

Self

#01

PAUL BARKER: THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

In 1969, Christopher Booker published *The Neophiliacs*,¹ his attack on the passion for change which had characterized Britain from the mid-1950s. In that same year, *New Society* published a special issue under the heading, 'Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom'² (Figures 1.1–1.10) It came too late for inclusion in Booker's onslaught. It would, anyway, have been rather difficult to categorize. On the one hand, it was certainly imbued with the desire for change (rampant neophilia). On the other hand, it argued that what ordinary people wanted – rather than what planners, architects and other aesthetic judges said they ought to want – was the best guide (rampant conservatism or rampant anarchism, depending on your viewpoint). Its tone, however, was undoubtedly that of the period: scathing and iconoclastic. It was marked, too, by a fascination with the culture of the car which, then as now, was seen by many cultural critics as a threat to civilization as we know it.

The idea of Non-Plan, or at any rate the word, was born one day in 1967. I was then the deputy editor of *New Society*. This weekly magazine of social inquiry had been founded in 1962. It was itself a sign of the contemporary preoccupation with trying to work out what sort of place Britain really was and might become. In *Too Much: art and society in the sixties, 1960–75*, his cultural history of the 1960s, Robert Hewison said that *New Society* was launched 'as a forum for the new intelligentsia'.³ I doubt whether, earlier, the word 'intelligentsia' could accurately have been employed in Britain.

The expansion of the universities in the 1960s gave *New Society* many of its readers and writers. But, though it was usually categorized as centre-left, it was always fiercely non-partisan. It sought to counter the usual preoccupations of magazines of opinion (party politics, foreign affairs, literature). The founder editor was a liberal Conservative and I was resolutely non-party. I saw the magazine as in the fine tradition of Dissent. I was always conscious of George Orwell's censorship troubles with doctrinaire editors and publishers. I was determined that this would not be repeated at *New Society*. The Marxist historian, E.P. Thompson, who found a friendly home in its pages, away from sectarian disputes, wrote, '*New Society's* hospitality to a dissenting view [is] heartening evidence that the closure of our democratic traditions is not yet complete'.⁴ From its launch to its demise in 1988, the magazine was obsessed with pinning down how things were, rather than how they were supposed to be. Urban change was always one of my own deepest interests.

1 Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs*, London: Collins, 1969 (new edition, London: Pimlico, 1992).
2 Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price, Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom, *New Society*, 13, no. 338, 20 March 1969, pp. 435–443.
3 Robert Hewison, *Too Much: art and society in the sixties, 1960–75*, London: Methuen, 1986.
4 E.P. Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight*, London: Merlin Press, 1980.

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Robert Holman WRONG POVERTY PROGRAMME

John Berger MAGRITTE RECONSIDERED

David Marquand EDUCATION BACKLASH

Rayner Banham NON-PLAN:
Paul Barker AN EXPERIMENT IN FREEDOM

Peter Hall
Cedric Price

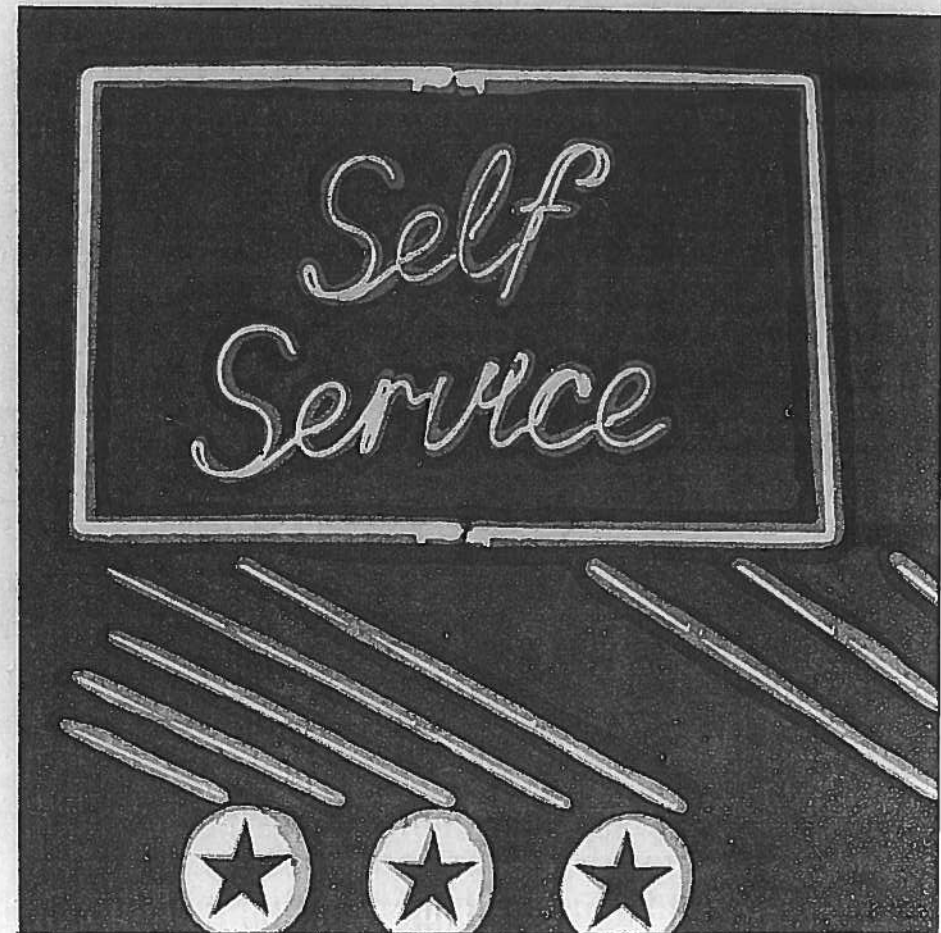


figure 1.1
NEW SOCIETY, 20 MARCH 1969, COVER

That day in 1967 I went out for a lunchtime glass of beer and a sandwich with the urban geographer, Peter Hall, at a pub called the 'Yorkshire Grey' on Gray's Inn Road, near *New Society's* offices. He was then best known for his book *London 2000*,⁵ and he had become a regular contributor to *New Society*. We were both disheartened by what urban planning was then producing. Peter Hall, then at the London School of Economics, was always ready to think the unthinkable – which being a member of the Fabian Society executive committee did not then rule out. He was strongly influenced by his extensive knowledge of the United States of America.

Earlier in 1967, I had seized gratefully on a book by the American sociologist, Herbert Gans. *The Levittowners: ways of life and politics in a new suburban community*⁶ showed how a spirit of community evolved within the most despised form of American suburban speculative housing. I ran long extracts from it in *New Society*, as a corrective to the usual we-know-best snobberies about suburbia.

Between us, Peter Hall and I floated this maverick thought: could things be any worse if there was no planning at all? They might even be somewhat better. We were especially concerned at the attempt to impose *aesthetic* choices on people who might have very different choices of their own. Why not, we wondered, suggest an experiment in getting along without planning and seeing what emerged? We called it 'Non-Plan'. The word was, I think, mine. But it evolved after the usual batting to and fro which arises on such occasions.

For other collaborators, the decision seemed obvious: Reyner Banham and Cedric Price. It would make a quartet of mavericks: paid-up members of the Awkward Squad.

In 1965, I had persuaded Reyner Banham to become *New Society's* regular design and architecture critic. He was then at University College, London. I was enchanted by the quality of his writing and his loving observation of everyday objects. His first major essay for the magazine was a review of *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, by the then-unknown Tom Wolfe. With Peter Hall, he became one of *New Society's* most characteristic voices. The Non-Plan idea was strongly influenced by Banham's essays in the magazine.⁷

It was Cedric Price, the fourth maverick in our quartet, who had first suggested to me that Reyner Banham should be writing for *New Society* (where the range of critics included John Berger, Angela Carter, Peter Fuller, Albert Hunt, John Lahr and Michael Wood). Price's designs had appeared in the pages of the magazine.⁸ His proposal for

⁵ Peter Hall, *London 2000*, London: Faber & Faber, 1963.

⁶ Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: ways of life and politics in a new suburban community*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1967.

⁷ Reyner Banham's essays in *New Society* have appeared in three selections: Paul Barker, *Arts in Society*, London: Fontana, 1977; Penny Sparke, *Design by Choice*, London: Academy Editions, 1981; Mary Banham, *A Critic Writes*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. The Tom Wolfe review was published on 19 August 1965 (*New Society*, 6, no. 151, p. 25).

⁸ Cedric Price, Pop-up Parliament, *New Society*, 6, no. 148, 29 July 1965, pp. 7–8; Potteries thinkbelt, *New Society*, 7, no. 192, 2 June 1966, pp. 14–7.

what he called a 'Pop-up parliament' was one of the things Booker objected to in *The Neophiliacs*. Booker missed Price's irony. The proposal to knock down, and update, the Barry-Pugin masterpiece was one way of criticizing the relationship, or non-relationship, between Parliament and people. In the mid-1960s, Cedric Price was probably best-known for his long-running battle to build a 'fun palace' in London. It was never built, but it is the acknowledged intellectual inspiration for the Piano-Rogers Pompidou Centre in Paris.

