies a multi-disciplinary
and time specific conceptual approach, more likely to offer realistic explanations
of events occurring within a late, industrial capitalist cultural framework. In other
words, to discover how companies like Sainsbury provide that ideological (and
cultural) link between planning and the wider world, indeed ultimately the globe.

A most potent analytical tool for deconstructing inherent ideological partnerships
and antagonisms in political formations and parties and the roles they play in
developing dialectical materialism, is Marx’s ‘Eighteenth Brumaire’ (Marx,
1977b). As Engels recognised, this offers an astute conceptual framework for
considering the complex historical schisms operating in everyday culture between
the interests of production affecting political changes and strategies within the
State (Engels, 1977b, page 683). The role of key Sainsbury personalities and the
ideologies they carry within this process is to be scrutinised. In particular, how
they strive to fulfil the expectations of a modernising company within the tenets of
capitalism, whilst being an integral part of a process that constructs hegemony and
maintains key ideologies, producing, reproducing and adapting, modern industrial
capitalism to a rapidly changing world culture. Also, offering potential to construct
and modify new and existing markets for commodities. In other words, how in real
life Capital retains and develops its power and mobility to secure its monopoly over profit, through their agency.

What is apparent is that the period offers research at different levels within layers of cultural events that surface, peak or disappear at particular moments. Further, these may be related to events either in sequence or conditioned by historical situations. An all pervading ideology of postmodernist thought and explanation has a global context set by a shift in the nature of Capital formation relating to and partly constructed by epistemological perspectives about manufacture and service industries, favouring less certain and more flexible outcomes. At one level, we can see the era as a microcosm of the ongoing process of capitalist change, the loss of old primary industrial development, the relocation of investment globally that has universally fired the ideologies of both the left and the right. Planning epistemology and legislation in practice has evolved new paradigms which seek to accommodate more flexible and less rigid formulations attacking the very nature of praxis, the production of conceptual ideas, translated into policies and development plans which under capitalism, may, or may not, become reality. The period witnesses a scrabble for new service industries which favoured retailing, albeit that arguments about the merits of centralisation, or decentralisation, have failed to acknowledge wider issues about the ideological nature of the construction of choices. Especially so-called demand factors and their manipulated role in the commodification process assigning variable rights of access to land and other key
resources. All this unites the forces of Capital in a focus on consumption where the somewhat rosy future of ‘development’ lies.

The contradictory interests can be seen through the planning process reflecting competing paradigms about ‘centralisation’ and ‘decentralisation’ in capitalist society. These tend to be based on classical economic and related spatial models of development, and growth making assumptions about the best and most efficient use of the most accessible, centralised ‘market’ sites. In these terms, they form key transport nodes, which also happen to be on the most expensive land, smallest in area and dictating variable travel costs, bearing harsher on those less mobile and poorer people, further away. The concept of centralisation (concentration) inevitably raises an issue of ‘monopoly’ regarded as ‘undemocratic’ in liberal democratic terms, mostly because access is difficult for the greater number of poorer consumers. Thus, ‘competition’ held to be democratic because it brings more supply points into being, is seen to be the logical answer. As more commercial outlets take up more locations and space, thus moving with a centrifugal dynamic outward towards the greater areas of population (representing a suburbanisation process over time), the erosion of older forms of centralisation and concentration in space and time occurs. Thus ‘decentralisation’ leads to lower costs because there is a greater supply of land which is cheaper at the periphery and market provision is larger across a greater number of supply centres and catchments. More flexibility and a less rigid supply hierarchy, plus the mobility of Capital and a potential for lower costs and privatisation, combine to provide an
increased resource supply, especially for the better-off decamping from the urban centres.

Decentralisation as the obverse of 'centralisation' thus carries with it the baggage of classical economic theory: individualism, and the nature of consumer 'demands', 'choices', 'needs' and 'wants', as natural as biological exactitude. Also, the way these provide rational cum behaviouristic models of their actions and expectations within an area framework, more recently 'the region' under prevailing political and professional paradigms. Yet operating within human culture, they are political and ideological concepts, reflecting normative expectations about the management and control of human life, and raising questions about the construction of consumption and the ideological imperatives that implies. Supermarkets, in concert with large retail development as key instigators of cultural code systems, offer a key conduit of ideological control and cultural manipulation by the state in partnership with capitalism. Land use planning concerns the interplay between the home, a key location of socialisation, and the servicing functions provided by: a) the workplace, banks and post offices, b) shops, c) education and health, and d) recreation. It also links to other key sites of employment and sources of welfare, articulated in the main by roads, footpaths and rail transport. Ultimately, in strict Foucauldian terms a discursive formation is constructed, a culturally historic entity for the administration of control over people to cast them as 'subjects' of manipulation through an exercise of knowledge and power in industrial society (Rabinow, 1991, page 7).
As industrialisation proceeded on the back of colonisation, home agriculture mechanised and shook out surplus labour, which drifted to the towns in search of work in the new factories. Towns and cities grew at a rapid rate causing serious public health problems and engendered within the ruling class a political priority for new forms of social management. Agricultural land was sold off for development and the suburban process was under way to accommodate a rapidly growing, healthier population. The main framework of present day planning control was established after the Second World War when policies were underway to decentralise the older, metropolitan areas, rundown cities and towns, especially through the new town movement. Planning was seen to be a means of arbitrating between competing uses and much of the American pattern of suburban land use, building large council and private estates on redundant agricultural land, was copied. Inevitably, the large out-of-town shopping format was adopted and the new focus of urban investment starved the older urban centres to the detriment of older, poorer and ethnic communities occupying cheaper, slum property.

The New Labour Government inherited an apparent change in planning policy which shunned out-of-town shopping and sought to redirect investment back into the older metropolitan areas. As part of that process New Labour seeks to modernise the planning system which it sees as a key tool in the proactive regeneration of the urban fabric and economy, whilst providing greater social justice for all sections of society. It has replaced the tendering of local council services to private industry with ‘best value’. This carries the same argument in
favour of making better use of key public resources, by copying better practice elsewhere, now to be extended to the planning arena (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1998a). New standards such as for the control of development emanate from the Government, seemingly at odds with its desire to decentralise decision-making whilst adopting the centralised pattern of land-use control established under the Conservatives.

Yet it believes in regionalism, part of the decentralising thesis, albeit still part of the language of classical economics and physical geography which has influenced and bedevilled the planning process since its inception. It could be argued that the Government seeks to manipulate the physical language of planning, its code system, whilst firmly controlling the ideological context which favours the modernisation of the planning process as a means of enabling capitalism to develop and reproduce itself. That process is an ideological one, namely commodification that drives the elements of the planning processes and feeds back on the development and maintenance of capitalism. Thus, it is possible to discern historically a public - privatised continuum. First, ‘public’ by way of state controlled industry such as coal, steel, ship building, car production, etc., having a nationally organised framework, but reflecting local, national and global interests (in that order); plus the various services such as power supply and general regulation, i.e., public services. Secondly, ‘privatised’ having a global, corporate context organised on a national, local and global basis, in that particular order.
All this amounts to a revamping of Capital on a global scale: the construction of new corporate monopolies, in theory able to lower costs and reduce the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) placing pressure on the cost of private borrowing via higher interest rates and deterring foreign investment. Therefore, the continuing political paradigm shared by the main European & pan American neo-liberal political parties is to frame a new economic focus on supply economics, via monetarist policy. Thus, at the heart of the prevailing social and political change is the exercise of a regime of power and ideology to construct a shared belief in the agency of Government, in partnership with corporate interests unlikely to achieve full social welfare goals, but harnessed towards that aim. Thus the overall ideological continuum moves towards a new form of corporate democracy for the masses signified, amongst other sectors, through the process of food retailing, allowing a central conduit of constructed ideological power realised through the constructed process of commodification. In other words, this project looks at the wider cultural context in which the process of commodification has itself changed and adapted as a sophisticated means of Capital reformulation over the two decades since Sainsbury first entered Loughborough.

A key socialist pamphlet published by the Fabian Society ‘Government and Industry: A New Partnership’, and authored by David Sainsbury (1981), attacked what it saw as the failure of British Industry, on the heels of the new Thatcher Government. Its focus on a need for a restructuring of the nations’ industrial base to combat stagnation and revitalise itself within a rapidly changing world
economy, was viewed as the key economic imperative to realise social goals achieved through new growth rather than redistribution. Perceptively, it anticipated much of what the social democratic movement that broke away from the Labour party a few years later would stand for, along with the tenets of modernisation established under Tony Blair in the guise of a re-launched New Labour. The message was a simple one: private industry had failed to innovate or adapt to the new market order and without major reconstruction, led by Government, it would fail. The Government had the power and indeed a duty to intervene in the arenas of enabling education for intellectual attainment and new skills, investment in research and development for new and better products, and more even sources of funding. Yet for a socialist diatribe it was riddled with contradiction: industry knew best how to manage itself and market mechanisms guarded against overt centralisation of the sort favoured by civil servants (who knew little about commerce). Indeed, this underlying plea is for the integrity of the market, or the interests of Capital to do what it knows best in not only running its own businesses, but also defending society against a concentrated monopoly of interests.

Interestingly, the argument in favour of a public subsidy for private investment can be interpreted as seemingly sugar coated with 'common-sense' language of 'the left': indeed of the sort eventually to be adopted by New Labour:

"The aim should be to create as many different decision-making points as possible, and to work as far as possible through the market rather
than seeking to concentrate decisions about investment in a few hands."

(Ibid., page 28)

What is meant is that the 'few hands' are civil servants, such as the key ones that ran the National Enterprise Board (NEB) under the former Labour Government. However, for the democratisation of the ownership of Capital David Sainsbury seems not so sanguine:

"...wider ownership of lower levels of wealth has naturally led to a greater aversion of risk and a greater desire for liquidity."

(Ibid.)

Here, concerns are with long term profitability and investment seen as the key to the nation's industrial success and he laments the diminishing role of 'local' banks where the manager has personal knowledge of, and an eye towards, long-term financial growth and stability of known companies. Further, the role of the stock market in share ownership at the expense of the banks has tolerated and fostered this interest in short-term economic goals, to the detriment of commercial probity and competitive growth. Not that David Sainsbury failed to see the advantages of the membership of the NEB as conducive to a partnership between Government and private interests. The Board had shown the determination to stand up to the Government over their attempts to take some companies into public ownership on previous occasions and that boded well for his vision of a thriving private enterprise. Yet for him, the criteria by which firms should be rewarded with financial support was dependent upon their demonstrating a measure of commercial acumen and success for the future.
CHAPTER 3

RETAILING AS CULTURE

The terminology used in general terms to describe and explain the interrelated activity of selling and buying, i.e., 'retailing' and 'shopping', focuses on what is considered to be the primary motive, or leading dynamic for the connected relationships linking the self interests of production and consumption within the market place. As such, they might be presented or viewed as neutral terms; but each is hardly so. Each represents and signifies a code system, a discursive formation that defines, supports and reproduces the wider ideological interests they come to represent; and the nature of the dynamic relationship between the two, mutually inclusive yet potentially hostile, sets of activities afforded meaning through articulated chains of production and consumption. Inevitably, each particular perspective comes to attract different epistemological concerns: particular academic focuses centred upon prevailing paradigms. In academic literature, thus, more traditional approaches to 'shopping' have tended to focus on the cognitive behaviour of consumers to seek a rationale for set patterns of individual behaviour as a response to the actions of suppliers. In terms of retailing, however, the main focus has tended to be on economic decision making by producers and retailers, giving rise to geometric land use patterns establishing assumed market catchments. Each focus has come to rely on classical explanations based on idealistic assumptions about supply and demand factors, and the rationality of actors and the roles they occupy.
For an easy definition as a simple generic label, ‘retail’ as a noun is defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990) as “the sale of goods in relatively small quantities to the public, and usu(ally) (sic) not for resale (cf. WHOLESALE)”, whilst ‘shopping’ is the corollary of this direct act, to complete the market transaction: “the purchase of goods etc.” Notwithstanding this focus on the position of ‘the seller’ as the object of the meaning afforded to the phenomenon of ‘selling’, retail is nevertheless inevitably posited here, by inference, as a segment of a wider cumulative, social activity, without which it could not take place. Thus, the meaning suggests the primacy of a greater, communal connotation over a narrow social event, involving other parties, the ‘subjects’ of retailing, i.e., consumers who do the buying. Also, it raises questions about the potential suppliers and manufacturers linking with the object of the discourse, that is to make profit from selling to shoppers, and the panoply of marketing interests that support and sustain these relationships at various local and global levels, to make that outcome inevitable.

As this dynamic human activity occurs in space and time, in other words they are geographically spatial markets in an historical context, the meaning of the word ‘retailing’ inevitably (and conveniently), comes to represent a generalised discourse of ‘selling’ and by implication ‘buying’, represented in geographical and planning epistemologies. In so doing, it acknowledges a structured pecking order in power relationships favouring the interests of capitalist producers. Thus, it is
obvious that the segmented act of selling alone is incomplete and has no meaning without the involvement of suppliers and buyers. Further, the dynamic relationship between the parties articulated and mediated through the social relations of production and consumption, and manifested through cultural chains of social interaction, provides the key to a holistic understanding of the integrated culture of retailing and shopping, enacting the ideological struggles between these competing interests.
Retail Literature Review

In this wider sense, then, this thesis takes 'retailing' as a broad focus on selling and buying as part of a concerted activity; although a particular emphasis will be given to the phenomenon of 'shopping' as a self contained discourse about consumption. Literature on general retailing over the last three decades is wide in terms of its particular origin and focus, although that concerning supermarket development is limited. Literature from a technical town planning aspect dealing with this aspect of 'shopping' tends to be seen as a corollary of retailing, as a 'natural', secondary imperative of production. More recently, much of this largely emanates from consultant planners responding to the recent debates about the monopoly effect of large retailing and a political focus taken up by the retail industry, political parties and the profession itself. A catalyst for this has been Parliament and enquiries set up by Select Committees, calling expert witnesses and other interested parties to give evidence (GREAT BRITAIN, Parliament, House of Commons, 1999a).

Here, this chapter narrowly focuses on the academic texts covering retailing and shopping, to gauge epistemological interests, whilst political tracts and vested arguments will be considered specifically in the context of the ideological paradigms offered alongside the Thatcherite and Blairite Governments principally during the 80’s and 90’s. Key texts have thus been sought relevant to the period under study from five main articulated perspectives: Government policy; academic; professional; vested interests within the retail industry; and political
responses. From this, the research has sought to identify the key sets of shared and contradictory conceptual ideas and ideologies underpinning different approaches as an intertextual dialogue between competing and complementary code systems, and attempts to identify reciprocal effects.

A truism is that the particular emphases towards retailing and the paradigms employed more or less reflects the particular segmented specialisms of the writers and the epistemological paradigms operating. A common theme linking the more traditional approaches amongst geographers and behaviourists is a search for a spatial analysis based on identifying coherent patterns of consumer behaviour. For example, Brown (1992) who focuses on cognitive explanations, continues this approach, usefully plotting prevailing epistemological paradigms: 40/50's regionalists; 50-60's neo classicists; 60-70's behaviourists; 70-80's regionalists. Such a categorisation is an ideological construction in favour of traditional approaches supporting the interests of Capital. None of this adequately explains the all-pervasive role of ideology, particularly its propensity to initiate and retard action by both objects and subjects of production and consumption. Indeed, it is left to the more recent culturalists focusing on 'shopping' (Falk & Campbell, 1997 and Miles, 1998), to expose this obvious weakness in geographical epistemology.

Traditional approaches to the study of retailing mostly adopt an empiricist stance towards the categorisation of shopping types and location, concentrating on the virtues of analysing spatial markets and consumer choice (Jones & Simmons,
1990). Much of it follows the pattern of classical economic analysis, employing concepts of 'rational behaviour' in relation to empirically recorded data, i.e. statistical information about 'needs, wants, desires' and 'satisfactions' of individual consumers. These are interpreted through spatial outcomes, represented by geometric patterns signified and afforded legitimacy by the use of statistical and mathematical models. Such expressions of individual preferences are seen as vital to an objective understanding of human behaviour, empirically recorded and statistically evaluated. However, no credence is apportioned to the everyday cultural processes at work which construct the so called 'choices' on offer, and the context in which 'wants' and 'needs' as objectively defined 'truths' come to be expressed, let alone constructed, and potentially suppressed through ideologically determined events controlling agendas. That role is largely left to early sociology and later culturalists.

Behaviourist approaches, although sharing an underlying scientific empiricism with classical economic models of human rationality, thus offer challenges largely on grounds of an abstract rationality in human behaviour that simply does not exist and in terms of presenting a normative prescription of the future, is not based upon the reality of social experience. Thus, seldom can a writer express such a categorical, indeed clinical, statement of individual rationality expressed in terms of objective group behaviour, as witnessed here:

"Spatial consumer behaviour may be defined as the aggregate manner in which individuals act in the process of acquiring the goods and services that they need and want." (my italics)
Even accepting the possibility that needs and wants may consciously express some
preference in the eyes of consumers, an obvious underlying flaw here is in the
assumption of a premise assuming a totality of individually inspired actions
according to a positivistic method, which leads to a false deduction:

"However, all of these normative assumptions would only be valid if
each and every consumer was characterised by exactly the same
motives, values and desires, along with equal incomes, time budgets,
levels of mobility and propensities to travel, together with the perfect
information about the constituent elements of the urban retail system."

Thus a behaviourist approach is contrasted as essentially an inductive stance
towards individual rather than general behaviour in decision-making, offering an
antithesis to the earlier deductive empiricist method. However, the schisms
between the various wings of behaviourism is further exposed: only a 'humanist'
approach, such as that concerned with mental mapping and the irrational aspects of
human behaviour, individual responses to symbolic values within the environment,
is regarded as truly non-positivist and inductive. Even so, its value as a so
described 'non-scientific' approach is generally belittled and is not considered to
be well supported within the research fraternity (Brown, 1992). There is support
for a structuralist approach and Marxism’s best feature is considered to be its
emphasis on dynamics; although this is rather shallow and dated. Most
perspectives move in a typically pluralist manner, describing (rather than
explaining) retailers’ locational strategies as a product of the structure of business
organisation, land tenure and the effects of Government policies and related role of agencies. Brown sees advantages in identifying underlying processes rather than patterns, although he doesn't think that a study of capital accumulation, circulation and restructuring accompanying the power of the 'big players' will draw much support from the research fraternity.

A key feature in most of these approaches is the various authors' implicit construction of the 'consumer.' They are either rational actors, or in Simon's terms 'satisficers' (1971), each seeking to realise 'choice' and satisfy 'needs' and 'demands', according to the 'rules' of the model of analysis, which inevitably favours 'the market' by positing it as a fixed variable. In many ways, the cognitive approach seems more dangerous: here we have the antithesis to normative behaviour. Real life is measured and events (plus outcomes) are inevitably reflecting some 'simple truth' about the nature of the individual and their reaction to their environment (mental or physical). A cultural approach, in contrast, acknowledges the epistemological benefits of 'explaining reality', by accepting that no one lives in a cultural vacuum (suggested by the context offered to us) and that all roles and realities are socially constructed through interactive social relations. To this extent, they are imbued with symbolic meanings, values and ideology; but have a specific context and materialise as a fundamental part of human actions and responses to the development of political hegemony articulating with and mediating, common sense views of the world. Ultimately,
these are expressed through the texts and code-systems of a commodified popular culture, so essential to the perpetuation of the ethic of private enterprise.

In general then, the established approach to a study of retailing continues the positivist tradition, ultimately legitimising a psycho-economic categorisation of consumers, to which marketing strategists attach psychometric characteristics (O'Brien & Harris, 1991) and totally ignore the role of ideology. However, now, within the vanguard of cultural studies, issues dealing with retailing and consumption, concerning the construction of discourse and the roles and identities of consumers and producers, in the context of the process of commodification, is becoming an important focus for research (Nava, 1997). This builds upon a neo-Marxist challenge to the orthodoxy of traditional positivist social science established by the Frankfurt School at the Institute of Social Science, in Germany, in 1923 and outlined in chapter one.
Shopping as an Everyday Experience: Common Perceptions

There seems to be nothing perceived as quite as ordinary and neutral, yet, in contradistinction, so potentially self-fulfilling and symbolic, as the simple and rather mundane human act of shopping for commodities, whether for personal consumption or the benefit of others. Such a seemingly contradictory duality of opinion about the purposes of retailing (the mediated acts of sale and purchase, as part of an interrelated social chain of events linking the processes of production and consumption) feeds a range of opinions, controversy and debates about its cultural and ideological significance. Inevitably, this articulates with the planning process. At the core of advanced capitalist society the commercial market place functions largely through the phenomenon of large retailing for the masses. In the grocery trade this is expressed by supermarkets, new ‘cathedrals’ with a single-minded religiosity, dedicated to serving the newly established patterns of post-industrial, mass consumption. As such, they come to epitomise the legacy of the urban mysticism identified in Benjamin’s Parisian Arcades, generating an aura of fantasy and desire, key elements for Baudelaire’s perceived ‘religious intoxication of great cities’. Here, indeed, departmental stores, the predecessors of supermarkets, are considered to be “…temples consecrated to this intoxication.” (Benjamin, 1999, pp 60-1) More recently, Thomas Frank’s article in ‘The Baffler’ provides a contemporary single-minded focus in this vein, cynically contrasting the spiritual dimension from the commonplace:

“Buying and selling are holy acts, the source and end of human meaning; all else is empty sophistry and deceptive tricks by which scheming professors propose to get themselves ahead.”
Such an everyday, commonplace dichotomy is typically reflected in much contemporary writings on shopping in a cultural studies context:

"In the analysis of the practices of consumption it is useful to make a distinction between two different ways of understanding the concept of shopping. The first... emphasises the kind of shopping where the important thing is to enjoy oneself, where shopping is a pleasurable social activity in itself. The second sees shopping as strictly the grey and uninteresting purchasing of the necessary means of maintaining and reproducing the modern human being..."

(Lehtonen and Maenpaa, 1997, page 144)

In their empirical study of study consumer behaviour in a shopping mall on the east side of Helsinki between 1992-5, Lehtonen and Maenpaa develop this further. Data gained from observing and interviewing shoppers using participant behaviour is represented by a simple table with two columns: ‘Pleasure versus Necessity’, reflecting a caricatured dichotomy at the extremes of a continuum linking the apposite poles of work and recreation:

"On the one side we have the hedonistic element of consumption, the seeking of a new or lived experience... In the other... the kind of action typified reminds one of the objectifying (Simmel, 1990) or aesthetic (Weber, 1978) rationality also characteristic of the social action of modernity."

(Ibid.)

Here, shoppers are viewed both as functional workers and, effectively, personal experience seeking tourists, the two roles mutually bound, and inextricably linking necessity and pleasure that “...come to form the shopper's activity.” Certainly the value (and methodology) of much of this is open to question, reliant on a
behaviourist model of human activity which posits discernible human situational preferences alongside natural biology. As such, it can be seen to seek the legitimisation of an assumed rationality of consciously generated choices and, by implication, needs, in a purely relational and value-free context. Thus, inherently, the methodology assumes that what you see is what you get. That what goes on in the real world can be fully understand by a narrow, referential focus on observable characteristics of real human behaviour within its immediately interpreted context, which will be argued later to be epistemologically flawed. However, fundamentally, no big questions about the context in which shoppers live out their lives in society and the cultural baggage we all carry in consequence, are considered relevant in terms of the way our actions in the present are directly and indirectly mediated by past events.

In a post-modernist vein, there is an assumption that in Thatcherite terms, we are all individuals responsible for creating our own ‘fractured’ social contexts. Also, that the web of social interaction that we call ‘society’ is as irrelevant, or perhaps as ‘necessary’ but ideologically passive or given, as water is to fish. Society, thus, is merely a means to an end: to serve the competitive needs of the individual, whereas in Marxist terms, that is impossible. Society is the specific nature of human interaction through relationships, constructing and encoding specific and historically defined human existence. Thus, social settings are no more than the constituent human relationships and the reciprocated roles these allocate as people play out their lives with a potential for convoluted harmony and disjunction. But
the key here is that these reflect degrees of assimilated different and contradictory interests which arise directly from the human association in society giving form to the nature of the related ideologies reflecting the specific nature of social behaviour and interaction. Also, assimilated in the sense that while people through contradictions of interest may adopt relative positions of physical and/or social propinquity, such as through the manifest nature of a class relationship expressing consciously or subconsciously 'choices' constructed through specific cultural practices, their everyday social articulation cannot be avoided.

Thus writers such as Lehtonen and Maenpaa do not countenance the wider cultural process of social existence which, in terms of ideology can be seen to construct agendas and options for human choices and social relationships. What we encounter here is an empirical exercise ostensibly seeking to understand the reality of a microcosm of human cultural behaviour, apparently by letting readily observable 'surface events' - recorded data - 'speak' alone. Furthermore, to be interpreted within the context of a positivist paradigm that automatically assumes the neutrality of the academic and their empirical methodology. Nonetheless, at this juncture it usefully serves to demonstrate the potential significance of the act of shopping, as part of a wider cultural discourse about retailing. This needs to be viewed as inherently part of an ideological process that is given specific and real human meaning through everyday time-specific social events, which reciprocate linkages with, and mediate the complex wider and peripherally integrated relations of production and consumption, underpinning the working of late capitalist
society. Thus it presents a key focus of enquiry for an understanding of the processes at work, which function to impart meaning in so-called everyday events and ostensibly trivial undertakings.

This seemingly ‘normal’ and periodic event of making purchases from a retail supplier, either by a personal visit to a shop, or through a supplier via a paper or electronic catalogue, invariably touches us all, whether we shop alone, or have the benefit of others to buy for us. Either way, conventional wisdom holds that for many the act of shopping for commodities is perceived as little more than a narrow, functional chore: a means of obtaining the basic and vital necessities of life, such food, clothing and household requisites, through the impersonal cash nexus. Yet as argued above, it is not as simple as this. Another key dimension is that research suggests that shopping is a highly gendered activity. Thus, for most women it may be held to be a positive experience, a source of endless enjoyment where personal dreams are played out and ambitions achieved; whilst for many men, it is mostly a time-consuming chore:

“Not surprisingly, perhaps, this contrast is formulated in terms of the instrumental versus expressive dichotomy, with men inclined to see shopping as a purely purchase driven activity related to the satisfaction of need, whilst women are likely to view it as a pleasure seeking activity related to the gratification of wants and desires. That is to say, men presume that shopping only takes place when the existence of a ‘need’ has been established and they typically see no intrinsic value in the activity itself, judging it to possess worth purely as means to the need of acquiring goods. Women, on the other hand, whilst also aware of the value that shopping possesses as a means to this end, are also inclined to see the activity as possessing value itself, independently of whether goods are purchased or not.”
Yet there is nothing either 'natural' about perceived gendered activity or its causation structuring so-called choices. Clearly, regardless of the range of explanations on offer, as a cultural practice the act of shopping is part of a wider and complex social process, with significance and potential for linking both the objective and subjective aspects of everyday human life, socially constructed in culture. In general terms research into retailing provides a critical focus on the fundamental nature of the dynamic transaction between producers and consumers at the core of capitalism and the context in which real events operate as an ideological conduit linking with, and mediating, private and public cultural spheres. For example, through the process of commodity exchange, it has the potential to perpetuate and legitimise the producers' exploitative relationship to consumers, as well as protecting the wider interests of Capital.

