Mirroring England? Milton Keynes, decline and the English landscape

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November 2017

School of Historical and Philosophical Studies

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Abstract

This thesis traces representations of the new town Milton Keynes in British media, politics and popular culture from 1967-1992. From the time of its designation, Milton Keynes has been represented symbolically in terms of the ideologies which were understood to have created it, both in terms of political ideologies and particular theories of urban planning practice. While early responses to the town reflect concerns with its potential to over-determine the landscape, representations of Milton Keynes quickly adapted to the economic and political changes of the mid-1970s to reflect anxieties about the role of postwar socialism in having generated a form of national decline, and to have inscribed this decline on the landscape itself through the postwar housing and reconstruction policies which had led to Milton Keynes’ designation. By 1978, the town was consistently understood as symbolising a technocratic positivism opposed to ideals of national heritage, and therefore as undesirable and foreign, whether as a threat or as a “joke”. Even as it adapted to the political and ideological climate of post-1979 Britain through reimagining its public image and administration, in media and political representations Milton Keynes continued to function as a symbol of a failed Keynesian postwar reconstructionist state, and of the ideal of newness itself. As such it has also acted as an ongoing reminder of a political alternative to neoliberalism and its legitimating cultural narratives; it has therefore continued to challenge what and where can be considered a normal, typical or ideal representation of English and British landscape, and how particular landscape forms are understood as containers of both people and of national heritage. Historicising Milton Keynes’ reception and meanings helps render explicit the “common sense” which underpins judgements about ideal landscapes, the role and value of heritage in narratives of Englishness and Britishness, and how these symbolic identities are made and remade.
Declaration

I. That this thesis comprises only my work towards the PhD except where indicated,

II. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

III. The thesis is not more than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies, and appendices.

Signed

Lauren Piko
August 2017
Acknowledgements

I am lucky enough to have many people to thank for their support during the writing of this thesis. First and most profound thanks are due to my supervisors Professor Andrew May and Dr David Nichols. Their incisive, constructive and critical engagement with my ideas helped spur my intellectual growth and created a supportive and stimulating environment in which to develop confidence in my skills and voice as a researcher. Their unflinching support and personal encouragement in the face of substantial obstacles was crucial to this thesis ever making it to this stage, for which I will always be deeply grateful. I would also like to thank Professor Antonia Finnane for so generously engaging with my work and ideas; her wisdom and insights have been formative in developing and challenging my intellectual horizons.

During my visits to the UK in 2014 and 2015 I was privileged to be able to consult several regional and national archives; I would particularly like to thank Catherine McIntyre of Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre and the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies along with her colleagues at these centres for their dedication and vast professional expertise. Thanks are also due to the archivists and staff at the British Library, the British National Archives, the University of Reading’s Museum of Rural Life archive, and Milton Keynes Central Library’s Local Studies Centre. These trips were made possible through the University of Melbourne's travel grants programmes, the Australian Postgraduate Award, and the Wyselaskie Scholarship in Modern British History, and I thank their relevant committees for their support in enabling me to carry out this research.

The thesis was generously proofread by Cameron and Genevieve Pikó, whose creativity, humour and perseverance have long been personal inspirations as well as intellectual ones. Thanks are also due to academic fellow-travellers, especially Chloe Ward, Evan Smith, Polly Text and Zara Bain, whose solidarity, collaboration, and kindness have been continual sources of support and inspiration. I must also thank Paul Piko, for encouraging my love of words, history, and an appreciation and love of British culture.

Finally, I would like to thank Milton Keynes, its planners and residents, past and present. In the fiftieth anniversary year of Milton Keynes' designation, the town's resilience and tenacity shows no signs of abating, and it is as welcoming and beautiful a community now as in 2009 when it was all too briefly my home. One former resident in particular deserves especial thanks in ways that resist neat articulation; Alan Driscoll, without whom I would never have encountered not just Milton Keynes, but so many other things besides.
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# Abbreviations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLC</td>
<td>Bletchley Local Council</td>
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<td>BUDSU</td>
<td>British Urban Development Study Unit</td>
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<td>BCC</td>
<td>Buckinghamshire County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCCS</td>
<td>Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CES</td>
<td>Centre for Environmental Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNT</td>
<td>Commission for New Towns</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLC</td>
<td>Greater London Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLP</td>
<td>Greater London Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICS</td>
<td>Institute of Community Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGSM</td>
<td>Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDWFWB</td>
<td>Llewelyn-Davies, Weeks, Forestier-Walker and Bor</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCC</td>
<td>London County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDDC</td>
<td>London Docklands Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MKDC</td>
<td>Milton Keynes Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTC</td>
<td>New Towns Consortium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAUS</td>
<td>School of Advanced Urban Study, University of Bristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKBA</td>
<td>United Kingdom Border Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCL</td>
<td>University College London</td>
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Introduction

What Milton Keynes does is throw into sharper relief the way we live now, and the things that are wrong with it are a reflection of national problems. In any case, it would be wrong to expect it to transcend the society which created it.¹

Once an affective quality has come to reside in something, it is often assumed as without history. We need to give this residence a history.²

I came to Milton Keynes fresh. In 2009, I moved there from Melbourne, drawn as so many others were by low rental prices and proximity to London; I had no other preconceptions or information about what the town was like. On arrival, there was little about it that, to someone raised in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, seemed either unusual or controversial. It was suburban in style and density, the houses surrounded by gardens. The buildings were all built in the last 40 years, and its main roads were relatively straight. The glass-walled monoliths of the city’s Shopping Building, cinema complexes, and train station, while striking, were familiar suburban commuter landscape features to my untrained eye. Perhaps naïvely, I did not realise these features were controversial, especially in relationship to their English context, despite my familiarity with the deep-rooted elite fear and mockery of suburbia that infused popular culture in Australia and beyond.³ I had just completed a four-

year British history degree in Melbourne, but had never visited Britain; my knowledge had been wholly mediated by text and distance. The idea that Milton Keynes’ newness would be so problematic in an ever-increasingly suburban country did not cross my mind, and my embodied experience of moving through its streets was simply to feel at home.  

So it was that Milton Keynes mediated and shaped my first direct experiences of living in England. In the following months, as I travelled the country, met new people, started a job in affluent north-west London, the inevitable question would be asked: “Where do you live?” With what in retrospect seems a deep naivety, I would simply reply, “Milton Keynes.” The following responses taught me more about Milton Keynes than I had learned in weeks of living there. I cannot remember any favourable responses; a cognitive bias may be at work, whereby any benign or more tactful responses have fallen through the cracks of my memory. Yet I cannot deny the sheer number of individuals who expressed emotions somewhere on a spectrum of mild disgust to incredulity.

“Urgh.”

“Why? That’s not really England.”

“Concrete cows and roundabouts, huh.”

“Is it really that bad?”

“When are you moving?”

Most awkward was when people would simply laugh and change the subject, as if glossing over an indiscretion. Emanating from many of these responses was a sense of pity;
I didn’t know any better than to live there, and as a foreigner, the decision to do so must have been made on faulty or incomplete knowledge. If I followed these judgements up with questions, such as “what’s the problem with Concrete Cows?”, the answers invariably used essential language: “They’re just wrong.” “They’re just bad.” “It’s just awful.” By failing to demonstrate sufficient embarrassment about where I lived, I had unwittingly committed a faux pas, the exact meaning of which was so “common sense”, that it was too obvious to need full articulation.\(^5\) I was deeply familiar with Australian “cultural cringe” but had thought it was a strictly colonial experience; the idea that in England I was still expected to harbour apologetic self-consciousness, even embarrassment, about where I lived was alien to me.\(^6\) Moreover the specific reasoning behind this cringing was implied, rather than explicated. This was the work of tacit cultural knowledge, a shared, unspoken understanding which could be evoked obliquely, by association, without needing to be fully explicated. Without access to the nuances of this “metonymic slide” of associations and meanings, I did not understand the affective response.\(^7\)

**From personal to political: Milton Keynes and the historiography of postwar Britain**

This thesis had its genesis in those quizzical and disgusted looks. Its purpose is to render explicit the meanings behind them, and to contextualise them within a longer history of how ideal landscapes have been represented in modern British culture. Most of those who

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responded with such displeasure to my mention of Milton Keynes had never been there; their ideas were second-hand, mediated through popular culture and media. I soon learned my anecdotal experience was far from unrepresentative, as I encountered ever more jokes and derisory comments about the town in print media, literature and popular culture; from jokes to newspaper articles to pulp novels, many of these chance discoveries have become sources for this thesis. This bank of “everyday” popular cultural reference was not, however, the type of canonical historical material which I had become familiar with during my undergraduate degree.

Much of this education had drawn on the broadly-focused general social histories of postwar Britain published from the 1980s onwards, some running to their fifth and sixth editions by the time I cited them in my first essays. These histories were largely concerned with explaining how and why Britain had “declined” since 1945, explained through models of revolution and counter-revolution, from socialism to Thatcherism. The internal contradictions and omissions of these histories’ logic, of rising living standards haunted by obsessions with relative decline, with immigration standing in for the wider cultural impact of a shrinking empire, and their insistence on an internal cohesion of “British” experience across its constituent nations and demographics, did not yet appear problematic to me. The influence of these books, however, was significant, especially their organising narratives of

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10 These concerns will be explicated further below, however for an overview see David Edgerton, *Warfare state: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-7.
revolution and counter-revolution, and the universal assumption that decline in national status was the most significant feature of the postwar years. Indeed, in these works the new town programmes appear mainly as an example of wider Attlee government policy, rather than any topic for investigation in themselves.\textsuperscript{11}

This limited coverage is notably in spite of the extreme scale of postwar state-sponsored urban planning policies, and the drastic changes they wrought on Britain's geography and demographics over several decades. These have been more substantially explored in specialist urban planning histories and social histories of postwar housing. These works present the New Towns Act of 1946 as part of a complex and ambitious reformist postwar agenda, addressing the problems of decaying public housing stock, urban overcrowding, and industrial centralisation through constructing self-sufficient planned towns ringed by green belts.\textsuperscript{12} Despite the garden-city goals of providing the ideal balance of urban and rural lifestyles, many early postwar new towns replicated the problems faced by early garden cities: tight master-planning, mass population movement, under-provision of public leisure and social resources, and disproportionate population by upper-working- and middle-classes helped facilitate social homogeneity and isolation.\textsuperscript{13}


This standardised progressive narrative, of the tensions between good technocratic intentions and fraught execution, has tended to present Milton Keynes as an attempt to correct this imbalance in planners’ visions and the realities they created. In this “mythic” planning narrative, Milton Keynes appears as a potential solution to the problems of earlier planned spaces and their failings, emerging from the Labour governments’ consultations with sociological research think-tank the Centre for Environmental Studies (CES) which had informed the designation of the second New Towns Act in 1965. This experimental and sociologically aware planning focus would, in this narrative, be borne out when in 1967 Milton Keynes was designated with an unprecedented size and population target, and with its chief planners the CES-affiliated firm Llewelyn-Davies, Weeks, Forestier-Walker and Bor (LDWFWB).

In their Plan for Milton Keynes, published in 1970, these initial ambitions were substantiated with a bold new vision of what urban planning could and should do to create ideal cities. The purpose of the plan was explicitly not to impose “any fixed idea of how people should live”, but rather to provide only just enough structure that the residents of the new town would be able to adapt its administration, aesthetics, and economy to fit the evolving needs of the future, whose form “could not be determined.” Its main formal elements remained controversial in spite of this openness to change, particularly its low


15 A useful overview of this planning narrative can be found in Margo Huxley, “Problematizing Planning: Critical and Effective Genealogies,” in The Ashgate research companion to planning theory: conceptual challenges for spatial planning, ed. Jean Hillier and Patsy Healey (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2010); Some limited consideration of this approach in forming Milton Keynes’ “mythology” can be found in Finnegan, Tales of the city, 24-33. Mark Clapson, Anglo-American Crossroads: Urban Planning and Research in Britain, 1940-2010 (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 42.


density, and its decentralised layout along a grid road system. At the same time, unprecedented monitoring and feedback mechanisms were to be in place to allow residents and businesses to interact with the town’s administration and shape its forms according to their needs and desires. This combination of flexibility as future-proofing and flexibility as a rejection of determinism nonetheless relied on some controversial aesthetic choices, from the wide-spaced grid road system to low-rise, low-density and decentralised land use.

Considering Milton Keynes’ overtly, deliberately experimental urban planning model, rejecting both historic urban models and heavily master-planned postwar new towns, it is striking that political and cultural responses to its provocations have not been treated as integral to the telling of the town’s history. Yet Milton Keynes’ reception in British politics and popular culture has remained largely unexplored in histories of the town. While passing reference is often made in academic histories to the town’s negative reception, this is consistently done in a fleeting manner, with the content of the negativity deliberately unexplored and explicitly rejected as inaccurate.

The historiography of Milton Keynes has remained fairly limited, and until recently was dominated by planning and ultra-local histories whose chief concerns have been the town’s planning and construction, without reference to the wider context of the town’s reception other than to deflect criticism; these texts have been specifically interested in measuring the town’s relative “success” as a planning experiment without reference to the town’s reputation, representations, or meanings. Planning-historical narratives of Milton Keynes’ development have referred to the town in the narrow context of its culmination of

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the new town programme, focused on debating the relative “success” of the town and noting any potential lessons for urban planning as a discipline.20

This utilitarian approach has been developed by the major academic social historian of Milton Keynes, Mark Clapson. Clapson’s histories of postwar urban planning and new towns have been path breaking in their focus on the experiences of new town residents and administrators, and have helped bridge the disciplinary gap between social history and planning histories by addressing the lived experience of new towns, and of Milton Keynes in particular. In doing so Clapson frequently invokes the existence of negative journalistic or cultural assessments of Milton Keynes as justification for his work, essentially presenting his histories as efforts to disprove widespread cultural attitudes to the town he sees as false.21 The motivations for these representations, and their potential political implications, are of less concern for Clapson than the overarching issue of “accurate”, that is to say positive, representations.22 Nonetheless these corrective visions are predicated on the stated existence of cultural antipathies and negative mythologies about the town, the content of which is imagined to be inherently inaccurate, irrelevant and historically unproductive.