Our scheme for launching Non-Plan involved Hall, Banham and Price each taking a segment of English countryside and hypothesizing what might happen if Non-Plan were applied there. We wanted to startle people by offending against the deepest taboos. This would drive our point home. I suggested Constable Country to Banham, partly because of his East Anglian roots and partly because it represented the greatest rural taboo of all. (In the end, he shied away from this a little. We kept the title *pour épater*, but he moved the focus westwards from Constable's heartlands to Royston-Stansted, where there was no Foster airport yet.) Cedric Price chose the hinterland of the Solent. Peter Hall chose the eastern edge of the Peak District. To maintain the fancy nomenclature, we called these Montagu Country and Lawrence Country. The wider polemic would then be built around these three case studies.

During 1968 some of the material was written, but the idea marked time. I became editor of the magazine. It was a year of historic eruptions. Other issues took precedence. An anti-Communist uprising in Czechoslovakia was put down by Soviet tanks. In Paris, students rioted against President de Gaulle (the protests were strangled by a deal struck between the right-wing government and the Communist trades unions). In England and the USA there were recurrent campus and street protests against the Vietnam War.

The Non-Plan special issue was finally published on 20 March 1969. I had written an introduction, trying to capture the spirit of the enterprise. Peter Hall and I wrote the closing pages. But the issue appeared under all our names. We had all agreed the entire text and every page included thoughts from each contributor. It was illustrated mainly with specially taken night-time photographs of illuminated signs in and around London: for petrol stations, launderettes, supermarkets, burger bars. It is worth noting here that the Venturi *et al.*'s *Learning From Las Vegas*⁹ was not published until 1972.

Non-Plan produced a mixture of deep outrage and stunned silence. The environmentalist and anarchist, Colin Ward, wrote later: 'If I were to choose a single article (endlessly cited by me) which most epitomised everything I believe in, in a particular field, and which was valuable to me just as a legitimization of opinions I seemed to be alone in advocating it was ... "Non-Plan: an experiment in freedom".'¹⁰ But, at the time,

⁹ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972.

¹⁰ Colin Ward, quoted in Paul Barker, Painting the portrait of 'The Other Britain': *New Society* 1962-88, *Contemporary Record*, 5, no. 1, summer 1991, pp. 45–61.

all the architects, conservationists and socialists I knew were highly offended by it. It was perhaps ten years ahead of its time. It is a key text in the intellectual counter-attack against Webbian Fabianism. Later in 1969, Non-Plan was one of the ideas put forward in a pamphlet, *Social Reform in the Centrifugal Society*,¹¹ on which Peter Hall and I collaborated with the sociologists, Michael Young and Peter Willmott.

Non-Plan had very practical consequences. Peter Hall, as always, carried on thinking. We had not believed that our ideas could be applied in London, but the problem of what to do with derelict docklands changed this argument. In 1977, Hall gave a paper at the annual conference of the Royal Town Planning Institute under the title 'Greenfields and grey areas'.¹² He suggested 'enterprise zones' in the run-down parts of cities, where planning restrictions would be lifted in order to spur improvement forward. In London, local authorities, including the Greater London Council, had been notably unable to come up with any useful strategies when the docks closed. In-fighting and short-sightedness prevailed.

When 'Non-Plan' was first published, one of the few friendly reactions, at the time, came from an ex-Communist turned *Daily Telegraph* leader-writer, Alfred Sherman. In 1974, Sherman helped Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher to found the Centre for Political Studies, the purpose of which was to carve out a new way for Conservatism after Edward Heath's failed corporatism. The first Thatcher government was elected in 1979 and enterprise zones were introduced as a brief legislative experiment in Non-Plan. (It was brief because the Treasury eventually decided that the associated tax breaks were costing too much.) Without enterprise zones, we would not have had the Gateshead MetroCentre, the first such shopping mall in Britain, or the London Docklands' love-it-or-hate-it trademark skyscraper at Canary Wharf. Both were built in enterprise zones.

The idea of Non-Plan never went away. It continued as a kind of underground river. Recently, it has resurfaced. Is this because we are once again surrounded by people who think that planning is the answer to everything and who believe that they alone know the way we should all live? Under guidance issued by John Gummer, as Environment Secretary, planners were once again encouraged to pay special attention to aesthetics in giving permissions. In other words: they can decide what is beautiful *for you*.

Non-Plan was essentially a very humble idea: that it is very difficult to decide what is best for *other* people.

¹¹ The Open Group, *Social Reform in the Centrifugal Society*, New Society pamphlet, September 1969.

¹² Peter Hall, Greenfields and grey areas (paper presented at Royal Town Planning Institute annual conference, Chester, 15 June 1977), reprinted in Peter Hall, *The Enterprise Zone: British origins, American adaptations*, Berkeley: Institute of Urban and Regional Development, Working Paper no. 350, 1981. Colin Ward followed up Non-Plan from a different perspective with his concept of a 'do-it-yourself new town' (which he first proposed in 1975). This linked the experience of the pre-war 'plotlands' in the English countryside with the post-war adventure of the self-built settlements that surround every city of Latin America, Africa or Asia. See Colin Ward, *The unofficial countryside*, in *Town and Country* (Anthony Barnett and Roger Scruton, editors), London: Jonathan Cape, 1998.

But what, exactly, did we say? What follows is the introduction to 'Non-Plan'.¹³ Some of it – like the passage about petrol stations – turned out to be a very accurate forecast of what happened, though prediction was not really our purpose. The language is sometimes dated but much of the argument has an all too contemporary resonance. Our conclusions, after the three case studies, were headed 'Spontaneity and space'. We said that the British 'seem so afraid of freedom'. We argued that 'the notion that the planner has the right to say what is "right" is really an extraordinary hang-over from the days of collectivism in left-wing thought'. We concluded: 'Let's save our breath for genuine problems – like the poor who are increasingly with us.'

Today it is very striking that the 1947 nationalization of land development rights is the only nationalization left unrepealed. But the dilemmas have not gone away.

We wrote, in our conclusion, that 'as people become richer they demand more space; and because they become at the same time more mobile, they will be more able to command it. They will want this extra space in and around their houses, around their shops, around their offices and factories, and in the places where they go for recreation. To impose rigid controls, in order to frustrate people in achieving the space standards they require, represents simply the received personal or class judgements of the people who are making the decision.'

Non-Plan, however, was never against some kinds of *negative* planning (for example: this land shall not be built on); the trouble, so often, lay – and lies – with would-be *positive* planning. The British vice is bossiness. As I go around Britain in the dying days of the twentieth century,¹⁴ I am unconvinced that our planned towns and cities have delivered the best we could hope for. Nor do I think that what now passes for wisdom will necessarily turn out to be any wiser than the misplaced confidence of previous generations.

But it is time to raise the curtain on 1969: 'Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom', by (in the alphabetical order we used then) Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price. The subtitle said: 'Town and country planning has today become an unquestioned shibboleth. Yet very few of its procedures or value judgements have any sound basis, except delay. Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment?'

¹³ First reprinted in an Open University course text: Andrew Blowers, Chris Hamnett and Philip Sarre (editors), *The Future of Cities*, London: Hutchinson Educational, 1974.

¹⁴ Many of these journeys were chronicled in my weekly column in the *New Statesman*, from May 1996 to January 1999, combining social, architectural and topographical observation.

NON-PLAN

A dispute has arisen about a booklet, *Dorset Building in Rural Areas*, just issued by Dorset County Council, and aspiring to be a guide to good design for people building houses in the countryside – our Architecture Correspondent writes.¹⁵ Most of the examples that it illustrates and recommends as models are utterly commonplace, the sort of house to be found in almost any speculative builder's suburban estate. This view is shared by the Wilts and Dorset Society of Architects, which, through its president, Mr Peter Wakefield,¹⁶ has asked for the publication to be withdrawn.

THE TIMES, DECEMBER 1968

This news item illustrates the tangle we have got ourselves into. Somehow, everything must be watched; nothing can be allowed simply to 'happen'. No house can be allowed to be commonplace in the way that things just *are* commonplace: each project must be weighed, planned, approved and only then built, and only after that discovered to be commonplace after all. Somehow, somewhere, someone was using the wrong year's model.

Once, Rasmussen, in *London: The Unique City* (first published 1934), thought it worth printing a picture of the entirely commonplace domestic architecture built along Parkway, Camden Town, in the early nineteenth century. It was architecture that worked; it provided what the inhabitants wanted from it. Now there'd be trouble if you tried to knock it down (though the London motorway box will pass close by¹⁷). But at least the preservationists didn't get in at ground level, as they do today, in order to try to make sure – *before* the event – that something that is eventually worth preserving is built.

The whole concept of planning (the town-and-country kind, at least) has gone cockeyed. What we have today represents a whole cumulation of good intentions. And what those good intentions are worth, we have almost no way of knowing. To say it has been with us so long, physical planning has been remarkably unmonitored; ditto architecture itself. As Melvin Webber has pointed out: planning is the only branch of knowledge purporting to be some kind of science which regards a plan as being *fulfilled* when it is merely *completed*; there's seldom any sort of check on whether the plan actually does what it was meant to do and whether, if it does something different, this is for the better or for the worse.

The result is that planning tends to lurch from one fashion to another, with sudden revulsion setting in after equally sudden acceptance. One good recent example, of course, was the fashion for high-rise flats – which had been dying for some time before

¹⁵ This was J.M. Richards, for many years the editor of the *Architectural Review*.