Thus, it is important to establish two key imperatives: firstly, that the articulation of the cultural process of retailing between producers and consumers involves more than just the mundane act of buying and selling physical objects that can be tangibly measured or weighed. Secondly, in Marxist terms, all commodities have the capacities of being symbolised by meanings constructed through a process of commodification serving the functional interests of capitalism. As part of a code system constructed and encoded by producers and interpreted (decoded) by consumers, it carries the possibility of subversion, a challenge to constructed
meanings and ideologies, potentially allowing consumers to interrogate and contest the latent and manifest interests of Capital.

Thus for Marx, under industrial capitalism the commodity is more than just a passive, manufactured product being sold and bought in the market. It embodies a unique, symbolic imprint of its labour as a product of the particular social relations of production, which brought about its construction. Also, in the market transaction between the consumer and producer, it is given particular life and specific meaning beyond a crude summation of its physical properties and comes to express a social relationship between commodities. It adopts a quasi-religious, significance, which emanates from a spiritual dimension of the sort befitting the metaphysical contexts touched upon earlier. In looking at the nature of products and their exchange values in a money economy Marx recognised the role desire plays through the act of ownership and exchange, where commodities achieve social relations of status:

"A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value a use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the produce of human labour. It is clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it. Yet for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden
brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than "table-turning" ever was."

(Marx, 1977d, page 76)

At a simplistic level, the types and ranges of physical commodities manufactured through the social relations of production between Labour and Capital in capitalist culture and available for purchase, are extensive, reflecting every facet of human cultural life: literally from birth to the grave. They must also include artefacts made ready for use through human labour (itself a commodity, constructed through employment) through the assembly of materials gained from nature, including fixed items that cannot readily be transported around in their manufactured state, such as buildings used for residence, work and recreation. Also, the land these stand upon, in common with that occupied for human habitation, are also culturally constructed in that their utility is enabled and given meaning through physical development and use. Not in isolation, but as part of a reciprocated social process, articulating with and given meaning by the availability of physical and cultural infrastructure: roads, sewers and the whole panoply of capitalist institutions and services constructed through everyday, reciprocated human actions encoded by explicit social relations. For all these, the perceived cultural usefulness of a commodity to an owner is realised through the market process, whether as a private or state transaction. In other words, a seller has a buyer potentially available and they (the consumer) make the purchase and the
deal is struck ‘caveat emptor’, on the assumption that perfect information operates for all parties.

Conventionally, retailing has been viewed by land-use planning professionals, academics and politicians as a rather narrow compartmentalised specialist subject, essentially a closely defined and rigidly self-contained economic discourse within society: a subsidiary ‘service industry’ largely supplying consumers with the commodities of industrial production, rationally meeting perceived ‘needs’ and ‘demands’. However, as argued above, the practice has a wider meaning and goes beyond the sale and purchase of manufactured items. Retailing activity thus inevitably will include the selling of some form of paid assistance or expertise, itself reflected through wage labour, rather than just supplying physical goods. Indeed, the very labour providing the energy and skills to transform materials or problem solve, which may be hired or fired, is a form of commodity. Perhaps not to be bought or sold as in a slave economy, but, nevertheless, deemed to have a utility legitimised by its market value and reflected in a wage or salary.

So, given that all forms of retailing are fundamentally part of the chain of supply and consumption articulating with, and mediating, the integral relationships of production, it may be argued that a general retailing discourse should also embrace the sale of professional services and the roles they undertake. This is important because they facilitate and sustain the articulated functions of production and consumption for the achievement of profit through a complex process of
commodification of goods, services, buildings and land, in advanced capitalist society. As such, the commodification process is not only a key ideological means by which capitalism sustains and reproduces itself, but is given meaning and reality through all social phenomena manifested by related, everyday events signified by the social relations of production and consumption, which are open to interpretation and challenge.
The Emergence of the Supermarket

In terms of definitions of supermarkets and the related terminology which has come to be used in planning circles, this thesis adopts an interpretation contained in Annex A of PPG 6 (Revised) (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1993). In this, a supermarket is a single level, self-service store selling mainly food, with a gross trading floor space between 500 and 2,500m², often with its own car park. It also includes a superstore having a similar definition and a threshold of a larger floor space above that, often with dedicated car parks and a similar range of goods sold, or having a mixture of food and non-food commodities.

‘Town centre’ is used to cover city, town, and traditional suburban centres, providing a broad range of facilities and services providing a focus for a community and having links with public transport. It excludes small parades of shops with purely local significance. ‘Out-of-town’ development is an out-of-centre development, which is either on a green field site or beyond an urban boundary. ‘Out-of-centre’ is separate from the town centre, but not necessarily outside the urban area, whilst ‘edge-of-centre’ is within reasonable walking distance of the town centre and provides parking facilities that serve this as well as the store, thus enabling one shopping trip to serve several purposes. The key definitions here thus acknowledge that in generic terms, a supermarket is a large, single story shop principally selling food, convenience goods against consumer durables, and most likely having an associated car park for customers vehicles.
Since the Second World War, related planning issues in the UK have generally concentrated on the relative social advantages of locating supermarkets and superstores in either centralised, urban or decentralised suburban and rural locations and consequential disproportionate effects on segments of the population, especially low income groups with poor mobility. Also, the extent to which undermining existing investment in key, central locations would exacerbate these problems by reinforcing unequal social relations of consumption between different places.

In ‘Supermarket Futures’ Rachel Bowby explores the origins of the supermarket, an early twentieth century North American self-service retail phenomenon held to have similarities with the stereotypical ‘European’, nineteenth century department store; although in reality even that is American in origin. Both are held to be:

“...large-scale retailing organisations, selling a vast range of goods under one roof and making use of modern marketing principles of cost-effectiveness, high turnover rates and low profit margins. Both encourage the customer to look and sometimes handle, with no obligation to buy. Both are taken, in their times, as emblematic of contemporary developments not only in marketing, but in social life more generally: cities and leisure in one case, suburbs and automobiles in the other.”

(Bowby, 1997, page 96)

Thus each appears to be symptomatic of a different kind of urban culture invoking alternative perspectives towards an understanding of the key contrasting locational imperatives regarding metropolitan society and decentralised growth. For the American supermarket which originated from the grocery store via chains, food
was the main commodity sold serving the new suburbia created by a centrifugal explosion in residential growth away from town centres fostered by a new found mobility via the Model T Ford motor car.

Zimmerman (1937) records the emergence of a spate of chain stores pre First World War and Bowlby notes that the invention of ‘self-service’ is attributed to Clarence Saunders in 1916 when he opened his first ‘Piggly Wiggley’ store in Memphis, Tennessee. This was a prototype ‘self service’ supermarket, which introduced turnstiles for entry and exit, aisled shelves and a checkout counter, features that were patented the following year (Ibid., page 98). It sets the context for the post First World War era where Zimmerman identifies the emergence of early, self service ‘super markets’ such as that run from a vacant Durant Automobile plant in Elizabeth by Big Bear, a new themed retail commercial venture linking up entrepreneurial and wholesale business interests. Bowlby sees more than just an economic dimension: perceptions of enjoyment and comfort matter. So this is not just a freak of the depression and she picks up Zimmerman’s examples of other similar initiatives across the States from as early as 1927 in Los Angeles. A key feature was the makeshift nature of the retail interiors and fixtures:

“...and huge displays of merchandise as the center of attraction, with thousands of people who were swarming around them with baskets on their arms, content to wait on themselves.”

(Ibid.)

By 1937 the phenomenon exploiting economies of scale and bulk purchasing had proliferated and what was originally viewed as perhaps a media stunt evidenced
through the adoption of fantasy show names reflecting ethnic American stereotypes seen in films, e.g. Giant Tiger, Big and Little Bear, had become normalised retailing behaviour. Thus, the character of the ‘event’ initiated an air of the grand spectacle and magnitude in marketing that has remained with the industry ever since. Zimmerman had identified a pioneer spirit in the adoption of crude and ephemeral effects so that in the post-crash context, retailing had, in effect, modernised to directly reduce marketing and distribution costs by targeting the new consumer. Thus:

“For Zimmerman, the ‘ultimate goal’ of retailing developments is the progressive elimination of steps and costs in an ever smoother economic journey, ‘the flow of goods towards the customer’s home’.”

(Ibid., page 93)

Customers went to collect the goods which, unlike local grocery stores, were now remotely located away from customers’ homes. The new-found mobility led to huge parking lots alongside the stores to attract motorists. Piles of ‘market baskets’ near the doorway signified the new self-service ethic to become the norm across Europe in the post Second World War era, marketed by Zimmerman.

Bowlby, whilst contrasting the natures of department stores and supermarkets, where the former is arguably for more middle class groups and the latter for the working class, is also keen to identify their shared characteristics in terms of cultural effects, via perceived social advantages and disadvantages. These have led to the modern marketed image of the supermarket to be adopted in the UK, functional behaviour recast as fantasy:
“Both come to be represented in terms of magic and enchantment, seen – as in as in many of these double sided images – as either pleasurable or insidious, the work of friendly or evil wizards. Department stores and supermarkets in their later developments dazzle with their lighting and displays of goods. Both are thought to produce in their female customers states of mind that are far removed from the normal: the collective ecstasy of the nineteenth-century crowd of women in front of the array of fabrics, the hypnotic trance of the 1950’s housewife numbed by the musak and the psychologically selected colours of the packets of washing powder (see Packard, 1960: Chap 10; Zola 1992).”

(Ibid., page 96)

Thus for Bowlby, in the eyes of critics the post Second World War era saw networks of entrapment and manipulation accompanying development of the supermarket concept. In its worst manifestation:

“...the supermarket can itself come to stand for the all encompassing powers and control of modern society.”

(Ibid., page 94)

While the departmental store ‘invites’ customers, the supermarket ‘catches’ and ‘won’t let go’ with its constant targeting of consumers through commercial innovation via brand name products, mass marketing and advertising techniques. Cheap food is brought to the masses and originally marketing emphasis was given to ‘efficiency’, minimising effects of work and labour, both for customers (especially women in their stereotyped role as ‘house-maker’) and staff. Modern scientific methods reflected in the new, clean ‘home’ orientated service industry permeated marketing imagery, and wed functionalism with pleasure. Thus food shopping came to be presented in the post war era as an ‘experience’ instead of a chore. Bowlby identifies a key aspect of supermarket retailing as a proxy
producing activity, that is, the immediacy of the reciprocated linkage between the new corporate, industrialised food industry (Marsden, Flynn and Harrison, 2000) and the domestic environment, a prime location for consumption via what is really a large, ancillary warehouse:

“...simply a two way station between the factory and the home.”

(Ibid., page 97)

In post-war Britain with continuing political imperatives merging social welfare with industrial and tertiary growth linked to employment goals and greater popular prosperity, this dynamic articulation between consumers, State policy and producers becomes a key ideological context for Government policy, mediated by new planning legislation and everyday events. Specifically, Marsden, Flynn and Harrison (2000) would see it as a sort of conduit facilitating a dynamic interplay constructing and mediating the regulation of the food industry. Although theirs is a concern with an administrative process and its effects on the policing of food standards, it does highlight the nature of the power of the main retailing conglomerates and the extent to which they come to act as agent for Government policy, which continues today. So, in their struggle for competitive space and profits, powerful large retailers not only mediate between the consumer, the State and food manufacturers, but they become:

“...a critical agent in the delivery and modification of consumption patterns.”

(Ibid., page 34)
For Bowlby, in the post war era economies of scale become the central imperative, to be reflected in the ever increasing, 'giant' floorspace of supermarkets. In turn, these reflect the 'jumbo' packages of commodities they sell, such as washing machine powders targeted at the new, 'female' orientated kitchens (Bell & Valentine, 1997, page 70) containing labour saving devices produced by the new domestic economy. By the sixties, in marketing terms the notion of shopping as a boring chore is challenged by ideas that it can also be seen as a pleasurable leisure pursuit. Supermarket shopping, however, continued to be presented as a functional response to a perceived consumer demand for a more modern existence, where food shopping was complementary to other important areas of an individual's life style rather than just seen as a form of enjoyment in itself:

"It has been necessary to meet changing buying habits, since shopping is no longer a major diversion but rather a task or chore to be performed as expeditiously as possible. The desire to shop quickly, conveniently, and informally, and to do it by automobile, has not only to be met by decentralised locations, new store architecture and the provision of adequate off-street parking facilities, but also by measures to expedite purchases after the customer has entered the store, including open display, functional fixturing, brand promotion and various degrees of self service or simplified selling."

(McNair, 1997, page 103)

Not only does the sub-text here represent the essential characteristics of a successful business enterprise, a well-focused operation targeting and managing consumers in its preferred location, but also Bowlby challenges the image of a neutral supermarket presented as a commercial activity simply responding to given 'market trends'. In challenging McNair's functionalist argument in favour of decentralised, self-service stores, rationally laid out for car borne customers, she
signals a more cynical view about the passive role of retailers in relation to the 'needs' and 'demands' of customers (see also Slater, 1997a, and Packard, 1982):

"In the imagined shift here from 'diversion' to 'chore', from going shopping to doing the shopping (my italics), the supermarket is there to fulfil an existing social need (my italics) in the form of the 'changed buying habits', to which the stores themselves are passive, only waiting to serve it."

(Bowlby, 1997, page 103)

Here, 'going shopping' is perceived as an extravagance, where wandering, looking and spending on clothes have no limits, whilst 'doing the shopping' is an obligatory, limited and regular routine to buy food. Yet alongside this, such a blatantly, naive divide between an understanding of perceived social habits and responsive practice is immediately, rightly questioned:

"But more often (retail store) planners attempted to shift the association of food shopping from work to leisure: if customers can be persuaded to linger and dally and enjoy, they will spend more than if they see themselves in the same role as operators themselves, interested in minimising their expenditure of time, effort and money. Hence the promotion of self-service as a positive pleasure by contrast to the delays and dullness of over the counter serving, or later, the regimented monotony into which self service had declined."

(Ibid.)

Thus the nature of the store layout of aisles and shelving came to adopt a psychological ploy, rather like a maze, channelling shoppers and confronting them with key display nodes and linked cluster of commodities. The nature of the 'housewife's' operation of a shopping list and the rationale between it and the shelf layout offering self-management to meet personal objectives is viewed as an incentive to buy. Indeed, gradually the store itself becomes the 'list' obviating the
need for the paper equivalent, just as the exit and cash transaction are modernised, focused and transformed into an office cum bank, based on an abstract plastic card transaction at the EPOS (electronic point of sale) check-out. Here, a convergence between stock management imperatives and psychologically profiled customer reward schemes provide the store with a snapshot of logistics and commercial progress: the extent to which commodities sold are monitored and trigger immediate, just-in-time inputs. Also, facilitating money services reflecting a new commercial imperative, expanding traditional commodity sales to allow internal cross-subsidy effects exploiting the brand image to make better profits on the overall capital investment through the sale of financial services and privatised utilities.
Sainsbury: History and Company Development

Sainsbury epitomises the post Second World War supermarket development in the UK, built on the originality of the American experience, a modern, commercial retail enterprise, where:

"The concept of a supermarket assuming total responsibility for products managed for them, including factory vetting, product specifications, packaging design and labelling information, is new."

(McEwan, 1992, page 305)

Unlike the US experience involving cost cutting during the depression, the stimulus for self-service in the UK was initiated by the post-war Labour government, ostensibly keen to tackle scarcities. John Strachey, Minister of Food, gave special building licences, to larger retailers keen to:

"...experiment with self-service trading."

(Williams, 1994a, page 303).

Williams, who is Sainsbury's archivist, argues that only the most efficiently managed and best-resourced companies were able to introduce self-service, drawing on that wealth of experience gained in the US. Self-service was suited to the sale of packaged, industrially produced groceries, so the nature of the retailing structure, its integration with production and marketing reflected through commodity brands, became a key characteristic in defining dominant, power relationships in the retail food industry and control over the supply chain. Not only did larger retail multiples venture directly into production, but new buyer-retail contracts accompanied the acquisition of specialists retail outlets as the industry
modernised exploiting economies of scale, new power relationships and opportunities for increased consumption on a wider geographical scale.

Smaller companies such as Sainsbury’s sought to combat the new power of emerging multiples by serving as a wholesaler for its own branches. This came to signify the success of the company in eventually establishing itself in time as a major multiple retailer, one of the big four players during the 80’s and 90’s:

“Wholesaling was the key to Sainsbury’s competitiveness and its success in establishing a brand identity. By eliminating the middleman the company ensured that a greater proportion of the value added to a product was retained. It also had the secondary advantage that it enabled the company to exercise control over product development and quality control. This was of crucial importance in the successful marketing of own brands. As Tedlow has pointed out, the wholesaler had a significant advantage over the independent retailer in having reliable information about sales and customer preferences (Tedlow 1990: 210). This information, coupled with the economic advantages of bulk buying and multiple retail outlets, greatly improved the development of its own brands.”

(Ibid., page 297)

The marketing of an ‘own brand’ thus became a key quality assurance signifier for multiple supermarket companies, directly aping the nature, quality and reliability of processed food established by key manufacturers marketing their products at a global level, such as the successful transatlantic firm, Heinz. Given the independent retailer’s local origins, the journey from that locale to national, even international, status carries echoes of neighbourhood and quasi-domestic origins. The multiple’s brand crudely exploits the marketing power of the giant industrial food manufacturers, whilst affording a trusty reaffirmation of the homely origins
and a one-to-one relationship with individual local customers through the construction of myth and folk memories. Thus, the ‘new’ corporate company operating multiple supermarket branches not only signifies that customer loyalty which is earned through echoes of its humble origins, but the company name becomes that brand signifying legitimacy to new, unrelated business ventures, such as Sainsbury’s expansion into banking in 1996 (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2000).

Mary Ann Sainsbury and John James established the first Sainsbury shop in 1869. It was a small dairy located in Drury Lane, London. A second shop was opened in Kentish Town in 1873 (155 Queens Crescent, St. Pancras, London, in the 1881 census) and the first store out of London was established in Croydon, in 1882. By 1890, a new headquarters, depot and factory was located in Blackfriars, London and at the turn of the century there were 48 stores in southern England with an average retail floor space of 1,000ft². In 1920, grocery departments were formed in larger shops and new branches, and in 1922 the business adopted the name J. Sainsbury Limited. Just before the Second World War in 1936 the firm purchased the Thoroughgood chain of stores in the Midlands allowing the company to penetrate the grocery market beyond the Home Counties.

After the war, the company was the first retailer to adopt the American supermarket layout and the first self-service store was thus established at Croydon in 1950. By then, the number of Sainsbury’s stores was 244, a fivefold increase over the previous fifty years whilst there had been a threefold increase in an
average floor space to 3,000 ft\(^2\). By 1960 under the company chairmanship of Alan Sainsbury, grandson of the founder and ennobled later in 1967 under Harold Wilson’s Government, the number of stores had only increased to 256 with a marginal increase in retail floor space to 4,270 ft\(^2\). By 1970, the number of stores had fallen to 225, although in turn the floor space had more than doubled to 11,500 ft\(^2\). In 1971 the now familiar name of J Sainsbury was established and the company was floated on the stock exchange in 1973. A year later, the first Sainsbury edge-of-town store was developed in Cambridge and two years on in 1976 the company opened its first store in Wales, at Cwmbran, in Gwent. In 1977 the first Sainsbury Savacentre hypermarket was established in Washington New Town, Tyne and Wear. Two years after the election of the Thatcher Government in 1979, which also heralded the introduction of Sainsbury’s experimental computerised check-outs in Crawley, the first Homebase House and Garden Centre was opened in Croydon under the company Chairmanship of John Sainsbury (son of Alan), knighted in 1980 and ennobled in 1989. 1980 saw a marginal increase in the number of stores to 231, whilst a significant increase in average retail floor space reached 14,800 ft\(^2\).

In 1987, Sainsbury’s extended its operations to the United States by the acquisition of Shaw’s Supermarkets. A year after Sainsbury’s started accepting payment by debit cards, Savacentre became a wholly owned subsidiary of the business. By 1990, Sainsbury’s was the UK’s most profitable supermarket company with profits of £628m. Its number of stores had increased marginally to 299 while the average retails floor space exploded to 33,500 ft\(^2\). At this time, some 11,700 products were
being sold, contrasting significantly with 550 products in 1950 and rising from 2,000 in 1960 to 4,000 in 1970 and 7,000 in 1980. In 1992 under the company chairmanship of David Sainsbury (cousin of Sir John), Sainsbury’s first supermarket was opened in Scotland, at Glasgow and in France at Calais. Two years later in 1994, a 16% share was acquired in Giant Food Inc. (Williams, 1994b).

A significant retailing trend in the retail sector between 1961 and 1984 had been a 53% reduction in the number of single outlet grocery firms (Test, 1989, page 30). By the late 80’s, the five largest supermarket chains, including Sainsbury’s, accounted for 52% of all grocery sales (Ibid.) and between 1976 and 1987 the multiples as a whole had boosted their market share to 78% (Gardner & Sheppard, 1989, page 155). The 80’s had been a period of immense competitive struggle for market dominance between the key players. Superstores, reflected by the larger decentralised store initiated from the US by Asda in the mid 70’s, were adopted by Sainsbury’s which gave additional opportunities for in-house developments such as the inclusion of fresh foods counters, an attempt to diversify custom by segmenting the market (Ibid., page 178) using a direct hark back to its origins. During the 80’s out of town superstores blossomed and larger multiples accounted for 40% of total sales. In the 1986 company annual report, the then Finance Director David Sainsbury wrote that the 79 shops opened during the last five years had transformed the business.
However, within three years the economy had faltered, Thatcher resigned and the re-elected Conservative Government was to signal a change to the direction of decentralised planning policy. In 1992 David Sainsbury succeeded Sir John as company chairman. By 1997, the year David Sainsbury was also ennobled, despite Sainsbury's Supermarkets achieving sales worth £6.1 billion and operating profits of £386 million, Tesco had overtaken the company in terms of profitability and Sainsbury's was losing revenues. Lord David Sainsbury had a year to restore profitability and a year later left the company to join the New Labour Government.
CHAPTER 4

IDEOLOGY AND THE COMMODIFICATION PROCESS

This chapter provides a key focus on events constructing ideology linking land-use planning and retailing cum shopping policy during the 80's and 90's, as expressed through a lived, everyday experience of commodification encountered by the parties and set in context by events during the 70's. A deconstruction of a chronology of events seeks to reveal the nature of the articulated and mediated relationships and dimensional influences of commodification as a project of Capital. In those everyday terms, the effects can be seen crystallised by the remarks of Sainsbury's Development Policy Manager Huw Williams who is a chartered town planner. Although the object lesson here is that the construction of ideology and paradigms is a complex process often unclear from text which may assume obscured meanings expressed through less articulated code systems, he unquestionably distils the fundamental essence of commodification on himself as a chartered planner employed by the company. Unquestionably, he stands as an agent of change at key points of disjuncture in society, able to mediate between competing articulations.

In an interview for 'Planning' (Forrester, 1999), the journal of the Royal Town Planning Institute, he best sums up his job, and thus professional role as a chartered town planner, in applying the ambition of Government to the retail sector. This facilitates a two way process: promoting (articulating) Sainsbury to planners and the planners to Sainsbury. Thus the process of mediation presents
itself as a normal, everyday fusion of interest that dispels any notion of conflict. However, he did not envy the task of local authority planners having to juggle the conflicting views of different interest groups in the full glare of public view. His role was less visible and thus more focused, aptly in the terms of this thesis, presenting a somewhat questionable single-minded and 'harmless', if not neutral imperative for the planner as an agent for the management of environmental change on behalf of the profession:

“\(\text{I work in a relatively specialised area with a simple brief. Essentially it is about selling cans of baked beans and finding the best way to do it.}\)"

(Ibid.)

Such a commercial mission may not readily present itself as a beacon for equity and fairness for the public good underlying much of the chartered planner’s professional code of conduct seeking to link the disparate and seemingly oppositional roles of those working for the private and public sectors. However, it resonates well with a single minded view of business management where:

“\(\text{There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.}\)"

(Drucker, 1954, page 37)

Thus, the two statements together articulate to offer a clear expression of the power of commodification and the nature of its mediated articulation with the planning profession and interests related to the formulation and implementation of land-use policy that ultimately this thesis seeks to address.
Discourses Articulating Retailing and Planning: Thatcher to New Labour

Having previously considered the nature of academic literature, this section now attempts to identify and assess the significance of other documented events and publications revealing paradigms on retailing during the two decades under study, which as explained earlier uses the term to include reciprocated views about its corollary, shopping. It focuses on key texts (used in a wider context to embrace any object or image embodying a code-system open to deconstruction) linking the reciprocated views and actions of key parties. These include Sainsbury’s and the retail industry, the planners’ professional body, The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), political parties and Government. The documents and events reflect reified action by which the articulated agency of those campaigning to advance their respective and mutual interests within the public arena, ostensibly to gain hegemony over ‘common sense’ explanations of everyday life, seeks to influence and reinforce public opinion, as well as challenging oppositional interests. This features a concerted struggle to change general and specific Government land-use planning policy, its key arm of social and political intervention. Also, to influence the organisational priorities of the retail industry, particularly in relation to the location and operation of large convenience food retailing from supermarkets and superstores to exploit economies of scale and achieve commercial priorities. Thus, firstly, it is difficult to separate retail and shopping issues from questions about general Government policy towards the economy and business, and secondly, land-use planning responses in relation to
both a general political background concerning the world of commerce and more specifically about retailing and shopping. Inevitably thus, the texts considered here spill over into the planning arena.

In relation to retailing and shopping per se, the range of material considered, therefore, principally includes Government planning policy documents on retailing, and published views of the Sainsbury Company about the operating commercial environment and Government policy, viewed against other political and commercial inputs. An attempt is made here to deconstruct these, to engage and interrogate the sub-texts and identify the complexities of ideologies reflected in contradictory and shared root paradigms, fuelling everyday action through a process of encoding and decoding (Hall, 1999b). As implied earlier, the pressures of space and time have necessitated a selective inclusion of key texts about retailing during the 80’s and 90’s, set in context by the 70’s. Much of the writing here suffers the limitation of being, perhaps, too partisan and overtly rationalised in a formal sense, to adequately show what is actually being sought by the respective parties and it is not always possible to deduce by direct comparison, whether they were successful in achievement. Rather than just setting out a complete chronological list of events, this section, therefore, seeks a representative display of the ideological dialogue ostensibly articulated between the parties. It seeks to identify the formation and blurring and overlapping of ideological arenas, by offering an insight into the nature and processes of struggle played out between their respective interests. Also, the extent to which strategies can be seen, for
example, to take on and try to subvert oppositional common sense views and paradigms in a chameleon fashion, as a possible means of establishing ideological dominance through hegemony. In such cases elements of apparent strategies may appear to be shared, though set in context they may take on wider meanings to gain hegemonic advantage.
The 70’s Context: Decentralisation

It is impossible to look at the planning regime on retailing and shopping in the 80’s and 90’s and the context in which the retail industry operated and articulated with Government actions, without taking a brief look at some key events during the 70’s. The seeds of concerns and discontents within the industry and Government to surface later within the two decades under study, is evidenced in the Sainsbury’s Chairman’s Statement in 1973. A year earlier, the company frustrated by planning delays and enduring refusals from councils favouring traditional, centralised urban shopping locations and without policies for ‘off-centre shopping’ (trends they first identified in 1971) had initiated a joint conference with representatives of the planning profession, local authorities and the Government. Sainsbury favoured a decentralised store location to cater for the car borne customer, allowing single floor retail operations and more efficient and larger delivery vehicles as part of a rationalised distribution strategy involving regional depots. This would cut building and running costs to achieve lower food costs for the customer. Indeed, in this context the conference was considered to be:

“...valuable from a number of points of view, and it demonstrated the considerable misunderstanding that exists in official quarters of the changes taking place in the customers’ needs (my italics) and the pattern of retailing.”