Due to Clapson’s dominance of the field, this refusal to historicise negative attitudes to the town has been replicated in other works relying on his research. Ruth Finnegan and Adrian Franklin, for example, in their respective studies of Milton Keynes have dismissed


21 Clapson addresses Milton Keynes in most of his published works; however the most sustained focus on the town can be found in Clapson, Dobbin, and Waterman, Best Laid Plans; Clapson, Invincible green suburbs, 5-13; Suburban century, 5-10; A Social History of Milton Keynes: Middle England/Edge City (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Anglo-American Crossroads; “Introduction,” in The plan for Milton Keynes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

Milton Keynes’ negative cultural reception as due to changing “fashions”, with “fashions” imagined as abstract natural forces rather than as historically and politically specific phenomena.23 This has reinforced a sense of the town’s separateness and inability to be considered within wider national narratives. Official histories of Milton Keynes, written with heavy involvement of former Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) staff, largely follow a similar pattern by refusing to engage with the content of negative representations of the town; as for Clapson, mentioning them in passing in order to correct them is the only context in which they are addressed at all.24

This tendency to strip out political, social, and cultural context from attitudes to urban planning is, however, a characteristic of much planning historical literature. In those instances where long-range planning historical narratives have attempted to account for changing attitudes to urban planning as a discipline and a political practice, they have tended to use very broad characterisations, referring to wider trends or themes such as “generational change”, changing “fashion”, or changes in belief structures, without accounting for or tracing the processes by which these occurred.25 These nebulous changes are generally described using the language of natural, inevitable changes rather than highlighting the specific and deliberate historical processes by which changes in attitudes developed over time, as for example in Robert Freestone’s depoliticised vision of “the change in zeitgeist” from 1973 onwards in Western political culture.26 This persistent tendency to imagine postwar planned urban spaces, and changing attitudes to them, as divorced from specific, traceable national historical contexts has helped reinforce the gulfs between planning

23 Examples include Dominic Sandbrook, White heat: a history of Britain in the swinging sixties (London: Little Brown, 2006); Finnegan, Tales of the city, 42-45; Adrian Franklin, City life (London: Sage, 2010), 71-73.
24 The origins of this approach will be historicised in Chapter 8 of this thesis. For example see Bendixson and Platt, Image and reality; Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes; “Introduction.”
academic narratives of disciplinary “success”, whether in Milton Keynes or more broadly, and wider cultural, political and media histories of the period in which these planned landscapes were received and understood.

Declinism, status, nationhood, and postwar landscapes

Elsewhere, critical historiographies of postwar British narratives of national status have created a sympathetic environment for study of postwar landscape meanings. Histories of “declinism”, focused on British preoccupation with relative national status after 1945, have developed from the work of Richard English and Michael Kenny, who argued that ideological beliefs in Britain’s national decline functioned historically as distinct cultural phenomena separate to, and often disproportionate to, any empirical data about actual decline.27 Jim Tomlinson’s major work The Politics of Decline went on to outline the postwar political history of declinism, suggesting that it performed a separate political and cultural function apart from any economic realities, taking historically specific forms in the postwar period.28 In his subsequent works, Tomlinson has conceptualised declinism as an ideology which privileges a belief in the recent, reversible phenomenon of British relative economic decline compared to international competitors, whose causes are wholly internal to British culture and politics, and which must be urgently diagnosed to prevent potentially irrevocable or even terminal damage to Britain’s international standing, power and integrity.29

28 Tomlinson, Politics of Decline, 2.
The focus on the post-1945 period is not to suggest that there was any absence of “golden-days” nostalgia at work earlier than that, but rather to note that the purposive form of declinist political thinking and its overall direction towards curing postwar social ills took on historically specific forms during this period. While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political debates about the role of the state and the desirability of political reform developed with reference to imperial models and constitutional precedence, postwar declinism was focused primarily on criticism of recent cultural changes, with longer historical lenses implied rather than fully explicated. While Tomlinson has primarily investigated these attitudes in postwar political rhetoric, on both the right and the left, these attitudes have also been analysed in relation to broader cultural phenomena such as the “two cultures” debate between the academic arts and sciences, and popular cultural representations of nationhood throughout the postwar period.

This diagnostic culture necessarily interpreted changes from the imagined state of power and prestige to be corruptions, aberrations or rejections of that status, and thence as potentially implicated in decline if not having potentially caused it. Tomlinson has characterised these most frequently blamed social groups or trends as the “usual suspects”: these often included a weak managerial culture; excessively powerful trade unionism; the incomplete or stunted development of British capitalism; and new, decadent cultural traits.


30 The distinctive form of eighteenth and nineteenth century narratives of decline, particularly with reference to prescriptivist uses of history, is described in J. G. A. Pocock, The ancient constitution and the feudal law: a study of English historical thought in the seventeenth century, a reissue with a retrospect (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Vernon, Modern Britain, 25-35; 43-70.


32 Tomlinson, Politics of Decline, 21-23; Frequently referenced examples include Arthur Koestler and Henry Fairlie, eds., Suicide of a nation? An enquiry into the state of Britain today (London: Hutchinson, 1963); Peter Jenkins, Anatomy of decline: the political journalism of Peter Jenkins (London: Cassell, 1995); Wiener, English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit.
developing from the “permissive society” of increasing liberalisation and welfare provision.\textsuperscript{33} Overwhelmingly, these diagnoses were not followed by proposing explicit solutions; rather, reversion to earlier states, contemporaneous with the imagined period of historical prestige, were more usually implied. With regard to trade unionism’s imagined weakening of Britain’s economy and status, for example, the implication was usually that reverting workplace rights to lower historical levels would boost productivity, leading to greater economic and national strength.

The major limitation to Tomlinson’s focus on relative economic decline as a key index of fallen prestige is that cultural responses to absolute imperial decline are less substantially accounted for within his schema of declinism.\textsuperscript{34} While Kenny and English’s initial call for historicisation of declinism involved accounting for both absolute and relative decline, anxieties about falling international status, and belief in prestige and greatness as desirable and reattainable, have been more fully considered in tandem with declining imperial power in the works of Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and other scholars associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).\textsuperscript{35} Gilroy has theorised the forms of postwar imperial nostalgia, whether through Second World War triumphalism or the excesses of monarchical pageantry, as “postcolonial melancholia”, where the decolonisation of former imperial conquest is felt as an absolute loss that produces a grief for lost prestige and identity, but is unable to be fully mourned as it remains repressed, displaced into racialised anti-

\textsuperscript{33} Tomlinson, “Thrice Denied,” 243–46. Earlier works theorise this more loosely as “blamed groups”, see Tomlinson, Politics of Decline, 2.
\textsuperscript{34} “Decline of the Empire and Economic Decline” 203-04. Tomlinson’s recent work posits an alternative metanarrative framework of deindustrialisation, which also posits an insular national framework. See “De-industrialization Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History,” Twentieth Century British History 27, no. 1 (2016).
immigration politics and into the compulsive veneration of past prestige. Stuart Hall has examined this specifically with reference to narratives of national heritage, highlighting the political implications of constructing deliberately narrow, insular and exclusive models of historical value which inhibit political challenge or correction. Read together, these overlapping theorisations of postwar British attitudes to status point to a profound preoccupation with defining, defending and upholding particular visions of prestige and power imagined as deriving from the historical past.

Through drawing on political histories of declinism, as well as CCCS studies of cultures of inclusion and exclusion, Joe Moran has come closer to historicising the ideological processes at work in responses to Milton Keynes. Moran has repeatedly used Milton Keynes as a case study to challenge beliefs in the ahistoricity of everyday British life. His *Reading the Everyday* uses Milton Keynes as an example of tendencies to view postwar landscapes as ahistorical and unable to generate valuable meanings, and suggests negative responses to the town not only derive from a backlash to urban planning but also a backlash against state planning as an economic policy. Elsewhere he describes this relationship as symbolic, arguing that postwar planning has, through its negative reputation, functioned as “visual reinforcement[s] of Thatcherite ideology.” These insights are, however, relative asides in

39 Examples include *Reading the Everyday*; “The Strange Birth of Middle England,” *Political Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2005); *Queuing for beginners*; *On Roads*.
40 *Reading the Everyday*, 118-19.
41 *Queuing for beginners*, 414.
Moran’s works addressed in the pursuit of broader arguments, and as such do not receive substantial attention in themselves. While the association between political responses to specific postwar planned sites and contemporary political ideology has been receiving greater attention in recent years, these have tended to focus on brutalist sites, and to maintain a limited scope historically. This shows the potential for these types of explorations of political meanings and postwar spaces but has meant that the highly specific case of Milton Keynes has not yet been systematically investigated.

There has not yet been, then, a substantial, long-lens, historical analysis of Milton Keynes’ reception and representation in national British media and popular culture, which locates the town as potentially meaningful within wider political and cultural contexts. This thesis seeks to address this profound gap in the history not only of Milton Keynes itself, but of postwar cultural understandings of ideal landscapes in relation to national identities. This thesis traces the history of Milton Keynes in British media and popular culture from 1967, the time of the town’s designation, to 1992, when the town’s Development Corporation (hereforward MKDC) was wound up. It presents attitudes to Milton Keynes as dynamic, competing narratives, shaped by highly specific political and cultural contexts, and in a constant process of reiteration and reinvention. Amongst these influences it can be seen that perceptions of Milton Keynes have been shaped by and helped reinforce other political narratives, including imperial nostalgia, declinist status anxieties, post-industrial grief, and the rise of neoliberal attitudes to the role of the state. Through close reading of specific textual iterations responding to Milton Keynes, and placing these within contexts of wider attitudes to landscape, to the role of the state, and the state of the nation, this thesis seeks to create a

narrative that not only historicises a town often seen to be outside a national ideal, but to provide models for the integration of Milton Keynes and postwar urban planning in general into wider stories of postwar England and Britain. These goals are to de-essentialise Milton Keynes’ meanings; to historicise them; and to contextualise them in relation to the political landscape of Britain, both literal and abstract.

Cultural history through cultural difference

Joe Moran’s theoretical engagement with Gramscian-inflected British cultural studies methodologies, via the work of Stuart Hall, is a fruitful starting point for its focus on judgements of value as historically contingent and as embedded in ideological processes. Hall’s work, both in collaboration at Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and individually, was consistently interested with the political functions of media representations and individual and collective social behaviours, whether as reinforcing, reflecting or challenging wider ideological processes. This took Antonio Gramsci’s conceptualisation of the “spontaneous philosophy” of everyday life, mapping the transmission and maintenance of cultural hegemony through iterative processes. Framing everyday cultural iterations and practices in this way provides a means to render abstract ideologies more tangible, to historicise them, and also to challenge them; moreover, it also

43 See Moran’s approach to Gramsci via Hall in Moran, Interdisciplinarity, 49-54; “History, memory and the everyday,” Reading the Everyday, 12; “Stand Up and Be Counted,” 174-76; key examples of this development in Hall’s thinking are Stuart Hall et al., Policing the crisis: mugging, the state, and law and order (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978); Stuart Hall, “The Great Moving Right Show,” Marxism Today (January 1979); Hall and Du Gay, Questions of Cultural Identity, Stuart Hall, “The Neoliberal Revolution,” Cultural Studies 25, no. 6 (2011).
creates entry points into meanings that are considered ahistorical, emphasising both their contingency and their generative political power.\footnote{This is consistent with my reading of the Prison Notebooks, however note a critique of Hall’s interpretation in Michèle Barrett, The politics of truth: from Marx to Foucault (Cambridge: Polity Press; Blackwell Publishers, 1991). The development of this thinking can be seen in Stuart Hall, Encoding and decoding in the television discourse, Stencilled occasional paper: Media series SP no. 7 (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., Resistance through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain (London: Routledge, 1975); Hall et al., Policing the crisis; Stuart Hall et al., Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79 (Birmingham: Routledge; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1980).}

The CCCS tradition, drawing on Stanley Cohen’s “moral panic” theory of mediation, proposed a hierarchical “signification spiral” model to describe the escalation of meanings through their becoming implicated in ever larger symbolic crises of identity and state power.\footnote{Stanley Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2011); reference will be made to this most recent revised edition, however see the development of Cohen’s thinking in Folk devils and moral panics : the creation of the Mods and Rockers, Sociology and the modern world (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972); Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, The manufacture of news; social problems, deviance and the mass media, Communication and society (London: Constable, 1973). ; cf. Cohen’s influence in Hall and Jefferson, Resistance through Rituals; Hall et al., Policing the crisis; Hall, The Hard Road to Renewal; see a 2013 reassessment of Cohen in Bill Ogersby, “Stanley Cohen's Folk Devils and Moral Panics revisited,” in Reassessing 1970s Britain, ed. Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton, and Pat Thane (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).} This schematic has some limits in accounting for specific processes that conduct meanings across boundaries, and, like Cohen’s model to which it is indebted, theorises a singular, unidirectional escalation of moral panic.\footnote{Hall et al., Policing the crisis, 216-23.} While suited to the shorter-time-framed subcultural studies typically associated with CCCS analyses, this model is not especially useful for wholesale adoption to understand the process by which Milton Keynes came to attract such resilient negative political associations. This is due to the more complex trajectory of Milton Keynes’ negative cultural reception, which cannot be read purely as an exponential increase in hostility, though there certainly were spikes in negative representations throughout the period under study.

It also addresses a particular type of negative media association and does not fully account for the full range of types of negative meanings that Milton Keynes has become associated with, particularly the ridicule, mockery and derision which prevailed alongside
more serious implications of the town into national crisis narratives. At the same time, the longer-range narrative of this thesis does not match the unidirectional short-term model of the signification spiral; rather, Milton Keynes’ negative media representations never truly amount to a moral panic in themselves, and they fluctuate in intensity as well as taking different ideological connotations at different times.

A complementary methodological approach to emotions and national identity which better accounts for these political complexities can be found in Sara Ahmed’s work on the cultural politics of emotion.48 Ahmed similarly insists on the inherently political nature of value judgements, but does so within a Marxian psychoanalytic perspective, more closely aligned to Gilroy’s than Hall’s.49 Ahmed also locates the generation of nationhood and identity values in repeated cultural iterations, but her concept of “metonymic slide” more precisely accounts for the transference of meaning through affective judgements that charge particular signs and render their meanings “sticky” and resilient.50 The act of symbolically associating particular groups and values, and then locating these in an oppositional dichotomy of “us” and “them” definitions, is for Ahmed the organisational act which privileges and encodes affective responses as political definitions; as these are repeated, the organising criteria accrue the charge of affective language used to describe loved, hated, or disgusting groups or acts.51 In this sense, Ahmed’s work proposes a longer historical lens on the tacit cultural logics Raymond Williams referred to in contemporary culture as “structures of feeling”.52

50 Ibid., 4, 12, 45, 87, 91-92.
51 Ibid.
52 Williams, Marxism and Literature, 128-35.
While this conceptualisation is primarily concerned with embodied and social collective identities, it is also fundamentally relational and emplaced, pointing to a broader utility in defining collective identity on an abstract and spatial level as well as through bodies and groups. It also inherently involves the temporal unfolding of iterative processes which lend themselves, in similar ways to CCCS analyses, to applications to historical research. Indeed, in part through its use of psychoanalytic models of identity construction, Ahmed’s theorisation of “affective economies” closely resembles Catherine Hall’s models of meaning construction in her histories of eighteenth-century imperial culture.53 It is important to note, however, that these theoretical considerations of meaning generation and the political charging of symbolism were specifically developed with reference to post-1945 British culture and as such are not external, universal theorisations developed outside of the subject matter of this thesis. Rather, these conceptualisations of political meaning are deliberately and overtly implicated in the same political narratives which they seek to theorise.