¹⁶ Peter Wakefield has one credit in my editions of the *Buildings of England* volumes for Dorset and Wiltshire. A house called Low Ridge, in Crockerton, near Warminster: '1956, L-shaped, single-storeyed'.

¹⁷ Very little of this contentious Inner London motorway was ever built, but the planning blight, caused by the threat that it would run through Camden Lock, allowed hippy-ish dealers to start up in low-rent or no-rent properties. Without intending to, planners launched one of London's most vigorous, and wholly unplanned, tourist destinations.

Ronan Point gave it a tombstone. This fashion had been inaugurated with bizarre talk of creating 'vertical streets', which would somehow, it was hoped, re-create the togetherness of Bethnal Green on Saturday morning in (presumably) the lift shaft – this being the only equivalent communication channel in the structure.

Not that one can be too swiftly mocking. We may yet find that for some future twist of social or technological development, tall flats are just the thing. This happened with another fashion – that for the Garden City, as promulgated by Patrick Geddes, Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin. It's worth remembering that the garden in this theory was there specifically for growing food: the acreage was carefully measured out with this fodder ratio in mind. The houses in (say) Welwyn Garden City or Hampstead Garden Suburb were also scattered thinly because of the width of space allocated (for reasons of health) to the loop and sweep of roads.

Welwyn Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb were therefore built – and then duly mocked for dull doctrinarism. The layout made public transport almost impossible; the tin and the frozen pack rapidly outdated the vegetable patch. But then the spread of car ownership outdated the mockery: those roads lived to find a justification; the space around the houses could absorb a garage without too much trouble; and the garden (as, even, in many inner London conversions of Georgian houses) became an unexceptionable outdoor room and meeting space for children, away from the lethal pressed steel and rubber huriling around the streets.

Now it's nice that a plan should turn out to have reasons for succeeding which the planner himself did not foresee. At every stage in the history of planning, we have cause to be grateful for the quirks of time. It's doubtful if John Nash saw how well his Regent's Park would serve as an arty but fairly democratic pause on the north edge of London – just right for football and swings and non-copulating pandas and Sunday-promenading Central Europeans; inhabited not by Regency aristos but by film people, lumps of London University and H.M. Government, the American ambassador and high-class tarts.¹⁸ And did Scott foresee how his St Pancras hotel, superbly planned to fit in with departing trains and arriving horse-carriages would survive being a much-mocked office block¹⁹ so successfully that it can now be argued for as a natural home for a sports centre or a transport museum or Birkbeck College?

Nor is it just the cities and towns that have benefited. How many further-education departments²⁰ can be duly grateful for minor Georgian country houses or their Victorian imitators – so apt for giving courses in? How many angling clubs can thank the canal builders for where they spend their peaceful Sundays? How many Highlands-

¹⁸ In reading this thumbnail sketch of the park, remember the date. Many refugees from Nazi Germany lived on the northern edge of the park; Bedford College, University of London, was still in buildings in the middle; and newspapers were enjoying running the story that London Zoo was having trouble persuading pandas to mate.

¹⁹ For years the hotel, which narrowly escaped demolition, housed British Rail offices. There was intermittent debate, then and long afterwards, about what to do with it.

²⁰ As Non-Plan was published, these were being grouped into 'polytechnics'. In the 1990s they were all re-designated as universities.

addicted tourists, even, depend for the solitude they love on those harsh men who preferred the glens clear of people and who planned them out of the Highlands and into Canada and Australia?

Yet it's hard to see where, in this, the credit can go to the planner. That last example – which pushes the concept of planning altogether too far – is justified in rubbing in the coerciveness of it. Most planning is aristocratic or oligarchic in method, even today – revealing in this its historical origins. The most rigorously planned cities – like Haussmann's and Napoleon III's Paris – have nearly always been the least democratic.

The way that Haussmann rebuilt Paris gladdens the tourist; it was not such a help, though, for the poor through whose homes the demolition gangs went to create those avenues and squares. Similarly, the urban renewal programmes of the American cities gladdened the real estate men; they did not help the Negroes²¹ and poor whites who were uprooted with little to compensate them. In Britain, public housing programmes gladden the housing committees and the respectable working class; they do not help the poorest, the most fissile or the most drifting families.²²

The point is to realize how little planning and the accompanying architecture have changed. The whole ethos is doctrinaire; and if something good emerges, it remains a bit of a bonus. Not to be expected but nice if you can get it – like totalling enough Green Shield stamps²³ to get a Mini. At the moment, most planners in Britain are on a tautness jag: Camden's neatly interlocked squares, Southwark's high-density juggernauts or Cumbernauld's and the Elephant's sculptural shopping centres. Some of these look pleasant enough now – and some do not. But the fact is that, so far as one can judge, taut arrangements last much better when plenty of money can be spent on their upkeep (Oxbridge colleges, Chelsea squares) than when it can not (remember all those Improved Industrial Dwellings put up in the late nineteenth century by Mr Peabody and others?).

So it's at least plausible that some other doctrine than the current one would be right for everyday housing and building. It would be pleasant if 'doctrine' were precisely what it wasn't.

But how are we to know? Planning is being subjected to increasing scepticism. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1968, tidies up some of the abuses (especially those which caused delay in granting permissions); and the Skeffington committee is currently trying to decide how people might be given more say ('participation', in the jargon) in planning. The New City plan for Milton Keynes tries to shy away completely from planning. At universities, research is being done. The one thing that is not being

21 This reads oddly now, it was then standard usage. It had recently displaced 'coloured people'. At the time, 'blacks' – the usual word afterwards – was seen as offensive.

22 In the following decade this kind of criticism, commonplace then among housing experts, led to changes in official allocation policies. There is now no doubt that council estates house these once-excluded groups. The unplanned result has been to stigmatize much of what is now called 'social housing'.

23 Instead of a discount, shops gave away stamps with purchases. The stamps could then be traded in against goods from a catalogue.

done is the harshest test, the most valuable experiment, of all. What would happen if there were no plan? What would people prefer to do, if their choice were untrammelled? Would matters be any better, or any worse, or much the same? (Might planning turn out to be rather like Eysenck's view of psychoanalysis: an activity which, insofar as it gets credit, gets it for benefits that would happen anyway – minds can cure themselves; maybe people can plan themselves?) But even if matters ended up much the same, in terms of durable successes or disastrous failures, the overall pattern would be sure to be different: the *look* of the experiment would be sure to differ from what we have now.

This is what we're now proposing: a precise and carefully observed experiment in non-planning. It's hardly an experiment one could carry out over the entire country. Some knots – like London – are, by now, far too Gordian for that. Nor are we suggesting (here) that other than physical planning should be shelved.

The right approach is to take the plunge into heterogeneity: to seize on a few appropriate zones of the country, which are subject to a characteristic range of pressures, and use them as launch-pads for Non-Plan. At the least, one would find out what people want; at the most, one might discover the hidden style of mid-twentieth century Britain.

It's 'hidden' for the same reason that caused any good social democrat to shudder at the anarchic suggestion of the previous paragraph. Town planning is always in thrall to some outmoded rule-of-thumb; as a profession, in fact, planners tend to read the *Telegraph* and the *Express*, rather than the *Guardian* or the *Times*.²⁴ Take a specific example: the filling station.

'Watch the little filling station', Frank Lloyd Wright said. 'It is the agent of decentralization.' Like all focuses of transport, the filling station could be a notable cause of change. Self-service automats, dispensing food and other goods, could spring up around the forecourt; maybe small post offices, too; telephone kiosks; holiday gear shops; eateries (*not* restaurants): all this quite apart from the standard BP Viscostatic/ice cream/map and guidebook shop. (Thus, at Cumbernauld New Town, it's already clear that only the most repressive controls can stop the two conveniently sited filling stations from replacing the inconveniently sited town centre as a shopping focus.)

Well, you can watch as long as you like in Britain, but you will see small sign of this happening. It's hard enough to get planning permission to put up a filling station in the first place. (There's still a feeling – dating probably from the hoo-ha which broke out when the Set Britain Free Tories decided to replace pool petrol²⁵ in the 1950s by commercial brands – that it is very easy to have 'too many' filling stations.) To have anything else on

24 The *Daily Express* was still the obvious example of a popular right-wing newspaper; the *Daily Mail* was in the doldrums. The *Daily Telegraph* was much more the mouthpiece of the Conservative Party than it later became. The *Times* was still a fairly rigorous newspaper of record: conservative, but with liberal leanings.

25 'Pool petrol' was a wartime expedient, like Utility furniture. The 1945–1951 Labour government kept it. With other echoes of wartime, like food rationing, the Tories ended it.

the forecourt is almost impossible. Only in the motorway service areas (themselves damply over-planned) is there anything like this; and here the unfortunately not unique combination of incompetence and non-spontaneity kills the whole thing.

And yet there's no doubt that the popular arts of our time (i.e. those on which everyone thinks he has a valid opinion) are car design and advertising; and these are doubly symbolized by such characteristic forecourt figures as the Esso tiger or the BP little man. The great recent soap-opera films have been Jacques Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (hero: a filling station owner) and Claude Lelouch's *Un Homme et Une Femme* (hero: a racing car driver). If you drive down the French Rhone valley motorway - not so planned as ours - one of the most memorable sights is a Total petrol station, writing the letters T-O-T-A-L huge across the valley, with a flutter of flags underneath. Stay in Moscow, and you end up yearning to see an Esso sign.