(J. Sainsbury Ltd, 1973, page 9)

Here, then, the customer is viewed in a positivist sense, having given biological ‘needs’ that the industry must rationally respond to rather than bear some sense of
responsibility for, as having in some way created and sustained them through its marketing function (Slater, 1997a). Ironically, a less neutral view of the 'independence' of 'the customer' comes later in the Chairman's castigation of those local planning authorities that try to prohibit customers, chauvinistically constructed here as 'the weaker sex', from using trolleys to get goods to their cars in multi story car parks, through their:

"...demonstrating a lack of sympathy or understanding for the ordinary housewife (my italics) who, if shopping for a family, has the task of getting home about 56 lbs of goods per week from a supermarket."

(Ibid.)

Whilst in stark contrast, in the next paragraph gender assumptions about Sainsbury's operations take a decidedly stronger and more productive masculine stance:

"During the year, we achieved further improvements in our sales per man hours."

(Ibid.)

No doubt, of course, symbolising the overwhelmingly male gender of the prevailing management structure; although, the likelihood was (and still is) that a woman conducted the actual sales, reflecting a gendered division of labour in the nature of supermarket employment that persists. Perhaps today, the perception of the gender of the 'shopper' is less rigidly stereotyped, although as suggested earlier, women still do most of the household food shopping and this persists as a strong marketing focus. The important point to be made here, apart from the stark nature of the gender stereotyping, is the assumption that customers independently
construct their own needs in a neutral way. Just as cultural entities define and construct everyday perceptions about what is *normal* to be the accepted gender characteristic of a typical supermarket customer, so must be the nature of their perceived 'needs'. So this smacks more of a 'fiction', perhaps to be gradually sought as a wish-fulfilment; a somewhat logically constructed myth justifying the large retailers preferred commercial strategy, which might now involve the targeting of higher income groups as women succeed in the professions.

In the statement, Sainsbury sees the company in the global vanguard in the introduction of new measures to improve productivity in the retail industry. It is not only presented as a modernising company by introducing better management and the introduction of new electronic equipment such as for recording and transmitting store orders, it is also an informed arbiter of land-use planning and Government bureaucracy. By coincidence, or otherwise in this latter respect, later that year Circular 142/73 ‘Streamlining the Planning Machine’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1973) was published. This highlighted a recent period of increased pressure on the planning system and set the context in which the Dobry Report would initiate a fundamental review of what was considered to be the time-wasting bureaucracy associated with development control and propose major modernising improvements. This was a theme to be echoed throughout the rest of the 70’s and on through the 80’s and 90’s, under Conservative and Labour Governments. Of course, the key political divide between the major political parties in the post war years concerned industrial
growth and related regional employment reflected through the north-south divide, and the reference here to the 'planning machine' reflects that productionist paradigm permeating the ideological Zeitgeist.

The early origins of Government policy towards planning policy as then expressed through development plans and appeal decisions, and clarified by Government circulars, was first consolidated through the publication of Development Control Policy Notes (DCPN) by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) commencing in 1969. They were not intended to be other than general guidance and did not have any legal footing. However, as a material consideration to be taken into account in the determination of planning applications, they influenced development plan policy formulation and decision-makers, including inspectors dealing with appeals against planning refusals. Not only did these appeal decisions create in common law terms precedents setting parameters by which other decision-makers would act, thus reinforcing what was generally regarded as 'best practice', but ostensibly afforded the Secretary of State immense powers. Policy guidance, through this circular process of reinforcement, focused on strict and uniform compliance through the development policy process, in turn open to legal challenges which tended to (and still do) support the prevailing views of Government.

The first policy document which may be said to have had a bearing on retail areas was DCPN 5 'Development in Town Centres' (GREAT BRITAIN, Ministry of...
Housing & Local Government, 1969). This said nothing about specific retail or shopping land use issues, although the general prosperity of town centres was perceived to be under attack from traffic congestion and development inertia. The key focus was on the physical obsolescence of the built environment potentially unable to cope with all the demands made upon it. A more comprehensive approach balancing redevelopment and traffic needs alongside conservation was advocated, within the framework to be adopted in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 that superseded the post war 1947 and 1962 acts.

Circular 71/76 ‘Large New Stores’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1976) signalled a revision to Development Control Policy Note 13 ‘Out of Town Shops and Shopping Centres’ and Circular 17/72 that had accompanied it (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1972a, & 1972b, respectively). These had initiated the first Government concerns with larger, decentralised convenience retailing. They set a floor limit of 50,000 sq. ft or more on edge-of-town and out-of-town proposals, beyond which individual applications would have to be referred to the Secretary of State who could call them in for determination. Circular 71/76 raised this threshold to 100,000 sq. ft, thus focusing Government concerns solely on macro retailing expressed through hypermarkets, superstores and district centres. In effect, by drawing a line against very large retail proposals, it legitimised a relaxation of policy in favour of smaller supermarkets and their decentralised locations, although it was not be perceived by the retail industry that way. The Circular gives useful snapshots of contemporary
appeal decisions with salient points and crucial issues focusing on ‘local shopping
needs’ and the effects of individual proposals on the viability of local shopping
provision and the urban retail hierarchy. Here, planning interests are thus
presented as directing concerns towards two potentially antagonistic conditions: a
loss of social welfare alongside the erosion of a culturally constructed urban
pattern, based on geometry and centrality. The gloom to be expressed
subsequently by Sainsbury against increased Government intervention in the
retailers’ freedom to locate was not the norm. In one case, an Inspector
recommended that an appeal be allowed because of the social advantages of
enabling competition through the entry of new stores in new locations, against the
everial emergence of new retail orthodoxy in Government circles:

“In my opinion the advantages to the general public of the introduction
to this part of the Birmingham conurbation of a new type of shopping
centre offering a convenient shopping environment, lower prices and in
creased competition in convenience trading outweigh the planning
disadvantages advanced at the inquiry.”

(GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1976b, page 20)
Deconstructing the 80’s: Deregulation.

Following the election of the Thatcher Government in 1979, the tenets of the Dobry Report were developed further. Circular 22/80 ‘Development Control - Policy and Practice’ identified the job of the planning system to balance “the protection of the natural and the built environment with the pressures of economic and social change” (paragraph 1) and took up the Sainsbury accusation that the system brought about delay and hindered modernisation:

“The planning system should play a helpful part in rebuilding the economy. Development control must avoid placing unjustified obstacles in the way of any development especially if it is for industry, commerce, housing or any other purpose relevant to the economic regeneration of the country. It is and should be seen to be, part of the process of making things happen in the right place at the right time”

(GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1980, paragraph 3)

Local Planning Authorities were thus asked to give special privilege to commercial proposals. They were expected to “adopt a more positive attitude to planning applications; to facilitate development; and always grant planning permission, having regard to all material considerations, unless there are sound and clear-cut reasons for refusal.” (Ibid.).

New built development was vital to the regeneration process and at any time £8 billion’s worth was passing through the planning system. Unnecessary delays had a price that affected economic efficiency, jobs and profitability. The planning system was to afford priority to industry and commerce, and the development industry. Industry and commerce was continuously evolving its character and
these changes had occurred since the inception of planning control. Small business was to be particularly promoted and a more flexible zoning policy adopted, especially in residential areas where land-use separation between homes, services, and employment sources, had been a feature of strict land-use control. The whole thrust of the document perceived the bureaucracy of the planning system as a negative inhibitor of economic regeneration and therefore sought to establish a presumption in favour of meeting the 'reasonable' needs of private businesses, particularly small firms as key motors of the new economy.

There is a resonance between the ideals here and the frontispiece to a somewhat nostalgic, but useful biography of the Sainsbury company "JS 100" (1969) published on its centenary. This harks back to the notion of a family business with small roots and its struggle to grow into a multiple chain of larger supermarkets and adapt to the modern world of commercial competition, ever anxious to bridge the divide between the old way of running business, and the modern:

"Each new generation of the family, as it has come into the business, has had to meet the changing social needs and commercial conditions of its time: each has made changes that have transformed the style and structure of the business. So the story is one of constant adaptation and re-shaping of the Company's methods of trading and management. Although the changes have been radical, the basic principles established by the founder a hundred years ago remain unaltered."

(J. Sainsbury Ltd, 1969, Frontispiece)

That 'need' to adapt and change to the 'requirements' of the modern world is developed further in a paper 'Food retailing and the Environment' given by Sir
John Sainsbury to the Oxford Preservation Trust in 1981. It encapsulates established company priorities about the commercial trading environment and the land-use planning context that were to feature in company annual reports through to the mid 80's. The thrust is to view food retailing as a convenience activity which, as a service, should be located as near as possible to the places customers (or rather 'housewives') live, and that means decentralising new larger supermarkets away from congested town centres. The planning system has built in delay and fails to come to terms with the 'needs' and priorities of consumers and the industry. Successful retailing is about understanding the consumer's changing 'needs' and preferences for food shopping, particularly by acknowledging the 'housewife's' choice: in savings and convenience. This is an unapologetic treatise in favour of decentralising food shopping away from town centres, whilst making a good argument in favour of investment in places likely to benefit from regeneration such as Covent Garden, disused factories or railway stations. Such philanthropy more likely seeks to exploit the commercial potential of older redundant sites in urban areas experiencing residents, visitors and workers as potential customers, whilst projecting the social and moral ideals of the company that aids a marketed image for a perceived, more environmentally conscious, middle-class customer.

Sainsbury's saw itself as a major innovator in the field of retailing and the 1982 Chairman's Statement (Sainsbury, 1982) takes pride in its scale of operations, becoming what it believed to be the largest retailer of food in the country (page 4).
The number of new Sainsbury's products developed under its own label was certainly greater than those produced by the largest food manufacturer. Seventeen new stores had been opened that year with a total net sales space of 358,000 sq. ft. Yet again, the regenerative opportunities of store development were argued for, particularly where brown-field sites allowed for customer car parking, and the planning system was castigated for its delays; also, what Sainsbury's perceived to be a misuse of planning powers working against free competition and necessary retail change. A high rate of company investment is identified and there is a distinct advantage argued for in terms of better relations with suppliers and in the moral imperative of job creation at a time of high unemployment. Thus, a social agenda is presented and these issues become established in the subsequent annual company reports for 1983 and 1984, to which environmental objectives were added.

In the 1983 Chairman's statement, other issues come to the fore such as a call for the relaxation of shop opening as a response to wider 'demands'. The company achieved an increased share of the grocery trade (9%) and more stores were developed in the North, making new incursions from their foothold in the South. Their last traditional counter service at Peckham was changed to self-service and a greater proportion of sale and leaseback schemes were negotiated with developers. More property was available to meet their operational needs favouring single deck retailing and car parking. Town planners were seemingly becoming more co-operative:
"It is also evident that today there is a greater awareness in planning circles of the value of edge-of-town developments and our recent success in winning the planning appeal for a store on the outskirts of Ipswich is a good example of this."

(Sainsbury, 1983, page 5)

However, the company’s gripe against planning delays continues and there is a call for the land-use planning system to be reformed to give greater simplification, a less costly burden for commerce and more certainty:

"The planning process needs to be more predictable and this could be achieved by closer definition of what should be permissible and the considerations which should influence decisions. The world has changed so much since the post-war period when the present planning system was first established. We must ask ourselves how we can better manage the protection of our environment and encourage good architecture while stimulating developments that are needed by the community (my italics)".

(Ibid.)

In the 1985 Chairman’s Statement, Sir John Sainsbury highlights competition as an important element of the retailing sector as the increased number of new, larger supermarkets and superstores operate across the country:

"...bringing for the customer, wider choice, more convenience, lower prices and better car parking, and for the retailer, greater efficiency."

(Sainsbury, 1985, page 6)

A key point extolling benefits to consumers is that:

"...the food trade is continually enlarging the choice available to the public by opening larger stores that have the space for a wider range and the product innovation, both proprietary and private label."

(Ibid.).
For Sainsbury's this meant that their larger stores were coping with a massive increase in own brand products, some 25% in the previous five years, while the average customer purchases there had increased 3 times greater than in their more traditional stores. Their new supermarkets were twice as large as the national average and they were able to gain a cost advantage in minimising overheads across sale space "considerably greater than the industry average." (Ibid.)

The document shows the key commercial priorities of the firm which suggest that retailing is an integrated activity, a holistic enterprise linking the objectives of selling to make a profit with the best quality control ideals of production and manufacture. The retailer now manages the sharp end of an integrated process embracing the production and sale of a commodity that firmly links the interests of producers and consumers: their focus is on the production of 'value' for the customer through the entrepreneurial expertise of the all-managing retailer:

"The importance for successful food retailing of the size of supermarkets and the convenience and choice they offer, is matched by the importance of the quality of the goods on sale. This is nowhere more vital than in perishable foods where quality variation is greatest and the highest skills are required in buying, distributing and selling. In the non-perishable, branded grocery range no difference can exist in the quality that different retailers can provide."

(Ibid.)

So quality competitiveness is as important as price competition and scale of operation, and the company speaks for the all-seeking, rational, female consumer: what 'she' is concerned with is the good value she obtains in respect of "quality, price and service." (Ibid.) Planners are still criticised. Seemingly their policies
protect outdated and smaller stores that are failing to modernise and thus ignore the ‘needs’ of the consumer. Here, the concern is not that the competing smaller convenience retailers should be protected by the planning system, or from the different market conditions that divide them from the larger retailers in this competitive arena. Instead, it is the very nature of the segmented character of general retailing itself. In other words, the sale of consumer durables, which does, and in the eyes of Sainsbury’s, should, retain a presence on the high street, in the very places that convenience retailing has vacated. That is, despite perhaps having an equal case for decamping more bulky items to the urban periphery for higher income groups in suburbia:

“There is often concern with protecting existing trade in town centres rather than permitting developments of supermarkets in new locations. I would suggest that the best protection for town centres and for the commercial attraction of the traditional high streets is not the preservation of out-of-date food outlets but their replacement by modern, specialist retailers, for example in clothing or consumer durables. The argument that a new store development would impact on existing traders, so often given as a reason for refusing planning permission, fails to recognise the facts of changing commercial life and consumer needs (my italics).”

(Ibid., page 7)

All these views about the unsuitability of the town centre for accommodating convenience shopping and a perceived ‘need’ to decentralise the location of supermarkets were a culmination of the key locational issues raised a year earlier in the company’s publication of “‘Off Centre’ and ‘Edge of Town’ for Supermarkets: A Policy Statement 1984” (J Sainsbury plc). It is not unlike a
political manifesto, ranging arguments for 'edge-of-town', 'border-line' and 'off-centre' locations alongside coloured photographs, uncompromisingly directed at land-use planners. Its introduction urges them to reconsider the question: "...where is the best place to build a supermarket?" The prescription, seemingly for the best of all worlds, envisages a decentralised store close to where people live, located near to main roads, to cater for users of both public transport and cars. Indeed, as it rather creatively concludes in the introduction:

"There is no one answer as to where is the best place to locate a supermarket. Different places need different solutions. But the overriding consideration on the part of today's consumer is the need for convenience of food shopping. This just cannot be provided by traditional high street sites, except in very rare instances."

(Ibid., page 1)

Yet, despite this flexible approach implying overriding concern with the welfare of the consumer, shopping made easier by bringing the retail facility closer to the homes of shoppers in the suburbs, who rather like Joel Garreau's 'Edge City' no longer reside in towns and cities, there are several other agendas. The locational imperative of consumers as a fixed and immutable characteristic of modern life, is firmly enshrined in common sense:

"The consumer requirements of a wide range of choice and products, surface level car parking, good communications and proximity to housing mean that on the grounds of sheer size alone a store cannot be easily accommodated in a traditional high street location."

(Ibid.)

Having argued the case for larger, convenience retail sites on the periphery of the town centre and in suburbia (the urban fringe), focusing in part on the merits of
urban regeneration and demonstrating the company's early brown field credentials, other open land beyond spills into the focus. Ostensibly to herald what was to become perceived as a loosening of planning policy and control by the Thatcher Government:

"There is also a third category of site that we would term 'borderline'. This is the location that was once designated green belt but which modern building works - often new motorways and major roads - have transformed out of all recognition as green belt and may well now be merely an island site."

(Ibid.)

That year, Sainsbury had picked up a prestigious award 'The Most Outstanding Food Retailer in the World' from the American Food Marketing Institute (Daily Express, 1984, page 9). The company, which went public in 1973, was the largest and most successful food retailer in Britain with the previous years profits exceeding £100 million, and with 6 million customers a week shopping in its 242 supermarkets and superstores. Three of the Sainsbury family member directors were amongst the top five men in Britain earning over £1 million per annum. The image presented of them is one of a caring benevolence, with 78 % of profits ploughed back into the business and a staff profit sharing scheme. Both as a family and a company Sainsbury gave generously to the arts, involving the National Opera Company and the Tate Gallery. A strong philanthropic streak emerges which, according to the then company Chairman and Chief executive, Sir John Sainsbury, justifies the intervention of business in culture:
"I haven’t always expected our shareholders to go along with some plans," he says. 'I thought they might say: "What has this to do with me?" They haven’t. I believe we have a responsibility to the community which is outside direct business."

(Ibid.)

Reference is made to the company’s wine selection as a response to an identified trend amongst a discerning, travelling public and a desire to create new connoisseurs. The article affords a unique image of the successful entrepreneurial enterprise, linking the seemingly irreconcilable elements of philanthropy, morality and business acumen. Here, it may be argued that the subtext links all three through their articulation with the perceived common-sense expectations of Sainsbury’s targeted aspirant, middle-class customers, which they hope to attract. Thus, in Sainsbury’s real terms store location is more about physical and informational propinquity in relation to a higher earning, better educated (and discerning) and travelled consumer. A year later, company advertisements in the Radio Times echo this: “Introducing Yellow fin Tuna. Now available in Fiji or Sainsbury’s” (Radio Times, 1985, pp 44-5) and “Now Sainsbury’s feed the mind” (Radio Times, 1985, pp 30-1). Besides extending the company branded product range, they seek to articulate with and reinforce images of self-awareness and potential fulfilment by allusions to the efficacy of global travel (what Hall, 1988b, page 43, sees as absorption of the imperial theme) and good parenthood. Whether or not individual life styles actually allow these to be realised is not important. Either way, Sainsbury’s offers a tangible alternative to turn the dream into reality.
that proffers an appropriate lifestyle image for an aspirant First World, middle
class and those who define themselves accordingly. Also, by linking books with
the notion of feeding 'good food' to the body and brain, the subtext reinforces the
notion of individual choice and 'need', so vital to the company's marketing
strategy. Further, the notion of a 'complete' consumer (body and mind) resonates
well with the company's view of its wider, political role in society beyond
retailing.

A major Government White Paper entitled 'Lifting the Burden' published by the
Department of the Environment (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the
Environment, 1985a) encapsulated the Thatcherite anti planning rhetoric of the
first part of the 80's. Circular 14/85 'Development and Employment' reproduced
as an annexe to the White Paper identified the Government's priority in
"...reducing controls and regulations in the interest of promoting enterprise."
(GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1985b, Paragraph 1). In
other words, it argues for deregulation and in the White Paper's own words
"Freeing markets" (Ibid., page 1). At its best, planning control protected the
heritage, quality of the environment and the Green Belt, and conserved good
agricultural land; at its worst it was a hindrance, frustrating modernisation of the
economy. Development plans, often out of date, were not the only material
consideration in deciding planning applications, so Circular 14/85 set a new legal
presumption, which ostensibly downgraded the status of development plan policy:
"There is, therefore, always a presumption in favour of allowing applications for development, having regard to all material considerations, unless that development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance."

(Ibid., page 1)

In a sense, this was a kind of delusion. As the document acknowledges, the key thrust of planning intervention since the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, had always assumed a central presumption in allowing an owner, or other developer with a material interest in land, to develop it in accordance with their aspiration. That is, provided the public interest was not seriously harmed. That became defined through society’s enjoyment of standards of amenity, culturally defined by the planning profession and policed by the Government and courts. This was an underlying tension that the Act and land-use planning control had to deal with: trying to reconcile the wider public community interest and shared benefits against the freedom of an individual land owner to maximise personal gains. Thus a clash occurred between two, irreconcilable philosophies: municipal socialism and free market liberalism. As a compromise, policy considerations had always been just one element of the overall material considerations: although a very important and often leading one at that. Compensation was seen as ameliorating the two stances. Thus, to receive a planning refusal, such as for residential development in the countryside, implied the loss of a development right and a scheme of compensation allowed a once and for all financial payment for that loss. Here, in the newly stated Government policy, which underlined a key ideological belief in the sanctity of a developer's right to materially gain from
development, they weakened the development plan policy status. Much of this, however, was predicated on the lack of real resources fed into the process of updating development plans, so historically it may be argued that in the longer term this raised wider questions about planning expectations and also local authority funding.

On 5 July 1985 the Secretary of State for the Environment in answering a question tabled in the Commons about the Government’s policy towards large new retail developments concluded that it was not necessary to update the policy approach adopted in DCPN 13. Again, he stressed that the earlier guidance that it was not the function of the planning system to inhibit competition amongst retailers or methods of retailing, or to preserve commercial interests. LPAs should take into account the full benefits to the public that flowed from innovation in distribution and retailing. Yet the potential cumulative effects of large retailing on the viability of a nearby town centre as a whole, was a material consideration. A transcription is later carried in Annex A of Circular 21/86 ‘Policy on Major Developments. Town & Country Planning (Shopping Development) (England and Wales) Direction 1986’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1986, page 3). This set a new ‘call-in’ threshold at 23,325 m\(^2\). As at January 1985 the Minister stated that there were 260 hypermarkets and superstores operating in England and Wales, compared to less than half this (125) in January 1979 and only 26 in 1973.
Despite the rapid growth in the phenomenon the Minister thought that the planning system could accommodate the new types of retailing for which “there is a clear public demand.” (Ibid., page 3) Perhaps here a tension shows between the ideological stance favouring a market solution and the profession calling for more central Government intervention, which the formal direction achieves. In Sir John Sainsbury’s chairman’s statement for 1988 the Minister’s answer to the Commons question was applauded, paraphrasing key text which reiterated the exclusion of commercial competition as a valid land-use consideration. However, again, local authorities and planning inspectors are lambasted for employing:

“...the old anti-competitive argument designed to preserve the status quo rather than recognise the need to respond to changing consumer requirements.”

(Sainsbury, 1988, page 6)

Thus, the company sides with the Thatcherite rhetoric citing delays and loss of development as inhibiting urban renewal and greater employment facilities.

Much of this finds resonance with the Government, which by January 1988 had come to recognise the significance of retailing to the national economy facing structural industrial decline in the face of wider global competition. The DOE published a Planning Policy Guidance document PPG6 ‘Major Retail Development’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1988) against a background of increased sales, falling prices and fewer, larger shopping units. A few months later in July 1988 the town planners’ professional body, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) published the report of its Retail Working Party
"Planning for Shopping into the 21st Century" (RTPI, 1988). The committee members were mostly senior members of the profession holding senior office in local government and the private sector. Dr Brian Raggett, a director of Hillier Parker, planning consultants, specialising in retail matters, was a member of the working party. Later on he becomes a central figure in the interpretation and criticism of Government retail policy, acting at various times on behalf of the retail sector and Government departments, and reporting to a Parliamentary Select Committee (GREAT BRITAIN, Parliament, House of Commons, 1999a). The RWP had met two years earlier in April 1986 to examine the current trends in customer habits and retailing practice. In particular, how these might affect the existing shopping hierarchy; to assess likely developments in retailing in the UK until the end of the century; and consider how the planning system could provide for more efficient retailing and better customer facilities whilst recognising the role and function of established shopping facilities (RTPI, 1988, page 1). It will be useful to compare the key features of the RTPI document with the 1998 PPG6 both as a means of teasing out shared paradigms and the nature of any antagonisms between the politicians and the planning profession.

The introduction to PPG6 highlights a shared view between Government and the industry about the perceived political importance of retailing in a national context:

"1. Retailing is a major industry. It is an important feature in everyone's life and of great significance to the national economy. Growth in retailing is likely to continue and this generates opportunities both for new forms of retail development and for the modernisation and improvement of existing town centres."
The retail industry is perceived as responding to cultural change and these new, evolving market conditions are beneficial to all:

"2. Distribution and retailing are constantly adapting to changed economic and social conditions and these, with changes in shopping habits, are bringing about changes in shops and shopping areas. Retailing developments which extend choice in shopping, allow more efficient retailing, enable a better service to be given to the public as a whole and make shopping more pleasant are to be welcomed."

(Ibid.)

The Government offers no prescription for the location of different types of retailing, but the policy guidance is intended to assist both local government and others in formulating development plan policy and in dealing with planning applications for major retail development (paragraph 3, page 1). A trend towards larger stores is recognised and the advantages are spelt out in terms of increased efficiency and greater consumer choice through economies of scale which "...can be passed on to the consumer in better value for money." (Ibid., paragraph 4). This resonates with Sainsbury's point that greater car ownership and lack of shopping facilities in the suburbs and town centres has led to longer car journeys for shopping and changes in shopping habits and "methods of retailing" (ibid., paragraph 6). However, for the first time the variable nature of customer access to a car is acknowledged, along with the inequality this may potentially confer. The needs of low mobility groups (the elderly, people with disabilities, mothers and young children and those on low incomes) must be met by the provision of smaller shops catering for their needs and large new convenience stores located close to
public transport (Ibid.). Here there is a tacit acknowledgement that the new superstores are being targeted at more affluent middle class groups and the first signs of a tension between the adherents of an unregulated market approach and the social welfare concerns of land-use planning in Britain, are evident.

Thus may be detected a schism between the role of land use regulation to control development in the public interest and the underlying integrity of the market place to function through competition, unhindered by the state. The document reiterates that on 5 July 1985 in answer to a parliamentary question about major retail development and policy, the Secretary of State for the Environment had confirmed that:

“It is not the function of the planning system to inhibit competition among retailers or among methods of retailing, nor to preserve existing commercial interests as such; it must be to take into account benefits to the public which flow from new developments in the distributive and retailing fields. The public needs a wide range of shopping facilities and benefits from competition between them. Local planning authorities must take full account of these various needs, both in framing structure and local plans and in dealing with applications for new shopping developments of all types.”

