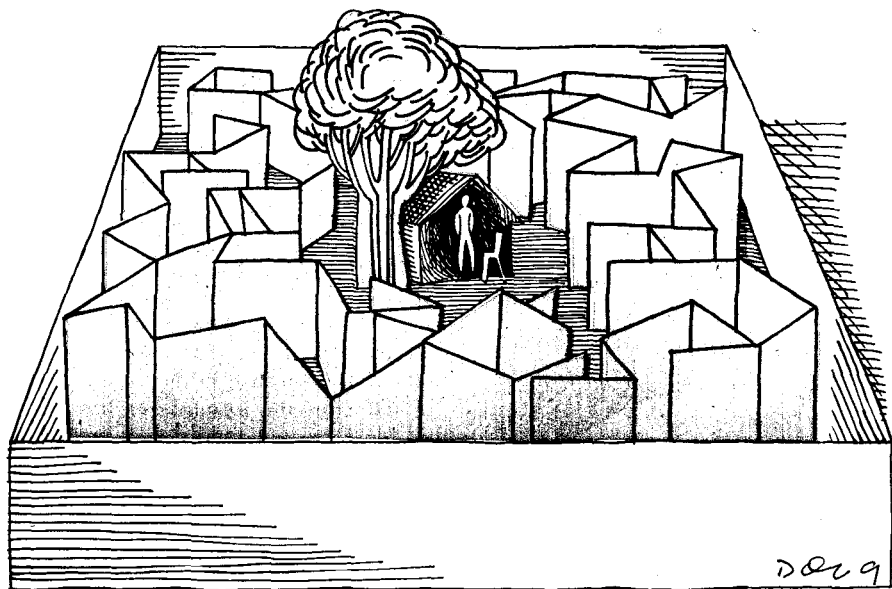


# PLANNING “NOTPLACE” FOR NOBODY



By ROBERT SOMMER

**I**N 1516, Sir Thomas More described an imaginary island called Utopia, which enjoyed perfection in politics, law, and family relations. More's choice of name was not accidental. It came from the Greek *ou* (not) and *topos* (a place) to emphasize that Utopia did not and probably could not exist, although it was an ideal toward which men could strive.

Chad Walsh laments the declining number of authors who construct ideal societies along More's lines compared to those who foreshadow nightmares that he labels Dystopias, inverted Utopias, and anti-Utopias. These portrayals of an unwholesome future were only a minor satiric fringe of the imaginary society literature in the nineteenth century, but they are the dominant type today. It is possible to view these anti-Utopias as warnings that society is on the wrong course.

Even the word Utopia has fallen on bad times. A design can be dismissed preemptorily by calling it Utopian, which means, in plain language, unrealistic, impractical, and expensive. The planner Doxiadis substitutes the term Entopia, or "in place," which is realizable, for Utopia, which is not.

Probably the most common notion of Utopia is what might be called the visionary environment—the furthest application of the most advanced technology.

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It is a Buck Rogers world with floating cities covered by plastic globes, people flying effortlessly through purified air, and all food and clothing manufactured in spotless factories where machines do all the work. It remains a pleasant enough fantasy until questions are raised regarding the quality of life for the inhabitants. Then one finds the Dystopias of Orwell and Huxley.

American writers are less concerned now than they were several decades ago with spatial mobility as a means of finding Utopia, since it has become apparent that there are problems in the best places, too, usually produced by the attractiveness of the best places for too many people. If a place is desirable, it will attract people until the point is reached at which the density produces undesirable consequences that cancel out its advantages.