There is another more visceral dimension which underpins the cultural historical methodologies of this thesis. Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre* defined the tools of cultural history through entering into and exploiting the unfamiliar, untranslatable elements of culture, such as “jokes” whose punchlines no longer translate, as entry points to networks of tacit historical meanings.54 Darnton’s famous experience of reading about a “hilarious” historical cat massacre he could not identify the humour in was bounded by the textual expectations and professional context of historical study.55 Unlike Darnton, I experienced that exteriority from a “joke” first-hand, in the present, where the punchline was somehow related to the place I lived. Moreover, this gulf in meaning had only been exposed after I had

55 Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre* 77-78; Ortolano, *The two cultures controversy*, 7; Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 4-6.
already crossed geographical boundaries between Melbourne and Milton Keynes, through navigating the bureaucratic boundaries of the UK Border Agency. The possibility of perceiving Milton Keynes’ meanings as constructed and historical rather than innate, therefore arose from my initial inability to recognise specific cultural languages about ideal landscapes. My subjective, lived experience as a white settler colony migrant to the metropole rendered its common sense uncommon to me, opening the potential for seeing an ahistorical town as having historical meanings.

Sources, Britishness and Englishness

In order to trace the history of Milton Keynes’ representation in British politics and popular culture, this thesis draws on two major bodies of source material. The first is material generated by external media and popular cultural sources which represents Milton Keynes and its wider context; this material includes print media, television, film, radio and popular music generated outside of Milton Keynes and intended for, or which posited itself as relevant to, a substantial regional or national audience. Such material is examined to trace the way in which Milton Keynes was understood and represented in a range of national media over time. The second body of material concerns Milton Keynes’ official representation by MKDC, including plans, marketing and public relations materials, along with archival records of MKDC marketing policies and responses to media criticisms. Reading these two bodies of material against each other not only facilitates a deeper contextualisation of Milton Keynes’ meanings but helps locate these within an evolving dialogue, where official and

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56 UK immigration and visas were handled by an independent statutory body, the UK Border Agency (UKBA), until 2013. These functions have since been absorbed by the Home Office who continue to administer them at the time of writing. “UK Border Agency,” UK Government Digital Service, https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-border-agency. Cf. Greg Dening, Performances (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1996); Beach crossings: voyaging across times, cultures and self (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2004); Readings/Writings (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998).

unofficial, serious and satirical depictions developed in dialogue, influencing each other over time. In addition, these materials are contextualised with reference to wider political and cultural historical sources, particularly novels, television, music, media, government policies and other popular cultural sources focused on the spatial politics of national status and identity.

This thesis specifically does not attempt to trace the way in which Milton Keynes has been understood by its residents, nor how MKDC communicated and cultivated a sense of the town’s internal cohesion and identity over time, though these areas are worthy of further academic study to consider the impact of national reception on local experiences. The planning history and development of the form of Milton Keynes as an urban space has been well researched and documented elsewhere, and appears only in this thesis with reference to how these changes impacted the way in which Milton Keynes was represented more broadly, and how it was understood in relation to its form. Rather, the intention is to trace the ways in which Milton Keynes was understood and represented in a national context, both by MKDC itself and through wider national media sources, in order to explicate the relationship between these representations and wider belief systems about the value of postwar British landscapes during the period of Milton Keynes’ development.

By drawing substantially on national print media, this means that in practice print media sources based in London are dominant in the materials studied, including broadsheet and tabloid newspapers along with magazines and popular periodicals. This is partly due to archival biases towards national papers of record but also reflects the concentration of power and capital in London generating such material, and the tendency of south-eastern English economic and political power structures to imagine themselves representing a cohesive and singular national whole. Where possible, nationally distributed media from outside of
London, including television and newspapers, have been consulted, however access to these types of materials has been substantially archivally constrained.

This elite London focus is replicated to some extent in the popular cultural sources examined, including television programmes, radio shows, novels, plays and popular music. The expressive conventions of these formats more specifically foreground the symbolic language and associative thinking which appears latently in more ‘objective’ media sources; however these materials, especially those considered “light entertainment”, have been inconsistently archived. This is especially the case for television and radio, where more popular, widely disseminated programmes were often not preserved while more niche, elite-oriented materials were archived disproportionate to their audience size or influence. While drawing on a broad range of source types is attempted to circumvent these biases as much as is possible, it remains significant that the material examined is largely filtered through London elite media culture. This does not downplay the significance of the findings; however it frames them within a specific context of London media dominance, and highlights the significance of south-eastern English cultural power in the textual construction of these political narratives of inclusion and nationhood.

The related issues of national identity with reference to British and English urban forms is a recurring theme throughout this thesis, and these notions of nationhood are largely explored as emerging from the specific London-centric elite political and cultural texts that form the bulk of this thesis’ source materials. Much as these sources are interrogated to understand their construction of Milton Keynes’ identity, so too is it understood that these are inherently partial textual representation that emerges from culturally and geographically constrained groups, but which often purport to represent a singular national vision. These sources have a tendency, as will be noted throughout this thesis, to universalise their perspective and equate it with that of an imagined national audience, both in terms of
England, and in terms of Britain as a whole. Where these constructions of national values are explored in this thesis, it is to deliberately engage with how particular politically and culturally dominant south-eastern English conceptualisations of ideal nationhood were constructed, particularly with reference to parts of the country imagined to be inside or outside of these ideas. Such concepts of Englishness and Britishness are understood as elite weaponised ideological representations rather than singular facts, and as inherently unstable, unrepresentative political tools which generate narratives of inclusion and exclusion, both within and across geographical boundaries.

Similarly, the terms “city” and “town” are treated in this thesis not as fixed, immutable and quantifiable categories of landscape organisation, but as charged descriptors which encode values particular to historical contexts. In this sense, the intention of this thesis is to contextualise and historicise specific uses of “city”, “town”, “urban” and “rural” as ideals and relative statements of value, and to interrogate their uses over time. In full recognition of this context, however, I will refer to Milton Keynes as a town rather than a city throughout this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, Milton Keynes was designated under the New Towns Act of 1965, therefore it is formally a new town, and it has never received royal city designation. Secondly, this aspect of Milton Keynes’ origins has been crucial to how it has been represented and understood. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the concept of Milton Keynes as a city has been primarily promoted by MKDC, in a way which sought to encapsulate an aspirational point of difference from existing new towns. Elsewhere, Milton Keynes’ seemingly inescapable association with its new town origins has been intrinsic to its representations throughout its history, and therefore using the term “town” is intended to underscore this implicit frame of reference throughout this text. Again, whether Milton Keynes is or is not a city in functional terms is less significant to understanding its meanings on a national level, as how and why such categorisations are used to represent it.
Chapter summaries

Chapter 1 provides historical and theoretical background to the reception of Milton Keynes by tracing two major themes in elite British political, media and popular cultural representations of ideal landscapes from the nineteenth-century onwards. By locating the history of urban planning within this context of politicised landscape symbolism, this chapter highlights the contrast between positivist, technocratic interventionist models of landscape value, and a more conservative preservationist tendency that interprets value as deriving from an idealised version of tradition and changelessness. This conflict is traced through twentieth-century urban and land use policies, locating significant cultural shifts in attitudes to landscape value in relation to the escalating political influence of technocratic expertise in postwar British policy-making.

Chapter 2 describes the early planning of Milton Keynes and its initial national media representations between 1967 and 1972, from the designation of Milton Keynes, the publication of its Interim Report in 1969, to the publication of the final Plan for Milton Keynes in 1970. These crucial stages each saw the development of foundational symbolic tropes that linked Milton Keynes to wider cultural debates about the role of cities and the ideal form of the English countryside. These included concerns about Milton Keynes’ determining capacity, utilising symbolism of fluidity and overspill; and about its relationship to idealised English landscapes both rural and urban, understood largely with reference to foreignness in general and to resembling Los Angeles in particular. This chapter also examines the establishment of MKDC’s educationally focused advertising strategy, intended to correct inaccurate representations of the town, and traces the development of a dialogue between MKDC and mass media representations.
Chapter 3 locates Milton Keynes’ representations in the context of the developing backlash to urban planning between 1972 and 1976, which at this time was chiefly focused on the tower block as a symbol of socialist excess and determinism. While MKDC attempted to position Milton Keynes as a revisionist form of urban planning which transcended all determinism, including that of tower blocks, I argue that this differentiated view of urban planning was not shared by critics of urban planning, who were increasingly conflating urban planning, planned economics, and the idea of a “Keynesian state”. Milton Keynes thereby appeared increasingly throughout the 1970s as representative of a rejection of aesthetics, politics and values that has been associated with “greatness”, and thereby also as symbolic of the decline from that state.

Chapter 4 explores how this view became increasingly politicised in the fusion of declinist rhetoric with media constructions of state crisis from 1976 to 1978. In this context, Milton Keynes’ uniqueness and ambition were increasingly viewed as the greatest excess of state planning and as representative of a decaying and obsolete socialism. Fed by a polarised political climate, the declinist tendency towards metonymic symbolism and cultures of ‘reading’ abstract national values through landscape forms coalesced in reportage on Milton Keynes and the challenges of its early development. In this way, the collapsed causalities and metonymic logic of declinism, and the polarised urgency generated by viewing the British state as experiencing a crisis of governance, helped cement existing tendencies towards reading Milton Keynes as representing the political climate which created it.

Chapter 5 examines the evolution of this logic in the furore around Milton Keynes’ public art through 1978 and 1979. Through coverage of Liz Leyh’s public artworks ‘the Concrete Cows’ from late 1978 onwards, Milton Keynes’ critical media representation moved away from presenting the town as a fundamentally serious problem, but rather as a joke, as an inherently ridiculous and laughable form that could not be taken seriously. This transition
between serious challenge and ridiculous joke is traced in relationship to the symbolism of the Concrete Cows during the media build-up to the “Winter of Discontent” in 1979. This chapter argues that the ridiculing of the Concrete Cows not only encapsulated wider longer-term criticisms of urban planning as sterile, but linked these to the idea of “failed” postwar socialism. Reading Milton Keynes, through the Concrete Cows, as so aberrant as to be ridiculous, relied on understanding Milton Keynes as symbolic of state socialist excess.

Chapter 6 focuses on the drastic shift in Milton Keynes’ representations from 1979 to 1986. The opening of the Shopping Building in 1979 spurred MKDC to reframe the town’s marketing away from rational assessments of benefit and towards an aspirational aesthetic which framed the town as a haven from urban decline. This continued with the opening of The Point, Britain’s first multiplex cinema, in 1985. By using an increasingly aggressive advertising strategy, which presented Milton Keynes as a fundamentally non-deterministic, sensorily pleasurable space that could only be understood through the body, MKDC rhetoric was able to refute some of the major criticisms of the town that had developed during the 1970s by rejecting its earlier model of educational marketing. This bold repositioning of Milton Keynes as an idyllic refuge from existing cities nonetheless opened it up to renewed criticism of its inauthenticity, and for aligning itself too overtly with consumer capitalism.

Chapter 7 traces the relationship between Milton Keynes and the idea of the political centre, moderate political ideology, and Middle England, from 1980 to 1988. This chapter locates this within the spatialised identity politics of the first three terms of the Thatcher government. While Milton Keynes was understood as representative of particular forms of ideological compromise, its state-sponsored, planned origins consistently inhibited the town from being fully or comfortably assimilated into the dominant mid-1980s political rhetoric of typical, ordinary Englishness. The very fact of the town’s planned origins and recent
history pointed to the existence of a political alternative which under the Thatcher government was no longer meant to exist.

Chapter 8 looks at the last phase of Milton Keynes’ administration by MKDC from 1988 to 1992. As the town approached its twenty-fifth anniversary and “maturity”, Milton Keynes was still understood as exceptional, as unrepresentative of British landscapes and lifestyles, and yet driven by official PR, the idea of the town as a “success” in spite of its negative reputation was widely represented. Yet this view of Milton Keynes as an unlikely success relied on describing negative representations in order to correct them, which helped to reinforce the perceived starting point of Milton Keynes’ negative cultural perception. Moreover, these narratives of Milton Keynes’ success were thereby necessarily combative, designed to challenge and dismiss less favourable representations, in a way which would influence the historiography. It also obscured the centrality of the town’s flexible rhetoric to its survival, reinforcing the notion that Milton Keynes’ essential meaning and value as a “success” or “failure” was of primary significance rather than its context, reception, evolution and change.

The thesis concludes by examining the implications of Milton Keynes’ negative meanings for the politics of housing and state economic intervention since 1992. I argue that the political function of ascribing negative meanings to Milton Keynes and towns like it has continued to the present day to circumscribe the range of political solutions to ongoing and very real challenges of housing provision and land use regulation. If Milton Keynes’ plan is read as a bold experiment, fundamentally questioning existing industry and cultural definitions of urbanity and ideal British space, then it would appear that despite the increasing ubiquity of its suburban post-industrial forms, it remains irreconcilable to enduring, barely explicit cultural criteria defining valuable urban forms, from aesthetics to function, in British landscapes.
While pursuing a broadly chronological approach, there are a number of chapters in this thesis which use overlapping periodisations. This has multiple purposes: to highlight periods of time where there was no single dominant theme or framework at play; to identify the unique perspectives of different political actors, regions, or groups; and to emphasise the ways in which meanings are produced culturally, through constant textual reiteration which forms a dialogical relationship with past utterances. This focus on the incremental development and evolution of cultural narratives helps facilitate a broader reading of the range of Milton Keynes’ historic meanings as dynamic and political, even where they present themselves as fixed, essential and unchanging.