(Ibid., paragraph 7, page 2)

Thus planning is the facilitator of a new, evolving modernisation of the retail industry, whose benefits are reaped by consumers. Yet as statistics for the period show, the rapid growth of large, new decentralised multiple convenience retail outlets was accompanied by the rapid demise of small neighbourhood corner shops and supermarkets, mostly located in urban centres and in town centres (Oxford Institute of Retail Management, 1988; TEST, 1989). These were just the kind of
small shop which the new planning policy was seemingly to protect in its recognition of the mobility issue along with town centres. Yet, the very advice continued here serves to justify a blind eye that planning should have when considering issues about competition: not just between equal partners, but more likely David and Goliath:

"Since commercial competition as such is not a land-use planning consideration, the possible effects of a proposed major retail development on existing retailers is not in this sense a relevant factor in deciding planning applications and appeals. It will be necessary, however, to take account in exceptional circumstances (my italics) of the cumulative effects of other recent and proposed large scale retail developments in the locality and to consider whether they are on such a scale that they could affect the vitality and viability of a nearby town centre as a whole (my italics) - for example, whether they seem likely to result in a significant increase in vacant properties, or a marked reduction in the range of services the town centre provides, such as could lead to its general physical deterioration and to the detriment of its future place in the economic and social life of the community. Town centres need to maintain their vitality, but the range and variety of shops and services will change, as they have always done, in response to changing conditions."

(Ibid.)

Clearly, there is a significant contradiction here, which says more about the underlying clash between the ideology of an unrestrained market from a Thatcherite viewpoint and another social view about the interventionist role of Government exercised through the mechanisms of the planning process in a liberal democracy. A key tenet of planning control as exercised on the basis of precedent by the courts and Parliament is that each planning application must be considered on its own merits. Thus, policy has to be framed not just to meet the accumulative effects of individual applications over time, but in the short and intermediate
terms, to allow for each proposal to be determined solely on the basis of its individual impact. So while what was later to be termed as ‘social exclusion’ signalled a recognition of a valid policy concern, this became frustrated, no doubt as a price to be paid for allowing a modernised retail system to have more flexibility to relocate near higher income and high spending consumers. Located, by implication, away from those lower income areas, which might deter them. Certainly, on the one hand the policy statement disallowed the objections from individual displaced neighbourhood shopkeepers potentially losing their livelihood as a consequence of new, decentralised investment in larger convenience stores. These could only become valid if accumulatively it could be demonstrated that the character of the larger centre was potentially at risk through empty premises and other measurable injurious physical effects.

Much of the RTPI Report parodies the wisdoms shared between the Government and the retail industry, especially in terms of what shops do:

“It is an obvious truth that shops exist to provide a service to their customers and must be accessible to them.”

(RTPI, 1988, page 25)

That they also make profits, may become powerful corporate interests and become key elements in an ideological conduit linking commercial and Government interests, does not feature. Also, the tensions alluded to earlier become clearer. The choice of terms ‘retail’ and ‘shopping’ in specific contexts offer clues about the ideological preferences on offer. The terms of reference for the Retail Working
Party reveal a specific focus on the social relations of production and consumption by emphasising in its brief the examination of "retailing practices" and "customer habits". However, in the order of presentation, the process of retailing is clearly viewed as a functional and therefore value-free response to consumer trends, rather than an initiator of them (paragraph 1.1(a), page 1). Thus, a significant point here must be that the context for the evaluation fundamentally adopts and reinforces a traditional, empiricist paradigm, signifying 'retailing' as a neutral activity and an inevitable one at that. Here, the retailing industry as a whole is the passive customer of the shopper, whose individual character is defined as a totally free agent within a free market, very much on the model argued for by classical economists. Thus, in focusing on assumptions about the way consumer trends affect the existing shopping hierarchy (taken here as a geometric, locational model of the traditional spread of shopping types in relation to sales catchments over the urban hierarchy based on idealised notions of supply and demand) this interpretation appears substantiated. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, the focus of enquiry is upon the hypothesised changing consumption patterns, albeit given as an inevitable outcome without explanation, other than the usual references to rising prosperity and real incomes. Also, that the retail industry's inevitable ability to respond to these circumstances will result in a new equilibrium, a balancing of tensions in the formation of the social relations of production (and distribution) and consumption.
The terms of reference continue by committing the profession to second-guess the retail industries likely responses and retailing initiatives until the end of the century. Crucially, in welfare terms it sets the criteria by which planners will evaluate the wider benefits and costs to society. Proactively, how the planning system, operated by its members within the legislative and political frameworks, can (my italics) “provide for more efficient retailing” and “better customer service whilst recognising the role and function of established shopping facilities.” (Ibid.) Taking the latter part first as a function in need of a key definition, it is clear that this can never be ideologically neutral. All interests in the social relations of production will identify with particular paradigms seeking to articulate with and subvert alternative meanings as part of a struggle to achieve ideological hegemony. Here, though, the proper role and function of ‘established shopping facilities’ is explicitly undefined and rather ambiguous, so a deconstruction of terms is necessary to try and understand precisely what combinations of ideologies are being presented.

Clearly, the context of the report principally defends the conventional ‘retailing’ base of commercial companies whilst seeking improved customer ‘shopping’ facilities. In this sense, it appears to be a compromise, offering a coalition of benefits, which attempts to straddle the social relations of production and consumption. Yet immediately one recalls Sainsbury’s oft repeated argument in Thatcherite terms that the industry itself is the best champion of services for the consumer. Indeed, competition necessitates least Government intervention and
more planning control has achieved the opposite, to the detriment of the interests of the consumer (defined through easier access to shops in accessible locations, providing a greater choice of better quality commodities at lower prices). Likewise, in terms of the first criteria concerning more efficient retailing, the industry has argued similarly that through its own endeavours it has introduced innovation and modernised itself, despite the negative intervention of planning control. Thus, against this background, not only is there evidence here of an attempt to merge, if not blur, the paradoxical interests of the producer and consumer; but precisely how the profession will seek to influence the bureaucracy of planning control to make these possible, rather than an inevitability, is unclear.

However, the motivation, if not the means of achieving this, is shown in the “Concerns of the planning system”. (paragraphs 1.3 – 1.5, Ibid.). Future potential changes and trends are identified through the economic, social and environmental objectives:

“...which have traditionally been at the heart of the planning process...”

(Ibid.)

The concerns identified related to job creation or retention; the vitality and viability of town centres; the accommodation of technological change in the retail industry (a term alone that projects the notion of a service sector as a productive element of the economy); the implications for different sections of the community and environmental objectives regarding the quality of the urban fabric and development standards; and a beneficial use of land. Also, the antagonisms and
paradoxes between Green Belt policy, traditionally used as a blunt bureaucratic tool to stop development within and beyond the key metropolitan rural fringes and, in stark contrast, Enterprise Zones, introduced by the Thatcher Government to reverse the outflow of capital and re-vitalise run-down, older urban centres. These would liberate the interests of Capital from planning control, viewed as an autocratic vestige of municipal socialism, inhibiting investment and growth which produces jobs and prosperity.

With decisions about land-use and estate management located wholly within the private arena, their role was to generate investment to pump prime investment in ways that would meet the interests of Capital. Yet this selective freedom for the private sector had unforeseen effects and distorted the wider market by undermining investment in neighbouring areas, creating in the short term an implosive context: a situation acknowledged by the report. Also, where planning control at least offered an image of popular involvement through municipalisation, albeit seldom attained in reality, the privatisation of the control process eliminated it completely. Yet it could be argued that the two policies were actually complimentary. In acting as a constraint on suburban growth in close proximity to the older metropolitan centres, Green Belt policy worked with the market. The outward flow of investment and the relocation of people, jobs and services, had to jump the Green Belt to other more prosperous regions at home and abroad, and in this sense did the bidding of Capital in seeking a more profitable location for a new activity. Thus, the better-off people on the move taking their higher skills to
better jobs, benefited as a result, whilst the rest languished in poverty and unemployment.

Even so, the anti-planning rhetoric of the Government was perceived as eroding the Green Belt somewhat regarded in ‘common sense’ terms as a national cultural institution. Thus, eager to articulate with this ideal the RTPI report takes credit for edging the Minister towards a statement defending the Green belt concept; also, for encouraging the PPG 6 policy statement on retailing, which initially seeks to offer existing town centres some measure of protection for their investment. In this latter context the report identifies a trend for local authorities to encourage decentralised, smaller shopping centres. Indeed many seek to encourage this retail investment as:

“...one of the few comparatively mobile and footloose industries left in Britain.”

(Ibid. page 2)

In an era of rapid job loss as older primary industries and secondary domestic manufacture capitulated to the restructuring of Capital in the new global order, the political priorities of local authorities were perceived as needing to protect jobs at all costs. Here in the language of the report we can detect signs that the service economy is being afforded a status once reserved for ‘real’ manufacturing industry that traditionally made things and provided ‘men’, viewed as the natural breadwinner, with jobs for life. The service sector, traditionally thought of as a
non-productive activity, existed as essentially a complimentary feature to traditional manufacturing, where the role of women came to be established, signifying their weaker bargaining position in the gender hierarchy. Yet in terms of the role of office work and retailing within the national economy, the position was about to change. Under the Thatcher Government there had been massive industrial shakeout and high unemployment in those regions depending on traditional manufacturing, along with cuts in benefits and social security. Thus the position of the vulnerable in society was open to discussion and this surfaces in the report which identifies ‘disadvantaged groups’ with problems of mobility and therefore access. For most consumers, though, competition in the market place resolves difficulties of accessibility through location and for the minority for whom it doesn’t, the planning process is viewed as a necessary safety net.

Nowhere does the document seek to explain the commercial priorities of the retailers in wider political terms, the type of community democracy on offer by default and the overtly ideological nature of the competing interests linking the social relations of production and consumption.

Sainsbury’s ‘expectations’ about the planning system can be read from their document ‘Local Attitudes to Central Advice: A Survey of the Response of Planning Authorities to Government Policy Guidance’ (J Sainsbury plc, 1989). This provides an interpretation of responses from a sample of chief planning officers with responsibility for planning committees during a 20-minute telephone survey of their attitudes towards councillors and their knowledge of planning
policy and issues. Also, the council's dissemination of information, its response to major retail applications, planning gain and the officers' opinions about the efficiency of the planning system. A summary of conclusion commences the document and these hint at a self-fulfilling prophecy: there is only partial knowledge and understanding of Government policy throughout the council's organisation with elected councillors being poorly briefed. Planning gain is little understood, as is the significance of Government policy statements "encouraging new forms of retailing" which are given little weight by members (Ibid., page 2).

Most planning officers thought the system worked effectively, perhaps rather undermining Sainsbury's underlying thesis that it was to some extent in disarray. The company saw itself as a key player in the national planning system with considerable responsibility and expertise; and not without influence and a wider moral responsibility towards society:

"Like many major retailers Sainsbury's has a considerable involvement with the planning system in the country. Large retail developments are of considerable significance within a local community having a major impact on land use, traffic management, employment generation and urban renewal. For this reason Sainsbury's aims to maintain a continuing dialogue with local authorities and indeed everyone concerned with the planning process."

(Ibid., Introduction)

The sole justification for the survey was thus to highlight the perceived shortcomings of the planning process, encountered at first hand. Perhaps also, concern for the gradual emergence of a less accommodating attitude towards the decentralisation of large convenience shopping, somewhat out of step with the modernisation objectives of Sainsbury and the counter moves represented by
planners towards deregulation; also the weakening of the planning system under the Thatcherite Government:

“As a result Sainsbury’s has been able to observe distinct variations in the way in which development proposals are dealt with. Whilst it is to be expected that the way individual planning applications are handled will vary, there are inconsistencies about the way the planning system is handled administered and quite significant variations in elected members' knowledge of that system. Local attitudes to government policy also varies quite considerably, even for authorities of the same political persuasion.”

(Ibid.)

Surprisingly, the Sainsbury document does not seek to contest the merits of Government policy: merely to draw attention to the variations in the awareness of it. In this sense, the subtext suggests that Sainsbury’s engagement with the planning process is proving unsuccessful as changing paradigms against decentralisation militate against its commercial priorities. Despite the left-of-centre views of some family directors, the company needs to express an alliance with Conservative Government policy.
Deconstructing the 90's: Centralisation and the Modernisation Project

Sainsbury's formulae for the ideally located store, i.e., a large, single storey building located on a level, decentralised site in the urban fringe, accessible to its highly mobile, car owning customer base, fits in well with its centralised 'just in time' delivery policy and marketing ethic. Professor Leigh Sparkes notes that historically as the convenience retail function changed from individual owners running many small corner shop businesses to corporate companies operating fewer, larger multiple stores, the logistics of commodity distribution achieved greater significance. It changed from a separate wholesale activity to a more structured distribution controlled by the retailers (Sparkes, 1994). Thus, the logistics of supply for much larger stores is perceived to be central to the retailer's changing focus on anticipated business and consumer needs, fundamentally linking production and supply through the context of retail marketing. The retailer takes on the role of producer via contractual control of sub-contracted suppliers, ensuring a more holistic and targeted cum flexible retailing operation, achieving greater efficiencies and, of course, larger profits:

"Multiple retailers have progressed from being simply the innocent recipients of manufacturers' transport whims, to controlling the and organising the supply chain, almost in its entirety. The adoption of a logistics approach requires the intervention in wholesaling and manufacturing processes. Retailers began this intervention through the mechanics of own-brand production, but have extended it to encompass almost all product distribution. The expanding data and information capabilities have allowed retailers to exercise this control in an even greater fashion."

(Ibid., page 331)
The dimension of space is critical here. Land is cheaper at the urban periphery as
are transport costs in the new supply logistics. Sparkes thus shows how
Sainsbury’s pioneered the centralised distribution system dependent on a new
relationship to subcontractors. He also examples the case of Tesco who by 1989
had restructured a network of regional road transport distribution centres close to
motorways, tailored in terms of propinquity and technology to match the corporate
supply needs of its stores.

Sainsbury’s Archivist, Bridget Williams shows that by 1992 the Company had
become the UK’s most profitable supermarket retailer, making a profit of £628
million, its wider retailing function affording it a leading 10.4% share of the
market it operated in. (Williams, 1994a, page 292). Two years earlier, Sainsbury’s
had commissioned a further telephone survey of car users attitudes towards ‘Food
Shopping and the Car’ (J Sainsbury plc, 1990). The study purports to have
established a national data set on typical responses amongst car users to the use of
their vehicles for food shopping. It targeted its interview samples across 14 urban
and rural locations covering seven location types (small market towns and rural
hinterlands, small semi-industrial towns, provincial cities, prosperous commuter
belts and metropolitan areas of London), areas with mature, high and low
superstore representation, based on 7,000 telephone and car owning households.
Immediately a bias towards higher income and more mobile groups in the south
and ‘Edge City’ suburbia (Garreau, 1992) is readily apparent, suggesting
somewhat the likelihood of a self-selecting consumer base with characteristics
more likely to match its existing (and potential) customer profiles. Thus the conclusions to be drawn are perhaps misleading. Or more pertinently, they offer an obvious image of Sainsbury’s expectations of the attitudes and characteristics of its car owning (and potential) customers and the middle class consumption habits that Sainsbury’s marketing strategies seek to create and sustain.

The survey shows that the car owners will use their cars for less frequent bulk buying: as the report’s conclusion says, “...convenience and the car are inextricable” (page 15). Those “...with access to a car will use it for their main food shopping, regardless of the location of their chosen store.” (Ibid.) Superstores provide ease of parking and shoppers with the necessary travel resources will thus “travel long distances to achieve this end.” (Ibid.) Nevertheless, the document interprets the survey as justifying more decentralised superstore development which will both satisfy individual bulk buying needs as well as rather contradictorily satisfying a green policy for conserving energy which a sustainable planning regime seeks. Indeed, largely as to be set out seven years later in PPG1 (revised) ‘General Policy and Principles’ a statement of policy published by the Conservative Government in February 1997 (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment), just before New Labour was elected. Therefore, unless greater numbers of larger, out-of-town stores are to be permitted, the ‘chore’ of food shopping will further clog up town centres if that is where new superstores must be located. Thus, another Sainsbury’s ‘manifesto’ on behalf of the frustrated shopper ends with a ‘rational’ clarion cry:
"The findings of this survey may seem to state the obvious. That is that in an evolving convenience shopping environment shoppers expect (my italics) to enjoy the benefits of superstores: if the provision of such stores is more dense than average, journey lengths will be below average. The research reinforces the view that carefully planned, accessible out-of-centre locations can play a part in reducing vehicle omissions."

(Ibid.)

In December 1991 David Sainsbury, deputy chairman of J Sainsbury plc, presented the Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Salford entitled 'Lessons from the Worlds Best Companies' (Sainsbury, 1991). Several years later in 1997 he was to be ennobled by the New Labour Government elected that year under Tony Blair and in 1998 he was appointed Minister for Science. Arguably, the Chancellor's Lecture is a key portent of New Labour ideology. It not only resonates with a wider movement of conflicting strands that identified 'New Times' (Hall & Jacques, 1989) necessitating a radical political prescription for a post-Fordist industrial age; but importantly appears to have laid a basis for much of the corporatist approach of the New Labour Government to be elected in 1997. This seemed to challenge the crude monetarism of the Thatcherites; nevertheless, confidently reasserting the entrepreneurial values of the market (though greatly in need of modernisation) with the benevolent assistance of a centralised State seeking to articulate the interests of an unfettered Capital, albeit with defined social priorities.
The starting point of the paper is the identification of key contemporaneous influences in management studies and it cites the influence of the publication ‘In search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies (Peters & Waterman, 1982). This built upon the methods employed by more successful Japanese and other Far Eastern companies having a more focused and entrepreneurial management style, which was being picked up by the more successful American companies:

“They showed a bias for action, they were close to their customers, they fostered autonomy and entrepreneurship, and they treated the rank and file as the root source of quality and productivity gains. The management of the excellent companies had a hands-on, value driven style of management and did not go in for unrelated diversification. The companies also had a simple organisational force and few top-level staff, and exhibited simultaneous loose-tight properties (my italics). In other words, they were both centralised and decentralised. They pushed responsibility down to the shop floor or the product development team. At the same time they exercised a strong central control over their core values (my italics).”

(Ibid., page 3)

Sainsbury criticises the authors because of the US-centric focus and argues for a global model for the best companies if they are to successfully modernise and compete against the new Pacific Rim economies. British companies need more than a change of attitude:

“The reality is that Japanese companies perform better because they have different long-term objectives, because they are organised differently, because they invest more in people and because there is a profoundly different relationship in Japan between shareholders, managers and the workforce.”

(Ibid., page 6)
The emergence of a new ‘co-operative’ and socially inclusive set of social relations comprising a new company culture is held to acknowledge the importance of the work community which translates itself into a key dynamic commercial focus:

“The first most striking feature of the world’s best companies is the priority they give to building sustainable competitive advantage. Their long-term objective is not to make profits by squeezing the wages of their workforce or by buying and selling companies. It is to build up their skills so that they can meet the needs of their customers better than their competitors.”

(Ibid., page 7)

The means of achieving this competitive advantage is threefold. Firstly lower cost production, such as by holding down the very wages which Sainsbury later cites as a successful tactic of the Japanese colour television industry in gaining a foothold in the US economy, contrary to the laudable criticism offered above on squeezing the wages of employees. Secondly, innovation of product and, thirdly, a focus upon market segmentation, which the company can meet, better than others do. Competitive advantage must be sustainable through a twin association of continuous investment and new organisational approaches. The latter becomes an ideological battlefield for the hearts and minds of workers achieved through ‘three basic techniques’. Firstly, task delegation to front-line workers, which is held to achieve improved job satisfaction and the absorption of behavioural assumptions of managers by operatives. Secondly, factory floor roles like the former are to be reorganised to achieve a reduction in communicational inputs. Thirdly, the
processing of information through ‘lateral relations’, where higher management roles are re-articulated amongst workers on the shop floor, producing a flatter lateral, self-disciplining organisational hierarchy. These are to be backed up by a heavy investment in training and an earlier example of a German bank investing in a form of apprentice training for school leavers from the age of 16 supports the degree of ideological absorption into the company ethic envisaged. Further, a comparative study of a segment of German and British manufacturing industries is held to show:

“...that training is of vital importance in achieving competitive advantage even in a single industry.”

(Ibid., page 16)

In terms reminiscent of Weber’s ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (1971) and Samuel Smiles’s work ethic (1986), which resonate a few years later in the New Labour Government’s ‘Learning for Life’ initiative (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of Education and Employment, 1998), training is not only necessary for front-line workers involved in a process of ‘continuous improvement’, but they ‘need’ it, and ‘opportunities’ for ‘self-improvement.’

All this leads to the ideological notion that the success of a company actually depends on the community of the commercial organisation and that those with expertise would be singularly rewarded for their cleverness, whilst all other workers would merely rank as economic inputs for manipulation. Thus, here is the
crux of Sainsbury’s argument, as a necessary component of long-term commercial success of the UK economy as a whole:

“...increasingly the success of companies depends on the skill and initiative of the whole workforce, and that is why the ability to align the interests of the individuals who make up an organisation with the interests of the organisation is the fourth attribute of excellent companies.” (my italics)

(Ibid., page 19)

Thus the integration of the employees’ interests with those of the company’s is crucial to commercial success. Yet, here a paradox arises in that the delegation of management functions such as organising just-in-time methods increases the power of the workforce and potentially invites subversion. Success needs the willing co-operation of workers and key elements such as job security, representation and gain-sharing must be shared between company and employee. Thus here, the role of the company union is cited as a means of integrating stability and conformity in line with company objectives. The single union deal established in 1981 between Toshiba and the EEPTU is cited as the way forward, within a climate of change in the labour movement:

“All of this would seem irrelevant and far removed from the British system of industrial relations if it were not for the ‘new realism’ movement in the British Trade Union Movement in the 1980’s”

(Ibid., page 23)

Employee share systems are identified amongst the panoply of measures designed to buy worker loyalty, improve company performance and competitiveness. Initiatives and leadership have to come from the private sector via managers best
able to take decisions about strategy, organisation, training and gainsharing and there is but a limited role for Government in this:

"Governments, even if they are staffed with the best civil servants, cannot know as much about market forces as the participants, and in most cases they find it difficult to isolate their decisions from political distortions. The Government can play an important indirect role in creating an environment which helps excellent companies to grow, but shadow decision-making by Government is bound to fail."

(Ibid., page 30)

Thus, a key plank of former Labour Party policy regarding public ownership and intervention in the national economy is critically viewed as a 'no-go' area, an option eventually to be denied to voters. Trade unions should abandon class-based adversarial relations and stop defending job demarcations, albeit that Sainsbury rather contradictory advocates single union deals. Government should confine itself to creating conditions in which a vigorous level of domestic competition should flourish. In this context, cartels and mergers are seen as an obstacle to free trade and growth, as are poor management, labour movement aligned trade unions, and punitive taxation policy. Despite earlier arguments against holding down wages, he ignores the wider redistributive benefits of corporate taxation, proffering somewhat partisan guidance that Government should encourage long term views about company investment:

"...it can give favourable tax treatment to long-term capital gains on equity investments in firms, or have no capital gains taxes at all." (my italics)

(Ibid., page 32)

The indirect role of Government is thus an important one for firms: to ensure for
business a well-educated workforce, technology formation, capital and supportive infrastructure. In essence, a middle way is advocated to produce the best companies to obtain ‘better standards of living and to reduce unemployment’, a traditionally liberal democratic stance to become the hallmark of New Labour:

“In this country because of our political system we have oscillated between extreme laissez faire policies and detailed interventions. Neither makes sense, and there are lessons to be learned by looking at government policies in countries which have produced more excellent companies than we have.”

(Ibid., page 33)

Here, the mission presents a challenge not only to companies, but also the trade unions, universities and the Government. Management, of course, provides the vital leadership whilst in clear, patriotic terms, that coincided with the year of the Gulf war:

“Nothing less than a national effort is required.”

(Ibid., page 34)

Some months earlier in November 1990, Mrs Thatcher stood down and was replaced by John Major, representing, perhaps a more moderate political shift within Government towards environmental matters. In 1991 a new planning Act was introduced which modified an earlier Act given Royal Assent just a year earlier. This tightened planning policy introducing a policy requirement prioritising development plan policy (Elizabeth II, 1991). A year later in 1992, which matched another surge of out of town shopping development and a significant downturn in the national economy, Britain was forced to leave the ERM. Labour lost the
general election and the new Conservative Government under John Major introduced for consultation a draft revised PPG 6 'Town Centres and Retail Development' (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1992) modifying that published in January 1988 entitled 'Major Retail Development'. At first sight, the key area of change appears to be a new emphasis on protecting existing investment in town centres. Where previously, out-of-town retailing had to demonstrate that it would not affect the vitality and viability of a nearby town centre as a whole, the new policy objective was to ensure a wide range of shopping opportunities to which people had easy access; to encourage town centres to play a full part in the life of the community; and to see that full use was made of town centre locations for new development. This new urban focus is reflected by the first bullet point in the introductory text setting out main policy changes:

"...to set retail development clearly in the context of town centre vitality and viability, while continuing to encourage competition between different types of shopping provision"

(Ibid.)

This key statement maintains the established continuity in the prevailing political perspective which views retailing as a commercial function which will best reach diverse groups of shoppers in urban and rural locations, through competition between different retailers. Indeed, whilst the document expresses a worry about the fragility of town centre investment, the key to its vitality and viability is the fostering of flexibility and diversity in land use. Food supermarkets have an important role, particularly for less mobile consumers dependant upon the town
centre as a key transport node (paragraph 35). However, there is a degree of contradictory neurosis in the document. Whilst the introduction reflects a growing concern about the effects of out of town retailing on the vitality of town centres, the document as a whole, nevertheless, seeks a balance between the two, which are said to compliment each other. New forms of retailing, an indirect reference to out-of-town developments, are viewed as an inevitable and healthy response to ‘consumer demand’ (paragraph 10) despite the worry expressed about their potential effects in undermining town centre investment.

In the draft document, Sainsbury’s argument that out-of-town stores can reduce traffic movements was accepted (paragraph 5) and retailing was seen as a “major industry” of great significance in the national economy and a key social function, providing a “…complex interaction between retailing and other activities.” In particular, it is seen as a catalyst to wider investment and development.

Furthermore, out-of-town retailing is an innovatory response to the market:

“Out-of-town retail developments also offer opportunities that consumers want in a different form…”

(Ibid., paragraph 2, page 1)

Indeed, all forms of retailing respond to consumer demand, a rather simplistic statement that seemingly has rapidly established it in general academic and popular literature as a truism. Similar arguments to that posited in earlier policy guidance about the response of retailing to consumer trends and consumer advantages from efficiencies gained from economies of scale are continued. Given the dynamic
nature of ‘retailing’ and rapidly evolving new forms, a new terminology for the different types of retail development is offered, including self-service of mixed food and non-food supermarkets and superstores.

Much of the flexibility of approach argued for by Sainsbury’s over the years is contained here, especially in regard to the role of planning not to protect or inhibit retail interests and flexibility of location perceived as directly meeting needs. However, an undercurrent of concern about a need to protect the vitality and viability of town centres continues and the Town & Country Development Plans and Conservation Direction 1992 set a new notifiable ‘call-in’ limit of 10,000 m2 of retail floor space (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1992). This actually set a more restrictive lower limit than the draft figure of double that which appeared in the consultation draft released the same year and was later embodied in the published document a year later. At one level, this appears to signify a somewhat ambiguous confidence by the Major Government to deal with the effects of decentralised retailing, which had gathered pace and lingers with earlier decentralisation. Further, structure plan policy is to identify the scale and location of new retail development on a county basis and major shopping proposals are required to demonstrate economic impacts on other retail locations. This built upon a radical change to planning law where in order to challenge the perceived erosion of planning control under the previous Thatcher Government, a new bill was introduced which, for the first time, enshrined an obligation to prioritise development plan policy in the determination of planning applications. Thus
Section 54A of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 (Elizabeth II, 1991) retrospectively added a new section to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 enacted the previous year (Elizabeth II, 1990). This marks an emphatic divide between the cruder free marketers of the Thatcher Government and John Major's more interventionist Government.