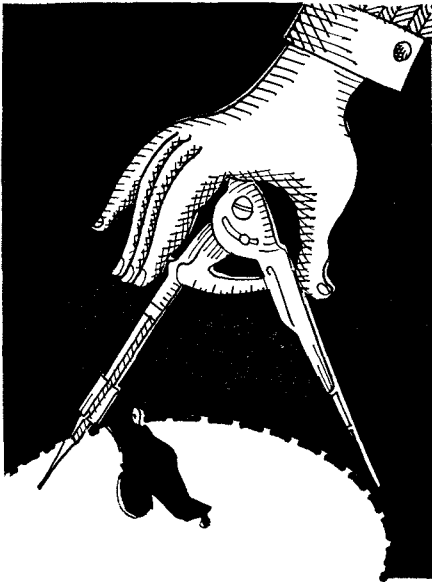
Historians and sociologists have shown a fascination toward Utopian communities. American Utopian communities have been of three sorts: religious, non-sectarian, and factory towns. The second category, the non-sectarian and frequently Communistic society, has attracted the bulk of the attention, although the number of inhabitants in the religious communities and the mill towns—starting with Lowell, Massachusetts, on up to the new industrial cities such as Kitimat, British Columbia—have housed far more people and have proved more viable economically and politically.

The internal use of space within Utopian communities is often very different from its use in society outside the communities. Communitarians of the secular variety are characterized by close physical contact and directness of manner.

"Hippies" complain that "squares" do not look at one another but treat each other as non-persons. At Big Sur Hot Springs one might see a man and a woman discovering one another at breakfast, embracing for no special reason—even before coffee is served. A female reporter intent upon writing a story about the Keristans, a communitarian love cult in New York City, found herself "being groped by both sexes. The groping was impersonal and almost mechanical, as though this were an habitual form of communication." This description does not fit most religious communities, specifically those founded as a reaction against the licentiousness and immorality of the outside world. Yet the line between these subtypes is not always obvious. A nominee to the California State Board of Education objected to schools teaching about the Pilgrims because "they lived in a Communistic society."

**T**HE concept of Utopia as well as the word itself is surprisingly frequent in architectural books and articles. It seems to fill much the same role for architects as the word health does for medical practitioners and the word efficiency for engineers. As laymen continue to strive toward a Utopia through laws intended to produce harmonious and frictionless social intercourse, designers use environmental programming to develop physical forms that will increase the sum total of human happiness. The problem is generally phrased in quasi-scientific terminology such as the quest for the optimal environment.

Some opportunity for planning on a Utopian scale is provided in the design of New Towns, instances where a city arises whole according to a prearranged



plan. In theory such New Towns are balanced communities that provide jobs for the residents, although there may be some commuting in and out. Specifically excluded from this category are the suburban bedroom communities whose residents work outside the community and whose workers (plumbers, gardeners, teachers) cannot afford houses in the community and live elsewhere. Perhaps because of the American antipathy toward large-scale planning, the development of New Towns in the United States has lagged far behind that of many European countries.

Another fertile field for Utopian planning is the design of special facilities for the blind, crippled, or the insane, although phrasing the problem in this way tends to convert the clients into non-persons. There are excellent studies of the effective turning radius for a wheel chair, the optimal incline of a stairway, or the best sorts of railings for showers and baths that have proven invaluable in designing facilities for the handicapped. Some planners, discouraged by their lack of success in finding optimal environments for healthy middle-class families, are beginning to maintain that their *raison d'être* is the design of facilities for people with special needs—low educational achievement, blindness, or insanity. Not only are these needs definable, but the people themselves are usually helpless or dependent and thus unable to protest the planner's intervention into their lives. The poor and the disabled become the guinea pigs of social and environmental experimentation that would be unacceptable to a politically entrenched and financially strong middle class.

Many designers reject the idea that the optimal environment, even for the disabled, has a single static form. Architect Raymond Studer advocates *servo-*

*environmental systems*, which respond to changes in behavioral input. He feels that design problems phrased in terms of buildings, schools, houses, and neighborhoods obscure dynamic processes that will change over time. James Marston Fitch has described a school environment that rejects day-long environmental norm—the “ideal” temperature of 72 degrees, 50 per cent humidity, 60-foot lamberts at desk top, and 45 decibels of sound. A child needs less heat in the afternoon than in the morning, more oxygen and less humidity by the end of the day, as well as greater sound levels in the afternoon than in the morning.