Ask yourself why it is that almost the only time you ever see flags on any *unofficial* occasion - i.e. not at an ordained festival or other jamboree and not on a public building - is on filling stations or else on the rear windows of cars.

Now the purpose of this is not to write a kind of Elegy in a Country Filling Station. The purpose is to ask: why don't we dare trust the choices that would evolve if we let them? It's permissible to ask - after the dreariness of much public re-building and after the Ronan Point disaster²⁶ - what exactly should we sacrifice to fashion?

Here we take a look at three zones where one might make the experiment of succumbing to the pressures and seeing where it led: the East Midlands, 'Lawrence country'; the area around Nuthampstead, 'Constable country'; and the Solent, 'Montagu country'. There are, obviously, other candidates. Anyone can fill in his own sacred cows or *bêtes noires*. (Imagine, for example, dividing the Lake District so that Coniston and Windermere could satisfy all those M6 hordes by becoming a Non-Plan zone: it might help protect the Wastwaters that are worth preserving). The main thing is that the experiment should be tried - and tried quickly. Even the first waves of information would be valuable; if the experiment ran for five years, ten years, twenty years, more and more of use would emerge. Legally, it would not be too difficult to set up. It only requires the will to do it - and the desire to *know*, instead of *impose*.

Of course, any experiment of this sort will have a tendency to endure. The megaliths are still with us; so is Paddington station; so is Harlow New Town. Non-Plan would leave an aftermath at least as interesting as these. But what counts here, for once, is now.

²⁶ The new Ronan Point tower block of council flats in East London, built by industrialized methods, collapsed on 16 May 1968. It was the beginning of the end, in Britain, for tower blocks as social housing. Later, I commissioned Nicholas Taylor to write *The Village in the City* (in Paul Barker (general editor), 'Towards a New Society' series, London: Temple Smith, 1973), a pioneer defence of Britain's suburban streets against planning megalomania.

NON-PLAN: AN EXPERIMENT IN FREEDOM

Town-and-country planning has today become an unquestioned shibboleth. Yet few of its procedures or value judgments have any sound basis, except delay. Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment?

"A dispute has arisen about a booklet, *Dorset Building in Rural Areas*, just issued by Dorset County Council, and aspiring to be a guide to good design for people building houses in the countryside—our Architectural Correspondent writes. Most of the examples that it illustrates and recommends as models are utterly commonplace, the sort of house to be found in almost any speculative builder's suburban estate. This view is shared by the Wilts and Dorset Society of Architects, which, through its president, Mr Peter Wakefield, has asked for the publication to be withdrawn"—*The Times*, December 1968.

This news item illustrates the kind of tangle we have got ourselves into. Somehow, everything must be watched; nothing must be allowed simply to "happen." No house can be allowed to be commonplace in the way that things just are commonplace: each project must be weighed, and planned, and approved, and only then built, and only after that discovered to be commonplace after all. Somehow, somewhere, someone was using the wrong year's model.

Once, Rasmussen, in *London: the Unique City*, (first published 1934), thought it worth printing a picture of the entirely commonplace domestic architecture built along Parkway, Camden Town, in the early 19th century. It was architecture that worked; it provided what the inhabitants wanted from it. Now there'd be trouble if you tried to knock it down (though the London motorway box will skirt it close). But at least the preservationists didn't get in at ground level, as they do today, in order to try and make sure—before the event—that something that will eventually be worth preserving is built.

The whole concept of planning (the town-and-country kind at least) has gone cockeyed. What we have today represents a whole cumulation of good intentions. And what those good intentions are worth, we have almost no way of knowing. To say it has been with us for so long, physical planning has been remarkably unmonitored; ditto architecture itself. As Melvin Webber has pointed out: planning is the only branch of knowledge purporting to be some kind of science which regards a plan as being fulfilled when it is merely completed; there's seldom any sort of check on whether the plan actually does what it was meant to do, and whether, if it does something different, this is for the better or for the worse.

The result is that planning tends to lurch from one fashion to another, with sudden revulsions setting in after equally sudden acceptances. One good recent example, of course, was the fashion for high flats—which had been dying for some time before Ronan Point gave it a tombstone. This fashion had been inaugurated with bizarre talk of creating "vertical streets" which would somehow, it was implied, recreate the togetherness of Bethnal Green Road on Saturday morning in (presumably) the lift shaft—this being the only equivalent communication channel in the structure.

Not that one can be too swiftly mocking. We may yet find that for some future twist of social or technological development, tall flats are just the thing. This happened with another fashion—that for the garden city, as promulgated by Patrick Geddes, Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin. It's worth remembering that the garden in this theory was there specifically to grow food in: the acreage was carefully measured out with this fodder ratio in mind. The houses in (say) Welwyn Garden City or Hampstead Garden Suburb were also scattered thinly because of the width of space allotted (for reasons of health) to the loop and sweep of roads.

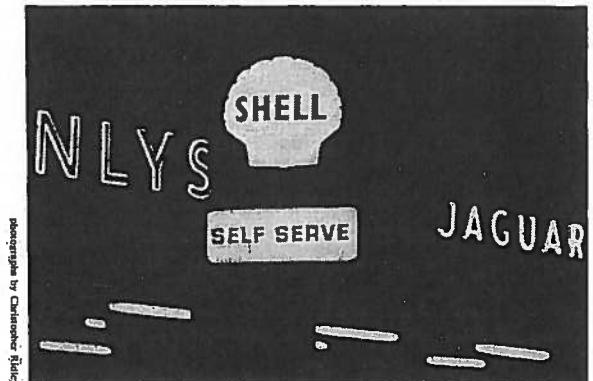
Welwyn Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb were therefore built—and then duly mocked for dull doctrinairism. The layout made public transport almost impossible; the tin and the frozen pack rapidly outdated the vegetable patch. But then the spread of car ownership outdated the mockery: those roads lived to find a justification; the space around the house could absorb a garage without too much trouble; and the garden (as, even, in many inner-London conversions of Georgian houses) became an unexceptionable outdoor room, and meeting space for children, away from the lethal pressed steel and rubber hurling around the streets.

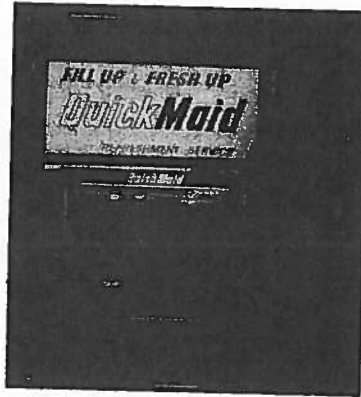
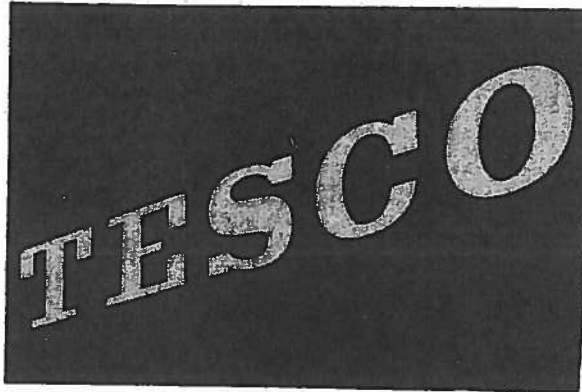
Now it's nice that a plan should turn out to have reasons for succeeding which the planner himself did not foresee. At every stage in the history of planning, we have cause to be grateful for these quirks of time. It's doubtful if John Nash saw how well his Regent's Park would serve as an arty but fairly democratic pause on the north edge of inner London—just right for football and swings and non-copulating pandas and Sunday-promenading Central Europeans; inhabited not by Regency aristos but by film people, lumps of London University and HM government, the American ambassador and high-class taris. And did Scott foresee how his St Pancras Hotel, superbly planned to fit in with departing trains and arriving horse-carriages, would survive being a much-mocked office block so successfully that it can now be argued for as a natural home for a sports centre or a transport museum or Birkbeck College?

Nor is it just the cities and towns that have benefited. How many further-education departments can be duly grateful for minor Georgian country houses, or their Victorian imitators—so apt for giving courses in? How many angling clubs can thank the canal-builders for where they spend their peaceful Sundays? How many Highlands-addicted tourists, even, depend for the solitude they love on those harsh men who preferred the glens clear of people and who planned them out of the Highlands and into Canada or Australia?

Yet it's hard to see where, in this, the credit can go to the planner. That last example—which pushes the concept of planning altogether too far—is justified as rubbing in the coerciveness of it. Most planning is aristocratic or oligarchic in method even today—revealing in this its historical origins. The

**Reyner Banham
Paul Barker
Peter Hall
Cedric Price**





most rigorously planned cities—like Haussman's and Napoleon III's Paris have nearly always been the least democratic.

The way that Haussman rebuilt Paris gladdens the tourist; it was not such a help, though, for the poor through whose homes the demolition gangs went to create those avenues and squares. Similarly, the urban renewal programmes of the American cities gladdened the real estate men; they did not help the Negroes and poor whites who were uprooted with little to compensate them. In Britain, public housing programmes gladden the housing committees and the respectable working class; they don't help the poorest, the most fissile or the most drifting families.