The final publication of the revised PPG in July 1993 (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1993) is significant in that in contrast to the draft guidance, the key introductory guidance no longer heralds changes in policy. It remains keen to prioritise competition between 'different types of shopping provision' over 'retail' and in this respect there is a subtle change in emphasis over the older language. The significance of maintaining diverse and flexible retailing policy objectives is, however, still at the heart of its guidance which, in essence, prioritises the availability of a wide range of shopping opportunities to which people have easy access, and emphasises a more consumerist approach. However, retail provision, which contributes towards the vitality and viability in town centres, is now equally as important for villages. Both in-town and out-town retail developments have distinctive roles to play, although priority is given to balancing their particular advantages, besides protecting the particular role of established shopping centres.

In a key contrast with the draft, however, the document seeks to place sustainability at the centre of its rationale as a logical adjunct to a modern and
efficient market. In these respects, it reflects the priorities of the new Environment Secretary John Gummer, somewhat on the left of the Conservative Party, and takes legitimacy from agenda 21 on action for sustainability adopted in 1992 by the UN. Whilst acknowledging the unique roles that both town centre and out of town shopping can provide as established in the draft, there is a heightening of worry about the potential undermining of investment in key shopping locations. In this sense, the established culture of geographical order and centrality of markets in relation to their 'natural' catchments is still being expressed, as are the tenets of classical economic supply and demand theory. Here, this not only depends upon a preconceived expectation about the regularity of human behaviour, but its assumed neutrality in relation to the market. Yet even so, the conceptual contrast offered between the notion of centrality and dispersal is inherently a contradictory one, only made sense by a real dynamic social process, which plays out, if not seen to try and resolve, the integral paradox. Town and country become the key poles in this dynamic geography, thus reflecting more than a neutral symbolism. In simple historic cultural terms they have, in a sense, come to reflect the ideological positions of Capital and Labour, in reality the living embodiment of social, everyday life, symbolic of their respective complex cultural interests and antagonisms struggling in time and space.

Thus, at a more subtle level, what may also be discerned in ideological or symbolic terms is the relativist positions of urban centres and their symbolic associations for power brokers in terms of capitalist power and influence, especially in the sphere
of modernisation of political systems and economic institutions. Certainly the 'urban' has come to express modernity and intellect: a confluence of ideas and community actions within an informed and contemporary metropolitan focus; in contrast to this centrality, dispersal to the rural hinterland has gathered associations of the vernacular and individualism. In between, the urban fringe has mutated into a blurred and neutral interface between the two poles, reflected in the bland architecture of the mass housing estates, or the corporate world of Joel Garreau's 'Edge City' (1992).

Much of this can be seen as perhaps romantic fantasy, but then that is the outcome of real, lived lives in everyday culture. For the practices of capitalism like any other social system have to mutate within its generated culture to survive and that is part of the dynamic cultural process emerging and fading as people and groups strive to rearticulate perceived common sense meanings of life. Despite the complex array of social relationships that arise to redefine and articulate new forms of behaviour and cultural symbolisms, perhaps there is a shared paradigm that can be easily expressed: that is the redefinition of what constitutes centrality for the sake of investment. Thus in simple terms from this narrow perspective, what is perceived to be the best location for new retail development is simply that which occupies a convenient node for higher concentrations of potential spending. This results from the many facets of human behaviour and social characteristics, which may be potentially manipulated or rearticulated by society to achieve just that.
Many of these proxy cultural themes are carried through into a unique policy consultative process initiated by the Labour Party. A one-day conference ‘Talking Shop’ on 14 February 1994 was organised by the Labour Party Planning and Environment Group (LPPEG) formed in 1990 and sponsored by key retail groups including Marks & Spencer, Tesco, the Co-op, W H Smith and Boots the Chemist. The event was chaired by Clive Solely MP, and brought together leading retail, academic and professional interests and Labour politicians from local and central government, to consider a paper ‘Getting to Grips with the Retailing Revolution’ in the light of the new PPG6 initiated by John Gummer. The event was quite extraordinary and drew in a wide coalition of managerial and corporate interests. These generally welcomed what was seen as the potential certainty engendered by the new development plan policy presumption and support for shopping centres in the new, tighter retail policy giving stronger support to existing shopping centres, redefined as any concentration other than collections of individual shops.

The one glaring omission from the event which was recorded in the document ‘Report of the Labour Planning and Environment Group Conference, Talking Shop’ (LPPEG, 1994) was any formal trade union representation. That was ostensibly odd given Labour’s position as the official party of opposition in the House of Commons, having lost yet another election and also having within its ranks a key retail trade union USDAW concerned about low pay and the low protection given to its predominantly women members. Neither was any mention made of existing or previous Labour Party policy either towards the planning
system or retailing as an ideological activity. The principal paper outlining the policy of the LPPEG set out key imperatives. These are listed against a background of a retailing revolution where the previous decade had seen a dramatic change in the pattern of retailing across the UK. Where decentralisation had challenged the dominance of shopping centres and undermined traditional local shopping, discriminated against non-car owners, raised prices and encouraged low skill, part-time employment. Competition between large supermarket chains had increased the pace of innovation and the range of products on offer to the consumer. A balance had to be drawn, but much of the new PPG6 was welcomed despite its ambiguity, especially towards out of town shopping. Underlying this, however, a similar rhetoric idealising the role of retailing in its response to the 'needs' of the consumer is evident:

"New forms of retailing continue to increase the choices available to the shopper."

(Ibid., page 2)

The paper posits strengths and weaknesses on both sides of the argument and the range of terms identifying retailing and shopping interests reflects a somewhat 'middle' approach that seeks compromise: unanimity rather than discord. Indeed, this is precisely what the document seeks in quoting the CBI Task Force Report 'Shaping the Nation' (1992) which was held to have identified a key problem with the planning system as being:

"...the absence of a national consensus between central and local government, business and the public on the key priorities for shaping the nation for the 21st century."
The document also quotes the CBI’s task Force conclusion that:

"In the absence of a national lead, many significant planning applications are in danger of leading to local debates which should be encompassed by explicit national policy."

PPG6 is held to be contradictory and confusing, and certainly it can be argued to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate a range of different initiatives in terms of urban and rural places and shopping types. In this respect, the LPPEG report ostensibly gathers a consensus between the interests of Capital and Labour seeking a greater certainty for capital investment. As such, it attacks the erosion of planning control under Thatcherism and calls for more centralisation, which becomes a key objective of the project:

"It is no accident that Regional Shopping Centres have been developed in Enterprise Zones or urban Development Areas. Some might see this as vindication for a relaxed planning regime. The reality is the opposite. They have occurred because of the absence of an adequate national policy on retail development. It is the aim of this paper and the conference to start to fill that widely perceived ‘policy vacuum’.

Thus, whilst taking a side swipe at the Tory Government in this respect and seemingly uniting those disparate interests of Capital and Labour towards a defence of a highly centralised policy which prioritises the urban centre and the customer, the LPPEG agenda for change is itself confusing. Like PPG6 it envisages a “range and variety of retailing” on a planned regional basis taking account of “need” and “where the key word is balance” (Ibid., page 5).
Fundamentally, the LPPEG shares a wide common sense perception that “Retailing is all about consumer choice” (Ibid.). Informed decision making based on full and up to date information is a priority. So is a balanced transport policy which prioritises the use of public transport in town centres along with a flexible approach to car parking, if the town centre is to successfully compete with other centres (Ibid., page 6).

Of course, here we witness the juxtaposition of different competing paradigms that are struggling for hegemony: principally the attempt by the Labour opposition to manage a new, common sense view about retailing that gains credibility with leading interests within the industry and politicians. In particular, with a future Labour Government in mind. To achieve this, a key focus wrestles with the notion of linking flexibility of investment with the certainty of available political options and outcomes. In this latter respect, the notion of centrality, which favours the urban centre as a potent symbol of modernity and political control, with options for linking and controlling town and country, become the real focus. Thus, there is in reality a leading ‘consensus’, an outcome of internal struggles of hegemony, seeking to gain credibility and articulate with the Conservative Government’s more flexible retail policy. To achieve this on-going process of dialogue, the main objective of the project was the setting up of the National Retail Forum to link the professional and political worlds. Thus to:

“...create effective and on-going links between the public and private sectors.”
That year had also seen the new Conservative Government under John Major introduce the 1994 ‘Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win’ White Paper. Behind this was the notion that a better society incorporating higher living standards, better services, defence, a cleaner environment and a thriving artistic culture all depended on wealth creation (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of Trade and Industry, 1994). The document was the first Government attempt at defining competitiveness cutting across the culture of Government and business, and drew together key policy strands justifying intervention when “market imperfections” operated (Ibid., paragraph 1.22): stable, macro economic management and low inflation; liberalising global markets; deregulation; privatisation; self-help for business; encouraging inward investment; and improving “…value for money and standards in services, such as education, which are best provided by the public sector.” (Ibid., paragraph 1.22) The intent was to help business improve its performance in the new global age. Much of this resonated with the writings of David Sainsbury. By 1997, Sainsbury’s Supermarkets had achieved sales worth £6.1 billion and had operating profits of £386 million. This represented over an 8% increase in growth. The launch of its bank earlier that year had seen over 5000,000 accounts started and accumulated deposits in excess of a billion pounds.

A year later in 1995 the Government in response to criticisms from the business sector reviewed the White Paper and published another one entitled
‘Competitiveness: Forging Ahead’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of Trade and Industry, 1995). There was considered to be wide spread recognition of the importance of competitiveness in both the “wealth-creating sector” and the public sector (Ibid., paragraph 1.9). There is “no winning post in the search for competitiveness” and “Governments throughout the world are now committed to a competitiveness agenda.” (Ibid., paragraph 1.14). Firms were responsible for this in a market economy, bench-marking their ‘best practice’ against “the best in the world and striving to surpass that standard.” (Ibid., paragraph 1.21). Government intervention was justified when market imperfections operated and it created the climate in which business would prosper by its fiscal policies aimed at low inflation, liberalising the economy by removing trade barriers and seeking deregulation, besides creating stable conditions for inward investment and value for money public services, such as education (Ibid., paragraph 1.22). Public Private Partnerships and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) were introduced along with a continuing commitment to reduce public spending as a share of national income (Ibid., paragraph 2.10). A low tax rate continued and the burden was being shifted from income to spending (Ibid., paragraph 2.17).

These themes were reiterated in a further White Paper ‘Competitiveness: Creating the Enterprise Centre of Europe’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Cabinet Office, 1996). This highlighted both the competitive pressures from sectors of the global economy and the market opportunities available to secure a high wage economy in the UK. The document spearheads a campaign to improve European competitiveness and forms
a political justification for the Conservative Government not signing up to the social Chapter (Ibid., paragraph 1.15). After the election of the New Labour Government, two other key documents continue these global themes. Firstly the 1998 Competitiveness White Paper 'Our Competitive Future: Building the Knowledge Driven Economy' (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of Trade and Industry, 1998) considered that:

"The key to competitive advantage in the knowledge driven economy is the capability of firms and other institutions to acquire and absorb knowledge, to exploit it to develop new products and processes, and to learn from best practice."

(Ibid., paragraph 4.1)

Globalism necessitated that:

"The key to competitive advantage in the knowledge driven economy is the capability of firms and other institutions to acquire and absorb knowledge, to exploit it to develop new products and processes, and to learn from best practice."

(Ibid., paragraph 4.1)

Further: "If we are to compete in a world economy increasingly driven by knowledge, we need to improve our capabilities..." in the areas of science and technology, enterprise and innovation, functioning capital markets and by exploiting skilled labour (Ibid., paragraph 4.2). The continuity in approach is obvious. This was followed up by the introduction of the Competition Act 1998 (Elizabeth II, 1998) aimed at monopoly effects and abuse of dominance in the market which prevented, restricted or distorted competition in the UK in the provision of goods and services. The legislation ostensibly put an end to price fixing, the control of markets (including control via production, technical
development and investment) and outlawed the use of contracts to gain advantage over unrelated matters. This latter aspect reflected contemporary debates about the monopoly power of supermarkets (Monbiot, 1998).

A key document continuing these themes, linking a fairly naked free market ideology with a liberal democratic view of Government as a vital tool of public intervention to deregulate the economy on behalf of producers, is ‘Driving productivity and growth in the UK economy’ (McKinsey Global Institute, 1998). In considering the productivity of the food retailing sector in the UK, the report holds that notwithstanding its high productivity, it remains unable to be efficient due to land-use planning controls restricting the supply of land for large scale formats, essential for higher productivity:

“Although the United Kingdom is one of the most deregulated economies in Europe, it retains a plethora of regulations governing the use of land and property that are intended to protect the nation’s countryside, high streets and heritage (my italics). The powers of regulation are widely distributed and often highly devolved. Their direct and indirect effect is to restrict productivity-driven growth, and not only in the food retail sector.”

(Ibid., page 3)

Here, the coupling of a rather fragmented and simplistic set of national planning objectives with the commercial imperative sets an agenda trivialising UK land-use controls. Further, these controls are exercised at a local level, raising the issue about the lack of a central, directing force in planning strategy focused upon by the LPPEG conference. Yet that commercial imperative itself is flawed. Here, the UK food retailing industry is presented as a global co-leader with France through
technical and managerial innovation. But the UK industry itself is bipolar, with a few strong performers:

"...and a long tail of weaker ones that drag down average productivity."
(Ibid.)

So for McKinsey, the average productivity would improve if the top firms were to command a much bigger share of the market through the operation of larger store formats. Obviously, this would have to be at the expense of the majority of smaller and less productive food retailers, which by the report's standards are failing to grow and therefore much less efficient. The report acknowledges, as an aside, that whether this is desirable in terms of competitiveness may be debatable (Ibid.); nonetheless, it continues to posit what is really a contradictory monopoly effect. By arguing for the liberation of planning controls across the sector, they advocate a shrewd statistical device intended to lift the average productivity of the sector as a whole, whilst in reality liberating the big players at the expense, and inevitable demise, of others. Thus, the proposal here is a clear prescription for an uncompetitive monopoly effect, despite the document aiming for the modernisation of the conditions of competition held to shake mediocre, average individual performance. Thus much of David Sainsbury's exhortation to emulate the world's best performing firms is also here, along with the argument that the dynamics of entrepreneurial activity are best led by the commercial sector. Also, that the key role of Government is to liberate the commercial environment from barriers that inhibit commercial success.
In essence, again what we see here is a corporate blueprint of Edge City (Garreau, 1992): a deregulated, decentralised and flexible environment. Indeed, here is an ideological exhortation in favour of the modern, corporate world where Government intervention is not directly for the benefit of the consumer, but the business managers of the new service economy. In Foucauldian terms, controlling the modernising discursive formation in terms of manipulating its system of power and knowledge in the subjectification of people (Foucault, 1991). What is particularly intriguing about the report is its preface identifying its mission to assess “...the economic performance of leading economies around the world” (McKinsey Global Institute, 1998, page iii). A degree of impartiality is sought by their drawing on the counsel of an external “advisory committee” (Ibid.). Just who financed the report is unclear, although it may be seen as a commercial venture aimed at both Government and commercial interests. The preface goes on to acknowledge the support of many companies and Government officials who made the report possible, although it is also stressed that the work is independent and has not been commissioned or sponsored by any business, Government or other institution (Ibid.).

This veneer of pluralism is very interesting, especially in view of contemporary press items and a reference in a Parliamentary debate about the report’s publication suggesting that the UK Government in the guise of the Treasury had commissioned it (GREAT BRITAIN, Parliament, House of Commons, 1999). That was hotly denied and the preface of the document makes it clear that there
was no direct political link with Government, although in the author's correspondence with the Treasury, it was claimed that in fact the DTI had commissioned it. Suffice it to say that the DTI has failed to acknowledge that or respond to correspondence from the author. However, as a clear ideological broadside against the growing tenor of PPG6 which sought a compromise between decentralisation and older definitions of centralisation, it can be deconstructed as seeking to re-articulate a common sense view of a neo-liberal retailing policy, attacking Government intervention and favouring the big corporate players.

Yet in June 1996, again, a Revised PPG6 was published which overtly supported centralisation (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of the Environment, 1996). A clear new strategy for the revitalisation of town centres dominates, set against a firm plan-led commitment marrying new transport priorities working against the car. Applications for more than 2,000 m² retail floor space have to carry impact statements to demonstrate a joint approach between the public and private sectors to a strict sequential testing of proposals, and the desired methodology is firmly spelt out. The preferred option is for town centre sites followed by edge of centre, or district and local locations. Out of centre is strongly discouraged and all locations under consideration must meet a transport test favouring the availability of facilities for public choice other than the car. Clearly, an urban renaissance is in mind, although again the themes of competition, innovation and consumer benefits are stressed. It is not the job of the planning process to hinder these. Supermarkets and large food shops have a key anchor role in smaller towns and are essential for
less mobile groups. Public transport nodes may reduce the need for associated car parking. Rural shops are to be supported and these elements provide continuity running alongside a more radical bias towards towns.

At this time, a year before the election of New Labour to office in 1997, David Sainsbury wrote chapter 3 ‘A Competitive Economy’ in ‘What Needs to Change – New Visions for Britain’ (Radice, 1996). This is akin to a manifesto for New Labour and carries forward his earlier messages about the economy and the modern conditions necessary for a motor of growth. His approach is clear:

“In looking at economic and industrial policy, I start from two strong beliefs. Firstly, it is companies that create wealth. It is they that have to build competitive advantage over their rivals in foreign countries and any attempt at shadow decision making by government should be avoided at all costs.”

(Ibid., page 113)

Civil servants are no match for entrepreneurs necessary for that task:

“Secondly, building and maintaining competitive advantage in world markets is a tough and demanding task. It requires constant improvement and sustained commitment. It means endless change. Most companies would prefer to have a protected or controlled market. If government seeks to put a break on economic change by protecting companies or giving them assistance, they will not make the necessary changes.”

(Ibid.)

The role of Government is to facilitate firms upgrading and changing to achieve more productive growth within the nation’s economy. Thus the goal of the national economy should be ‘competitiveness’ defined thus as: 
“...the ability of firms to expand and produce high and rising levels of productivity, and therefore a high and rising standard of living for a nation’s citizens. Productivity in this context is defined as the value of the goods produced by a unit of labour or capital. It is a function of both the quality and features of the goods sold, and therefore, their desirability to customers, and the efficiency with which they are made. Productivity defined in this way is what in the long term produces the standard of living of a country, as it determines national per capita income and should be seen as the goal of national economic policy.”

(Ibid.)

Here, we see the cult of consumerism. The never-ending spiral of net disposable income couched in seemingly ‘neutral’ classical economic language where a free market equals growth and prosperity for all. Yet a form of colonialism creeps in, rather betraying its narrow perspective at that global competitive level to achieve, unbridled, endless growth, for Western consumers alone:

“To produce increasing levels of productivity over time a nation’s companies must continuously upgrade themselves. In existing industries they must raise their level of quality, introduce new products and increase productivity efficiency. They must also develop the capability to compete in new and more sophisticated industries. This will involve the movement of less productive jobs to developing countries either through foreign investment or foreign sourcing. If less productive jobs are being transferred overseas this is an entirely healthy process, but if high productivity jobs are being lost this will clearly damage long-term prosperity.” (my italics)

(Ibid., pp 113-4)

Thus, the benefits of modernisation are so unfairly distributed at that global level, suggesting that for Sainsbury the term ‘competition’ is not so much a free and fair context between commercial rivals. More so, it is an inevitable process of growth, which not only relies on a cultural advantage of relative historical global power
and development between older and newer nation states and trading blocs, but also in ideological terms is nakedly about Western domination and monopoly. Thus competition and monopoly here go hand in hand.

This theme about competition, which lies at the heart of the various discourses about enterprise and, therefore, retailing as a paradigm of production, is the key focus of a Liberal Democratic Party publication ‘Checking out the Supermarkets, Competition in Retailing’ authored by Dr. Shayne Mitchell (1998). It focuses on the dominance of the four top players in the retail industry, Sainsbury’s, Tesco, Asda and Safeway, and the conditions leading to this unrivalled dominance, namely laissez faire planning policies and a soft competition policy. The document argues that the inexorable growth of the supermarket sector has been at the expense of smaller, independent retailers and the decline of rural shops and town centres, whilst suppliers also suffer the effects of supermarket dominance resulting from their unyielding control over the market. Indeed, it holds that as a result of unfair competition, poor planning laws and a failure of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to intervene on behalf of consumers and suppliers, the position is such that:

“Within the UK market economy, the effect of the dominance of the large supermarket chains seems more akin to a command economy.”

(Ibid., page 6)

Such emotive terms at best suggest a degree of centralisation of power within the retail industry by default, or more likely, amongst the big players, a deliberate or
concerted ploy to dominate the smaller firms, through whatever tactics are available. Yet, underlying the report is a key confusion that permeates the debates about commercial competition reaching its zenith in relevant parliamentary debates and an eventual OFT inquiry. This is reflected in a comparison between two fundamental points made in the document concerning, firstly, the nature of the market and the business interests of the company, and, secondly, the necessary optimum conditions for free competition. On the first, the opening summary holds that:

“A fundamental problem is that supermarkets at present regard their duty to shareholders and consumers as sourcing in the cheapest market, often outside the UK, regardless of social or environmental issues. In the short term this destroys local economies. In the long term it will destroy national food industries, as markets are switched from one country to another, with particularly damaging results for developing countries.”

(Ibid. page 1)

At first this appear to betray the overtly productionist stance offered by the document’s title which prioritises retailing interests. Certainly at a global level we can see a clear oppositional position in relation to the colonialist argument advanced earlier by David Sainsbury. Further, it would seem to distance itself from the Sainsbury line which is that firms competing in the new global market have to stay fit and lean to obtain the best advantage from the point of view of price, according to that definition of competition. The document takes a pluralist position advancing the cause of what it sees as marginalised interests suffering the effects of dominance. In this sense, it also advances a ‘bottom-up’ power perspective which is also contrary to the more centralist, strategic planning policy
line taken by the LPPEG document, irritated by local debates that hold up the 'modernisation' project, the provider of jobs and prosperity in the new post-Fordist age.

However, there are clear shared assumptions in that the document adopts a key cultural 'fact' that 'competition' is good for commercial success, enabling an efficient and low cost service for consumers. This is much in line with the Office of Fair Trading's Research Paper 13 'Competition in Retailing' authored by London Economics (1997) which was published a year earlier, and the tenets of classical economic theory. This holds that the dynamics of a free market will oscillate so as to achieve a stable equilibrium, maximising profits whilst keeping a check on price inflation and allow new efficient producers to enter the market. That in turn will hold down component manufacture and sale prices, whilst ensuring steady economic growth and political stability, plus healthy and fair returns on investment. This situation allows a stable background for Government to intervene politically with a programme of welfare intended to act as a safety net and provide the healthy and well-educated workforce that the interests of Capital require, so neatly expressed by the various Sainsbury documents.

The second key strand of thought in the Liberal Democratic publication is that competition is discouraged by the context in which retailers and the planning process operate. Not only do supermarkets avoid opening new stores where competitors already operate, and lobby to thwart rival firms, but:
“The planning system itself makes it unlikely that supermarkets will be built close to existing ones. Sites are rationed to levels of ‘need’ and planners are reluctant to encourage competition with established shopping centres.”

(Mitchell, 1998, page 5)

This suggests a clear contradiction with the document’s policy objection to the undermining of existing, local shopping provision, mostly to be found in existing shopping centres as defined by Government at an urban or rural level. Also, there is a clear misunderstanding of the nature of the dynamics of development and urban growth. The very classical economic model found underlying many of the assumptions here particularly in relation to the desired object of ‘competition’ will, of necessity, in David Sainsbury’s terms, see firms avoiding a location offering poor commercial returns and commercial instability. Only those retail uses seeking to exploit surplus income spent on high value consumer durables will offer the opportunities for clustering to undercut and obtain lower prices. But then, the fallacy of locational propinquity is but an historical and cultural event. If distance is no deterrent to shoppers travelling elsewhere to make comparative purchases, then physical clustering in historic market terms is irrelevant.

However the position is patently less so for convenience food shopping selling to given local populations. Different social groups depending on their mobility, priorities and resources may seek convenience, price and quality in varying degrees. However, the key factor with food retailing must be an ability to tap into available spending and that inevitably means that companies will seek to dominate
their desired market niche. Also that means either striving to beat a rival firm as in David Sainsbury’s terms, or avoiding going to the wall. So the model of competition advocated here is as equally flawed as elsewhere, particularly when its somewhat romantic and idealistic characteristics are put under scrutiny. The assumption is that there should be a plurality of firms in different locations, avoiding monopoly effects, which ought to be ironed out with interventionist welfare schemes. In particular, new entrants are squeezed out, drawing the inevitable assumption that no economies can be gained from the rigidly monopolistic position operated by the main retail cartel. Yet competition is itself a dynamic concept where the power to succeed and maintain a position of commercial hegemony is regarded in most commercial quarters as the recipe for commercial and entrepreneurial success. Indeed, contrary to what was said in the Competitiveness: Forging Ahead’ White paper in 1995 about there being no winning post:

“It is the essence of a healthy competitive process that there are winners and losers – in this way efficiency is promoted”

(Myers, 1994, page 5)

Of course, more likely there will be one winner and several losers in each case. In this sense, the document shares that prevailing capitalist paradigm whilst seeking to underline social welfare inequalities.

A year after New Labour was elected to Government, it published ‘The Impact of Large Food Stores on Market Towns and District Centres’ (GREAT BRITAIN,
Department of Employment & Transport, 1998). This took as its key focus a quantitative assessment of the impact of out-of-town or edge-of-centre retailing on the traditional social and trading functions of smaller, rural towns and district centres; although the latter is not defined, indicative of several inherent contradictions and tensions. Invariably, the former is predicated on a mystical 'rural' character referred to in terms of a specific heritage that is, in reality, mostly given life through modern physical artefacts such as modern building technology, street construction and furniture. These inevitably must reflect a deeper series of struggles occurring within a wider pluralist debate about the impacts of out-of-town superstores on smaller centres, which in some quarters may well experience notions of political vulnerability. Notwithstanding a change in Government, the document thus provides continuity with an earlier policy focus leading to the revised PPG6 in June 1996 incorporating a tighter, plan led sequential test for retail location which allies with more centralist, urban interests.