Fitch cites the example of hospitals that have created totally new environments to enhance therapy, rooms that are therapeutic tools rather than containers: the hyperbaric chamber where barometric pressure and oxygen content are regulated to treat circulatory disorders and gas gangrene; metabolic surgery suites where body temperature can be reduced to slow metabolic rates before difficult surgery; the use of saturated atmospheres for serious cases of burns; artificially cooled, dry air to lighten the thermal stress on cardiac cases; and the use of electrostatic precipitation and ultraviolet radiation to produce completely sterile atmospheres for difficult respiratory ailments and prevention of cross-infection from contagious diseases. Such total environments have the greatest applicability when the individual is passive, helpless, or infirm. Since he cannot look after himself or seek out and alter the environment to fit his needs, it is necessary for others to do the job for him.

**T**HIS work rests on the assumption that the needs of these specific individuals can be known and used in programming facilities. Larger questions about the place of these people in society remain unasked and hence unanswered. A handbook of housing for the elderly will recommend bright illumination, nonskid floors, windows for looking out, and so forth. One cannot argue with these recommendations (although one can ask whether they do not apply to all people rather than just the elderly), but they miss the overriding issue of segregation or integration. A building that caters to an elderly person's need for support, visual stimulation, and privacy, but is disabling him socially is hardly an ideal solution to his problems. One can spend a lot of time researching the design of prisons without getting into the question of whether prisons as they now exist, even the best ones, do more harm than good.

When society constructs special institutions of classes of non-persons, the idea of Utopia is not very relevant. For the most part these institutions are de-

signed with society's interests in mind rather than the individual's. Consider the large state hospitals which, at this moment, incarcerate 700,000 men and women in North America. Has an attempt been made to design these institutions from the standpoint of the patient's own needs, with respect for his way of life, his craving for privacy and refuge?

The poorest institutions are designed with security, custody, and economy in mind, the best for something nebulously called therapy or rehabilitation. In no sense can a therapeutic milieu be equated with one designed to give happiness and pleasure to the inmates. Therapy implies society's goals and interests rather than the patient's. It is stipulated by law that patients must be treated humanely while receiving therapy, but the idea of changing the individual is implicit in the concept of therapy. Let us contrast the state hospitals with a designed Utopia, Storyland Park in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

Storyland is intended as a childhood imagination come true. Besides the junior fire engine, there is a Western town with a real jail where each child can be sheriff. There are tunnels to crawl through, walls to climb, things to take apart, an absence of no-nos—in short, everything to delight and interest the child. Buildings are child-sized, with small doors and windows, tiny tables and chairs, all to the child's scale.

One cannot say the same of Rockland or Pilgrim State Hospital, each located in progressive New York State and containing more than 10,000 patients. Yet the point is not the number of individuals incarcerated, the shortage of nurses, the crowded wards; for privacy is a matter of barriers rather than square footage. It would be possible, although somewhat difficult, to design a large state hospital as a Utopia for schizophrenics, at least in the way we have been using the concept. This would require that society recognize the legitimacy of the patient's way of life. For a patient who happens to be labeled schizophrenic, it means explicit recognition that withdrawal from social intercourse is a legitimate *modus vivendi*, acceptance of the fact that some people find no place to hide in society and turn within themselves for solace. Strange mannerisms, bizarre dress, and crazy talk are all means for keeping other people at a distance.

Knowing the schizophrenic's need for isolation, it is possible to design mental institutions that make it easy for him to withdraw. Instead of long corridors and open dayrooms, we could provide many private areas, lockers, and dressers where he could keep his belongings, and wooded areas where he could be secluded or build a shanty. A good archi-

tect can design for isolation and solitude just as creatively as he designs for custody and enforced behavior change.

Is society willing and able to build institutions—asylums, refuges, communities, call them what you want—for people who want to avoid contact with others?

At first glance, this is a dollars-and-cents question: whether society can afford it. I will not try to answer the question in terms of specific amounts. What society can afford to pay is largely dependent on political considerations and the felt needs of its leaders. Under John F. Kennedy, there was an awareness of mental retardation; and under Lyndon B. Johnson the poor were discovered. At this moment, \$2 billion a month is being spent on a war in a small Asian nation.