The point is to realise how little planning and the accompanying architecture have changed. The whole ethos is doctrinaire; and if something good emerges, it remains a bit of a bonus. Not to be expected but nice if you can get it—like totalling enough Green Shield stamps to get a Mini. At the moment, most planners in Britain are on a tautness jag: Camden's neatly interlocked squares, or Southwark's high-density juggernauts, or Cumbernauld's and the Elephant's sculptural shopping centres.

Some of these look pleasant enough now—and some don't. But the fact is that, so far as one can judge, taut arrangements last much better when plenty of money can be spent on their upkeep (Oxbridge colleges, Chelsea squares) than when it isn't (remember all those Improved Industrial Dwellings put up in the late 19th century by Mr Peabody and others?)

So it's at least plausible that some other doctrine than the current one would be right for everyday housing and building. It would be pleasant if "doctrine" were precisely what it wasn't.

But how are we to know? Planning is being subjected to increasing scepticism. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1968, tides up some of the abuses (especially some of those which caused delay in granting permissions); and the Skeffington committee is currently trying to decide how people might be given more say ("participation," in the jargon) in planning. The New City plan for Milton Keynes tries to shy away completely from planning. At universities, research is being done. The one thing that is not being done is the harshest test, the most valuable experiment, of all. What would happen if there were no plan? What would people prefer to do, if their choice were untrammelled? Would matters be any better, or any worse, or much the same? (Might planning turn out to be rather like Eysenck's view of psychoanalysis: an activity which, insofar as it gets credit, gets it for benefits that would happen anyway—minds can cure themselves, maybe, people can plan themselves?). But, even if matters ended up

much the same, in terms of durable successes or disastrous failures, the overall pattern would be sure to be different: the look of the experiment would be sure to differ from what we have now.

This is what we're now proposing: a precise and carefully observed experiment in non-planning. It's hardly an experiment one could carry out over the entire country. Some knots—like London—are, by now, far too Gordian for that. Nor are we suggesting (here) that other than physical planning should be shelved.

The right approach is to take the plunge into heterogeneity: to seize on a few appropriate zones of the country, which are subject to a characteristic range of pressures, and use them as launchpads for Non-Plan. At the least, one would find out what people want; at the most, one might discover the hidden style of mid-20th century Britain.

It's "hidden" for the same reason that caused any good social democrat to shudder at the anarchic suggestion of the previous paragraph. Town planning is always in thrall to some outmoded rule-of-thumb; as a profession, in fact, planners tend to read the *Telegraph* and the *Express*, rather than the *Guardian* or *The Times*. Take a specific example: the filling station.

"Watch the little filling-station," Frank Lloyd Wright said. "It is the agent of decentralisation." Like all focuses of transport, the filling-station could be a notable cause of change. Self-service automats, dispensing food and other goods, could spring up around the forecourt; maybe small post offices, too; telephone kiosks; holiday-gear shops; eateries (not restaurants): all this quite apart from the standard *vis* Viscostatic/ice cream/map and guidebook shop. (Thus, at Cumbernauld New Town, it's already clear that only the most repressive controls can stop the two conveniently sited filling stations from replacing the inconveniently centred town centre as shopping focus.)

Well, you can watch as long as you like in Britain, but you will see small sign of this happening. It's hard enough to get planning permission to put up a filling station in the first place. (There's still a feeling—dating probably from the hoo-ha which broke out when the Set Britain Free Tories decided to replace pool petrol in the 1950s by commercial brands—that it's very easy to have "too many" filling stations.) To have anything else on the forecourt is almost impossible. Only in the motorway service areas (themselves damply overplanned) is there anything like this; and here the unfortunately not unique combination of incompetence and non-spontaneity kills the whole thing.

And yet there's no doubt that the popular arts of our time (ie, those that everyone thinks he has a valid opinion on) are car design and advertising; and these are doubly symbolised by such charac-

teristic forecourt figures as the Esso tiger or the BP little man. The great recent soap-opera films have been Jacques Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (hero: a filling-station owner) and Claude Lelouch's *Un Homme et Une Femme* (hero: a racing-car driver). If you drive down the French Rhone valley motorway—not so planned as ours—one of the most memorable sights is a Total petrol station, writing the letters T-O-T-A-L huge across the valley, with a flutter of flags underneath. Stay in Moscow, and you end up yearning to see a Esso sign.

Ask yourself why it is that almost the only time you ever see flags on any unofficial occasion—ie, not at an ordained festival or other jamboree, and not on a public building—is on filling-stations or else on the rear windows of cars.

Now the purpose of this is not to write a kind of Elegy in a Country Filling-Station. The purpose is to ask—why don't we dare trust the choices that would evolve if we let them? It's permissible to ask—after the dreariness of much public rebuilding, and after the Ronan Point disaster—what exactly should we sacrifice to fashion?

Here we take a look at three zones where one

might make the experiment of succumbing to the pressures, and seeing where it led: the east midlands, "Lawrence country"; the area round Northampton, "Constable country"; and the Solent, "Montagu country." There are, obviously, other candidates. Anyone can fill in his own sacred cows or *bêtes noires*. (Imagine, for example, dividing the Lake District so that Coniston and Windermere could satisfy all those M6-borne hordes by becoming a Non-Plan zone: it might help protect the Wasitwaters that are worth preserving.) The main thing is that the experiment should be tried—and tried quickly. Even the first waves of information would be valuable; if the experiments ran for five years, ten years, twenty years, more and more of use would emerge. Legally, it would not be too difficult to get up. It only requires the will to do it—and the desire to know instead of impose.

Of course, any experiment of this sort will have a tendency to endure. The megaliths are still with us; so is Versailles; so is Paddington station; so is Harlow New Town. Non-Plan would leave an aftermath at least as interesting as these. But what counts here, for once, is now.

Non-Plan

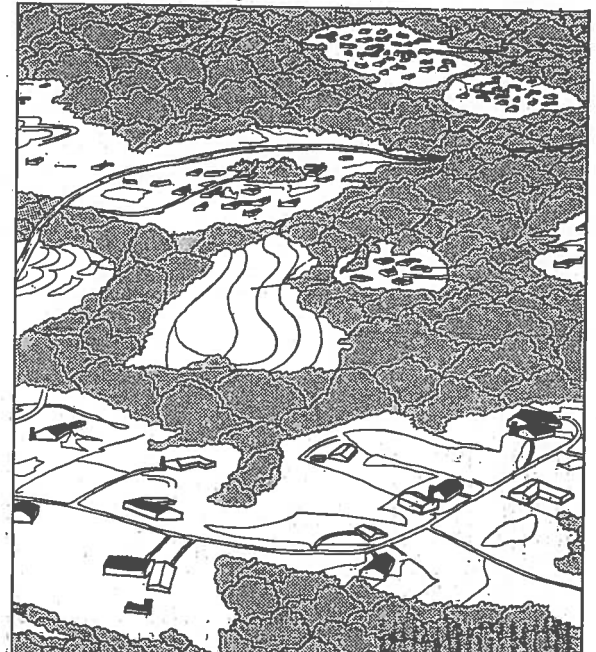
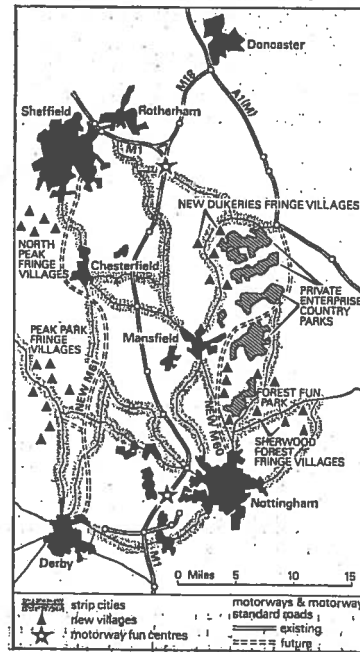
LAWRENCE COUNTRY

The east midlands are perfect for Non-Plan. Stretching from Nottingham and Derby northwards through Mansfield up to Chesterfield, the Nottingham-Derby industrial zone has a population of close on 1½ million. By the year 2000, it is expected to have 2½ million: the same as the west midlands conurbation today. Just to the north of this zone (and, by an administrative accident, in another planning region), is Greater Sheffield with over three quarters of a million more people.

This is an anomaly in England: a big, fast-growing industrial area with a lot of people on the ground but with no Birmingham-type conurbation. The east midlands regional economic planning council, in its report back in 1966, was frightened that by the end

of the century a conurbation was what they might have. It was unnecessarily afraid. The west midlands conurbation around Birmingham, which was the example that frightened them, was a product of the public transport era—first the tram, then the bus bound the towns together. The three quarters of a million extra people expected in the east midland industrial zone in the next 30 years will mostly have cars, and their tastes in housing will be quite different from those that shaped the Black Country.

As American experience shows, such people will be more mobile than previous generations. They will commute farther each day, some of them much farther. Industrial decentralisation will mean that many of them will be working outside the cities



PETROL OPEN

FISH BAR

BEA

Non-Plan

too. To use the urban economists' jargon, they will "trade off" amenity against accessibility. For many the result will be life in far-flung suburbs, close to open countryside.

In the east midlands this is all the more likely, because the countryside is worth having, and because it is relatively more accessible than elsewhere. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* describes what industrialism has done to the countryside he knew, north west of Nottingham. But really, the impact of the towns is still remarkably small in the whole of this countryside. Everywhere, there are still patches of the old symbiosis of mining and the rural economy, which Lawrence himself describes poignantly in the opening pages of *Sons and Lovers*.