Rather than attempting a complete or exhaustive narrative of the multiple ways Milton Keynes can and has been understood, this thesis intends to highlight that such a narrative is impossible; that such widely criticised places like Milton Keynes are deeply implicated in the way that landscapes are understood as reflective of contemporary lifestyles, politics and potential futures. Rather than being outside of history, or possessing an unchanging value apart from wider context, Milton Keynes has had an active and varied symbolic life in postwar British culture, acting as a spatial metaphor for wider and more nebulous political narratives, and anchoring these ideas to the national fabric and to concrete experience. This thesis explores one particular reading. Many more are not only possible, but indeed necessary, in order to more fully integrate postwar landscapes and their meanings into understandings of postwar British life.
Chapter 1: Landscape value in modern Britain

This chapter locates the intellectual traditions of urban planning history within wider and longer histories of political landscape symbolism throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century British culture. The development of the urban planning discipline in Britain negotiated tensions between two interrelated but ultimately conflicting visions of modernity. This involved attempts to reconcile a positivist, future-focused technocratic modernism which viewed rational interventionism as an absolute good, with a conservative approach that privileged an immediate, sensed experience of ideal tradition and unbroken cultural continuity as primary determinants of landscape value. The gradual political ascendancy of planning expertise up to and throughout the Second World War led to increased state sponsorship of more technocratically-focused, classically modernist urban planning solutions. This had the effect of drastically and definitively transforming much of the British landscape into forms that explicitly embraced this rationalist modernism, while increasingly prominent critiques of urban planning drew largely on the language of cultural conservatism, advocating for the value of continuity to the construction of ideal urban spaces.

In this context, I argue that the first term of the Wilson government from 1964 saw a renegotiation of the relationship between technocratic expertise and government policy, motivated by a desire to move away from totalising, determinist forms of state planning associated with postwar reconstructionism. This informed a changed approach to urban planning policy in favour of flexibility, inclusion, and actively learning from early new town planning. It was into this context that Milton Keynes would be designated in 1967, with the intention to provide a new solution to these conflicts between traditionalism and positivist landscape change.
Modernity, anti-modernity and landscape value

Reading across nineteenth-century histories of Britain, two major themes can be traced regarding cultural attitudes to landscape, and particularly regarding how certain landscape forms were interpreted as good, consistent with imagined national norms, productive and valuable.¹ These reflected distinct attitudes to time, the direction of history, the function of landscape in relationship to national identity, and to its capacities to contain meaning.

The first of these is frequently outlined in standard urban planning historical narratives, which trace the development of an intellectual discipline predicated on the belief that good landscapes were regulated by human intervention in the name of increased economic productivity as well as the pursuit of social goals.² This approach to landscape reflected a classically modern and Enlightenment era set of values which privileged a rationalist language of objectivity and scientific analysis, and which celebrated the rationalisation of public life as both economically and morally productive. This thinking can be seen at work in British politics spanning the political spectrum, from informing the systematic economic rationalism that drove the expansion of industrial capitalism, liberal imperial expansionist rhetoric, to the reformist rationalist politics of Catholic emancipationists, Chartism, and slavery abolitionism.³ This positive predisposition towards

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¹ This recognises both the generalised ideal of Britishness emergent from elite English sources, as well as noting themes consistent amongst disparate local nationalisms of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, along with discrete regional English identities. As is the case throughout this thesis, “Britain” or “British” refers to a constructed national ideal which largely emerged from elite English values yet which conflated and universalised these onto a British national whole. The term “British” is not posited as having any organic basis as an essential binding value set, but as one which enacts particular forms of power in service of British and imperial cohesion and identity.


³ This continuity is commonly foregrounded in New Left re-examinations of industrial modernity; see for example “The Languages of Class” in Dorothy Thompson, *The Dignity of Chartism* (London: Verso, 2015); E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, New ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Eric
change and intervention informed many urban reformist campaigns which are often invoked as part of the “pre-history” of urban planning as a discipline, including campaigns for public health and hygiene, concerns about urban overcrowding, poverty and crime, and the “development of a new science and machinery of government” to expand and systematise state regulation of urban spaces.4

This belief that new historical action should intervene on tradition, and should actively be pursued through the application of new technological and scientific knowledge, would inform the disciplinary development of the social sciences in the late nineteenth-century, and which would form a foundation for the development of urban planning as a subdiscipline within these. It is important to note that these disciplinary knowledges, for all their appeals to empiricism and objectivity, nonetheless reflect historically specific and contingent underlying epistemological values. Emily Robinson has conceptualised this approach to time as a kind of “progressivism” which interprets the idea of change and modernity itself as an “uncontestable good” and which posits a linear emplotment of human activity as “progress.”5 These interventionist technocratic systems reflect a foundational preoccupation with the potential for absolute good to derive from applying rational logic, which reveals objectively truthful and therefore valuable knowledge, to landscapes which are otherwise considered as inert and unregulated.

Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage, 1989). This is even the case with texts that are otherwise preoccupied with insular decline narratives; see Anderson and Nairn, cf. Woods. This is even the case with texts that are otherwise preoccupied with declinism or what E.P. Thompson terms “inverted Podsnappery”; see analysis of Perry Anderson’s and Tom Nairn’s approaches in Wood, *Pristine culture of capitalism*, 12-15. See a longer historical view in Pocock, *Ancient constitution and the feudal law*.


The second approach to determining landscape value in nineteenth-century Britain has been less systematically explored with relation to planning history. This can broadly be understood as a hostility to technological modernity, spanning political conservatism and Romantic radicalism, which posits ideal political, social and landscape organisation as reflecting unbroken continuities with various imagined valuable pasts. This attitude to political value has been theorised by Ellen Meikins Wood, Michael Gardiner and others in a longer historical narrative traceable through Cromwellian politics, through to conservative responses to the French Revolution such as those by Edmund Burke. These historians have traced the development of an idea of English identity as specifically aligned to the veneration of “ideal tradition”, an imagined narrative of historical progress as an unbroken, unifying force linking the present to the past, which admits no substantial breaks, changes or opportunities for alternative direction. Burke’s rejection of French Revolutionary politics as abhorrent due to their rejection of continuity as an absolute good is a key example of this thinking.

Constructing any continuous narrative of Englishness is necessarily selective and relies on concealing or omitting drastic interventions and changes, whether in terms of imperial acquisition, violence, or other unprecedented impositions of political and economic power. Distinct from other uses of the past during this period, including uses of ancient constitutionalism as a prescriptive historical model for expanding the franchise, Gardiner terms this Burkian closed narrative of tradition “canonicity”, a selective principle which is

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6 Hall uses a wider historical lens which he terms “intellectual history,” however his transnational approach leads to less examination of finer aspects of cultural context. See Hall, Cities of Tomorrow, 11-25.

7 Gardiner, The Return of England in English Literature; see this idea expanded in The Constitution of English Literature: The State, the Nation and the Canon, 1. ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013); Claire Westall and Michael Gardiner, Literature of an Independent England: Revisions of England, Englishness and English Literature (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); this conceptualisation is indebted to Wood, Pristine culture of capitalism, 65, 76-78, 90-92. This is explored in a more overtly political postwar context in P.W. Preston, Britain after empire: constructing a post-war political-cultural project (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 19-38.

8 Gardiner, The Return of England in English Literature, 8.
entirely opposed to the idea of historical action. In this culturally conservative logic, valuable cultural forms were understood in terms of continuity with existing aesthetics, and through the ability of their audience to perceive references to an imagined coherent past.

This value system has been explored in studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century English literature, including English colonising literatures which “imagine” or rather impose mythologies of continuous English traditions in imperial settings, and thereby legitimate the exertion of colonial power. Ian Baucom has argued that “Englishness has consistently been defined through appeals to the identity-endowing properties of place,” theorising that particular symbolic sites, from ruined country houses to Gothic cathedrals, have functioned in British imperial culture as totems of Englishness, encoding colonised landscapes with an English symbolic history that at least from an English perspective naturalises and conceals the radical discontinuities involved in imposing imperial power. Baucom suggests this “cultic phenomena” objectifies landscape sites and renders them specifically as mystical conduits of historical meaning, forming a national identity which is fundamentally rooted in proximity to iconic national landscape forms. Significantly, it is understood as pre-verbal and resistant to explication, emphasising the felt, fundamentally embodied experience of connection deriving from an immediate transmission of meaning between place and audience. This has been most systematically explored through English literary representations of empire, particularly the works of Kingsley and Kipling, but such political

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10 The politics of this are problematized in Edward W. Said, Culture and imperialism (New York: Knopf, 1993), xiii; Hall, Cultures of empire; Hall and Rose, At home with the empire; metropolitan culture and the imperial world.
11 This is the organising principle of the essays in Arnold, Cultural identities and the aesthetics of Britishness; Hall, Cultures of empire; David Rogers and John McLeod, eds., The revisions of Englishness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); see also Neill, Urban Planning and Cultural Identity, 1-4.
13 Ibid., 1.
Invocation of landscape mysticism to justify imperialist politics can be seen at work in wider imperial politics of architecture and place-naming.\textsuperscript{14}

Valuing mystical transmission of meaning between place and audience privileges the experiential over the rational; a value structure which was not purely invoked for conservative or imperial ends, but which was also shared by radical and Romantic critiques of modernity which modelled alternative, more dynamic definitions of traditional knowledge, but which interpreted them as similarly emplaced and pre-verbally communicated, understood through the body rather than the mind. Reading across histories of nineteenth-century art, architecture, poetry, and religious expression, there is a recurring cultural focus throughout this period on particular landscape sites and forms encoding valuable meanings that create a sense of connection between the present and an idealised pre-modern past.

These trends have been identified in diverse cultural manifestations, from Romantic poetry, through to nationalist invocations of Classical religion, Arthurian revivalist art and religious practice, and the growth of folklore studies and archaeology from amateur interests into academic disciplines.\textsuperscript{15} Many of these focus on the contemporary, emplaced resonances of relics or ruins which are read as testifying to binding national myths, often combining spiritual or religious imagery with historical or quasi-historical references which are seen as testifying to ideals that remain pertinent in the present. Hutton's surveys of these trends focus on the uses of imagined classical and domestic pagan traditions in nineteenth-century

\textsuperscript{14} The implications of this have been most fully explored in Said, \textit{Culture and imperialism}, xiii; Hall, \textit{Cultures of empire}, 12-16.

\textsuperscript{15} Some syntheses of these diverse trends can be seen in Sam Smiles, “Albion's legacy: myth, history and the matter of Britain,” in \textit{Cultural identities and the aesthetics of Britishness} (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 164,79; Vesna Goldsworthy, “The love that dares not speak its name: Englishness and suburbia,” in \textit{The revisions of Englishness} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); and is explored most systematically in the work of Ronald Hutton, most recently in \textit{Pagan Britain} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 70-72, 131-33; although see early development of this in Ronald Hutton, \textit{The triumph of the moon: a history of modern pagan witchcraft} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For reference to the influence of spiritualism on Howard's ideas see Dennis Hardy, \textit{From garden cities to new towns: campaigning for town and country planning, 1899-1946} (London: Chapman and Hall, 2004), 24-25. See also Hobsbawm and Ranger, \textit{The Invention of Tradition}; Hobsbawm, \textit{The Age of Empire: 1875-1914}, 262; Preston, \textit{Britain after empire}, 38-39.
attitudes to specific places such as Stonehenge or Arthurian sites in Wales and Somerset, but also to landscape types more broadly, especially those which were imagined as historically untouched.16 These tended to frame agrarian landscapes not as sites of industry and capitalist production, but rather as untouched sites, reflecting continuities with immemorial rural practices; the opposition between sites of history and sites of progress was therefore often an opposition between rural and urban.17

Most relevant for the development of twentieth-century urban planning is the way in which this thinking informed creative utopian writings which posited future utopias explicitly as historical returns, frequently involving the rural historical mode overtaking the urban industrial one. This notably includes Edward Bellamy’s novel Looking Backward, and William Morris’ depiction of London in News from Nowhere.18 The preoccupation with historical return modelled in these works reflected wider trends in late nineteenth-century socialist politics which invoked purported historical precedents as legitimating factors, thereby presenting political changes as the restoring of a “natural” order rather than as interventionism.19 This appeal to history as representing natural forms was shared by conservative political critics who sought to undo recent changes in the name of restoring or preserving existing archaism, imperfect functionality, and even ruin and decay, because of

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16 These themes are developed throughout Hutton, Triumph of the moon; Pagan Britain; note consistencies in imagery with the case studies used in Bacom, Out of Place, while for a longer view on folk cultures and constructions of the rural past, see Karl Spracklen and Stephen Henderson, “Oh! What a tangled web we weave”: Englishness, communicative leisure, identity work and the cultural web of the English folk morris dance scene,” Leisure/Laisir 37, no. 3 (2013).
17 This is the primary argument in Wood, Pristine culture of capitalism, while see discussion of agricultural innovation which belies the “untouched rurality” narrative in Vernon, Modern Britain, 84-88.
19 See an overview of these uses of 1688 and socialist progress narratives in Emily Robinson, History, heritage and tradition in contemporary British politics : past politics and present histories (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 30-42; the analysis here draws on James Vernon, Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c. 1815-1867 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
their testimony to desirable pasts. Even while the specific historical imaginaries differed in these cases, the capacity of archaic landscape forms to act as political testimonies in the present established closed teleologies which bound historical imaginary to ideological programmes targeting the future. This interprets landscape as a receptacle for national memory and identity, through the retention of trace evidence of earlier behaviours and practices. While there were potentially politically revolutionary dimensions to this mystical framework of landscape value, it was also significantly implicated in the veneration of ideal tradition, and the construction of a homogenised cultural canon which legitimated the power structures of the present in terms of the value placed on the weight given to a selective narrative of the past.

From Howard to new towns: the mournful experience of urban change

These two approaches to determining valuable landscapes were not necessarily rigid or exclusive, but can be seen as consistently recurring frameworks through which landscape was understood, and which drew upon opposing philosophies of the value of human intervention on existing landscape forms. For the purposes of this study, this pre-existing conceptual conflict can be seen as formative for garden city thinking and new towns, as well as of the context in which these ideas were received and understood. Ebenezer Howard’s To-morrow, and its condensed later edition Garden Cities of Tomorrow, published in 1902, proposed a privately instigated solution to urban overcrowding whereby a network of self-contained, dispersed and entirely new towns would be constructed on greenfield sites around existing metropolises in forms which would combine the benefits of urban and rural living in an ideal...