Set in this context, the question whether society can afford to build retreats becomes meaningless. Of more relevance is the fact that American society already maintains institutions for 700,000 of these people. Would it be more or less costly to switch from the present system of custody and behavior change to one of refuge and protection from unwanted social intercourse?

**T**HERE can be no doubt that a refuge would be less expensive to staff, particularly if it were maintained by inmates who possessed gardens and tools for handicrafts and light industry. There would be no need for several thousand employees—gardeners, cooks, accountants, and attendants.

The amount varies from state to state, but in California it costs \$14 per patient per day to maintain a state mental hospital, which works out to about \$5,110 per patient per year. One could construct and maintain a very nice refuge—including a private chalet for each patient—with this amount of money. The problem, then, is not the cost of the plan but society's reluctance to underwrite an institution that is basically subversive to society's own values.

In mental hospital design, we see that it is possible to conceive of Utopia as a place where everything operates to make a cohesive and efficient society. The individual does not learn the wrong habits because the environment has been programmed to optimize the well-being of the collective. Considered in this way, the mental hospital and the prison are behavior change mechanisms in a larger Utopia designed to benefit the full society—a concept that contrasts with the view of Utopia as a world designed to meet the needs of the individual residents. This brings us to the notion of the individual's rights versus those of society, which is as relevant to city and regional planning as it is to forensic psychiatry.

The libertarian view is that Utopia maximizes the individual's right to do as he pleases, and that society is a hypothetical construct composed of the sum total of individual efforts. There should be no zoning, setback, or esthetic regulations pertaining to home building, except those required by safety and/or public health.

Opposed to this is the view that Utopia can operate only at the societal or even world level at which the needs of the collective, as expressed in majority will or the decisions of elected representatives, are paramount. If the citizens decree that all houses in an area must cost \$25,000 or occupy lots of a certain size and shape, or fit certain styles, the individual must bow or move out.

The concept of Utopia involves fundamental decisions regarding the rights of the individual vis-à-vis society. The example of the schizophrenic is felicitous because, unlike the deviant individual who wants to become a painter, inventor, or political activist, the schizophrenic withdraws from society under such circumstances that it is almost impossible to say that he is contributing to society; in the case of the schizophrenic, the issue is primarily one of civil rights, and secondarily of economics.

To use another example, it requires no great imagination to program an ideal world for a drug addict. The major requirement would be a place where he can obtain his drugs and then go about the business of living a full productive life. One can, of course, be concerned with the sorts of interior spaces—deep carpets, lounge chairs, music, soft lights—that will enhance the drug experience, but an American addict at this moment would settle for an unfurnished basement so long as he can have his drugs. No precise figures are available, but addicts frequently use public toilets for shooting drugs—certainly not the most attractive setting. Once an addict's need for drugs is met, then we can start making provision for other aspects of his life. His Utopia would be very different from any institution designed to help him live without drugs.

In the present social climate, it may be simpler to program a drugless institution than to change the laws, but this does not mean that such a world is more suited to the addict's explicit needs. Instead of the present policy, which costs untold millions in theft of drugs, erratic enforcement of drug laws, unsuccessful rehabilitation of drug addicts, and human suffering, society could choose to legitimize the addict's need for drugs, just as it might accept the schizophrenic's expressed needs for isolation and the homosexual's for liaison with people of like inclination. Society already tolerates nudists and monastics, allowing their rituals in geographic isolation.

Whether one is discussing the place of the elderly in society, suburbs vis-à-vis the central city, housing for low-income groups, or the location of medical services, one is forced to weigh the needs of those people who would gain from segregation against the needs of those who would suffer from it.