The biggest difference in fact has come in the last year or two. Now, the M1 rolls on only two miles from the village of Eastwood, where Lawrence grew up. It links northwards not only with Leeds but also with the Great North Road at Doncaster, thus forming the new main north-south route down the eastern side of the Pennines. From Nottingham to Sneydbyrd by the motorway is now half an hour's drive. From Nottingham to Leicester, also half an hour. From Nottingham through to the outskirts of London, two hours. The transformation in space relationships is as great as anywhere in England; and, as is already occurring on the M1 between St Albans and Northampton, it will be accompanied, after a time lag, by a massive shift in commuting. In the whole 60-mile tract between Leicester and Sheffield, many people will find that they can live where they like. There will be colossal pressure for scattered, often small-scale growth in hundreds of villages and small towns. Non-Plan would permit this.

The biggest practical problem is preserving open space. There is really no difficulty about the ordinary local open spaces; they can be bought in the market, or from the land commission, in such amounts as

the appropriate department thinks necessary. (But only after an examination of actual needs.) The problem is the large regional or national park areas. The Peak park, west of the zone, is one case; the Dukeries, forming a series of potential country parks to the east, are another.

Land for these parks would simply be bought in the market by a state Countryside Commission because the social benefits from recreation would outweigh those from development. The commission would then recoup its expenditure (like a nationalised industry) by charging for entry to the country parks, with the aim of breaking even, "taking one year with another." American experience shows this can work. It may be necessary to buy now, while the expected benefits only justify the purchase some time in the future. This may justify a state subsidy, but it does not justify an arbitrary refusal to consider the alternative uses to which this land might possibly be put.

Non-Plan, applied to this area, would keep all the options open. No land-use pattern could be regarded as sacrosanct.

What would result? Probably a pattern which intensified the present one, but without the "planning" rigmarole. The forces of dispersion, of mobility, are already strong. But there would be certain differences. Development would be more scattered and less geometrically tidy than our present planners would like. It would be low-density—the apotheosis of exurbia. There would be more out-of-town shopping centres and drive-in cinemas, and Non-Plan would let them zoom to considerable size by the end of the century. With the aesthetic brakes off, strip development would spread along the main roads on the American model. Much of this will serve the needs of a mobile society: eating places, drinking places, petrol stations, supermarkets. It would not look like a planner's dream, but it would work.

CONSTABLE COUNTRY

Nuthampstead? Only 38 miles from London—this, among the Roskill commission's four short-list sites for a third London airport, has a not-bad chance of being finally chosen. As an alternative to Stansted it would change nothing. It doesn't matter which side of Bishop's Stortford the airport is located: the ultimate disturbance to the Herts-Essex border country will be the same. The actual aircraft noise contours will be moved ten miles to the north west, but the airport project is not a cause, it is merely one symptom of what is trying to happen anyhow in this rare enclave of a dying way of life that has, so far, escaped pressures that are normal in the rest of London's exurbanite belt. Proclaiming a Non-Plan zone thereabouts would reveal what pressures are currently being held in check (but only just) by present planning routines. Even more than that, taking the planning lid off would produce a situation traumatic enough among the amenity lobbies to make their real motivations visible; to show how much is genuine concern for environmental and cultural values, how much merely class panic.

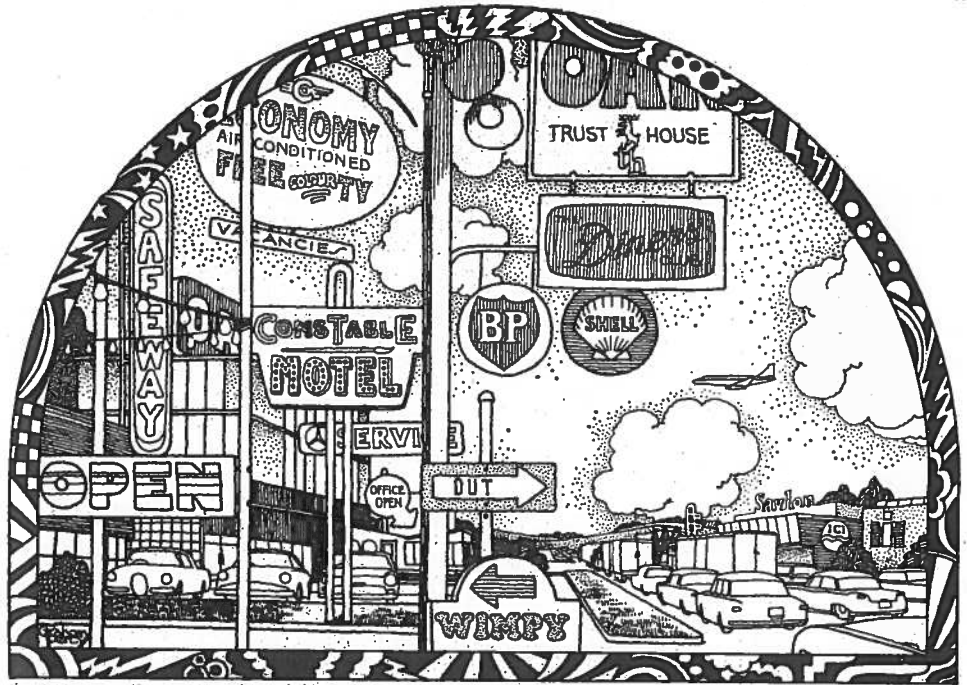
For the kind of population that rallies to its defence, this countryside and its villages have everything to recommend them, the perfect ecology for retired officers and gentlemen who are now something in the City.

The scale of the countryside is relatively small and garden-like—the landscape does not really open out until the chalk downland rises north of the Chertefords, where the main communication links—the railway to Cambridge, and the A11 trunk road to Newmarket—separate. Up to that point, the terrain is mostly gently folded, with shallow dips separating spot heights that rarely break the 400 foot contour. The tree cover is often thick enough to give the illusion that this might be some westward extension of that sacred of English sacred scenery: "Constable country,"

But this is largely illusory; most of the trees are in the belts of a few very handsome parks that more or less alternate with the half-timbered, or Georgian, villages along the A11, which has almost the air of a parkway in places. The rest of the area is fairly badly off for roads of this quality (with the possible exception of the east-west A120) but tends to exhibit instead the kind of intricate grid of minor roads that characterises the heartlands of Hertfordshire.

This close-grained and rather private terrain has long been immune to the development pressures that have transformed many other areas in London's exurbanite belt. If this area were freed of direct or implicit planning prohibitions, what semi-submerged tensions (which underlie the present malaise of insecurity here) could come to the surface and be studied?

By comparison with the other three suburban quadrants of London, the north-east quadrant is almost an underdeveloped country. Because of this, it was able to absorb a disproportionate amount of London's satellite New Town population—or, to express the matter another way, it had enough spare space for the working and lower middle classes to be shut away in separated ghettos of which the Becontree Estate was the prototype, and Harlow New Town the final solution. Until recently, the north-east quadrant was buffered against developmental pressures that were "normal" in the other quadrants. Urban sprawl of earlier kinds was largely blocked by the marshes of Hackney and Wanstead, and by the inviolable common lands of Epping and Hainault forests. Later developmental pressures were also abnormal, probably because these same blockages pushed the main railway lines towards the edges of the quadrant—northwards to Cambridge, eastwards to Colchester, with anything in between typically petering out at Ongar. This has always thrown a (probably dispropor-



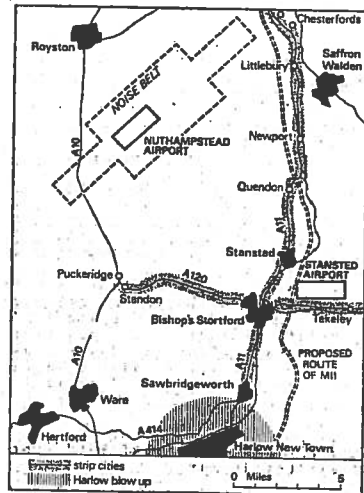
tionate) traffic load on the A11, which probably ought to have been let rip to develop as a thick local "midway", rather than being regarded, as at present, as an inefficient trunk route to remoter parts of East Anglia. The building of the M11 motorway (which an airport at Nuthampstead would certainly hasten) will lift the through-traffic load from the old A11 trunk, but will leave untouched the unacknowledged local pressures to which that road is increasingly subject in its role as a kind of diffuse, linear "downtown" for the whole area between Potter Street and the Chertefords. These pressures are revealed not only by the eruption of more motels than their national average distribution would suggest (two at Epping, one at Harlow, others removed further north) but even more clearly by the constant widenings, re-alignments and general tinkering with the A11 to cope with the local traffic crossing or turning on and off it.

Of course, Harlow New Town is the major cause of hidden pressures on the whole area. Not in the way in which, for instance, Stevenage has become a focus for junkie activity in the northern home counties, but simply because the introduction of a large and unbalanced new population in any area brings with it many more demands and needs than can be accommodated by the building of homes, schools and community centres. Harlow has been parasitical on surrounding communities for entertainment, to take only one example, ever since it was founded—and Bishop's Stortford appeared to be profiting handsomely from the New Town's unsatisfied needs in its early days.