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20 This is a common theme in case studies of imperial relics as interpreted by writers including Charles Kingsley and Rudyard Kipling; see discussion in Said, Culture and imperialism; Baucom, Out of Place; Georgie Wemyss, The invisible empire: white discourse, tolerance and belonging (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
While this necessarily involved construction of towns on rural greenfield sites, Howard’s work frames this as a pre-emptive form of rational expansion that improves and magnifies the benefits of rural-agricultural lifestyles and progressive technological urban development.\(^{22}\) Offsetting the repulsions of urban modernity through the moderating attractions of rurality is central to Howard’s widely reproduced “three magnets” idea, in that Howard’s work presumes that accessing “untouched” countryside and thereby accessing its continuity and sense of meaning, is crucial to understanding the roles of the green belts in his designs.\(^{23}\) Howard’s use of Romantic literary quotations as epigraphs in *To-morrow* highlights the influence of this mystical interpretation of landscape meaning, underpinning and shaping the rational and deeply practical focus of his reformist logic.\(^{24}\)

While Howard’s thinking inspired private experimentation at Letchworth (1903) and Welwyn (1920), along with experiments with garden suburbs, these piecemeal, privately-funded experimental approaches necessarily had limited benefit in addressing the major pressures on early twentieth-century British cities which persisted from their Victorian-era roots.\(^{25}\) These problems of working-class urban overcrowding, deteriorating housing stock quality, and infrastructural stress, were compounded by the unprecedented expansion of urban sprawl in the first decades of the twentieth century, driven by the development of public transport systems and the increasing adoption of the car.\(^{26}\)

The speed of these changes fed increasing concern amongst intellectual elites, particularly at “ribbon development”, or the development of a low-density utilitarian sprawl

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\(^{25}\) This is explored in detail in Ravetz, *Council housing and culture: the history of a social experiment*, 56-80; Hardy, *From garden cities to new towns*, 114-39.

\(^{26}\) Alexander, *Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, 16; Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, pp. 63.
landscape along major roads, chiefly around London, during the interwar years. This manifested in a growing body of literature criticising these new landscapes as harbingers of and causes of wider social decay. Popular works by Clough Williams-Ellis, J.B. Priestley and George Orwell fused travelogue-style narratives of personal experience with extreme political critiques, drawing on their pre-verbal “senses” of changing landscapes as valuable or as damaging.\(^{27}\) Williams-Ellis frequently resorted to language of monstrosity, decay, and perversion to describe the irrevocably corrupting influence of urban sprawl on the countryside; Priestley’s tone was more reflective, but was underpinned by a similarly mournful attitude towards lifestyles and living patterns that were being lost through the rapid onset of a newly decentralised suburbia.\(^{28}\) The main target of this writing was unregulated sprawl, while pre-emptive dispersal was viewed somewhat more favourably. Williams-Ellis praised Welwyn in particular, while John Betjeman’s popular poetry condemned undifferentiated suburbia while expressing affection for parts of “Metroland”.\(^{29}\) At the same time, Orwell’s writing linked suburbia with a bourgeois moral malaise, drawing on a longer tradition of anti-suburban literature.\(^{30}\) Uniting these works was nostalgia for lost patterns of living associated with rigidly differentiated urban and rural spaces, and scepticism of rapid technological change. These fears were expressed through ascribing a causal relationship


\(^{29}\) Williams-Ellis, *England and the octopus*, 39, 45; Betjeman, *English cities and small towns*; see discussion of Betjeman’s attitudes to Metro-land over time in Mark Tewdwr-Jones, “Oh, the planners did their best: the planning films of John Betjeman,” *Planning Perspectives* 20, no. 4 (2005); Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*.


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between exposure to modern suburban spaces, and psychological and moral malaise, both individual and collective. This notion of the deterministic, mystic communication of meaning encoded contemporary political and social concerns into essentialist language.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{World War II: ‘Technocracy’ ascendant}

A further impetus for this mournful, nostalgic literature of urban change was the increasing political ascendency of a more technocratic interventionist attitude to ideal urban spaces.\textsuperscript{32} James Vernon has argued this emerged from the “revolution in government” in the second half of the nineteenth century, where the development of a bipartisan “science” of political administration through the establishment of the Civil Service was further developed by the ideological development of “planning” as an ostensibly empirical political science during the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{33} This can certainly be seen in the field of land use planning and demographic management by the 1930s, where private models of experimentation in urban planning were slowly accompanied by state-sponsored attempts at proactive sprawl containment, such as the London County Council’s (LCC) overspill estate at Dagenham.\textsuperscript{34} Again, these small-scale experiments were insufficient in themselves to address the massive scale of urban overcrowding, declining quality of public housing, and the ongoing over-centralisation of resources in the south-east of England.

Nonetheless these formed important precedents for the drastic increase in central government interest in urban planning from the late 1930s onwards, most notably the establishment of the Barlow Commission under Neville Chamberlin. Patrick Abercrombie’s

\textsuperscript{31} Baucom, \textit{Out of Place}, 4; Gardiner, \textit{The Return of England in English Literature}, 8.
\textsuperscript{32} My use of ‘technocracy’ is after Edgerton, understanding this as an ideological favouring of technological advancements and their use by the state to further its goals. See Edgerton, \textit{Warfare State}, 1-12.
\textsuperscript{33} See Vernon, \textit{Modern Britain}, 362-76; this reading draws on Edgerton, \textit{Warfare State}.
subsequent Greater London Plan (henceforward GLP) formalising the ideal of pre-emptive population dispersal as a goal that not only limited piecemeal urban sprawl, but which actively allowed for improvements in infrastructure provision, urban overcrowding, the declining quality of Victorian-era public housing stock, and the more active preservation of ‘green’ spaces through strict regulation. Population dispersal, like green belt provisions, was conceived of positively, in that it required active intervention on existing land use, and negatively, in that it would facilitate greater protection of the boundaries of existing cities. The GLP therefore negotiated the same tensions between positivist knowledge and a more preservationist mindset which characterised Howard’s thinking, with emphasis on the proactive construction and negative legislative protection as forms of control over landscape form.

The GLP arose from one of many wartime policy inquiries which drew on consultation with scientific and elite expert knowledge, producing an intersecting suite of postwar policies reimagining the role of the British state. The wartime context of both destruction and disruption were significant facilitating factors: the impact of the Second World War on the British landscape was significant, not only through German bombing of major industrial cities, but also through the vast repurposing of rural landscapes for displaced urban populations, along with government-mandated alternative agricultural and military


37 Hardy, From garden cities to new towns, 133-43; Freestone, Urban Planning in a Changing World, 26-29.
usages. The extent of this disruption was such that a simple reversion to pre-war patterns would be neither simple nor desirable, and in many cases impossible. Moreover, this urban disruption occurring during a context of increased political centralisation gave a unique opportunity for British government to develop a systematic approach to urban problems, while drawing on the vast technical expertise which had been amassed under wartime centralisation. The scale and totalising nature on which the Second World War was fought facilitated vast centralisation and concentration of state power in areas that had hitherto remained relatively outside of it; this concentration of power was accompanied by the concentration of elite specialist expertise within policy-making bodies, and facilitated the overall technocratisation of the state.

The post-1945 reformist Attlee government’s policies must be seen within this context; the six years of the Second World War, particularly since 1940, had seen increased state power, and increased accumulation of specialist knowledge, along with the development of a culture of applying technical knowledge to the running of the state in order to improve its functioning. When combined with a socialist Labour government, this led to the application of technocratic knowledge to the improvement of the state for its own sake, no longer for the improvement of the nation as war machine. This entrenched the progressivist model of value in elite political power such that Conservative governments, while

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39 Despite a pervasive belief in postwar culture that the British wartime government was characterised by under-utilisation of scientific and academic expertise, there is significant evidence that the British state was drawing extensively on technical expertise during its wartime and postwar reconstructionist planning. “Science and the nation: towards new histories of twentieth-century Britain,” *Historical Research* 78, no. 199 (2005); *Warfare State; Britain’s war machine*; for discussion of this with relation to the postwar “two cultures” debates see Ortolano, *The two cultures controversy*, 10-11.
substantially less radical, and while substantially more attached to imperialist visions of value as deriving from social value, nonetheless continued to adhere to the key principles of a reformist state by embracing the notion that change was necessary and valuable at least in key areas such as architecture, housing provision, and so on. While the conservative, preservationist elements of the GLP remained important, the wider motivations underpinning Attlee government policy were a more scientistic modernist view of technological advancement as a liberatory force.\textsuperscript{41}

The New Towns Act of 1946 was part of this overhaul of the role of the state, designed to give wholesale reform to Britain’s planning, housing and landscape management laws, as part of the wider reform programme of the Attlee government.\textsuperscript{42} The New Towns Act was intended to pre-emptively direct urban growth and infrastructural development into new towns, thereby decentralising population and economic opportunity while inhibiting urban sprawl. This drew on Abercrombie’s expansion of Howard’s garden city thinking: situating new towns on greenfield sites, on the far side of green belts to major conurbations, while relocating industry along with residential areas to engender self-sufficiency. In addition to these formal and infrastructural aspects, however, the Act was intended to mutually reinforce the social engineering and wealth redistribution intentions of other Attlee government policies. In parliamentary discussions of the Act in its final tabling, Minister Lewis Silkin introduced the Bill with a preamble which located it within a historical tradition stretching back to Thomas More’s \textit{Utopia}, explicitly highlighting that the bill was intended not purely in terms of spatial and land use planning but as using these tools in aid of a kind of social engineering.\textsuperscript{43} Silkin explained this as a desire to attempt to create a “new kind of


\textsuperscript{43} HC Deb 08 May 1946 vol 422 cc1072-184.
citizen” through creating new determining environments; both a paternalistic goal, given that new town populations were intended to be largely working-class, but also an explicit rejection not only of historical landscape aesthetics, but also of subjectivities.44

Despite this future-focus in terms of ideal citizenship, the actual planning of early new towns reflected a more fixed vision of planning’s formal requirements. The first wave of new towns designated under the New Towns Act of 1946 were overwhelmingly in south-east England around London, explicitly targeting the population congestion in the capital.45 While the reception of early postwar urban planning policies will be considered in greater depth in subsequent chapters, it is important to note the main themes in early responses to these policies. These towns were tightly master-planned, offering an explicitly totalising and highly specific vision of the urban form, and reflecting faith in the capacity of planners to “get it right the first time”.46 On the ground, this had the effect of including little to no flexible land use or under-utilised space, meaning that there was little opportunity for later changes to the planned layout of the town without substantial demolitions.47

Similar problems beset smaller-scale residential dispersal projects undertaken by local authorities during the same period, particularly in “overspill estates” which primarily expanded housing provision while relying on existing employment and social infrastructure. This imbalance frequently increased social and economic deprivation in housing-only estates.

44 Ibid.  
45 With the exceptions of Washington and Cumbernauld, the most relevant new towns to the reception of Milton Keynes were those in the south-east of England; as will be discussed in later chapters, the significance of these sites’ proximity to existing concentrations of south-eastern media elites meant they had a greater influence on national media representations emanating from this region. This is not to downplay the significance of Welsh, Northern Irish, Scottish and northern English new towns, but rather to recognise the distinctive history of postwar urban planning and its reception in these regions, along with their relatively lower profile in south-eastern English media representation which is the focus of this thesis. Clapson, Invincible green suburbs, 98-105; Taylor, Urban Planning Theory since 1945, 4-18.  
46 Hall, Cities of Tomorrow, 390.  
47 Bob Giddings and Bill Hopwood, “From evangelistic bureaucrat to visionary developer: The changing character of the master plan in Britain,” Planning Practice & Research 21, no. 3 (2006); Taylor, Urban Planning Theory since 1945, 4-18.
where car ownership remained uncommon. A third element of postwar urban reconstruction was the demolition of “slums” to be replaced with high-density residential developments. These were undertaken at a vast scale, transforming the skyline of British cities in a short space of time, and drastically altering their dynamics and functions. Relying on modernist aesthetics and post-Corbusier politics of publically provided “machines for living”, the practice of tower block developments involved demolishing large areas of terraced housing in overcrowded working-class regions of British inner cities, in order to replace them with high-rise apartments that permitted greater numbers of people to be housed while ostensibly improving housing quality. As will be explored in Chapter 3, tower blocks were often understood as adversely deterministic, inflicting psychological damage on residents through totalising aesthetics and their necessarily inflexible design. Moreover, not only was there a lack of any informal or legislative channels for resident consultation on these new forms, there was also very limited opportunity for residents to exert agency in this process of rehousing. While the postwar state accepted that providing housing and reshaping urban infrastructure was its responsibility, outside of election processes, decision-


50 Glendinning and Muthesius, Tower block, 307; Moran, “Housing, Memory and Everyday Life in Contemporary Britain,” 613; Glendinning, “Multifaceted Monolith,” 47.


52 Clapson, Invincible green suburbs, 63-64. On consultation in new town and welfare state policy see Ortolano, “Planning the urban future in 1960s Britain.”; Larkham and Lilley, “Exhibiting the city.”; Thorpe, “Locking out the Communists.”
making on the forms and extent of these activities was understood as an internal governance issue in consultation with elite practitioners rather than the general public.\[^{53}\]

Taken broadly, media and political objections to postwar urban planning policy can be understood as forming three major categories: resisting totalising elements of policy administration; the extreme scale and speed of change; and innate hostility to new urban forms as either aesthetically or morally valuable. These motivations were often presented through arguments that postwar urban landscapes were not only aesthetically objectionable but were fundamentally harmful. This can be seen in the pop-psychologisation of “new town blues”, a term deriving from a *Lancet* study that described an ostensibly unique form of malaise afflicting residents of new towns and which was presented as causally deriving from the deterministic forms of the town.\[^{54}\] These findings were disputed by later psychological research, as being not substantially different from the disconnection and stress which accompanied any experience of moving house.\[^{55}\] Nonetheless, the imagined link between forms of new towns, postwar estates and tower blocks, and residents’ negative psychological experiences, remained an influential and recurring theme responses to postwar urban planning. The resilience of this idea can partly be explained by the way in which it meshed with pre-existing approaches to judging the cultural value of particular landscapes. In


\[^{55}\] Cullingworth, “Social implications of overspill: The Worsley social survey.”; Sainsbury and Collins, “Some Factors relating to mental illness in a new town.”; S. P. W. Chave, “Mental Health in Harlow New Town,” ibid.; this body of evidence has also been used to justify the dismissal of new town blues as an idea with any social relevance; see for example Clapson, *Invincible green suburbs*, 79; *Social History of Milton Keynes*, 105-06.
particular, the belief that exposure to older landscape forms would impart an inexplicable but inherently meaningful sense of cultural belonging and transcendent connection to an unbroken tradition can be seen at work in “new town blues” literature, in that the absence of perceived continuity was seen as damaging, regardless of any personal aesthetic preference.