The DETR report claims to be the most comprehensive assessment of retail provision ever, setting methodological criteria by which the viability and vitality of commercial centres it to be evaluated by local planning authorities. In effect, the report focuses upon the dilemmas presented to local planning authorities by the notion of 'competition' so strongly defended in the earlier PPG6 and bearing an underlying and residual significance in classical economics and 'common sense'. As such, it provides a backcloth to a shared continuity in Government policy. Thus centrality and market catchments feature here, as does a key political notion that
rural centres are particularly vulnerable to unbridled 'competition' from large, retailing formats that are decentralised from metropolitan urban centres and thus predicated on the smaller, more economically vulnerable rural centres. Here, therefore, is the classic notion of a 'rural – urban' divide; or at least, a continuum, as such. Not only is their 'special character' built upon an historic heritage, a legacy of 'ancient streets' and 'buildings', but that the threat from more powerful decentralised food-retailing outlets challenges traditional rural functions.

Yet in failing to define precisely what 'District centres' are, the report actually lumps them together with market towns by advocating a research methodology prioritising a multiple retailer count representing a shared proxy for the strength reflected in the spending power of the greater commercial catchment. Indeed, the logic behind the research methodology is presented as a holistic approach. In this sense then, the market is, indeed, a single urban continuum where one might have expected that competition would have had its freedom to operate, just as the market assumes that individual consumers have the freedom to locate and travel according to their 'desires' and 'needs'. Yet, here another key assumption is that in the variable growth and powers of market forces, not only are town centres at risk from large, 'foot-loose' retail predators with the flexibility to adapt and relocate to exploit new investment opportunities. But that the systemic economic decline of the rural economy, an on-going feature of long-term national structural industrial change, fostered by an on-going global re-ordering of capitalism, is to be challenged by the service sector. In this sense, protecting the vulnerability of the
food retailing hierarchy in smaller urban centres is a key means of protecting jobs and investment: thus, the existing social order providing the local power structure and the cultural means by which that is reproduced.

In contrast to that focus on the rural end of the urban continuum, later that year Richard Caborn, the New Labour Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning, gave a speech to the British Council of Shopping Centres annual conference where he spoke on the conference theme of "What's new? What's next?" Again, a curious set of continuities and contradictions are evident, suggesting, as before, an outcome of paradigms in struggle, also with doubt about shared meanings alongside the compromises reached through everyday, cultural articulations. The first point made is that any expectation about a new (political) direction will disappoint the audience:

"Our policy has all-party and widespread public support. Most people just want to see it clarified. They want to be sure of their operating context and what they can expect in the future."

(GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1998, page 1)

Caborn was talking to a body of town centre managers and his less radical consensual focus becomes one directed at the producers, albeit that in strong contrast to the earlier document he uses the language of 'shopping' to signal a clear affinity with consumers. But against that theme of continuity in policy, which he identifies with the previous Government's more balanced stance towards protecting town centres, he marks an impatience with the planning system and sets
an agenda for modernising the process, creating an urban renaissance and tackling social exclusion.

Thus, this continuity in approach is actually a “much more positive approach to planning”, one which prioritises a focus for development and regeneration in the urban environment. Thus planning is for “growth, for competition and innovation”, not unlike the Sainsbury formulation for the modernisation project outlined earlier. However, yet again the continuities with previous Government policies are stressed:

“I am committed to modernising the planning system: to create a genuinely plan-led approach; and to speeding-up plan making as well as the handling of applications and appeals.”

(Ibid., pp 1-2)

Here, in a somewhat contradictory stance, he sees Government’s role as servicing production. Thus administrative improvements are a necessary corollary to a trade-off between helping retail production and goading it in the right direction:

“We must provide a clear steer and a better service to the industry if we are to create confidence in the system”

(Ibid.)

In fact, he wants to be tougher than the last Government and change the culture of planners to proactively assist developers find the right solutions:

“We have a generation of planners and developers who have little experience of the type of planning we now need.

(Ibid.)
The contradictions flow. While there is praise for the previous DETR research paper on the impact of large food stores on market towns, suggesting that the balance of policy was about right, Caborn continues to argue that it would be quite wrong to strike a balance between town centres and out-of-town shopping:

"This would be the type of wishy-washy policy that means all things to all people. This Government like the last one has an explicit preference for encouraging retail development in existing town centres."

(Ibid., page 3)

Certainly, there is a degree of truth in this continuity reflected by the former Government’s PPG6 published in June 1996. That identified the regenerative and social roles of supermarket development in town centres, more so than its predecessor publication. However, the latest PPG6 still maintained that priority to innovation in retailing where the industry knows best and competitiveness provided the key to retail location. In that sense, Caborn appears to be at odds with the policy. However, in taking a swipe at the McKinsey Report on the efficiency of the UK retailing sector as a whole, ostensibly carried by the outstanding performance of the top players, Caborn criticises what he sees as a policy in favour of creating unfair, monopoly effects. To do this, he has to bring in the concept of competition:

"There are other, important considerations to location. Their approach [McKinsey] would work against competition, against town centres, and against sustainable development."

(Ibid.)
Like his Conservative predecessor, Caborn sees the issue of sustainability as offering a basis for legitimising efficiency. Here, though, the central question is: how could a range of differing paradigms favouring different locational priorities and commercial cum political strategies be equally 'non-competitive', according to their various advocates? The key is that either different meaning are being offered, or that the term is used as a kind of abuse for the other paradigms. The position is, of course, that under a capitalist system, the notion of centrality and its corollary decentralisation both represent perceived ideal locations for investors to sell to buyers, located as social groups in space and time. Their behaviour depends upon not only their reception to cultural influences which articulate with and reform accepted notions of normality and common-sense, but are constructed by the ideological value-systems that operate, manifested through real, everyday social behaviour and communicated through code systems. In this sense, all parties are right. Equally, Caborn sees competition not only as a clarion call for freedom and a potential means of personal emancipation, but also specifically in the context of the propinquity provided by the high street, a means by which entrants to the race may block a monopoly effect. Equally, that effect is needed to give power to the market and allow 'trickle down' according to McKinsey, which means adjusting the supply of shops in bulk to match the accessibility of the purchasing power. Whilst for the John Major Government, that flexibility to be 'all things to all people' can be understood as merely generalising time/space management allowing for all manifestations of innovation in selling and buying.
An example of that occurs in Sainsbury’s local store format piloted in 1998 and set out in its promotional pack ‘Sainsbury’s Local, Fresh Ideas Just Around the Corner’ (Sainsbury Supermarkets Ltd, 1998). The company was at pains to stress that this was not a substitute for large, (decentralised) multiple retailing via supermarkets catering in the main for a regular, bulk weekly shopping trip. The company had clearly identified a particular metropolitan niche in the spirit of the times, communities comprising older and younger people in smaller households (especially single males who were now cooking for themselves), plus city employees and commuters with particular life styles and a more fragmented consumption pattern. The company acknowledged the significance of the local, corner shop serving convenience and a less structured shopping trip built on consumer whim and irregular shopping habits. Their new C-store format thus targeted the franchised ‘convenience’ stores operated by the independents such as the Spar group, and petrol station retailers. It offered a more flexible operating format plus the targeted exploitation of local community employment opportunities on lower wages and the available spending power, were key characteristics identified. Also, that whilst food prices would inevitably be higher, competition within the sector would ensure that Sainsbury sold for lower prices than its competitors. The total retail sales of this sector was some £15 billion annually, 18% of food store sales in the UK and “more than Sainsbury’s and Savacentre sales put together” (Ibid., sheet 7).
Less reliance on own brand was signalled along with a more aggressive marketing stance, evidenced by a quote from a Coca-Cola/Coopers and Lybrand report ‘Food retailing in 2005’ on sheet 3:

“...success and failure will be more about... different retail brands competing across formats than about one format triumphing over others”

(Ibid.)

Whichever branded product sells best will be sold and the key is commercial success and profit. Their competitive advantage over other retailers is inevitable in part due to the superior buying power and supply chain. Here, the company is laying stress as a de facto producer on its formidable power of ownership and control over suppliers, one that was soon to be the subject of a referral to the Competition Commission in April 1999 and challenged by Parliament (GREAT BRITAIN, Parliament, House of Commons, 1999).

The marketing ethos of the Sainsbury’s document is unashamedly one of drawing an association between its commercial trading goals and ethics, and the freshness of its produce for sale. The title cover ‘Sainsbury’s Local’ bears images of green apples; bowls of cooked spaghetti dishes and a forkful as if approaching the reader’s mouth. Also, glasses of red wine; an innovative pasta sandwich with its sides open for inspection; strawberries and bottles of European lager, all set against a dark blue background. Opening the folder one is met by the phrase “Fresh ideas around the corner” alongside images of baked French loaves, cut oranges and opened sweetcorn cobs. On the back cover is a small image including
coffee beans, dried pasta and a neat, regular row of cleaned carrots, with their tops.
The image suggests a visual metaphor for harmony between Sainsbury’s ‘innovative’ and modern, commercial enterprise and modernity in cooking. The latter encourages consumption of healthy, natural ingredients to pamper oneself by experimenting with a modern, cosmopolitan cuisine.

Thus, the common sense use of the term ‘local’, with its connotations of individual control and tailored ‘needs’, is redefined in terms of several meanings. These converge on notions of a more interesting life-style once reserved for the discerning and better-off customer; or a means of achieving the good life, if not the employment or other social prospects. As such it may be seen as legitimising Sainsbury’s own view of the ‘best’ of urban life and how different social groups of consumers can meet its marketing strategy. At a more subversive level, it may be seen to offer a proxy life-style of consumption as a substitute for people not having immediate control over their own lives. Further, that this will deflect any concern with the unfettered way that the Sainsbury company as a private owner in a capitalist society will manage their commercial affairs whilst constructing and legitimising the cultural characteristics of its potential customers. Certainly, at least this offers a manufactured air of exclusivity that may justify the higher prices to be paid (such as to be found in the Marks and Spencer food halls), even if not the lower wages to be earned. All this sets up and masks in contradictory fashion the complex sets of social and ideological characteristics of different groups of
customers and their wider levels of aspiration to engage in land-use and other political decision affecting their everyday lives.

In contrast, a different kind of 'local' is to be found in the Labour Government’s key focus on deprived sink housing estates and neighbourhoods demonstrating high levels of social and economic inequalities between different places as a result of major industrial decline and job loss in older urban centres. Two important related Government documents that year set a two-pronged approach to lay the basis for New Labour policy towards local areas. They complemented two other documents and policy initiatives. Firstly, the Government’s indications of a long-term overhaul of the planning system introduced in the policy statement ‘Modernising Planning’ published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in 1998 (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1998a). This introduced the notion of market fiscal measures as a means of promoting national policy, whilst devolving power to the regions as central policy was to be strengthened. Secondly, the setting up of an Urban task Force under Sir Richard Rogers to create an ‘urban renaissance’ favouring the city and centralisation contained in the White Paper ‘Planning for the Communities of the Future’ (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1998).

The White Paper ‘Modern Local Government in Touch With The People’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Cabinet Office, 1998) sets a strategy to radically overhaul an outmoded and inefficient local government with community planning with “…fair
competition as a means of achieving efficient and effective services” at its heart (Ibid., page 5). No longer could councils expect to provide public services on the basis of an outmoded and vested structure. As a key feature of the modernisation project, a new duty is to be required of councils to “…promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area.” (Ibid., page 3) Critically, these would feed into and link with other strategies such as local development plans. To achieve this, radically new political management structures are to be created along with partnerships with the business and voluntary sectors including the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for capital projects as a key feature of ‘Best value’. This was introduced ostensibly to replace privatisation and local business was to be afforded full involvement in tax and spend decisions, plus policy formation where their interests coincided. A new leadership championing the Authority and its locality would be subject to political pressures to succeed from the public and business community afforded equal status. This lays a key foundation for the creation of a new political hegemony between Government, local authorities and ultimately the private sector, aligning stable economic growth, sustainability and social justice, fostered by the deputy Prime Minister in regular meetings with leaders of local government (page 12).

The second document, ‘Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Cabinet Office, 1998) focuses on issues creating severe deprivation such as high levels of crime, drugs, and lack of jobs; poor education, health and housing, along with an associated breakdown in
traditional family characteristics. It prescribes a national approach to solve problems linking private interests and public services whilst seeking a multidisciplinary focus cutting across traditional approaches for reversing the decline in the character and quality of urban communities. Chapter 1 highlights a lack of easy access to shops and high prices, and paragraph 5.37 programmes Action Team 13 from the Department of Health to report in April 1999 on best practice and innovative ways to achieve improved shopping access. As published, this rather unique document ‘National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Improving Shopping Access for People Living In Deprived Neighbourhoods. Policy Action Team 13’ (GREAT BRITAIN, Department of Health, 1999) calls for a new proactive planning approach towards meeting community needs. The document links a sustainable business base in deprived communities with a more “positive signal of restored confidence” (page 27). It also notes the significant loss of independent community shops, some eight a day between 1986 and 1996, a decline of almost 40% between 1986 and 1997 as superstores increased from 457 to 1102 during 1986-7 (Ibid.). Large multiples have a competitive advantage in terms of buying power and location reflected in lower prices, which undercut small shops. The recommended planning initiatives can be summed up as providing more help for local businesses and encouraging regeneration and more local, private investment plus a more flexible policy regime sympathetic to that. The new, local Sainsbury retail format mentioned earlier might be seen as an example of what can be achieved although the targeted consumer base appears in contrast to seek a more affluent and less deprived clientele.
The themes here reflect a series of research papers published by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) prior to and following the Competition Act 1998 (Elizabeth II, 1998). This sought to strengthen competition by introducing powers to address monopoly power and anti-competitive agreements. It set up the Competition Commission with powers to investigate abuses in conjunction with the OFT, replacing the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Its key remit under the Fair Trading Act 1973 was the protection of the public interest by the promotion of effective competition between suppliers of goods and services and the interests of consumers in respect of the prices, quality and variety of goods and services supplied. Also, through competition the reduction of costs, the development and use of new techniques and new products, and facilitating new competitors to existing markets, and the maintenance and promotion of the balanced distribution of industry and employment in the UK. (London Economics, 1994). Here is a prescription for the policing of capitalism, which is reconstructed to suit the needs of a modernising liberal democracy. The role of the OFT is to regulate unfair practices, which militate against a perception of fair competition and investigate barriers to entry and exit. Indeed, under the Fair Trading Act 1973, the Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to:

"'keep under review the carrying on of commercial activities in the United Kingdom' and to 'receive and collate evidence' about these activities where they 'may adversely affect the interests...of consumers in the United Kingdom.' This raises questions about how the interests of consumers can be defined, and how 'adverse effects' can be identified and measured'"

(GREAT BRITAIN, Office of Fair Trading, 1996, page 3)
However, in the OFT’s earlier document ‘Predatory Behaviour in UK Competition Policy - Research Paper 5’ (Myers, 1994), the cold efficiency of the market had been accepted:

“It is the essence of a healthy competitive process that there are winners and losers – in this way efficiency is promoted”

(Ibid., page 5)

Here we must assume ‘efficiency’ represents a mythical shared advantage: equilibrium not just for producers and retailers, but also shoppers undertaking acts of consumption for sustenance and pleasure. Yet the OFT (Burden, 1998, pp 7-9) identifies vulnerable consumer groups: elderly people; young people below 16; the unemployed; those with a limiting, longstanding illness; those in low income households; members of ethnic minorities; and those with no formal educational qualifications: comprising in total almost 61% of the population of Great Britain (Ibid., page 6). That vulnerability is not just taken for granted without definition, but positively quantified in terms of an exclusive separateness implicit in the description of a species, typology or even subclass. Here, both classical economics and behaviourism dominate the code system with implicit meanings on offer. Not only are these groups implicitly disadvantaged in terms of other seemingly naturally given characteristics, but they equally face imperfect knowledge, or rather information (London Economics, 1997). Thus choice becomes a function of individual economic behaviour rather than social construction in culture.
Earlier, in September 1997 just after the publication of the Liberal Democratic publication of a similar title, the OFT had published its 'Competition in Retailing. Research Paper 13' prepared by London Economics (London Economics, 1997). In looking at the nature of competition issues in relation to retailing (as against shopping), a fairly bald and neutral view is taken in regard to the relationship between the retail function and the consumer. Here:

"Retailing is the final link between the production of a good and the end-consumer. The economic characteristics are thus crucial to the economics of retailing."

(Ibid., page viii)

Classical economics dominates the analysis and conventional supply and demand factors are applied to the individualistic and static nature of the individual consumer assumed to be 'small' in terms of power; 'immobile', given a reluctance to travel; and 'uninformed' about availability, price and quality of merchandise. Inevitably, retailers exist not to run a business to make a profit, but to operate a benevolent social service: bargaining with suppliers on behalf of consumers to prevent exploitation; providing information and quality assurances and bringing the product to the consumer. Thus, when buying the product the consumer purchases not just the physical commodity, but the various services comprising the added value of "all of the associated retail activity." (Ibid., page 49). The research paper illustrates the power of food retailers. They were the largest retailing group in the UK, taking almost 38% of UK retail sales, whilst the small number of key multiples accounted for some 30%, having an average of 113 stores each,
generating large per-store turnover. The top five accounted for 48% of all sales although this may be reduced by the inclusion of durable items (Ibid., page 4).

In September 1998 the OFT commissioned Research Paper 16 ‘The Welfare Consequences of the Exercise of Buyer Power’ (Dobson, Waterson, & Chu, 1998). This looked at a potential monopoly relationship between large retailers and their ‘captive’ suppliers and the extent to which this fed into an anti-competitive retail activity, to the detriment of consumers. The purpose of the report was to provide a framework for the case analysis of buyer power by the OFT and to spark debate on the issues raised. Appendix A ‘Recent Trends in UK Retailing’ (pp 39-42) demonstrates the enormity of the structural changes in the UK retailing industry 1980-94, highlighting a significant decline in the number of businesses and outlets, matched by a significant increase in the market share of the top retailers. The UK food industry sector follows a similar pattern for the period 1982-94 with the market share of the top five players moving from 26% in 1984 to 43.5% in 1992 at the expense of smaller enterprises. Much of this new concentration was formed through acquisition and mergers and overseas expansion was in evidence. Over this period, average net profit margins moved from 4.07% to 6.22% in 1994. Like the McKinsey report, this also acknowledges the highly successful nature of the UK retail industry; yet in contrast, through its final tone offering a wider comparative focus, ends with an implied criticism of the top food retailers that echoes publicly expressed concerns:
"British retailers are generally the most profitable in Europe, with the top six profit earners in Europe all UK-based firms. Similarly profit margins are seen to be considerably higher in the United Kingdom than in other European countries. For example, in the grocery trade among large retailers in the United Kingdom were found to be roughly three times higher than in France, Germany, Italy and Spain (where, particularly in the former two countries, hypermarket discount stores are much more common)."

(Ibid., page 42)

In the main body of the paper, consideration is given to ‘One-stop shops’ a description afforded to the more recent development of the larger supermarket and superstores into a kind of shopping mall or even a neighbourhood shopping area itself, constructed around a company brand. The supermarket originally changed the character of a traditional grocery shop to encompass a wider range of household durable goods besides the convenience food items. Now, more innovatory retail practices have taken this further by including a more extensive range of commodities and services for sale. These include household goods, clothing, fashion accessories, pharmacies, newsagents, restaurants, banks and petrol stations; indeed, the possibilities are there for the sale of almost any goods and services that can exploit the brand loyalty amongst customers. The report sees this as a key focus, which is more than about just a supplier-dominated set of issues, but also buyer domination in the supply chain, with potentially anti-competitive outcomes for both suppliers and customers:

"It is also the case that in this sector (retailing) there is wide scope for a variety of buyer-induced practices, which may be potentially anti-competitive, and more general concern that the exercise of buyer power may not only distort competition at the supplier level, but also
at the downstream level where retail competition may be restricted and
distorted.”

(Ibid., page 33)

Not only is this viewpoint in tune with the attitudes of those criticising the
monopoly power of large supermarket chains which finds public expression in
Parliament and the press, as mentioned earlier. More fundamentally, it highlights
what can be seen as the key characteristic of the marketing process associated with
large retailing, its exploitation of the company brand and its meaning for fair
competition:

“One-stop shops have arisen where dominant retail chains have
focused on developing their retail brand and used its reputation to
extend product range and move into new product category areas to
capture an increasing proportion of consumers’ expenditure and
thereby tighten their grip on the market. The leading UK grocery
retailers in particular have pursued this approach... These new format
one-stop shops attract consumers primarily for their need (my italics)
for regular (e.g.: weekly) shopping for groceries, and then rely on them
as ‘captive’ consumers buying other complimentary products.”

(Ibid., pp 33-34)

Thus, the ability of the large supermarkets to dominate retailer – supplier
relationships has strategic implications for selling and this, in turn, sets in chain a
context by which that potential power over the supplier is reinforced. The brand
not only provides the retailer with economies of scale enforcing their social
relations as a de fact producer, but a key ideological conduit by which customers’
loyalty and shopping habits and preferences may be influenced. So, in terms of fair
competition:
"While this approach provides immediate benefits for the shopper, it does of course discourage customers from undertaking search activity, the more so since customer retention schemes, such as loyalty cards, are often employed (The Sunday Times, 9 June 1996)."

(Ibid., page 34)

Nowhere in the report, other than by reference to earlier OFT publications, are either of the terms 'fair competition' or 'welfare consequences' adequately and independently defined. The criteria in the key issues for consideration by the OFT in its investigations and case analysis are built upon the classical notions of 'perfect competition' appertaining to an industrial capitalist market and the various models of monopolistic behaviour of firms and individuals over supply and demand characteristics. Presented this way, the approach appears both rational and objective in line with the prevailing market paradigm it represents. The highlighted 'need' in the earlier quote signifies an acceptance that societal behaviour is 'uniform' and given, although in this context the 'need' for a weekly shop must at least inevitably carry a view of the world and what is 'best'. At worst, it simply fails to appreciate precisely the necessary consistency for what it is arguing elsewhere. That is, if large retailers have the capacity to influence and shape the loyalties of its customers through the marketing of 'the brand', as a reinforced code-system, then similar ideological processes realised through everyday cultural events and relationships, will just as easily construct any image of 'need' and its meaning. That is precisely what a brand does: it projects the efficacy of caring and trust, communicating with the respondent (or customer)
what is best for them in terms of their constructed life style. Indeed, the brand becomes crucial for achieving and maintaining that projected life style and therefore in accepting the values implicit in that (trustfulness, honesty, integrity and value, plus consistency), this is precisely what is achieved (Brierley, 1995). Also, what a company ‘desires’ of a particular social group in terms of its ‘shopping preferences’ will equally be a product of the everyday supermarket organisation and location in time and space, as is the articulation of brand loyalty with relationships reciprocated between the retailer, supplier and shopper. Further, of course, the report and its authors as members of wider society, i.e., academia, the professions, and individual shoppers, must inevitably constitute part of the culture of a wider dialectical process seeking ideological hegemony.

Although the OFT report appears to part company with the McKinsey report in its support for even greater productivity by the top UK food retail players measured in terms of their global efficiency through high profitability, nevertheless, it concurs with it in its identification of interrelated institutional and regulatory barriers. The OFT paper sees the emergence of a more concentrated national market regime where powerful, larger supermarkets through own brands, mergers and acquisitions, plus sheer size and purchasing clout, control market outlets so as to deny manufacturers (some with own brands) viable options for distributing their products. Spatially, the land-use regulatory framework that ‘obstructs’ the competitive process reinforces this:
"This control of access, and thus limited provision of available shelf space, provides retailers with bargaining power over suppliers. This power is aided by tight planning controls, which feature in the UK. These may be necessary to protect the environment, but impede new entry and thereby provide a powerful first-mover advantage in favour of established outlets and thus provide an incentive for retailers to control key sites and possibly deter entry by preventing another retailer establishing a viable operation in the same vicinity as its own. This happens in a fairly overt manner in the case of alcohol on-licences, but is equally true for example of supermarket chains. Those firms who tie up likely sites for supermarket development can earn significant economic rent through their foresight or luck, since later developments may be refused or allowed only after costly changes. Hence by tying up sites, retailers retain their powers as buyers and may drive up rivals’ costs."

(Ibid. pp 24 – 25)

Rather like McKinsey, the report makes an assumption about planning intervention, which is seen as a cultural luxury, if not superfluous, when it comes to meeting the ‘needs’ of ‘social welfare’. Traditionally, planning land-use control has seen social and economic interests as especially important, such as evidenced through the Thatcher Government’s deliberate exclusion of regulation to afford greater flexibility to the interests of capital investment. Any view which sees the process as impeding that entrepreneurial freedom must countenance the notion that planning control is inevitably about political and ideological attempts to control the use of human and physical resources by the interests of Capital. If planning is not about intervening to achieve social welfare, however defined, then certainly neither is the true objective of this report. Thus it must be viewed as articulating the kind of laissez faire view of society that Thatcher took when she boldly stated that there was no such thing as society; or rather there should be no democratic
right to expect political intervention in the market. Like Sainsbury’s view of the world of business, it was best able to run its own affairs.

One feature of that is the innovative way in which the large supermarket retailers have taken a corporate view of the wider business venture eventually incorporating new service functions such as banking and insurance. Prior to this, the early 80’s saw large supermarket companies operating as developers with a vested interest in incorporating real estate into corporate strategy. However, as Weatherhead (97) shows, during the late 80’s retailers such as Sainsbury facing the experience of recession in the national economy realised the financial potential of their estate portfolios by engaging in property leasing arrangements. This freed a high debt to equity ratio achieved by the company’s earlier policy of having a 60% freehold of stores, allowing the company to gain access to cheaper finance during a period of national recession. Not only did this improve the income on an annual financial statement of income and expenditure, but allowed valuable and flexible sources of finance to support major investment in store alterations and modernisation projects, to cater for the company’s new diversification into service segments of the business. This not only allowed the company to develop a more flexible response to perceived market changes, but was in tune with the new retail ethic identified by the OFT report. Supermarkets were primarily in business to make profit for shareholders and directors. Therefore, a broader business approach which considered the efficiency of the returns on all company assets, including its buildings and property, were considered to be as equally valid a commercial
consideration as the profits made from selling commodified goods and services. Also, this legitimised cross subsidy effects to support ailing segments of the business concern.

The final year of this analysis, 1999, sees 'Modernising Planning. A Progress Report' by the Minister of State for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1999). This draws several strands of Government policy together: sustainability and centralisation, delivering "the certainty that business and community need" (paragraph 5), economic competitiveness and an urban renaissance. Urban sprawl and out-of-town retail is damaging to town centres (paragraph 21). Modernising partnership, policy, 'the system' and delivering 'best value' are key objectives. Uniquely, a duty is to be placed on local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of areas via Community Plans. These will provide a key focus in the delivery of all council services. The document makes reference to two key earlier publications setting the new 'plan led' context. First, 'Opportunities For Change' (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1998) integrating sustainability with economic growth targets and planning policy; and 'The Economic Consequences of Planning to the Business Sector (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1998). This research report set up to examine costs and benefits of the planning system to business echoes the fears expressed in the McKinsey Report (McKinsey Global, 1998) and sets a context in which further steps would be taken to research this aspect further.
In 1999, two years after New Labour came to power, Walmart, the world’s largest retail group from the US took over another large food retailer, Asda, initiating widespread fears about pressures on the Government to weaken the continuity of retail planning policy discriminating against decentralisation. Indeed, this fuelled a major debate in the Commons on 24 June concerning the extent to which the company had extracted preferential treatment in its meeting with the Prime Minister, Tony Blair (GREAT BRITAIN, Parliament, House of Commons, 1999). A memorandum to the Environment Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs from J Sainsbury plc in relation to food labelling offers a key insight into the company’s view of the retail environment and its own power regime within that (GREAT BRITAIN, Parliament, House of Commons, 1999b). By then, the company regarded itself as one of the world’s largest retailers operating three separate store chains in the UK, a supermarket chain in the US and a bank in the UK. The supermarket business represented 75% of the company’s business interests and served 9 million customers a week in more than 400 stores. A large store sold 23,000 products with Sainsbury’s own brand accounting for some 40% of stock.