Pressures of this kind appear to be contained for the moment, but it will be physically impossible to contain them if Harlow grows much bigger. And, if the population target of about 100,000 is achieved, Harlow will be the largest settlement on the A11 between the Greater London boundary and Norwich, and must make dependent suburbs of all other roadside communities from Epping to the Chertefords, including Stortford and Saffron

Walden, and the Ware/Hertford bijou mini-conurbation. And then add to this the effect of an airport, with all the attraction that scheduled flights would have for factory owners—consequently for speculative house builders. (One ought to remember, too, that there's an airport at Stansted already—and, though small, not all that tranquil.)

The result of these pressures would not, probably, look like the prewar ribbon development (of evil fame). The lifting of planning restrictions would not simply connect all the A11 villages into a continuous



Non-Plan

ribbon-running north-from-Sawbridgeworth. One of the national advantages of Nuthampstead is the fact that motorised traffic from the midlands and the north can (with a little ingenuity) reach it without passing through London at all, and does not need the A11.

Most conceivable airports in the other three quadrants around London would throw their main traffic load on the radial arteries leading to them from the metropolis. However, any airport near Bishop's Stortford will shed quite a bit of that load on to roads running east-west or north-westwards—in other words, moving through the area at right angles to the line of flow apparently envisaged by London-obsessed "national" thinking of the sort responsible for the M11.

A fair amount of heavy commercial traffic already moves through Stortford on this axis which, some 15 or so miles further east, connects with Braintree and the diffused zone of miscellaneous light industries in central Essex. If local (and other) authorities can respond freely to a plan-free situation, then Bishop's Stortford could shortly have an improved east-west thoroughway, which it probably needs even more than to be embarrassed of the A11. This could also be a step towards the creation of a fan of better quality roads carrying an increasing amount of containerised traffic to the rest of England out of the new freight facilities at Tilbury or Felixstowe—and, again, without entanglement in the private traffic neuroses of London.

In other words, what might be in store under a planning-free dispensation might not be the simple "destruction" of the pretty coaching villages on the main road to Newmarket, but a much more evenly distributed process of infilling and backfilling of communities in an area of some five to ten miles around the Stortford airport complex with a general thickening in all parts as far as Dunmow or Royston. Nearest the airports one can expect a zone of motels, long-term parking (essential and inevitable with a largely motorised access) and secondary services, with primary and engineering services down towards Harlow because of its existing industrial zone. The motels, restaurants and so on for Stansted might well string out eastwards, however, along the A120, in a similar manner to the development of the "little Las Vegas" strip along Mannheim Road to serve

Chicago's O'Hare airport.

Equally well, they might not. We don't know, because we have not seen the area around an airport develop naturally in England since Croydon in the twenties. Indeed few prospects seem less welcome to our present planning establishments, undermined culturally by Stephen Spender's identification of such situations as the landscape of hysteria and deafened by the barrage of propaganda that thunders down from the anti-noise lobby. And to have this happen in what is virtually Constable country...

Actually, the close-textured, tree-grown, Constable-type country is supposed, by bodies of opinion like the *Architectural Review*, to be able to absorb practically anything that is not taller than a grown tree, and the buildings which free enterprise would put up in this planning-free situation would not be half that height. On an open site, one and two storey buildings have overwhelming commercial attractions—it is only ultra-high urban land values or the activities of determined architect-planners like Walter Bor or Sir Hugh Casson, that make multi-storey commercial development thinkable.

So this small-scale, rather private landscape might barely reveal its new commercial buildings to the eye. But this would be very bad commercial practice, since an invisible building is no advertisement, and there would certainly have to be a compensatory efflorescence of large and conspicuous advertising signs. The overall result could thus be low commercial buildings set well back from the road behind adequate parking courts, backed by tall trees and fronted by tall signs, with a soft, rolipoly countryside appearing behind.

It might be quite graceful to the eye; certainly more so than the quasi-regimented squalor of our present suburban industrial concentration camps (or trading estates), and equally more so than the featureless boredom of the increasingly large areas of East Anglia that are being flattened out for efficient exploitation by agro-industry. I don't suppose that it will appear graceful to the eyes of the present generation of Stansted nay-sayers. But it may appear differently to their successors—as a deliverance from creeping death by economic stagnation that will awaft the area if it remains in its present condition of stalemate between development pressures and planning prohibitions.

MONTAGU COUNTRY

A few years ago a nuclear power station was rejected for the Isle of Wight, under the doubtful slogan of preserving the nation's heritage. In fact, this Victorian island—once one of the Old Queen's favourite roosts, and J. B. Priestley's—is losing what heritage it had. In the Solent area—Portsmouth/Southampton/New Forest/Isle of Wight—the island is one of the few parts suffering any loss of population. It might gain more from an abandonment of preservation than it has so far won from its continuance.

Altogether, the Solent is a curious hodgepodge. At Fawley, for example, it has the largest oil refinery in Europe and the most publicised productivity agreements in Britain—from which pipelings and moralisation stretch out to the rest of the country. Then there is Southampton—a major port with huge capacity for expansion—already within the orbit of Greater London. To arrive at Southampton, either by boat or by plane, is to feel yourself at the edge of an incipient megalopolis which doesn't stop till it reaches Bletchley. Twispich and Sevenoaks, Southampton doesn't just have four tides a day (which seems like an almost sinful amount of deep water), it has a university as expansionist as the rest of them and a rapidly swelling population. Fawley and Southampton, in fact, are at present the poles of growth. They generate various secondary industries: hovercraft, synthetic rubber, electricity, technical training.

The other pole of decision apart from the Isle of Wight is the Solent, the area between the two islands.

Wight (with its diminishing rail network) is Portsmouth. The highly equipped naval dockyard is being run down; skilled labour is looking for work. The ditched Buchanan plan for a Solent City is intended to arc between the Southampton and Portsmouth poles like a spark looking for a gap. It will be valuable to have the check of what Professor Buchanan expected to be able to instil here.

Besides growth and decline, the Solent has a flourishing middle area which is neither growing nor declining but simply being preserved. It has historic towns, villages and monuments—like the well-known monumental village school at Winchester; the palace, abbey and lord at Beaulieu; the New Forest itself. There's the small-boats industry: The preservationist lobby is powerful: there are assorted architectural knights at Beaulieu and at Buckler's Hard, and the yachting brotherhood at Beaulieu (again the lynch-pin), Hambledon and Lynton; Edward Montagu and Edmund de Rothschild (the latter, at Exbury) are showmen-gentry but they remain gentry. A consortium of landowners in the Beaulieu valley have launched a development plan.

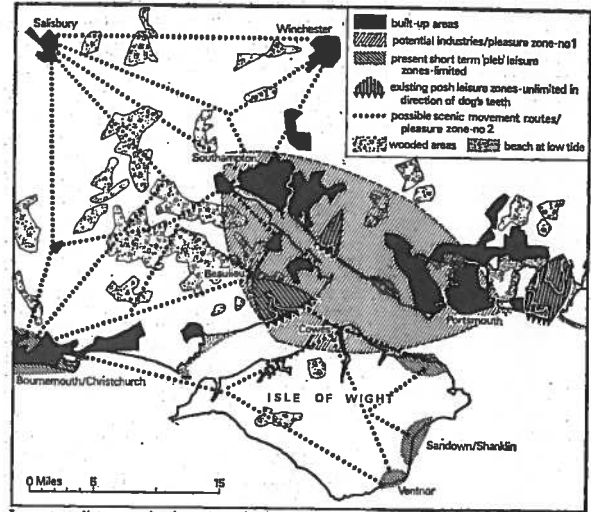
With Non-Plan, industrial sites would be likely to spread more freely along the coast west of Southampton/Fawley. So would housing. But there would also be a spread of pleasure. It's cut out to be a zone where work-life and recreation intersect: the Forest, the boats, the Isle of Wight...

wall/Devon might ideally be better (for a start, they're warmer) but they're too far from the London magnet at the moment. The division between freely willed and directed (ie, between leisure and work) would erode

Residents might become "auto-nomads" at holidays and weekends or in fine weather, and still remain within the Solent zone. The tourist pearls are remarkably evenly spread throughout the area: multi-funstops. This would not be for the big setpiece holiday—which, more and more, will be abroad (in Malta if the exchange regulations don't permit the Costa del Sol or Rimini). It will be for small, intermittent holidays. Visitors (as opposed to residents) will increasingly see it the same way—though they might stop off at the Buckler's Hard motel complex to refresh themselves en route from the continent to Stoke-on-Trent, Balham or Oxford-with-Reading. The New Forest pony sales would become a heavily plugged rodeo time.

Culturally, the prospect is bizarre. It was in Hampshire, after all, that the proposed New Town of Hook was killed: planning used upheave all that. An enclave would be ripped into and become one of the main play-and-live edges of the London region.

Mobile homes might dot the New Forest and the Isle of Wight. Caravans to begin with; later more elaborate, or at any rate more efficient, constructions. There would be high-level, tree-top chair rides through the Forest and convoys of computer-programmed holiday houseboats (both public and private) on the Solent. Fawley refinery would have *son et lumière*. Floating grandstands, with public address systems and information displays, would involve visitors in the speed and performance trials of new water gear (hovercraft, speedboats, water-skis, life-saving). Large retractable marinas would have sail-in movies and row-in bars. Beach buggies would drive through the heathland. Particular villages, especially on the Isle of Wight, would be got up as showpieces. Britain's first giant dome would rise on the Isle of Wight coast: the first all-weather, all-public Ile du



Levant nudist scene in the country—thermostatically controlled and ten bob a head.