This logic informed criticisms of postwar planned spaces as they became more common throughout the 1950s, from elite responses to popular satires. A significant example for the history of Milton Keynes’ reception is Ian Nairn’s contribution to the domestic travelogue genre in his 1955 work *Outrage*. Nairn’s writing conformed to the interwar establishment of this genre of mournful journalistic witnessing of landscape change, with *Outrage* describing his impressions of a journey around Britain’s newly transformed cities. *Outrage* coined the word ‘subtopia’, a portmanteau of dystopia and suburbia, to characterise the growth of generic urban-planned spaces which sought to explicitly eradicate the idiosyncrasies and specificities of place and of local culture. At the same time, Nairn was in favour of bold, experimental modernism that made positive contributions to a sense of local diversity, especially in the new town context. Nairn’s criticisms were primarily of undifferentiated, non-specific modernism which eradicated a sense of place, rather than with the fact of urban planned interventions themselves.

Working more explicitly in the Romantic left-wing critique of modernity were sociological studies emerging from the Institute of Community Studies during the 1950s and 1960s. The most renowned of their early publications were authored by Michael Young and

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Peter Willmott, *Family and kinship in East London*, and *Family and class in a London suburb*.59 These works drew on extensive research on inner London communities both before and after moving to new overspill estates in Essex. The authors’ findings focused on the sense of loss, disconnection, and grief afflicting working-class residents of inner London as they moved out of their traditional, over-crowded and under-resourced communities to new estates. These readings emphasised the resilience of working-class social structures to industrial modernity, and argued that the effects of population dispersal policies were to destroy long-established social networks of kinship. They argued that by failing to focus on maintaining existing communities, government housing policies “put their faith in buildings” while failing to address, or to acknowledge any need to address, the psychological and social needs of their residents.60 Nonetheless Willmott and Young argued that given sufficient time, new estates might come to replicate the sense of belonging they described at Bethnal Green.61 These arguments therefore reflected a concern with the value of continuity in urban residential spaces, based on research that reflected the sentiments of residents. As such rather than arguing in the abstract for the value of continuity in generating meaningful experiences of urban space, Willmott and Young located the impact of these values in their use value for East Londoners who moved to better-quality housing on the city’s fringes, and found them painfully lacking.62


60 Willmott and Young, *Family and kinship in East London*, 187, 98.

61 Ibid., 164, 69.

62 While hostile to many of the findings, a useful survey of similar sociological research can be found in Clapson, *Invincible green suburbs*, 63-68.
Declinism and postwar planning

As crossover texts between academic sociology and popular markets, Willmott’s and Young’s analyses were typical of a wider body of critical popularly-consumed sociological writing, yet also participated in a broader culture of political criticism of the role of the state, from both left and right, throughout this period. The above critiques of deterministic urban planning, and the social damage arising from radical landscape change, arose in a political context which was preoccupied with cultural symbols of Britain’s national status and its supposed decline. These critiques of planning therefore fit into a broader pattern of cultural analysis which has been theorised as ‘declinism’. As discussed above, the dystopian reflections linking urban forms to national health seen in works by Williams-Ellis and Priestley indicate that the idea of British society in decline was far from historically specific to the postwar period. The particular postwar manifestations of this belief in decline, however, can be seen as taking distinct forms and having unique political preoccupations and functions relative to the role of the Second World War in transforming the British state.63

While Britain’s economic, imperial and geopolitical standing and clout had all unequivocally diminished significantly since 1945, the focus of declinism in 1950s and 1960s British politics was less overtly on this absolute decline, than on the failure of Britain to “keep pace” with certain other global powers; this “economic arms race” interpreted Britain’s less significant economic improvement solely as considered comparatively to countries like the United States, Germany, and later, Japan.64 Tomlinson notes that the development of the idea of gross domestic product as a relative measure of national economic output was a

63 The development of this idea can be seen through Tomlinson, “Inventing ‘decline’: the falling behind of the British economy in the postwar years.”; Clarke and Trebilcock, Understanding Decline; Kenny and English, Rethinking British decline; Tomlinson, Politics of Decline; “Decline of the Empire and Economic ‘Decline’ “; Nicholas Crafts, “British relative economic decline revisited: The role of competition,” Explorations in Economic History 49 (2012); Black, Pemberton, and Thane, Reassessing 1970s Britain; A useful study of the “foundation myths” of declinism can be found in Preston, Britain after empire, 19-38.

product of postwar global political systems such as the United Nations and the IMF; at the same time, the development of economic history as a distinct academic discipline, and the competitive framework of the cold war, fed the use of these new bodies of statistics to create the perception of a “league table” of relative economic output and success. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in detail the economic history of relative global measurements of gross domestic product, it is significant to note that a substantial body of recent academic analysis has highlighted the historical construction of these criteria, and the way in which they established an illusion of an equally footed global competitive economy without reference to the specific constraining or driving factors for growth in different countries after the Second World War. The narrow application of this type of analysis can be seen in several major academic studies of the early 1960s which received significant media attention for their foreboding claims of Britain’s shrinking postwar economic status.

This assessment of relative economic decline was particularly notable for the way in which it both failed to take into account longer-term economic processes, and for the way

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in which it framed the interpretation of decline as caused by purely internal factors; that is, cultural or economic factors that were purely contained within Britain itself. The cultural hold of declinism can be partly understood through the way in which these abstract political and economic narratives of status interacted with everyday postwar experiences of austerity, rationing, and the types of urban infrastructural damage and collapse that motivated postwar reconstructionism. It posited a narrative of control on a national level by targeting domestic “culprits”. Declinist culture provided a way of accounting for Britain’s changing economic status which did not require substantially rethinking the moral foundations of its previous greatness while presenting it as reattainable rather than permanently lost.\footnote{Gilroy, \textit{There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack}, 47, 52; Hall, “Whose Heritage?,” 4-9; Gilroy, \textit{Postcolonial melancholia}, 89-93.}

During the early 1960s peak of national British media fixation with national decline, there was a particular focus on London as a site of urban decay, which in term was a metonym for specific forms of national decay that were not only afflicting international economic competitiveness but were reflecting a kind of social malaise. This symbolic association of the form of London with the economic, and thereby the collective moral or psychological health of the nation, was a recurring theme in works such as Penguin’s infamous “What’s Wrong with Britain?” series of books, and was also a central motif in the 1963 volume of essays published by \textit{Encounter} magazine, \textit{Suicide of a Nation}?\footnote{Koestler and Fairlie, \textit{Suicide of a nation}; See commentary in Tomlinson, \textit{Politics of Decline}, 23-26; Edgerton, \textit{Warfare State}, 191-93.} These essays argue that Britain was actively throwing away or even destroying those parts of its culture that had made it “great”, while blaming particular groups and specific changes for advancing this decline more specifically. Several essays focus on urban decay or change as an index of national status.\footnote{Most famously this is explored by Malcolm Muggeridge, “England, Whose England?” Koestler and Fairlie, \textit{Suicide of a nation}, 20-36; See commentary in Tomlinson, \textit{Politics of Decline}, 25; Edgerton, \textit{Warfare State}, 191-93.}

At the same time as participating in traditions of mournful landscape critique modelled by
Priestley and Williams-Ellis, then, postwar critiques of new towns, tower blocks and overspill estates, also participated in a wider political culture which diagnosed national malaise through metonyms of landscape form and aesthetics. Through the symbolic slippages of these kinds of exploration of status, high-economic analyses of relative decline, and the lived experience of postwar urban infrastructural weaknesses, were frequently “mapped together” in media representations of the state of the nation in general, representing both of these phenomena as shared features of a single set of causes, and as interrelated manifestations of an overall lapse in status from a projected historical high point.\(^{71}\)

Much of this involved the perception of change itself as inherently detrimental. Using decline as a framing device for postwar British experience is fundamentally conservative, as its mournful preoccupation with returning to a former state of “greatness” privileges historical models of cultural value, and inherently rejects the kind of historical action that admits narratives of political challenge, change, or contingency.\(^{72}\) Viewed in relation to declinism and to longer-term cultural conflicts around the relative merits of tradition and novelty, the above critical responses to postwar urban planning and to reconstructionist policies participate in post-imperial politics of status and national redefinition. Critics of postwar urban policy from as diverse political origins as Willmott’s and Young’s fears for romanticised pre-modern working-class culture, or Malcolm Muggeridge’s despair at London’s growing “shabbiness”, were also participating in a wider cultural conflict around the relative value of postwar political change.


“White heat” and reforming the reconstruction movement

During the early 1960s, the Labour party was also reimagining its relationship to postwar reconstructionist policy. Transforming its late 1950s concerns with economic decline into a more aggressive vision of reformism and change, the incoming 1964 Labour government under Harold Wilson explicitly framed its policies as updating postwar reconstructionist ideologies with a revised technocratic direction.\(^{73}\) This was undertaken as an attempt to arrest and intervene on the imagined trajectory of decline which the Labour party believed Britain was experiencing; it also was an attempt to diffuse absolute critiques of postwar policy innovations, including planning and land use policies, by creating more newly responsive and flexible policy approaches.\(^{74}\) The often-quoted statement from Wilson in the lead-up to the 1964 election about “forging democracy in the white heat of technology” explicitly locates his government within a context of Attlee’s reformist government, in that it is explicitly concerned with utilising the newest and most innovative forms of knowledge in order to improve British society.\(^{75}\)

The second New Towns Act of 1965 is a clear example of this. Rather than merely restating the Labour government’s interest in new town building, the towns designated under the second New Towns Act took drastically different forms from those developed under the initial phases of the programme.\(^{76}\) This manifested as a distancing from those specific aspects of earlier postwar new town planning which were now seen to have rejected the purportedly organic features of traditional urban forms too wholeheartedly; this includes the example of

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Cumbernauld, built to take Glasgow’s overspill in 1956, which experimented with high-modernist, higher-density low-rise forms.\textsuperscript{77} The revisionism of Mark III new towns was therefore to reduce the tight-master-planned reliance on wholesale new developments at the expense of adaptability and a greater capacity for incremental changes to be made over time.\textsuperscript{78} The impetus for this was not purely from within the Ministry of the Environment, the government more broadly, nor was it purely a concession to aforementioned media critiques.

Rather, the Ministry of the Environment was actively pursuing consultative relationships with academic groups that shared the aim of reforming planning policy. This included bodies such as the Institute for Community Studies (ICS), whose founding members included Ruth Glass, Michael Young and Peter Willmott; most significantly for the history of Milton Keynes, this also included the Centre for Environmental Studies (CES) which was formally established at University College London (UCL) in 1966.\textsuperscript{79} The CES had been established with philanthropic funding from the Ford Federation, and developed its programme through informal consultations with Minister for the Environment Richard Crossman.\textsuperscript{80} Key staff at CES included Richard Llewelyn-Davies, whose architectural and urban planning firm Llewelyn-Davies, Weeks, Forestier-Walker and Bor (LDWFWB) had consulted on government planning projects including Washington new town and Sunderland.\textsuperscript{81} The CES positioned itself as proactively bridging the disciplinary gap between

\textsuperscript{77} See debate in HC Deb 04 March 1965 vol 707 cc1680-91. Crossman, Diaries volume 1, 1, 158-60; Alexander, Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities, 20,40.

\textsuperscript{78} Hall and Ward, Sociable cities, 52-55; while Freestone usefully summarises the standard planning narrative of this period, he terms Peterborough and Milton Keynes “mark two” rather than “mark three” new towns as they are more usually classified; see Freestone, Urban Planning in a Changing World, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{79} Clapson, Anglo-American Crossroads, 30-31.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 31; cf. Crossman, Diaries volume 1, 1, 147. Also highly influential in terms of American planning influence was their close relationship with Professor Melvin Webber of University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA); see Melvin W. Webber, Explorations into Urban Structure (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964); Clapson, “Introduction.”

urban planning and sociology, while holding a close relationship with central government. Although Richard Crossman was replaced by Anthony Greenwood in August 1966, the deeper consultative relationship between the Ministry and CES was formative in the designation of new towns under the second Act, especially in the case of Milton Keynes.

The Ministry of the Environment’s investigation into south-eastern English population and development, *The South East Study*, was published in 1964, and it recommended the expansion of population dispersal programmes to account for its projections of substantial population growth. Amongst its specific recommendations, it recommended a new large, central-government-administered new town in the Bletchley-Aylesbury area, as per the Abercrombie proposals of the GLP. With this specific recommendation, and the wider consultative environment of expertise, there was a strong impetus at national level for the designation of a new town in north Buckinghamshire which drew on new approaches to urban research and planning.

**North Bucks New City**

Alongside this evolution in central government policy, there was a local drive to obtain state investment into North Buckinghamshire. By the 1950s the North Buckinghamshire economy including the small towns of Wolverton, Stony Stratford, and Bletchley, was declining, while South Buckinghamshire’s economy and population boomed due to its adjacency to London. During and after the Second World War, Bletchley and Wolverton advocated for

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83 The extent to which these intentions translated into policy is questioned in Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 199-200. However see closer examination based on archival research in Clapson, *Anglo-American Crossroads*, 42-44.
85 Ibid.
their towns to be regenerated under the new town programme. In 1943, Wolverton Council commissioned George Jellicoe to develop a plan for a new town at Wolverton; published in 1945, this advocated the complete demolition of Wolverton, to be replaced by a new town consisting wholly of tower blocks “separated by gay and spacious gardens.” This ambitious plan was harshly criticised on its publication and was not pursued. More fruitfully, the GLP named Aylesbury and Bletchley as two potential sites for expansion, with Bletchley proposed as a potential site for a town of 50,000 people. Bletchley Local Council (BLC) used these recommendations to negotiate formal overspill arrangements with the GLC to grow Bletchley’s population to nearly 20,000 by 1970. This growth was concentrated in peripheral estates at Water Eaton and Melrose Avenue which took excess council-housing population from North London, which would be formally opened in 1966.

Yet BLC’s “expansionist” attitude was not shared by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) until 1959, when the review of the County Plan sparked new advocacy for a new town in North Buckinghamshire. This change was partly due to the influence of Fred Pooley, BCC’s county architect and planning officer. After revising the County Plan, Pooley would go on to develop an official BCC plan for a potential new city based around Bletchley, which would be used to present a case to central government. This plan for “North Bucks

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87 Ibid., 16; Clapson, Dobbin, and Waterman, Best Laid Plans, 8-11; Ortolano, “Planning the urban future in 1960s Britain,” 482.
88 Bendixson and Platt, Image and reality, 16.
89 Ibid., 17; “Milton Keynes: 1967, An Agricultural Inventory,” (Reading: University of Reading Department of Agriculture, 1968).
90 Image and reality, 17; Hall, Cities of Tomorrow, 194.
92 I would move into one of these houses near Melrose Avenue in May 2009, and lived there until May 2010. This area is shown prior to substantial MKDC construction in the following unused stock news footage as it appeared in 1968; see British Pathé, “Milton Keynes (1968),” YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xqK0IPHI0A.
New City” was approved by BCC in early 1964, and the full plan was published in 1966. Like Jellicoe’s plan for Wolverton, Pooley’s plan advocated for high-density development, of tower blocks surrounded by flat open space; unlike Jellicoe’s plan, however, this was intended to in-fill the space between Bletchley and Wolverton, rather than to entirely redevelop the towns. This would take the form of a linear city consisting almost entirely of high-rise “urban units” each holding 5,000 residents, interspersed with “green spaces” in a “butterfly” configuration, linked by a publically subsidised monorail (see Figure 1).