Details of the company’s environmental policies are mentioned in relation to consumer products. Sainsbury’s take a holistic view of the commodity supply chain and see their midway role between supplier and customer as a key feature of the chain of production and consumption that will enable them to shape outcomes. In this sense and by quoting the mission of its policy goals, what is demonstrated
here, if not the potential to construct code systems, is certainly a company objective to:

"...influence suppliers of services and own brand goods to reduce their impact on the environment..." (and) "enhance awareness of relevant issues among customers, colleagues and others who have an interest in our business."

(section 2, page 1)

At the heart of the focus here is sustainability and the particular meaning Sainsbury attaches to that. In seeking to construct hegemony for free enterprise and consumption linking the company with Government and interests groups in wider society, legitimacy is sought by reference to a United Nations Development Programme report on human development. It holds that society shouldn't stop consuming, rather that it should carry on doing so in a more sustainable manner. Here thus, the brand is seen as the key means by which the company adjudicates between supplier and consumer by applying a 'life-cycle' analysis to the product management of those commodities which in market terms become ‘cost effective’. The company takes a leading role with suppliers in identifying significant issues:

"...whether it be in sourcing, manufacture or use and disposal... Almost all our suppliers are involved with us in one environmental initiative or another."

(Ibid., section 4, page 2)

This insight suggests a powerful mediating role by Sainsbury as a company with de facto producer rights articulating the social relationships between consumers and suppliers and the parties’ responses to the company’s perspective on the
world. The significance of the brand and its marketing function to Sainsbury’s mediating role is very important here, with the company constructing a somewhat paternalist argument for consumers, having rejected a separate eco-label product, because:

“...they wanted their normal (my italics) products with environmental improvements”.

(Ibid., section 3, page 1)

The nub of this response lies in an argument, well rehearsed in past Sainsbury documents, that any improvements in eco-friendly practise and labelling will come from private enterprise itself, whilst Government should confine itself to an inspirational role:

“Our assumption is that a market transformation approach allows the market itself to develop the need for improved products as opposed to regulations, which tend to be prescriptive and restrict options available – the free market can be far more creative and imaginative.”

(Ibid., section 7, page 3)

Although this was some eight months after David Sainsbury had left the company to join the New Labour Government, the continuity in the collection of paradigms extolling the virtues of free enterprise linking the company, Government and the retail industry generally, is clearly in evidence. Yet despite on going calls for self-regulation within the industry the Sainsbury document chooses to distance the company from sole responsibility for more environmentally sound practices in production and product labelling. The boundaries of the plural decision making context are being pushed:
“Sainsbury’s does not believe it is up to retailers alone to be responsible for market transformation or sourcing and marketing products which contribute to such change. Every party within the supply chain and the surrounding institutions within society has a role to play in helping to create and meet such demands.”

(Ibid.)

This is particularly interesting, not just because of seemingly inherent contradictions, i.e., associating a kind of Thatcherite free market ideology with a societal emphasis, where the two are complete anathema. But for the object which is to ‘capture’ the interest of the consumer, with the ancillary, supportive role of the state:

“Government’s role is to create a vision and then a fundamental shift in the demand for more sustainable products at every level of society – from the public purse to private companies through to the individual himself (my italics).”

(Ibid.)

So, in the language of classical economics, the demand side of the equation is for Government to manipulate in partnership with business, notwithstanding the perfect competition that seemingly operates in the market. Thus, not only is this an admission that, indeed, it does not operate, but there is recognition that attitudes and the sets of values that underlie these arguments about commodities and their manufacture cum needs can be socially constructed, and marketed through all levels of the supply chain. The full range of psychological ploys available to mould behaviour is apparently supported, legitimised by Government’s leadership:

“A variety of mechanisms are already under discussion by the Government but a combination of “carrots” and “sticks” is likely to be more effective than just deterrents. Environmental performance
standards specified within the Government’s procurement would raise the profile and set a clear lead for industry.”

(Ibid.)

Whilst the nature of the ‘end-product’ of the task is clear, the means by which this is marketed and group attitudes may be potentially changed, is thus a clear struggle, directly encountering the everyday commercial culture that the company as a large retailer competes in. Thus, the societal emphasis is a patriotic call for unity amongst consumers and the Government’s role is to construct clear support for the propaganda. Interests of Government and big business thus come to unite in:

“Creating a change in the attitudes of the individual (which) is recognised as being a challenge but it is essential that everyone can understand how to “do their bit”. This needs to be a consistent message delivered in an imaginative manner and importantly sustained at a sufficiently high level to break through the noise barriers within the communications environment.”

(Ibid.)

Retailers are therefore the purveyors of not just commodified products and services, but commodified Government policy, enabled and constructed by the means by which retailers fulfil their ideological roles to make profit. As such, it justifies a view that sees business having a legitimate service cum political role and one that is potentially subversive towards consumers:

“Retailers can take advantage of their interface with large numbers of customers by ensuring that information is made available to consumers in varying levels of detail to suite different needs (my italics). This will ensure that the message for environmental responsibility reaches the vast majority of the consuming population.”

(Ibid.)
In place here is a typified example of Sainsbury seeking to establish ideological hegemony over what the company perceives as 'needs', foisted on consumers. The important thing is not the notion that Sainsbury has the capability to think it can modify attitudes of its individual customers, important as that is, but that it legitimises its own retailing cum producer's role as a perceived enabler of Government policy. In so doing it seeks to marshal consumer behaviour as the lived experience of its particular ideology. Further, in so doing, to legitimise the process of commodification as an integral part of a culture of 'political democracy', where unelected retailers join the legitimised role of elected politicians; although in David Sainsbury's case he was ennobled and took his ideological values into the New Labour Government. Thus, for the commercial imperative, an open minded and receptive customer is vital, not just to the company objectives but in its shared role in governance, played out through the everyday lived experience of commodification:

"Lastly and possibly the most important the Consumer needs to be able to act on information and to have "reflexivity" i.e., be open minded and be prepared to make changes. All other parties in the supply chain will need to be able to contribute to creating a climate for this "reflexivity". The degree to which change will happen will be influenced by the availability of environmentally enhanced products coupled with credible information the consumer can trust."

(Ibid.)

In March 1999, the Government published its public consultation draft of Planning Policy Guidance Note 11 'Regional Planning' (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1999). The opening paragraph commits the Government to the decentralisation of
decision making and “the modernisation of our planning system.”(Ibid., page 1) taking up the theme initiated in 1998. Further, the regional focus pulls together the Government Offices and “regional stakeholders” which in concert:

“...will promote greater ownership of regional policies and increased commitment to their implementation through the statutory planning process.”

(Ibid.)

In two sentences the document reiterates the key policy function of PPG6:

“The Government’s policy is to use retail development to regenerate existing town centres. There is unlikely to be scope for major additional out-of-town shopping facilities without adversely affecting the vitality and viability of existing centres and the environment more generally, including through unsustainable pressures on the road network.”

(Ibid.)

This position is reinforced in chapter 7 ‘Retail, hospitals, leisure and sports uses’, which states that the Government policy is to “...use retail development to regenerate existing town centres.” (Ibid., paragraph 7.1) By assigning retailing rather than shopping as a use and categorising it with the provision of separate hospital, leisure and sports use functions, two ideologies are apparent. First, there is a strategic provision stressing the productionist aspects, legitimising a challenge of traditional economic views which see a clear divide between manufacturing industry and an ancillary service sector, for so long providing continuity in the domestic policy of successive Governments. Second, and against that backcloth, ‘service industry’ is becoming recast to a single generic type, linking the public...
service and private commercial worlds. The common denominator is set by the 'retail industry' that operates in a market context, and offers a basis for cost cutting measures. Cotermiously, the retail sector will be seen by association to be a public service function, thus legitimising its welfare aspects in the same way that swimming baths and football pitches are healthy and morally right. Underlying the sense of 'ownership' that is displayed here is, nevertheless, a clear contradiction with the stress placed on the productionist ideology.

That month (March), the Government published its White paper 'Modernising Government' (GREAT BRITAIN, Cabinet Office, 1999) which talks about modernising the economy amongst other sectors. Improving democracy is about focusing on people as consumers and citizens. Modernisation is for a purpose: to make life better for people and businesses. To improve the quality of service for users (rather than customers) is the main thrust and a package of key reforms will deal with strategic issues, achieving greater efficiencies, such as by the use of new technologies and rewarding innovation, and removing unnecessary legislation. It must engage with how government works and:

"The old arguments about government are now outdated – big government against small government, interventionism against laissez-faire. The new issues are the right issues: modernising government, better government, getting government right.”

(Ibid., Prime Minister’s foreword, page 4)

The document can be rightly seen as radical in the spirit of Thatcherism, talking in terms of a new 'joined up' strategy linking an efficient business approach with a more targeted set of policy objectives. The key to an understanding of this
document is its main focus on what it clearly sees as an ‘outdated’ notion of local government. Best global practice and value is an underlying theme and the new approach invites a more cost, oriented flexible approach to the delivery of services whether by the public service, the private sector or a partnership of both. New Labour’s key ideology is here; modernising both the economy and the political culture to deliver on ‘needs’ however poorly defined or little understood in terms of their social construction. Further, with little if not anything to say about the nature of the political involvement of the wider public. What is clear, though, is that the document in advocating better service delivery and more flexible ways of achieving this, avidly sees the retail sector as a new partner in provision. As such the Government aims to:

“...make certain that citizens and business will have choices (my italics) about how and when to access government services – whether from home via interactive TV, via call centres, via one-stop shops or, indeed, post offices, libraries, banks or supermarkets.”

(Ibid., Chapter 1 ‘Vision’, page 10)

Here, not only is the status of the user as a citizen, a politically interested individual, posited, either as an individual or as part of a social interest group or community, but they are afforded in whatever guise dual status with ‘business’. A lot of emphasis is given to a ‘choice’ of the means by which the services are ostensibly physically accessed, but the means of interaction and the extent to which the ‘user’ merely receives information, is explored. The type of council facilities likely to be available in supermarkets would be quite basic as the level of
interaction provided by a one-to-one meeting with a trained professional or councillor is unlikely to take place on commercial premises, due to costs and unavailability of qualified staff. Face-to-face contact with trained professionals could be via a televisual station, linking with the main council office where the staff resources are best employed, but is unlikely due to pressure on resourcing. There is no discussion of the quality of the interaction initiated by members of the public and commerce, or the level of generality of likely contacts with key council staff. Thus a very low key form of articulation could occur here, unlikely to meet the aspiration of the public as opposed to more specific concerns of the commercial community, for example, requiring professional, in-depth research concerning property interests. The comments are thus speculative and perhaps have more to do with establishing a paradigm linking the public and private worlds and their expectations of the public service, rather than highlighting their inherent and potential antagonisms.

In April 1999 the Director General of Fair Trading referred to the Competition Commission for report and investigation under the monopoly provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973, the supply of groceries from supermarkets. This applied to those with a gross floor area of 600m$^2$, where food and non alcoholic drink exceeded 300m$^2$, and were part of a multiple of ten plus stores (GREAT BRITAIN, Competition Commission, 2000). The reference arose from a "public perception" that UK prices were higher than in EEC countries and the USA, a perceived disparity between "farm-gate" and retail prices and "the decay of the
high street in many town" (Ibid., page 1). The OFT had conducted an earlier investigation in 1998/9 which touched upon barriers to entry limiting competition, the price of land impacting on store costs, price competition and supermarket operators and supplier relationships (Ibid.). Interestingly, the report noted a real fall in retail food prices of 9.4% between 1989 and 1998 matching a downturn in the economy. However, prior to 1996 profits had been high, but not excessively so after then. Land-use planning was considered to be a relevant factor, especially a restricted supply of land in the wake of the new policy initiative deterring out-of-town shopping (Ibid., page 2). Some monopoly effects were identified, although overall the industry was given a clean bill of health. Much of the language takes on the symbolism of classical economic analysis and both competition and consumer choices are considered in that simplistic and somewhat static context. The report notes that it is not the function of the planning process to safeguard competition, although as a result of policy and land pricing, distortion occurs. However, unlike McKinsey it does not call for a relaxation of regulation: more so, the introduction of another layer of bureaucracy by the grant of additional permits by the DTI for large multiples for their acquisition of addition out-of-town sites within a fifteen minute travel radius of their existing stores (ibid., page 6). This is reminiscent of previous industrial and office development permits to secure a better distribution of development allied to social and political goals and at the time of writing this some twelve months later, the Labour Government has not seen fit to take this up.
In the following month, April, the DETR published its Annual Report 1999 setting out the Government's expenditure plans for 1999-2000 to 20001-20002 (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1999). Chapter 6 ‘Planning’ establishes its objective to reverse the decentralisation process in favour of an urban renaissance (as set out in its mission statement accompanying ‘Towards and Urban Renaissance’ (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1999, page 1) and the modernisation of the planning system "...to improve its operation at European, national and regional levels." (Ibid., page 1). Paragraph 6.11 under ‘Retail’ spells that out in no uncertain terms by opposing out-of-town “retail developments” and further justifies the approach for a new land-use pattern reversing decentralisation with a desire to creating more “sustainable patterns of development”. This links with another initiative a month later when the Government published ‘A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom.’ (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1999). Two years earlier in December 1987, the Government had published its indicators for sustainable development and indicator f6 headed “Out-of-town retail floorspace” sought to demonstrate a causal link between decentralised shopping policy and urban decline, with greater environmental pollution and an implied energy waste (GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1997).

In July 1999 the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) published its White Paper ‘Modern Markets, Confident Consumers’ (GREAT BRITAIN, DTI, 1999). The kernel of its approach which offers a synthesis to the raft of New Labour
Government publications and legislative programme, is set out in the first paragraph of chapter one ‘Promoting performance, providing protection’:

"A stiff upper lip is not good for upgrading an economy" says Michael Porter in his analysis of international competitiveness (The Competitive Advantage of Nations, M E Porter), pointing out that the British are reluctant to complain and are less demanding as consumers than many other nations. He links demanding consumers in the home market with the competitiveness of a nation's suppliers. The UK has many innovative businesses that respond to and often anticipate consumer needs. But many others do not. The more informed and demanding we are, the more likely business is to respond, improving its competitiveness in the process and leading to better value for everybody."

(Ibid., page 4)

Here the Government lays out its ideological stall. The economy is in need of modernisation to avoid losing out in a rapidly changing global market. A free and open market generates not only the means by which British people gain the means to sustain and enjoy life, but the context in which the delivery of political objectives and democratic accountability is achieved. Underlying this seems the notion of a relatively fixed, caricatured relationship between owners who produce and customers destined to consume. By articulating their ‘demands’ in an idealised competitive manner (which here is taken to be rational shoppers seeking out the best buys of offer), consumers provide the necessary spur by which producers will increase their efficiency, force their pace of change and ensure that resultant benefits will be passed on. Thus in the new service economy, Government confines its key political role to that envisaged by Lord David Sainsbury. No longer is it to directly provide physical goods sought by voters, except for key policing, regulatory and health functions. Instead, Government becomes a shaper
of attitudes and an enabler whilst moulding a co-ordinated focus to achieve perceived social priorities through the activities of business. In so doing, it creates opportunities for private agencies to supply commodified goods along an ideological conduit, which shapes and reinforces everyday attitudes and expectations about political stability and change. This is where the nub of the new democracy is to be found: to shape political goals by constructing business in struggle as the legitimate agency of State action and emphasising key political priorities (between the once opposing parties of Labour and Capital) highlights mere illusions of potential change:

"Although many measures have been introduced in the past to address consumer issues, they were not co-ordinated and often failed to address the real needs (my italics) of people. They also overlooked the contribution that consumers can make to competitiveness. The Government will put consumers at the heart of policy-making to ensure such mistakes are not repeated."

(Ibid.)

Thus the existing political structure of society is not to be changed. Indeed, it is to be reinforced through the more active involvement of equally dominant consumers matching the strength of producers in the market process. So the playing out of the role of the customer in the context of an idealised and unreal equilibrium of classical economic theory, held in balance by a value-free, pluralist concept of society, is presented here as the key dynamic of Government policy linking various initiatives seen earlier:

"The aim of this White Paper is to reinforce this virtuous circle of strong consumers and strong businesses. ' To achieve this, the Government will:
identify the main issues facing British consumers and ensure new concerns are address.
introduce new ways to enable consumers to obtain high performance from business.
ensure consumer protection by public authorities is effective, without imposing unnecessary burdens on business, large or small.
This White Paper is primarily concerned with individual consumers of private sector goods and services. Through its White Paper, Modernising Government, the Government has already set out its plans to give a better deal to users of public services."

(Ibid.)


The group had been set up in September 1997 as an independent advisory group:

“To advice the Government on action which improves the effectiveness and credibility of government regulation by ensuring that it is necessary, fair and affordable, and simple to understand and administer, taking particular account of the needs of small businesses and ordinary people”

(Ibid., Annexe A, page 10)

In particular, its role is to examine the effect on small business of Government regulation and the competitive disadvantage faced by small businesses, especially start-up firms and growing businesses, in relation to larger firms. The somewhat disparate membership of the task force comprises representatives of private companies, including Northern Foods, Marks and Spencer plc, Camelot plc, plus the Federation of Small Business. Also, the Advertising Standards Agency, BIFU the banking union, an independent farmer plus an economist from the former Policy Studies Institute and Kirklees Metropolitan Council are in evidence. This
structure appears to reflect a search for legitimacy that not just unites the interests of Capital and Labour, but also accords the coalition of interests a public legitimacy via a marketed image presented as ideologically neutral.

Of particular interest here is that:

"In November 1998 the Chancellor of the Exchequer invited the task force to look at productivity and regulation following concerns voiced in the report "Driving Productivity and Growth in the UK Economy", published by the McKinsey Global Institute in October 1998."

(Ibid., page 3)

Not only is the tenor of that report identifying planning regulation as a key barrier to raising average productivity in the retail sector by hindering a supply of large, decentralised stores to meet the perceived wishes of the larger players, but who commissioned it remains unknown, as mentioned previously. Clarification of this would help identify what agenda the powerful interests involved were following. Certainly, the main tenor of that report is picked up by the group who:

"...recognise the importance of regulation to businesses, employees and consumers alike."

(Ibid.)

In setting that inclusive focus the group becomes a 'rational' ideological conduit for Government policy, setting a context in which business as service industry is seen as a social service, a vital arm of Government policy, not only “creating most of the jobs in the UK” but in doing so:

"They are generally seen (my italics) as particularly responsive to customer demands. They are increasingly used by large firms who wish to outsource many of their activities. They supply unique services
in areas where larger firms may find it unprofitable or impracticable to operate, such as inner city retailing. And they play an important role in combating social exclusion by providing services to poor communities1. ” (page note: “1. We support Government initiatives seeking to encourage large as well as small businesses to re-examine their approach to the socially-excluded”)

(Ibid.)

External regulation is thus viewed as competitively disadvantageous to small firms and instead ‘self-regulation’ is posited as the key approach along with identifying areas where deregulation would address that. This raises issues about the ‘governance of self’ and of ‘autonomous subjectivity’ (Miller and Rose, 1990 & 1997) which in Foucauldian terms are socially constructed in the context of the discursive formation operating. This applies to the meanings of ‘work’ exercised in everyday relational terms through the construction of new identities linking employers and employees, within an internal culture of organisational change, fostered by management consultants (Du Gay, 1997), such as that favoured by Sainsbury’s. Thus in terms of the interests of Capital, the governance of self and relational interests may be seen as a means by which the roles of individual entrepreneurs and employees are ‘governed’ to fulfil private and political roles in the service of the market and capitalism.

The final document to be considered is the 1999 Annual Review of the British Retail Consortium published in November. Many of these strands are synthesised here and ‘branded’ in the context of a frequently used term ‘UK plc’ throughout. This speaks for itself and the pseudo-patriotism symbolises the nation-state as an

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all embracing commercial enterprise and engine of growth, with success synonymous with the market and capitalism. The body represents the commercial and political interests of major retailers, although Sainsbury does not seem to feature in the list of members of the board of management. The significance of the organisation is set out in the BRC profile on the inside of the opening cover:

"BRC represents 90% of the total retail trade in the UK, which operates in excess of 290,000 shops and stores, occupying over 30% of commercial property portfolio by floor space and providing employment for about 2.9 million people, some 115 of the workforce. Retailing is a major engine of employment growth in the economy, creating 57,500 net new jobs in Great Britain in 1998. BRC retail membership covers all sectors, from the large multiples and department stores, through to the corner shop, from food and drink to furniture and DIY, from centre of town to rural and mail order."

(British Retail Consortium, 1999)

The range of topics and interests cover much of those discussed in this thesis. The key concern lies with forging formal and informal links with Government and the press. Since starting a campaign ‘Shopping in Britain’:

“We have begun to get a more balanced debate going, both in Parliament and the press. It is crucial all members support this drive and that we all put the same positive messages about the industry.”

(Ibid., BRC Chairman’s Report, page 2)

The role of Tony Colman Labour Party MP, ex director of the Burton Group as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Retail Industry Group is mentioned in the context of his having promoted and publicised BRC policy to a wider audience. This has enabled a direct linkage with Government Ministers such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, where issues such as the retail industry’s role in creating employment and policing inflation have been vital. The same classical
economic assumptions about production and consumption, supply and demand issues, are exemplified here, as are the translation of Government’s political priorities into the ‘social objectives’ of the retail sector. Indeed, this ‘sharing’ or alignment of goals and outcomes of both Government and the retail sector to rearticulate ‘common sense’ views about the role of retailing in British political society, is a key ideological device here to further its vested interests. For example, the:

"BRC has been working closely with the DTI on the Consumer White Paper and the Stephen Byers pricing initiative. Retailers put customers first and now the Government, through the publication of the paper, has pledged to do the same."

(Ibid., page 3)

Of course, there is no mention of social exclusion as ostensibly a motivating factor for Government, or indeed the commercial priority of the firms to make a profit for owners and shareholders, which vies with the underlying democratic mission of elected government. Indeed, here the retail industry is setting the political priorities prioritising relations of consumption and in mentioning the Consumer White paper, the BRC:

"...is pleased the Government... has pledged to follow the lead of retailers and put customers first..."

(Ibid., page 5)

On the New Deal, a partnership has been created with Government, which understands better the role of retailing in the implementation of its political priorities. The diversity of retail jobs means that not just the young are well united, but other socially excluded groups such as older unemployed people, adult
returners and lone parents. The industry has become a partner in sustainability policy applauding the more business friendly version of the final minimum wage strategy. Under the heading ‘Planning’, an item contrasts the underlying message of support for deregulation from McKinsey with opposition to the more draconian parking levels recommended for the south-east which would not be commercially viable. In relation to PPG6 and the mandatory sequential test, the question of defining need is raised as a potential problem and the linkage between regeneration policy and a ‘need’ for a ‘more efficient planning system’ is identified. Here, the ideas and criticisms consistently advanced by David Sainsbury achieve publicity again in the context of an articulation of productionist priorities.

Lastly, it is worth noting the opening policy statement that appeared on the DETR web-site in November 1999 under ‘Planning’, which is still repeated on the updated DTLR home page in September 2001:

“To create a fair and efficient land-use planning system that represents regional differences and promotes development which is of a high quality and sustainable.”

(GREAT BRITAIN, DETR, 1999)

Here, the Government’s land-use mission is synthesised: a fusion of social and moral imperatives with devolution of Government machinery to the regions as, in contrast, centralisation in favour of a revitalised urban focus takes shape. This is led by an increasing support by Government for the wider political landscape centred on the liberalisation of the market and its greater involvement in the
delivery of municipal services, plus a continuing planning agenda, sympathetic to the modernising interests of Capital.
CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS: THESIS AND ANTITHESIS

This research started with the objective of challenging traditional explanations of the development process seen in terms of a series of linked administrative, yet ideologically charged, decisions at the micro level, such as that used by the original Sainsbury research in Loughborough which inspired this work. It looked towards a wider ideological chain of cultural events linking the interests of production and consumption outside the immediate locality; indeed, beyond to the national and international arenas. In doing so, it acknowledged the ideological role of firms such as Sainsbury's in the construction of a ruling hegemony (Hall, 1988b, page 43). Thus it anticipated the construction of a complex set of interrelated and reciprocally interacting ideologies through praxis offered by everyday events linking the retail industry and Government with wider parties in the decision making chain. In practice, of necessity the focus has become somewhat narrower, although the key cultural themes and dynamic contexts shaping human relationships and behaviour have become, if anything, firmer in the search for better explanations about the complexity of everyday life.

In particular, the thesis took issue with the notion of a rational, plural landscape in terms of objectively segmented and fixed elements of social interaction involving many parties expressed in either physical or abstract, conceptual terms; also, its alternative meaning, as a metaphor for ideological stability. Again, this approach has been modified. Using Sainsbury's as a metaphor for underlying ideological
values, expressed by key players in the supermarket business interacting with the world of politics, has not just imposed a constraining discipline on the focus. In the context of the analysis, it now offers a new meaning and interpretation for the term 'pluralism'. No longer is it sufficient to see it as a descriptive term focusing on the disparate yet layered nature of parties and actors in a decision making process, even classical Marxism’s euphemism for a more unequal power structure favouring the status quo. Instead, it becomes more productive to see it in multi-dimensional cultural terms where shared and contested meanings about the organisation of time and space come to represent different core ideologies in a continuous yet disparate struggle to establish hegemony over common sense views of the world. Thus, coalitions and contestations co-exist in space and time forming alternative sets of theses and antitheses, which blur and initiate new rounds of ideological pacts and hostilities.

In this thesis, four key assumptions have been that, firstly, ideology is not a separate condition as in Foucault’s particular discursive formation dealing with specific systems of power, governmentality and knowledge, but actually lived, relational human existence emerging from the everyday experience of people, in the making. Secondly, that in those human relationships exercised through agency, people have a capacity to struggle to rearticulate and regain control over shared and dominated meanings established through code systems which signify through a reciprocated process of encoding and decoding, and in return are signified by facets of everyday reified culture. Thus, thirdly, that in seeking to establish
hegemony over code systems, human agency seeks in sequence and locality to exercise power through the ascendancy of monopoly over those everyday common sense explanations reflected through cultural events. Fourthly, in the context of knowledge gained from those events carrying the seeds of human frailty and able to contest the fallacy of a natural progression to modernity and human cultural progress, these elements become key features of praxis. As such, they are complex human actions in which thought and action synthesise, constructing options and outcomes that reify subjects and objects within the context and potential of Marx’s dialectic. Thus, in this meaning what may be termed here as dialectical pluralism becomes neither a wholly neutral nor structurally determined ideological landscape bearing the extremes of either a shared coalition or clear antipathy of interest: a trade-off, versus a struggle for domination, or even anarchy. Seldom do such pole extremes offer a basis for a real struggle of ideas and actions reflected in real life: nothing is that rational or provable as a given truth. Such a view is more likely to stereotypically represent a cover for political or academic bias.