It would be a good zone in which to tack on to the basic Non-Plan scheme a number of other possible try-outs: freedom for local authorities to raise money in ways they see fit (a sales tax, a sail tax, a poll tax, a pony tax); local commercial radio, with information for visitors and tourists; "pot" shops instead of all those declining tobacconists (and see how different the population seems, or how similar, after five or ten years); the abandonment of a few other rules, like pub hours—as at present happens, if you know where, during Cowes Week.



A 12x12 grid calendar for the year 1969. The columns are labeled with months from JANUARY to DECEMBER. Each cell contains a small icon representing an activity or event. Some cells contain question marks. The grid is surrounded by a decorative border with the months repeated along the sides.

To play: Take any counter and place it on the pleasure zone board; move again before 12 hours are up; after a year or two build a new board.

SPONTANEITY AND SPACE



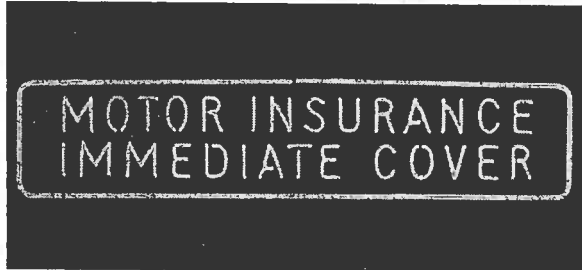
Any advocate of Non-Plan is sure to be misrepresented; we had better repeat what we mean. Simply to demand an end to planning, all planning, would be sentimentalism; it would deny the very basis of economic life in the second half of the 20th century.

As Galbraith has reminded us, the economies of all advanced industrial countries are planned, whether they call themselves capitalist or communist. In the United States or Japan or Germany or Britain, the need to make elaborate and long-term plans is as pressing for the individual firm, as it is for the central government. But we are arguing that the word planning itself is misused; that it has also been used for the imposition of certain physical arrangements, based on value judgments or prejudices; and that it should be scrapped.

Three developments in particular makes this argument compelling. They are developments of the last 15 years; their main force has been felt in this country in the last ten. They are: the cybernetic revolution; the mass affluence revolution; and the pop/youth culture revolution.

Cybernetics is commonly described as a technological revolution; but it is much more. It has its technological basis in the computer, as the 18th century industrial revolution had in the steam engine. But just as that revolution arose out of the intellectual ferment of the age of Newton and the Royal Society, so this has gone along with a major revolution in our ways of thought.

The essence of the new situation is that we can master vastly greater amounts of information than was hitherto thought possible—information essentially about the effect of certain defined actions upon the operation of a system. The practical implications are everywhere very large, but nowhere are they greater than in the area we loosely call planning. It is true that the science of decision-making, or management, was being developed in the United States from the 1920s, a quarter century before the cybernetic revolution; and it is almost true that it was this science of management, applied to military ends in World War Two, which made the cybernetic revolution possible.



Now, the two fields—that of scientific management, and that which embraces operations research and systems analysis—are so closely related as to be in practice inseparable. But physical planning flourished in this country when the science of management was almost unknown. Thus, simple, rule-of-thumb value judgments could be made, and were held to have perpetual validity, like tablets of the law. Since the cybernetic revolution, it has become clear that such decisions are meaningless and valueless—as, indeed, ought to have become clear before. Instead, physical planning, like anything else, should consist at most of setting up frameworks for decision, within which as much objective information as possible can be fitted. Non-Plan would certainly provide such information. But it might do more. Even to talk of a "general framework" is difficult. Our information about future states of the system is very poor.

If the cybernetic revolution makes our traditional planning technologically and intellectually obsolete, social change reinforces this conclusion. The revolution of rising affluence (despite the current economic problems) means that a growing proportion of personal incomes will be funnelled off into ever more diverse and unpredictable outlets. Non-Plan would let them be funnelled. Galbraith (again) has shown how the modern industrial state depends on the ability to multiply wants for goods and services; certainly a large amount of prediction is involved in this. Car manufacturers have a fair idea of how many cars will be sold in 1984. Similarly with refrigerator manufacturers, colour TV set makers and purveyors of Mediterranean or Caribbean holidays.

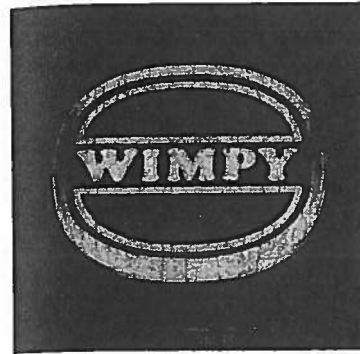
But in detail and in combination, the effects are not easy to relate to programmes of public investment. One change, however, Non-Plan would inevitably underline: as people become richer they demand more space; and because they become at the same time more mobile, they will be more able to command it. They will want this extra space in and around their houses, around their shops, around their offices and factories, and in the places where they go for recreation. To impose rigid controls, in order to frustrate people in achieving the space standards they require, represents simply the received personal or class judgments of the people who are making the decision.

Worst of all: they are judgments about how they think other people—not of their acquaintance or class—should live. A remarkable number of the architects and planners who advocate togetherness, themselves live among space and green fields.

This assertion may be most clearly demonstrated where different value judgments are involved. The most remarkable manifestation so far of mass affluence—above all in Britain—has been the revolution in pop culture. This is a product of newly emergent social groups and, above all, of age groups. Among the young, it has had a remarkable effect in breaking down class barriers, and replacing these by age barriers. Though pop culture is eminently capable of commercial exploitation, it is essentially a real culture, provided by people drawn from the same groups as the customers.

Most importantly for Non-Plan, it is frenetic and immediate culture, based on the rapid obsolescence cycle. Radio One's "revived 45" is probably three months old, and on the New York art scene fashions change almost as quickly as on the King's Road. Pop culture is anti-high bourgeois culture. Though it makes many statements it does not like, big statements.

All these characteristics could not be more opposed to the traditional judgments of the physical planner—which, in essence, are the values of the old bourgeois culture. Pop culture in Britain has produced the biggest visual explosion for decades—or even, in the case of fashion, for centuries. Yet its effect on the



British landscape has been nil, for the simple reason that the planners have suppressed it.

Three particularly ripe examples: one, the row over the psychedelic painting on the Beatles' former "Apple" boutique in Baker Street (objected to, and duly erased, because on a building of architectural merit—though the shop is next door but one to a fairly unreticent cinema); two, the rebuilt Jack Straw's Castle on Hampstead Heath, one of the few bits of pop fantasy to get past the taste censors, but only after a major row among the planners; three, the Prince of Wales pub in Fortune Green Road, north London, internally perhaps the most remarkable piece of pop design in Europe, externally a tedious piece of planner's Old English Good Taste.

The planning system, as now constituted in Britain, is not merely negative; it has positively pernicious results. The irony is that the planners themselves constantly talk—since the appearance of Jane Jacob's *Death and Life of Great American Cities*—about the need to restore spontaneity and vitality to urban life. They never seem to draw the obvious conclusion—that the monuments of our century that have spontaneity and vitality are found not in the old cities, but in the American west.

There, in the desert and the Pacific states, creations like Fremont Street in Las Vegas or Sunset Strip in Beverly Hills represent the living architecture of our age. As Tom Wolfe points out in his brilliant essay on Las Vegas, they achieve their quality by replacing buildings by signs. In Britain you only get occasional hints of how well this could work. The prime example—Piccadilly Circus at night—is apparently so successful it needs to be preserved. God help us. Why preserve it? Why not simply allow other efflorescences of fluorescence in other places? Write it in neon: NON-PLAN IS GOOD FOR YOU; I DREAMT I FOUND FREEDOM IN MY NON-PLAN BRA.

To say that Las Vegas is exciting and memorable and fine is also a value judgment. It cannot be supported by facts. But except for a few conservation areas which we wish to preserve as living museums, physical planners have no right to set their value judgment up against yours, or indeed anyone else's. If the Non-Plan experiment works really well, people should be allowed to build what they like. (Oh, and a word for the preservationists: much easier to relieve pressure on medieval town centres by letting the edges of the city sprawl, and give people chance to shop there in drive-in suburban supermarkets, than by brooding on inner-relief roads or whatever.)

At the very least, Non-Plan would provide accurate information to fit into a "community investment plan." The balance of costs and benefits to the individual is not the same as to the community. If there are social costs, the people who are responsible pay them. If low-density development is expensive to the community, the reaction should be to make it proportionately expensive to those who live in it; not to stop it. The notion that the planner has the right to say what is "right" is really an extraordinary hang-over from the days of collectivism in left-wing thought, which has long ago been abandoned elsewhere.

We're so afraid of freedom. But Britain shouldn't be a Peter Pan Edwardian nursery. Let it at least move into the play school era: why should only the under-sevens be allowed their bright materials, their gay constructions, their wind-up Daleks. In that world, Marx is best known as the maker of plastic, battery-driven dump trucks. Let's become that sort of marxist.

Let's save our breath for genuine problems—like the ones that are threateningly with us. And let's Non-Plan at least solve problems of planning with oblivion.



Reyner Banham is Reader in Architecture, Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London; Paul Barker is Editor of NEW SOCIETY; Peter Hall is Professor of Geography, University of Reading; Cedric Price is an architect.