Figure 1: North Bucks New City strategic plan and model layout.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{97} Pooley, North Bucks New City, 7.
Pooley’s plan was ambitious in scale and aesthetic, projecting an over ten-fold population increase and a major infrastructural overhaul of the whole North Buckinghamshire region. At the same time, its formal radicalism failed to account for many of the major criticisms of postwar planning described above. Even while the medium-rise residential blocks in the “villages” were not wholly inconsistent with wider mid-1960s trends in lower-rise high-density housing, they formed part of a wider tabula rasa vision dominated by high-rise tower blocks and a totalising formal organisation which strictly limited flexible land use or the retention of existing landscape forms. Overall, the plan replicated the brutalist lines, rejection of historical models, and totalising master-planning which showed a remarkable divorce from the increasingly vocal criticisms in British print media of postwar urban planning.\textsuperscript{98}

*North Bucks New City* was developed at the same time as Pooley’s most famous architectural project, the 15-storey concrete tower block housing the BCC Offices in Aylesbury which was opened in 1966. While many of Pooley’s other designs for BCC to this date had been more closely matched to their low-rise contexts, the BCC building was unabashedly imposing in scale, leading Ian Nairn to nickname it “Fred’s Fort”.\textsuperscript{99} While Bill Berrett, Pooley’s assistant and collaborator on *North Bucks New City*, subsequently denied that the plan was intended to be tightly-master-planned or high-density, the plan itself emphasises bold interventionist modernist aesthetics and inflexible high-rise forms, consistent with Pooley’s vision for the BCC offices.\textsuperscript{100} By advocating for a totalising, high-rise, inflexible use


\textsuperscript{99} Ian Rodger, “No more Brasiliars,” *Guardian* December 20, 1967; Ian Nairn, “Introducing Fred’s Fort,” *Observer* October 23, 1966. This tower continues to hold the Buckinghamshire County Council offices, including the council archives at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, whose archival holdings were crucial to the development of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{100} Bill Berrett, then Pooley’s assistant and later planning director at MKDC, consistently defended Pooley’s high-density public-transport-based plan throughout his career. See Berrett, “Worlds First Eco-City?”;
of space, Pooley’s plan demonstrated a very different set of values to landscape change than those which the Ministry of the Environment’s developing relationship with CES and similar bodies was demonstrating.

In this context, then, the decision for the Ministry of the Environment to pursue a centrally-sponsored new town in North Buckinghamshire, and its rejection of the BCC-approved Pooley model, is significant, as it meant that the town which would be built on this site differed from Pooley’s plan in almost every important aspect. While the Ministry for the Environment issued a draft designation order for a new town in April 1966, the order designated the area for the town over an area of 21,880 acres, including and subsuming the existing towns, while positing a population target of 250,000. This was both the highest population target and largest designated area set for a new town, enshrining a lower population density and therefore implying a lower-rise design than any variant of Pooley’s plan could accommodate. Rather than “North Bucks New City,” the town was also named Milton Keynes, taking its name from a small village in the designated area. This was a clear and decisive move from the Ministry of the Environment that actively rejected the blank-slate, totalising model informing Pooley’s plan.

This was confirmed once a further Order released under the New Towns Act 1965 established the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) on 13 March 1967.101 Lord Jock Campbell, Labour peer and millionaire businessman, was appointed chairman later that month, and the formal bidding process for the planning consultancy was undertaken in the same year.102 The long-established relationship between LDWFWB and the Ministry for...

102 “Master planners finish new city proposals,” Guardian July 17, 1967; “Chairman of new town,” Guardian March 22, 1967. The Wilson Government’s intentions for the newly designated Milton Keynes were further reinforced by the separate decision to locate the University of the Air, later the Open University, near the village of Walton Hall within Milton Keynes’ designated area. While the Open University’s media and cultural representations have largely diverged from those of Milton Keynes specifically, the location of the University centre at Walton Hall indicates the extent to which the Wilson Government more broadly, not just the...
the Environment was confirmed by their formal appointment as planning consultants to the Board in late 1967.

The designation of Milton Keynes therefore indicated that the Ministry of Environment was pursuing a very specific vision of new town construction. Significantly, this approach maintained that state-sponsored urban planning was a necessary and desirable exertion of control over the British landscape, which would preserve existing land use patterns as much as possible by pre-emptively directing population and economic growth into the designated area. Yet even while demonstrating this commitment to a positivist idea of human intervention as an absolute good, the designation of Milton Keynes clearly rejected the overt technocracy of Pooley’s plan, with its radical Brutalism and singular, absolute planning vision. As Chapter 2 will explore, Milton Keynes was intended from the outset to update and renegotiate the relationship between interventionist planning and the Romantic-conservative tradition of participatory, mystical landscape value, by reducing the extent of planner control and aiming to facilitate a flexible, evolving cityscape that encouraged incremental change and participation by residents. Such an intention formed a clear response to the longer history of British cultural perceptions of landscape value and an attempt to create a new compromise between conflicting perceptions of ideal British space.

Having located the designation of Milton Keynes within a broader context of attitudes to ideal landscapes, this chapter examines trends in national media coverage of Milton Keynes from 1967 to 1972 in relationship to concerns about the ideal function of urban spaces. During this period, two major themes would develop in media criticisms of Milton Keynes which would prove formative and influential in setting the tone for subsequent reportage. Early predictions prior to the publication of the Interim and final Plans expressed fear and concern at Milton Keynes’ potential to adhere too closely to Pooley’s high-rise plan for North Bucks New City, and thereby refusing to learn from the perceived mistakes of earlier postwar planned spaces. Such concerns emphasised the totalising qualities of Milton Keynes’ large scale. Secondly, media coverage which more closely responded to the town’s designation order emphasised the indeterminate and potentially dysfunctional role of a low-density city in preserving the rural countryside from sprawl. The Interim Report (1969) and later the Plan for Milton Keynes (1970) expressed an innovative and unprecedented approach to new town planning which sought to cultivate a flexible, participatory framework for Milton Keynes to develop organically, rather than being absolutely envisaged in a singular master plan. This aspect of Milton Keynes’ plan, however, further fed concerns regarding the way such flexible planning could effectively create a containing urban structure; whether expressed in terms of metaphors of fluidity and flood, or of foreignness and invasion, these concerns used a consistently symbolic language of threat which appealed to ideas of national cohesion, health and wholeness. While MKDC developed a thorough and comprehensive media strategy to address both bodies of concern, its primary focus on factual, rational education about the contents of the Plan limited its capacity to address broader, more abstract concerns about the town’s meanings and function.
Initial responses, 1967

The initial media response to the designation of Milton Keynes drew not only on the limited information given in the government orders, but responded to the longer history of the idea of a North Buckinghamshire new town. As described in Chapter 1, Pooley’s plan was almost entirely out of keeping with Ministry of the Environment thinking in 1966 and 1967, which was specifically focused on using a North Buckinghamshire new town site as an experiment in a less deterministic, more flexible, lower rise site in keeping with CES and ICS research. This direction was clear, if not fully substantiated, in the draft and final designation orders for Milton Keynes; the combination of high population targets over a large designated area averaged out to a lower density, and therefore a lower rise, than the concise high-rise plan of Pooley’s North Bucks New City could accommodate, at “44 acres per 1000 population”.1 Moreover, Minister for the Environment Anthony Greenwood had stated that Milton Keynes “must avoid dependence on a single centre, which is at the root of so many of the problems of existing towns”: Pooley’s butterfly motif for North Bucks New City relied on a fairly classical centralisation of urban amenities surrounded by residential areas.2 The actual terms of the designation therefore made it clear that the form of Milton Keynes would not resemble or accommodate North Bucks New City’s plan.

Despite vastly differing from the terms of the designation order, the idea of Pooley’s high-rise plan would prove highly influential in early national media responses to Milton Keynes in 1967. After BCC approval of Pooley’s plan, there had been substantial media attention on its proposed monorail, high-rise and high population.3 Indeed, in many cases

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these were the only, if not the major, two features of the plan which were reported in these articles, closely followed by reference to the expense, with projections varying between 4 and 19 billion, and to the scale of the projected population increase, of up to 250,000. These ideas, of high population, density, and expenditure, were interwoven in longer-form coverage which invoked the “space-age” elements of Pooley’s vision.

When Pooley’s plan was rejected by central government in 1965, this decision received less widespread national media coverage than the initial interest in the plan itself, with only a few smaller articles reporting it. The overall impression reading across national-level print media coverage of a new town in North Buckinghamshire between 1964 and 1967, then, is of a sense of continuity between the Pooley plan and the CES-influenced Ministry of Environment designation, despite the clear divergence in the actual content of these planning documents. The existing associations between incongruous high-rise development and the lead-up to the designation of Milton Keynes can in part account for the representation of the town as a high-density, high-rise plan, despite the explicit evidence to the contrary in the designation documents.

The high-rise association is most striking in cartoons published in the immediate aftermath of the designation. The Sun depicted Milton Keynes as densely packed with tower blocks, with two residents wryly remarking that they “always wanted to live in the country”; similarly, the Evening Standard depicted a planner reassuring a Milton Keynes vicar that his church services won’t be disturbed by a noisy discotheque, as “it’ll be on the forty-eighth floor” (see Figure 2.). In the background, Milton Keynes village is depicted populated by

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farmers and Morris dancers, as if untouched by modernity; the planners, however, are depicted as looming, threatening figures. News reports also used this dichotomy. The Daily Telegraph focused on the “obvious” influence Pooley’s plan would have, arguing that this meant that Milton Keynes would have “a rigid and constricted urban structure, which might well recreate the problem of existing towns.” Similarly, The Sun linked Pooley’s “monorail” plan to the town without reference to the projected density, while The Guardian published concerns that “the sore thumb of Fred Pooley’s Bucks County Council building dominating the Vale of Aylesbury” would be replicated in “the ambitious plans for Milton Keynes.”

![Cartoon](image)

*Figure 2: Evening Standard, January 14 1967.*

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Drawing on a more substantial body of evidence, the imposition of a new town onto an area with an unwilling population dominated early human interest stories about the town. The village of Milton Keynes itself was usually the focus in these stories rather than the larger market towns or other smaller villages in the designated area. This was often viewed through local folklore, invoked as a symbol of non-rational rural traditions; *The Evening Standard* published a letter which asked “what will become of the [resident] ghost of Milton Keynes?”, while *The Daily Mail* reported local superstitions that if the old elm tree in Milton Keynes village was cut down that “no more babies would be born in the village”. Emphasising the small scale of Milton Keynes village, drawing on anecdotes about its dwindling and aging population, drove *Daily Express* coverage which suggested “there must be some mistake” in the chosen designation site.

The terms of the designation orders were emphasised more clearly in news coverage by *The Times* and *Guardian*, and in longer-form periodical analyses. In particular, Terence Bendixson, who would go on to co-author the official history of Milton Keynes, argued that “The Minister's letter makes it clear that a town with a completely new shape is to be created in North Buckinghamshire”. This “completely new shape”, however, was not invariably viewed as an opportunity, with a common theme in early news coverage being concern about the particular form Milton Keynes would take, and particularly its ability to function as an adequate container for “overspill” population. The term “overspill” had long been established terminology to describe the pre-emptive government movement of population

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12 Milton Keynes village was renamed Middleton under the Plan for Milton Keynes, however despite this official designation it remains widely known as “Milton Keynes village”. For consistency this thesis will refer to the village as “Milton Keynes village”.


from densely populated urban areas to newly constructed peripheral areas, whether through mechanisms such as the Industrial Selection Scheme or through encouraging private movement through providing cheaper housing and more jobs. Overspill was usually understood in opposition to sprawl, in that the purpose of planned population dispersal was generally undertaken specifically to prevent unplanned urban sprawl, directing growth purposefully into specific areas approved for growth rather than facilitating indiscriminate expansion. This was especially a concern for Milton Keynes, an “overspill” city designed to take the largest dispersed population yet, and which was also planned to concentrate that population over a larger, lower area than had previously been trialled.

Early media coverage of Milton Keynes utilised the idea of “overspill” alongside a wider metaphorical language extrapolating from its literal description of fluid escaping containment. This facilitated both relatively benign, and potentially more catastrophic depictions. The idea of Milton Keynes as a containing receptacle for an inert, featureless London population is clear in the number of texts which describe “overspill” and “dispersal” of population without specifically referring to working-class people who would be moved, nor ascribing them any agency in doing so. Rather, describing mass population dispersal in terms of decanting and containing, while resisting use of language describing the people who are affected by these policies, indicates a perception of an inert, even dehumanised mass of working-class population who would absorb the constraint of whatever policy or urban container they were subjected to. The similarities between descriptions of the inert North

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Buckinghamshire countryside, which would passively absorb the imposition of human decision-making, and the populations which would populate the city are profound, in that the newsworthy content of such articles is the forceful, deliberate and rational actions of containment on subjects imagined purely negatively, as objects for control.

Depersonalised language was also utilised to represent the potential catastrophe of insufficient planning. The combination of Milton Keynes’ large scale and low density meant that it proposed a less conservative use of designated land, deliberately stretching its projected population over a larger area. Critical descriptions of Milton Keynes’ overspill as indiscriminate flooding combined this notion of extravagant and wasteful land use with metaphors of fluid tension; a typical example of this can be found in The Daily Telegraph’s editorial which argued that Milton Keynes would “engulf more than 30 square miles of rural Buckinghamshire and half-a-dozen picturesque villages in a sea of bricks and concrete”. Related metaphors of “swallowing” emphasised the consumptive capacity of the new city as well as its menace. This can not only be read in terms of culturally conservative interpretations of landscape value, then, but in terms of a perspective that active intervention on the landscape could primarily be understood as an act of violence.

This type of imagery can be understood as a flood of urban modernity forcing itself on passive rural landscapes, thereby engendering a mournful, nostalgic sense of loss consistent with the tone of interwar critiques of sprawl; at the same time, however, reading


this “flood” of change in terms of its composition of working-class people “engulfing” the rural landscape casts this group as a subject of fear and as potentially engendering harm through their presence. By framing working-class populations as a faceless, indistinct mass who collectively possess the catastrophic force of a flood, this posits a fearfully nostalgic cultural politics whereby the passive default of “traditional” English rurality requires defence against being subsumed and thereby lost.