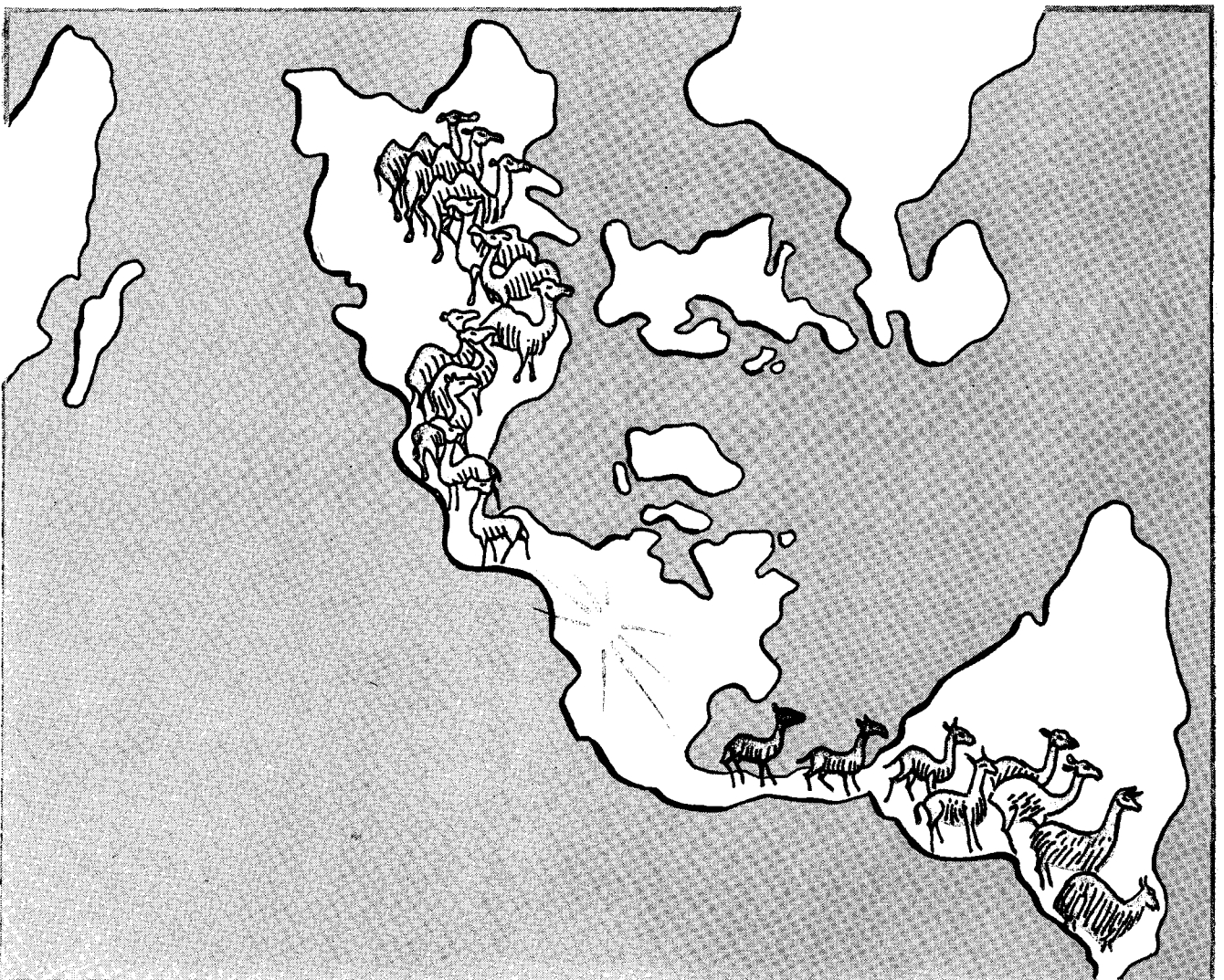
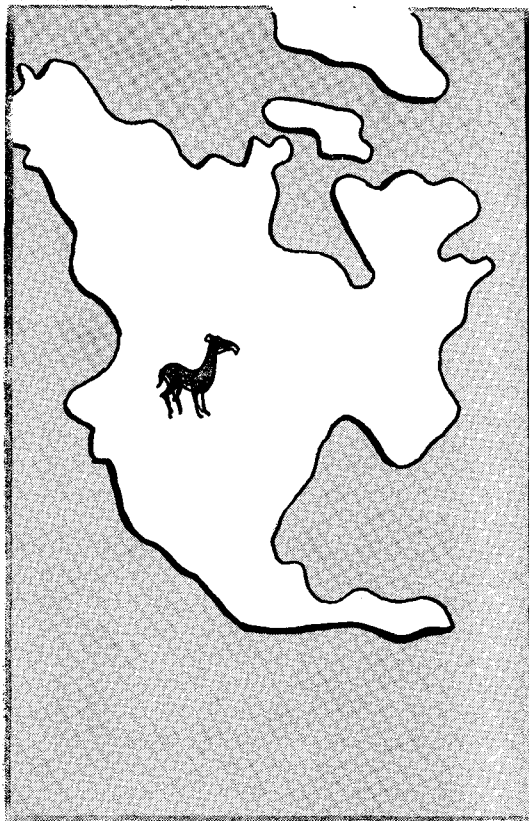
Space is related to status not only in amount but also in quality. The high-status individual has better space and more of it. Most attempts to equalize the situation on a limited scale are bound to fail because high-status individuals also have greater mobility and will move to places where their prerogatives are respected. It is hardly surprising that people will avoid juvenile delinquency, congestion, air pollution, and welfare problems if they can.