Thus, in this context the nature of thesis and antithesis on a single plane of action has been shown here to be an oversimplification of value positions and the nature of praxis. The range of propositions and counter arguments have a potential to not only swap, but fracture and shift, as new meanings are applied to code-systems which are challenged and redefined. Thus, they are potentially multi-dimensional in time and space as part of that dynamic process of praxis, where a two-dimensional coalition of interest between parties fails to reflect just a simple, or
short-term merging of interests for shared goals. More likely it expresses a complex ongoing struggle to gain hegemony over code-systems and their meanings where, what might be termed as the underlying structure of social events (represented through class, etc.) and outwards surface effects, are really one concurrent social and ideological manifestation. It is simply the positivist conceptual approaches of academics and others that have vertically segmented aspects of society for scrutiny to draw out so-called natural laws governing human behaviour, re-labelled as truisms. By their nature, they tend to become presented as static, crystallised and to a degree, artificially defined entities. Even in terms of a false dichotomy of ‘the state’ and ‘civil society’ which Gramsci sees, as part of a continuous whole (Gramsci, 1986, page 160), is part of the same problematic. Thus pluralism may be redefined as directing an alternative search for the understanding of those complex dynamic, ideological relationships and linkages via human agency in which this social process occurs. In this context the nature of commodification and the land-use planning system may be revisited to explore the character of the ideological conduit under construction, to secure its understanding for a lived praxis which planners might engage in for emancipatory projects.
Re-examination of Professional Paradigms and Praxis

Just as it was fruitful to examine the nature of retail and shopping ideologies as a function of the degree of articulation and mediation between the industry and central Government as expressed through attitudes towards land-use planning policy and regulation, so the corollary applies to planning as a professional discourse. Another key assumption here has been Gramsci’s notion that the role of the organic intellectual serves as a potential means of agency on behalf of the interests of Labour. Stuart Hall uses this to best advantage in defining the role of the academic which he argues is neither neutral nor political in a party sense, albeit highly ideological. The important point here is that the social and moral imperative of the academic assumes professionalism in their quest for understanding and truth, which carries a range of paradigms and priorities. This is not just as a kind of Platonic quest without question, a kind of ‘I look therefore I (automatically) find’ in a wholly neutral fashion. More so, in recognition that in an anti-positivist sense, understanding will only inherently improve society if an ideological imperative disciplining the direction and nature of the academic focus is acknowledged and applied.

The same approach, of course, can be applied to the planning profession, particularly as in pluralist terms as defined above, it is marshalled by the interests of Capital across the spheres of production and consumption, which Marx would see as one and the same (Marx, 1993, page 93). Whilst it is easy to contemplate a neatly divided corresponding ideological loyalty with planners in the public
service rejecting commercialism and those in the private sector favouring privatisation, ostensibly reflecting contrasting paradigms, the new definition of pluralism suggests that this is neither that simple to fathom, nor indeed true. Not only do the struggles for ideological hegemony operate at many dimensions within each local time-space domain, but also well beyond its frontiers, as Massey would argue (1994). Further, the nature of that 'beyond' is constantly being challenged and redefined, so that the spheres of 'public' and 'private' no longer have relevance as a simple, or fixed spatial geography. Also, just as what might be regarded as work or leisure is similarly redefined in terms of changed meanings reflected in new code systems signifying ideology and initiating paradigms. What transpires in people's heads thus, as an all-important dimension of relational existence and praxis, is a key factor as part of the whole picture of human existence.

The routes and avenues by which paradigms are constructed, articulated and mediated in time and space are certainly, in part, a product of the different plural interests involved in the planner's socialisation process, including the various professional bodies involved in their education and enabling support mechanisms. The argument here has been that the commodification process, as an all-pervading, 'shared' theme serving the wider interests of Capital, has been legitimised by a consensus of different parties as the means by which social welfare is distributed in society and thus regulated. Therefore, in general terms, and despite itself the nature of complex, internal struggles within its ideological arena to establish

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hegemony over meanings and paradigms, this becomes an all-embracing activity linking the private and public worlds, including work, leisure and state institutions, to a single albeit stratified social and ideological system. Thus, in the deconstruction of events and documents reflecting paradigms and expressing ideological views constructed through the complex daily interaction between parties during the period under scrutiny, a range of principally shared and secondary antagonistic attitudes and beliefs about the purpose of land-use planning may be identified. Here the paradigms not only reflect oppositional struggles, but in this multi-dimensional existence serve to justify and legitimise contradictory events containing the possibility of new, multiple meanings and values.

This section will attempt to synthesis the responses. However, limited time and space have conspired to narrow the focus of the research, so much of what is presented here must be viewed as constituting fairly generalised metaphors for interpreting prevailing attitudes, power systems and relationships, as against empirical facts and deducible, concrete truths. Also, it has to be acknowledged that the segmented character and nature of the planning profession responsible for land use planning policy and control presents a clear difficulty in its projection of a single, public image as a learned body representing a single train of academic thought. Whilst in craft terms it shares a professionalism with the engineering, architectural, surveying and public health control sectors from which it emerged as part of the state regulatory imperative, it nevertheless maintains its incoherence as a ‘single-job’ related profession. Much of the technical work overlaps or mirrors
aspects of these other professions, especially architecture, and the disparate yet seemingly political nature of the technical functions bear that apparent regulatory stigma. Also, within the profession, planners are recruited from a variety of academic backgrounds (such as history and the natural sciences) and levels of attainment. Indeed, planners also work in academia servicing a range of academic courses and engage in specific research dimensions within different public and commercial settings, thus adding to the professional complexity. Arguably, this totality not only feeds doubt and misunderstanding in the public perception of the raison d'être of town planners (inevitably reflected in their caricatured public profiles), but amongst planners themselves, especially in regard to the potency of the potential powers they may ostensibly wield on behalf of Capital.

Of course, the argument here is in the new definition of pluralism offered earlier, in that the profession and its constituent parts may only be viewed as a body struggling to exist under praxis, in response to both internal and external dynamics. In re-articulating and mediating with wider society in which, through the agency of its members, individual planners engage in wider reciprocated relational activity, there is the possibility of a potentially new understanding about power relationships. Thus, the extent to which the planning profession may be acknowledged as an inevitable initiator or inhibitor of social change is thrown into doubt and, therefore, is up for grabs. The focus, therefore, has to become one of anticipating the extent to which the wider interests of Capital, and internal responses towards those discernible effects, mediate the agency of the profession.
in terms of its constituent parts and relational paradigms. During the early Thatcher years, there is clear evidence of shared planning paradigms built around the modernisation project which previously gained the attention of most post Second World War Labour Governments, noticeably that of Harold Wilson in the sixties. Principally, this held that the economy as a segmented feature of British life was amenable to political change from the centre.

The Dobry report took this on board, signifying two other important premises. Firstly, that the process of change was a given, if not neutral, one: where the inevitable schisms occurring between the ‘natural’ and ‘built environments’, classically offered in a positivist sense as separate, vertically contrasting phenomena, could only be balanced in relation to the inevitable pressure of economic and social change. Just as the forces of nature are portrayed as potentially beyond the remit of humankind to conquer, as a form of determinism, so are the characteristics of societal change, presented as some kind of inevitable cosmic force that humans may only respond to rather than initiate. Thus, despite the emergence of human and cultural geography, a preoccupation with a theoretic approach to planning involving geometric and mathematical conceptualisation, remained firm, built squarely on the premises of positive science and classical economics in relation to supply and demand. Here, the role of ‘needs’ and ‘wants’ as an extension of biological and psychological paradigms came to be firmly established as metaphors for objectivity and rationality. Even radical paradigms challenging such orthodoxy assume that professional responses to empirically
defined social ‘problems’ are initiated from the signification of those identified ‘needs’, without considering the extent to which these may be part of a wider cultural sequence of events constructing the signification in the first place. Thus every signifier assigning ideology through activity and code systems is signified in the process: each encoding is a decoding, a key point of potential control and contestation in communication (Hall, 1999b). This is not just a very important statement, but a potent one at that. It forms a core argument in this thesis justifying the use of a cultural studies approach towards understanding the construction of ideology and paradigms though everyday relational events. Even a so-called neutral science dealing with so-called natural phenomena must ultimately be understood in those ideological terms (Aronowitz, 1988, page 533; and Jameson, 1994, page 77).

Another dimension of Dobry was to ensure that land-use planning and its associated cultural activity, seen here as a discursive formation, sought to make things happen in the right place at the right time epitomising an optimal management of time and space. The struggle to gain hegemony over the chain of cultural events labelled ‘land-use planning’ engaged disparate coalitions of interest constructed around the Thatcherite deregulation agenda, albeit for different objectives. Using the focus provided by Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire, evidence for a key dialectical change in planning policy accompanied by a shift in political power relations comes from the retailing conference in 1994 organised by the Labour Party in concert with the industry. This not only legitimised the more
centralised retail planning policy advocated by the Major Government, initiating the coup that brought down the Thatcher Government, but constructed a seemingly new policy direction for a future New Labour Government with its own internal modernising agenda. Under the guise of 'New Times' the modernisation project was to act in a chameleon fashion seeking to tie social welfare to a neo liberal agenda freeing up Capital as the rediscovered ally of the people, consumers who shop and have potential power to match those of shareholders. The complexity of the countervailing political schisms and alliances which broker power arrangements becomes apparent and it is clear that a complex set of contradictions operated alongside an underlying consensus between the key political and ideological parties prioritising and submerging aspects of their vested interests. Thus, in Stuart Hall's terms it identified a critical set of disjunctures between the parties, points of tension reciprocating with and allowing Capital to re-negotiate not just its own legitimisation, but the agendas and priorities of wider, multi-dimensional surrogate agencies acting on its behalf.

The third period under the New Labour Government consolidates this position. A reinvigorated consensus emerges which not only enhances and protects the classical economic models relating to supply and demand as epitomised by the publications by the Competition Commission advocating less restriction on firms and economic parties. It goes further and proffers deregulation alongside self-help for neighbourhoods and micro communities as a re-articulation of the powers and scope of a 'caring' capitalism, reintegrating private and public domains. The
uncertainty discovered here about the sponsorship of the McKinsey report advocating the slackening of planning controls, in effect represents a key moment re-articulating a new contradictory ideological stance. In essence, at one level it doesn’t matter who its sponsor was: its outcome was to redefine the constructed ideological conduit between surrogate interests of Capital and Labour by linking notions of personal political freedom and individuality (less regulation) with a focus on community and self help. Yet this implied decentralisation flies in the face of a more centralised action by Government in concert with business interests, which assumes more of a surrogate agency role in delivering Government policy. Thus, the net effect may be seen as not only as a potential liberation of Capital’s investment potential in time and space, but as another point of disjuncture in its relationship with the elected Government, with serious implications for popular participation in the planning process.
Re-constructed Planning as a Code System

Of course, the deconstruction of events and documents can only have meaning if the nature of their discourses, ideologies and paradigms and their articulation and mediation between the multi-dimensional facets of everyday life is acknowledged as an outcome of related and culturally constructed code systems. As argued here, to approach events as academically segmented or indeed incorporated administrative acts where participants operate in an unrelational manner, is to misunderstand the nature of human activity in society which constructs and signifies, and is signified by, the acts of others forming that relational experience. Commentators on the planning system across the left-right spectrum have failed to acknowledge that, which leaves a significant gap in the understanding of the ideological nature of the activity as an inherent part of late industrial capitalist society. Here the various strands of thought and analysis are brought together to offer a holistic conceptualisation of the alternative approach discussed here.

At the heart of this is what was described earlier as dialectical pluralism, which can be ultimately presented as a re-definition of a modular conception of society. Thus it offers a critique of a) the proffered neutrality of classical pluralism, and, b) alternative dogmatic critiques of the conspiracy of pluralism as a metaphor for Capital's thesis and antithesis. It assigns a multi-dimensional space-time functionality constructed through everyday lived, relational human experience enabled and moderated by interests of Capital via commodification and alternative responses. Central is a struggle for hegemony over common sense explanations.
via the unit of pluralism: the discursive formation, providing the context for the creation of ideology and paradigms motivating or retarding struggle, i.e., human agency and praxis within the context of wider dialectical materialism. Culture represents the joining of micro and macro events in which people do things and these come to form the code-systems, the language representing core beliefs, values, ideas and behaviour: the means by which these elements of human existence are constructed, articulated and mediated. Thus, they are the key component of human relational experience and not just set the context, but become the context in which people live out their lives. The relationships in time and space are not layered but multi-dimensional, thus offering possibilities for complex articulations and mediations in different places and sequences of events. Therefore, what might be simply seen in chronology as a series of straightforward theses and counter theses (fired by thesis and anti-thesis) has the possibility of representing both shared and different meanings for and between groups in alliance and contestation, in dimensional time and space. Thus, in simplistic terms, anti-thesis may not just become a thesis, but dynamically spawn different anti-theses in different time-space locations, through struggle and praxis. A complex set of articulations may occur that is difficult to consciously deconstruct and assign credible meanings to in terms of their internal and external inconsistencies (Engels, 1977b), but nevertheless a cultural studies approach identifying the potential natures of interacting and reciprocated code systems seemingly makes that possible.
In this context what we may discern is a relational experience in time and space between the complexities of everyday life and the nature of the professional activity labelled land-use planning. Clearly, different agendas operate within the different cultural dimensions, not just as a function of the internal components of the profession, i.e., within the different public and private spheres of employment, but in relation to their points of struggle articulating with wider society and its time-space dimensions. Land-use planning, therefore, has the capacity as a cultural activity to reflect not just the wider political imperatives in society, but the reciprocated responses of the interests of Capital to survive, grow and make profits. What is discernible but seldom analysed is the power of commodification that struggles for a wider consensus about the nature and purpose of planning, striving to articulate with a civic view constructing an ostensibly shared value system relying on the concepts of neutrality and functional purpose, for the public good. Equally important, commodification as a means of legitimising profit and wealth creation for private owners, inevitably carries its ideology through an interactive process which sees and places value on human behaviour as a function not only of the productive process, but of consumption also. Thus all constituent parts of society, including people, become commodities to be hired, bought and sold through Capital’s proxy interests and in that lived, relational experience producing the ideology sustaining capitalism and its values, the multi-dimensional features of commodification are invariably encountered. Just as in computer virus terms taken from classical literature, the assignment of that commodified Trojan so necessary for capitalism to recreate itself, carries a diversionary subterfuge
predicated on the back of a democratic ideal. Also, in understanding the complex nature of that chameleon effect, planners and others may exploit a basis for popular resistance and emancipation.
Land-use Planning and Wider Democratic Objectives.

It must be stated that the key objective of this research will be lost if it is interpreted in simplistic terms as a moral attack on capitalism. Whilst the author like Stuart Hall might share a personal political antipathy to the political system which prioritises market processes (as against naked market forces) as an efficient and humane way of allocating social welfare in society, this is not to be confused with the actual academic imperative presented here. The underlying objective has been to try and demonstrate the nature of the social construction of ideological processes at work in everyday events shaping society and replicating the power of vested interests through the power of commodification. Thus the task has not been presented as a preoccupation with contesting capitalism by revolutionary action to secure its defeat as a political system; rather as a means of understanding its nature exercised through the commodification process redefining land-use planning control as an integral part of the liberal democratic project. This operates not just at a perceived surface level, but in terms of its concern with wider human behaviour and so-called political expectations, throughout the complex dimensions of complete human relational existence. Thus, in terms of an understanding of the way the UK land-use planning system operates as a cornerstone of Western participatory democracy, where people have their constructed expectations of real involvement in the manifest decision-making process, falsehoods need to be exposed just as potential opportunities for change may exist. Therefore, not only has the priority here been to demonstrate the complex multi-dimensional context in which code-values, paradigms and code systems are constructed, challenged,
blocked and sustained beyond the visible decision-making arena. Moreover, in doing to so to reveal the level of social complexity as a means of fostering a better cultural understanding of how it engages with wider social aims and value systems. For within such an arena the possibilities of subversion and defeat in the interest of a socially emancipatory project, as envisaged by Stuart Hall (1988b, page 36), may potentially exist.

At a more basic level, what the research has shown is that paradigms about the liberal democratic project have oscillated around the dividing line between the public and private sectors of society, with national Government setting a firmly constructed context in which local government operates. In terms of the reciprocated interaction of ideas, paradigms and ideologies perceived as operating between the two sectors, invariably presented as crude thesis and anti-thesis, a complex everyday relationship exists through the mutually shared and contested roles, and cultural objectives shaped, as argued above, by commodification. Thus, as this thesis holds, the cultural lines are blurred and rather like the domains of civil and civic society, the two are but part of the same social experience, constructed as such by commodification. There has been no space to focus on the sociology of this minutiae experience, excepting for a very brief allusion to the professional role of planners in the private and public sectors.

Besides arguing here that the complex nature of the social experiences and relationships militating in favour of outcomes is akin to the two-thirds of an
iceberg hidden from public view, so even the top third 'public democracy' ostensibly seen by all represents a complex and rapidly reconstructed set of events. Here it may take on the constructed image of Baudrillard's simulacra (Poster, 1988). As the nature of publicly owned, funded and managed events assumes more of a surrogate role undertaken by the private sector, open democratic involvement in terms of the expression of political opinion and the weighing of bulk votes cast in favour or against, may become ostensibly obsolete. At one level this has ramifications for the land-use planning process, although in general terms planning policy formulation and control together are just one feature of the general cultural landscape. However, it carries two sets of contradictions: if decisions are the outcomes of complex processes marshalling ideologies, paradigms and values at a deeper level, mostly away from the public gaze, then the simple democratic process reflected through a popular vote inevitably becomes a sham. Alternatively, if true, the constructed hype about a simple, accountable democracy existing in terms of public debates legitimised by the infrequent casting of majority votes in space and time on constructed issues, merely presents shallow images representing a fulcrum of personal freedom, which in political terms could easily evaporate.
Epistemology and Commodification.

If the argument here hold true, that land-use planning as a professional activity is integral in ideological and political terms with wider society, then the same applies to epistemology. If planning practice should be seen as an emancipatory project to lessen barriers to effective popular involvement in aspects of everyday life, however that might be defined in terms of a new ostensibly contradictory yet democratic context, then the same must surely apply to academia. This applies in terms of planning education for both student planners and environmental activists, as well as local and national politicians and civil servants (including local government officers) engaged in state related, land-use planning activity. The key argument here is that the epistemological discourse has traditionally been centred on positivism, which comes to see social science as parodying the discourse of a natural scientific methodology. In this pursuit of academic truths the professed rigour of quantification acts as a ‘safeguard’ for the objectivity of the study, avoiding contamination with subjective views, value-judgements and unsubstantiated opinion. Yet in the context offered here, the notion of rationality and objectivity becomes little more than a metaphor for the classical models and explanations of the private market as suggested earlier. Thus, the irony is that although the search for enduring rationality and ‘truth’ seemingly attempts to distance itself from the partiality and bias of the market, yet at the same time it shares that dependence on assumed structural ‘truths’. In so doing, it
acknowledges the certainty of fixed and immutable laws derived from physics and nature, no less representing an ideological construct.

That is not to say that a modern epistemology should not concern itself with seeking to establish a rationale, as against a *rationality*, for seeking a more certain understanding of the nature of events in time and space. However, just as it is imperative to understand the nature of the problem and the questions needed to tease out credible answers, so it is vital to discipline the manner of that investigation. Not just so that any bias creeping in should be identified, but to afford an analysis of problems and identify potential solutions in the full knowledge of the real world and actual social events. Of course, the planning arena also involves traditional disciplines within the arts necessitating a more subjective and difficult merging of empiricism with opinion. Even so, the nature of the epistemological praxis is not so difficult to comprehend: as argued earlier, in the context of human understanding, the natures of physicality and objectivity can only be afforded meaning and understood through constructed code-systems containing meanings initiated through everyday relational experience. Thus, instead of the natural sciences and the humanities facing repulsion from each other like oil and water, as Jameson shows they are actually part of the same cultural system of human existence. As such, they share an integral value system with elements contesting each other and in so doing, signify, and are signified by, the mediated articulation between their value positions, potentially to be recorded, analysed and understood.
The disparate character of the planning profession viewed against the articulation of the differing professional specialisms mentioned earlier and a rather confused objective about the nature of the wider professional aims, seems to lead to a greater reliance on the positivist method as a bulwark against unprofessional standards. At one level, this separation of the methodology from values, often expressed in simplistic political terms, ensures a space for contesting notions of physical or social determinism, yet an uneasy alliance raises questions somewhat unique to the nature of the activity in the first place. For example, is planning education narrowly for the benefit of the profession, employers, the public, or does it represent some greater intellectual challenge, perhaps for the individual student and a wider project?

In the late 90’s, a prevailing concern and educational paradigm which cuts across the debates about the wider remit of planning education, was about the extent to which planning education has been, or should be, strictly devised to meet the job related criteria laid down by employers. At one level, this has been presented as a more realistic and hard-nosed confrontation of work demands placed on students trying to cope with the real world of work. At the same time, it has been contested as a means of dumbing down on the development of an intellectual capacity to not just think about the ideological consequences of different planning approaches. Also, the nature of paradigms and the means by which the professional limits should be challenged beyond the simple administrative logicalities of the public or private work sphere. In the context of Stuart Hall’s emancipatory project, this is
important, not just for the new round of workers recruited to the profession but for the higher education sector interacting with student planners and forming priorities for new rounds of planning research regardless of patronage.
Future Research and Other Projects.

This thesis concludes by recommending a limited focus for future research projects to take the methodology constructed here and described earlier as 'dialectical pluralism' to provide a prism of enquiry in relation to the key issues and priorities about the nature of ideological formation in land-use planning related events. These do not primarily envisage any retail cum shopping related activity which has been primarily used here merely as a metaphor to signify the ideological nature of a catalytic discourse as an analytical method to understand and influence the dynamic qualities of land use planning related interactions. However, as shown here, the conceptual approach may have significance in understanding further the wider, contemporary and pivotal political paradigms associated with the developing role of retailing in the context of a discursive formation embodying the wider political project to develop a service economy.

The principal argument here has been that land-use planning and related activities comprising that professional field of enquiry do not stand alone merely forming a clear and simple, culturally defined interface with other vertically segmented areas of human existence. As a discourse its cultural practise has been gleaned from and interrelates to, the myriad dimensions of everyday life epistemologically defined, not just into the segments convenient organised by academia for the purpose of specific fields of enquiry, but to reflect a vast political and social agenda embracing vested interests. As these have a propensity to change over time in terms of meanings and priorities, the imperative of paradigms may emerge and
fade, although the underlying consistency in deeper ideological formations favouring the interests of Capital remains well rooted in society.

Thus, not only are the attempts to define and integrate these professional activities in total under one organisational umbrella, as seen earlier, difficult to achieve as a complete professional discursive formation. The nature of that gross collection of activities is likely to be seen by elements of the profession and other commentators as a preoccupation with a narrow set of dimensions within the totality of society formed by everyday experience. In turn, that constructs further segmentation and specialisms as society tries to make sense of, and influence, human interaction. Further, the nature of the constructed relational experience between the segmented professional activity and wider, everyday events suggests that each wider dimensional sphere, i.e., what might be crudely, if not wrongly simplified as such, is embracing the other in a less than holistic manner. Of course, that is so as the practice of land-use planning becomes ritualised in concert with the vestiges of a liberal-democratic order reflecting the symbolism of a romantic political ideal, rather than the outward appearance of a social system actually constructed through the minutiae of everyday events, with events often hidden from view and certainly poorly understood.

Thus for an inductive study of actual events at dimensional points of disjuncture between cultural events energised by social agency representing vested and less well defined interests, it will be necessary to consider the means by which the re-
articulation of time and space is struggled for to establish hegemony. The subject of the topic occupying the points of disjuncture in time and space is not so important as is the political priority it acquires. For this reason research projects should prioritise as a wider political priority key emancipatory projects to engage the surrogate interests of Labour. These may be seen as sharing various forms of social and cultural exclusion and deserving of a more equitable distribution of welfare and means of political ownership of social resources and ideological code systems. As an initial key focus, it is recommended that a project is set up which not only re-examines and challenges the meaning and intent of the land-use planning process as it affects the democratic ideal, but looks at the cultural processes constructing the notions and definitions of social need. Also, the means by which planners are taught to understand the nature of those constructions in the first place and come to utilise the language of classical economics and positivist rationalism as a defining principle in establishing planning related norms and code systems.

This is not just important as a means of regaining the independence of their professional identity in their relations with politicians and administrators, but to engage in a rediscovery of their vision and philosophies underpinning their role, currently being encouraged by the RTPI, their professional body. Particularly important should be a focus on the means by which the four poles of Government, the town planning profession, academia and private sector interests, set and encourage criteria rewarding (and inhibiting) professional approaches as an agency
on behalf of Capital. The particular focus would be on the range of syllabuses taught to land-use planners, how these interact with Government and industry inspired and funded research strategies and policies reinforced by Parliament and the courts, interlaced with professional priorities and integration.

Further, the author’s voluntary role as a chartered town planner with the RTPI’s Planning Aid service, currently due for significant development and expansion across the UK regions, offers a context in which the thesis would be particularly helpful; not just for understanding the nature of the wider ideologies at work frustrating public involvement in the planning process, but in developing strategies for targeting social exclusion. RTPI volunteers run planning Aid, principally for the benefit of the public without resources to engage planning consultants. The service does not provide a substitute consultancy role but engages in wider community initiatives involving education and self-help schemes. The advent of a recent green paper by the Government mooting changes to the national planning land-use policy and control regimes, and an RTPI ‘new vision’ for both its professional role and Planning Aid, makes the approach of the thesis timely. Both respond to the post-modernist paradigms (and the anti-regulatory stance taken by the McKinsey Global Institute’s critique of planning regulations scrutinised here). Thus the conceptual approach taken by the thesis provides a unique platform from which the author and others may seek a better understanding of the complex array of cultural and ideological elements of the planning process, to secure a more effective engagement with the issues raised.
The abiding theme of this thesis has been the extent to which commodification, as an integrated dimensional feature of everyday life, has not just legitimised the means by which land-use planning has operated. Moreover, how it has set a key context in which ideals, paradigms, concepts and code systems have been constructed, afforded meanings and initiating paradigms by struggling to gain hegemony through wider everyday events by associating with moral ideals and values. Of course, the reverse is thus true. Just as Marx said that production begets consumption, so the consumption of planning as a constructed cultural practice reciprocally creates the construction of commodification. Similarly, just as the planning profession as an agency of social change is not only living out an expression of society in its wider political and cultural contexts, but in turn seeks by design or default to offer meanings back to society.
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APPENDIX 1

Surface & Structure:
Conceptualised Cycle of Praxis

Surface Effects
(Culture)

Deeper Structure
(Relations of Production: Capital & Labour)

Process Of Reification

Site of Articulation & Mediation
APPENDIX 2

Surfaces & Structures: Sainsbury's.
Schematic Construction of Discourse through Articulated Circles of Unequally Reciprocated Production & Consumption

Relations to Government

Deeper Ideologies

Articulations & Mediations

Relations to Planning System

Relations to other Retailers

Relations to Political Parties

Surface Cultures

Relations to Customers