Not only must we ask how older people fare in Leisure World; we must also measure the effects of the exodus of the elderly from the larger community—what does it do to the family traditions and culture when the people most intimately acquainted with the old days are no longer around? The young unmarriages of Los Angeles who move into age-segregated housing to obtain country club living (built, incidentally, by people who started out constructing segregated housing for senior citizens) are the vanguard of a trend that is likely to have important social consequences in terms of boy-meets-girl. To remove mental patients from society may temporarily ease their burdens and make life simpler for their families, but what happens when it comes time to return the patient to a family and community that has adjusted to his absence? We are dealing with hierarchies of needs and interdependencies, with ecosystems rather than isolated individuals and groups. There is no situation that is ideal for everyone all of the time.



—Sketches by Doug Anderson.







# The Three Worlds of the Camel

**A**NYONE looking for a camel in these United States of America nowadays must go either to a zoo or to a circus. That has been the state of affairs for the last few thousand years. Camels with a choice just don't live in this neighborhood.

But it wasn't always so. About 45,000,000 years ago, when there were no camels anywhere else on earth, a tiny precursor of the modern camel family appeared in the land now occupied by the states of Wyoming and Utah. Bones of these ancient animals have been found in sedimentary rocks dating that far back.

In the beginning, these miniature creatures—they hadn't yet grown humps on their backs and could be identified as camels only by the shape of their noses—didn't wander far from their original home. They couldn't go south because a strait of water lay where Panama is today. They couldn't go east because of the Atlantic Ocean. They couldn't go west because of the Pacific, which hadn't at that time disgorged the land bridge that later crossed Bering Strait.

About 4 to 5,000,000 years ago, however, the Isthmus of Panama rose out of the water. Sometime after that the camel family started moving south. In South America, the family produced llamas, vicuñas, alpacas, and guanacos.

About 2,000,000 years ago, dry land appeared where Bering Strait separates Alaska from Siberia today, and the camels then remaining in the Wyoming-Utah region went north and west into China and Central Asia.

Apparently the conditions that made the camels restless in their original territory finally became unbearable, for they disappeared entirely from what is now the United States.

Today, three different types of camels live in three different worlds. There are unhumped llamas, vicuñas, alpacas, and guanacos in South America. There are two-humped camels in Asia. There are one-humped camels in Africa and the Middle East.

Camels obviously are adventurous beasts. But their dispersion is in part due to man, who domesticated them.

The inspiration for this short story of evolution came from the new Stein and Day book, *Three Billion Years of Life*, written in French by André de Cayeux and translated into English by Joyce E. Clemow. Dr. Malcolm McKenna, Frick Curator of the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology, American Museum of Natural History, advised on the accompanying sketches, which were drawn for SR by Doug Anderson. Scan them left to right, beginning on the opposite page.

—WILL JONATHAN.