As described in Chapter 1, interwar literary constructions of urban sprawl had also relied on fluidity metaphors to describe how uncontained suburban development would spread itself thinly over the largest possible area, and irrevocably subsume rural landscapes beneath it. This attitude remained present in those responses to Milton Keynes that interpreted the planned movement of overspill as desirable, by contrasting the measured, pre-emptive dispersal of population as opposed to the indeterminacy of flooding. Despite these differences, when read together, these varied representations indicate that while the act of decanting London’s inert working-classes could be seen as preventing flood, constructing an overly generous new container was also potentially tragic and represented a flood in itself. This sense of catastrophic disjuncture between old and new helped establish the idea of Milton Keynes as a forceful intervention on historical traditions.


MKDC marketing and the Interim Report, 1967-1969

This context created a complex environment for the newly established MKDC to respond to in generating its media strategy. Part of the nature of MKDC’s work was not merely to plan and then to oversee construction of the fabric of Milton Keynes, but to consistently attract population from a wide range of social groups, while attracting substantial industrial investment to create jobs and build a sustainable local economy. The specific content of initial media responses was taken into consideration by the newly established MKDC, which set up a Public Relations Committee in 1968 to devise policies that encouraged both more sympathetic and more accurate media coverage.26 Milton Keynes’ public relations had been managed in the early months of 1967 solely by the MKDC chairman Lord Jock Campbell, and his attitude to public relations and publicity more broadly remained heavily influential in the development of early policy. Initially, following Campbell’s personal theorisation of public relations, MKDC public relations, including press liaison, drafting of copy, and development of advertising materials, were intended to be done in-house, though remaining theoretically open to the idea of collaboration with private consultants.27 By late 1968, however, only months after the establishment of the Public Relations Committee, MKDC contracted Prince Galitzine and Partners to develop a public relations strategy to support the launch of the Interim Report for February 1969, which involved public exhibitions, press visits, and the creation of promotional films, along with extensive press consultation and the development of targeted promotional leaflets.28 The committee had used Galtizine and Partners to develop an initial newspaper advertisement which ran in The Times in 1968, which

26 “Minutes agendas and papers of the Public Relations Committee, 1968-1969,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury).
27 Agendum 7, pages 1-2 in “MKDC Public Relations Committee - Friday 3 May 1968,” ibid.
28 Ibid.
was designed to “introduce” Milton Keynes to potential investors; at this stage, however, such contracts were intended to complement rather than replace in-house promotions.\textsuperscript{29}

MKDC’s openness to private expertise in the area of publicity appears partly to have been in response to the perceived complexity of the task of promoting Milton Keynes, a city whose plan had not yet been published, to both the often antagonistic residents of the designated area, and to national media which were not necessarily sympathetic to the idea of the city itself. Nonetheless, early MKDC public relations goals were unchanged by the introduction of private expertise. The idea that MKDC should adopt an “aggressive” advertising strategy predated the private consultation, and the goal of the promotions was to emphasise the value of the town rather than MKDC itself: indeed, it was minuted that “an organisation of this nature cannot expect to be loved.”\textsuperscript{30} The purpose of MKDC advertising, and the justification behind its aggressive tone, was rather to “educate” and “inform” the public about the “truth” of Milton Keynes, as a corrective to misinformation.\textsuperscript{31} The implication was that negative attitudes or fears about Milton Keynes derived from inaccurate representations; which, indeed, as seen with the conflation of the Pooley plan with the Milton Keynes designation, was a real concern.

Such an “aggressive” approach to public education could not be immediately enacted, however, as the future form of Milton Keynes was under threat from other planning decisions throughout 1968 and 1969. The Wilson government established the Roskill Commission in 1968 to investigate the merits of three separate target sites for a third airport for London.\textsuperscript{32} Of the three potential sites for the airport, two of these, at Cublington and at Thurleigh, were close enough to Milton Keynes’ designated area that considerable portions

\textsuperscript{29} “Milton Keynes,” \textit{Times} September 25, 1968.
\textsuperscript{30} “Minutes of Public Relations Committee, 1968-1969.”
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Agendum 4 in “Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Public Relations Committee, Friday 27th September 1968”; agendum 1 in “MKDC Public Relations Committee - Friday 3 May 1968,” ibid.
of it would be made unsuitable for residential development, while the population targets and goals for varied industrial compositions would also be placed under stress by siting a major airport nearby. With the Roskill Commission’s deliberations due to continue until 1971, the initial planning and marketing of Milton Keynes therefore needed to take place in an uncertain environment where the specifics of the plan could not be made absolutely clear. Within this context, however, MKDC was under additional pressure to gain momentum in planning and development, as well as in drawing potential residents and investors, in order to potentially combat and offset any threat by the airport siting decision.

**The Interim Report, 1969**

MKDC’s intentions to create a more open and participatory planning framework, however, here worked in the town’s favour. Rather than releasing a single absolute statement of Milton Keynes’ form, MKDC intended to release an interim report for public consultation in 1969. The *Interim Report* was intended as a consultative document whereby feedback could be obtained about the shape and direction of the plan. In this way, MKDC hoped to obtain feedback from local residents of the designated area, from professional organisations and governmental bodies, but also to make a fairly confident statement that the planning of Milton Keynes was progressing towards a definite goal, rather than planning “on a hypothetical basis” while the Roskill Commission deliberated.


Other than with reference to the Roskill Commission, from late 1967 to late 1968, there had been a substantial drop in national media coverage after Milton Keynes’ designation. During this period, most discussion of the town was speculative, regarding its potential role in south-eastern planning, and the potential for new technologies to be adopted there. Additionally, research undertaken at the University of Reading into Milton Keynes’ farming communities received some intermittent media attention with reference to the loss of farmland as well as of rural culture in the decision to designate the new town. This low-level reportage largely functioned within two related themes of earlier coverage; of representing Milton Keynes as a threatening, subsuming entity opposed to rural life and the human scale, or as a dehumanising futuristic landscape governed by technology. This would change with the release of the Interim Report on 4 February 1969, which was the first major release of information about Milton Keynes since the town’s designation. In the months prior to the Interim Report’s official release, MKDC released a promotional leaflet summarising its main points, but this had limited circulation. The Interim Report was launched in February 1969, accompanied by Galitzine and Partner’s multi-platform marketing strategy which included promotional films, extensive press briefing, exhibitions, and leafleting, alongside the Report itself.

The Interim Report and its promotions were intended to outline not only the physical form Milton Keynes would take, but also the goals and intentions informing its execution.

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This included officially confirming the terms of the master plan’s brief: to create a plan to accommodate a population of 150,000 “overspill” migrants, with room for natural population growth to take that number to 250,000 within twenty years.\textsuperscript{41} This large population target was to be evenly dispersed over the 22,000 acre designated area between Stony Stratford in the north-west, Newport Pagnell in the north-east, and Bletchley in the south-west, with the A5 and M1 forming the western and eastern boundaries.\textsuperscript{42} The report sought to explicitly “avoid ambiguity” and arrest concerns about the fate of existing communities, arguing that the plan would “fit the existing villages and hamlets into the development, not sweep them away;” and that this goal would be achieved through the use of a large-scale grid system formed by “a network of primary roads about one kilometre apart.”\textsuperscript{43} The proposed grid roads were made up of undulating curves, and incorporated existing major roads, particularly the A5 (Watling Street). These major grid roads were designed to carry through traffic and maximise car flow throughout the town, while the areas within each grid square were imagined as home to a low-density suburban-style community, or to one of the existing villages, each of which would have their own local neighbourhood social and economic facilities. This structure was designed to facilitate decentralisation within the town itself, while maintaining a distinctive sense of place within the local areas; while a “new city centre” was planned, at this stage this was imagined primarily as a central administrative precinct with some additional leisure facilities.\textsuperscript{44} The designated area would also be criss-crossed by “a continuous linear park” following the Ouzel River and Grand Union Canal, and other parklands building on woodland at Shenley and Linford.

\textsuperscript{41} *Interim Report*, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 6-7, 15-16, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 21-23.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
The Report also laid out ambitious technological, social and community goals for Milton Keynes. At this stage, however these received less prominent media coverage than the grid road system and the formal proposals for the town’s form. The grid system received some favourable coverage through its intended role in maintaining the integrity of existing small villages in the designated area, and its potential to prevent these communities being subsumed wholly into an undifferentiated urban space.\(^46\) This was partly offset by a more sceptical set of responses which spanned broadsheet and tabloid print media, along with radio and television broadcast reportage, on the perceived lack of “built-in safeguards” to

\(^{45}\) Ibid., iv.

ensure this level of integration, and a continued concern at the loss of rural land and isolated village landscapes. Moreover, this type of criticism tended to appear with reference to the proposed flexible public transport system to be used in the initial stages of the town’s development. The “dial-a-bus,” which could be summoned by phone like a taxi rather than traversing a timetabled route; criticising the grid system therefore appeared in the context of criticising a novel, apparently futuristic technological innovation in public transport provision. This concentrated a number of existing concerns about Milton Keynes’ combined high population target, low density, and potential embrace of technology in opposition to a human scale, into the specific critique of the grid system and the planned methods of traversing it.

The language used to link the grid system to futurism, technology, and the erasure of the countryside primarily associated Milton Keynes with Americanness, and specifically, with Los Angeles. The idea of Milton Keynes as representing the imposition of American urban forms on the British landscape was not new in 1969, having appeared to a lesser extent in some 1967 media responses which focused on the town’s lower density and its ostensible rejection of historical models of landscape organisation. It had also featured considerably in parliamentary debate about Milton Keynes’ designation. The announcement of the grid

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51 HL Deb 01 March 1967 vol 280 col 1164-5; HC Deb 22 March 1967 vol 743 col 1705.
system as a potential form for the plan, however, more firmly associated Milton Keynes’ with a particular vision of Los Angeles, usually through passing references and associations, but occasionally through more conscious and deliberate comparison. By suggesting Milton Keynes would be, or could be, “like” Los Angeles, then, these wider associations came to be ascribed to Milton Keynes itself.52

The idea of Los Angeles was not purely an illustrative metaphor for an as-yet-unbuilt city, but encoded wider declinist concerns about American cultural influence after the Second World War. While Professor Reyner Banham had developed a successful media career during the late 1960s arguing for the benefits of American landscapes and in particularly of Los Angeles, this type of celebration and embrace of American urban forms was not universally accepted nor representative of elite cultural attitudes during this period.53 Rather, the ascendancy of American cultural influence, in particular youth culture and television from the 1950s onwards, had been widely understood by a range of political parties, journalists, and elite cultural groups, as a cause for moral and intellectual concern, as well as a threat to national prestige and cultural autonomy.54 Associated with this were developing media narratives of Britain’s increased ‘permissiveness’, a pejorative concept which ascribed causal relationships between increased affluence, liberalising social reforms, and the erosion or rejection of ‘traditional’ values, aesthetic preferences, and patterns of consumption.55 While

52 While Ahmed’s theorisation of liminality is chiefly concerned with bodies, her concept of border delineation through defining groups and ideas as “like” or “unlike” the imagined nation is useful here. See Ahmed, Cultural Politics of Emotion, 89-92. A rare positive account of British cities learning from Los Angeles, albeit from Terence Bendixson, can be found in Terence Bendixson, “What’s wrong with our cities?” Guardian July 11, 1969.


55 Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, eds., An affluent society?: Britain’s post-war ‘Golden Age’ revisited (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 4-8; Mark Jarvis, Conservative governments, morality and social change in affluent Britain, 1957-64 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), ch. 7; Marcus Collins, The permissive
discourses of permissiveness had wider political ramifications, a significant proportion of its declinist focus proposed Britishness as ideally tradition-bound, and Americanness as a decadent, weakening outside force which needed to be resisted.\textsuperscript{56}

Such vague associations of American ascendancy with British cultural weakness and decline were borne out to a greater extent in Milton Keynes’ media reception during this period than the more tangible, actual associations the town had with American planning. As described in Chapter 1, the CES had been established with American philanthropic funding, and connections with American planning thought ran deeply in the centre due to its frequent collaborations with Professor Melvin Webber, usually based at the University of California, Berkeley.\textsuperscript{57} His principle of “community without propinquity” as a central feature of planning for post-industrial cities, which clearly drew on Los Angeles as a model, can be seen at work in the Interim Report’s simultaneous interest in establishing local, integral community units, with spreading them across a decentralised grid.\textsuperscript{58} Indeed, Webber was even listed as a formal consultant on the Interim Report. Yet the town’s “Americanness” in the above media representations derived more from its perceived aesthetic and formal departures from British urban models, and its embrace of the techno-futurism and low-density landscapes popularly associated with American suburban landscapes, than from its actual planning links with Los Angeles.

This context emphasises the conflict between relative definitions of Milton Keynes as a “city”, a new town, or an uncontained mass of urban sprawl at work in responses to the Interim Report, a conflict partly fed by MKDC’s use of “new city” as a descriptor. At the Interim


\textsuperscript{57} Background of this relationship is traced in Goodman and Chant, \textit{European cities & technology}; Clapson, \textit{Anglo-American Crossroads}, 66-68.

\textsuperscript{58} “Community without propinquity” is theorised in Webber, \textit{Explorations into urban structure}; see consultant list, \textit{Interim Report}, iv.
Report press conference, MKDC representatives were asked why they described Milton Keynes as a “new city, not a new town”; their response in full was “Because it’s rather grand!” Elsewhere, promotional material described Milton Keynes as a “new city” rather than a new town, using the term to emphasise the formal scale of Milton Keynes’ plan but also in an aspirational sense, to capture its social goals and intentions for the level of cultural significance Milton Keynes would attain. This appears to have also been an attempt to emphasise Milton Keynes’ differences from earlier new towns, and to respond to the context of negative responses to earlier new town developments. A major issue with this term as a marketing tool, however, was its legal status, given that the legal category of “city” under British law did not apply to Milton Keynes. Internally, MKDC would debate the legal ramifications of this issue until at least as late as 1971, including with reference to whether using the word “city” in promotions constituted false representation under the Trade Practices Act. MKDC internal memoranda differentiated using the term city in its “dictionary” sense, to describe “an important town,” from using it in its legal sense, and it was this “dictionary” sense of grand aspiration which continued to motivate their use of “city” in promotional materials.

Further complicating this, however, were the associations between urbanity and urban sprawl captured in responses to the grid as a “foreign” form; emphasising Milton Keynes’ large scale and low density through the term “city” necessarily erased some of the distinction between existing cities and distinct new towns established to contain the countryside from floods of urban sprawl. It also was the term used to describe Pooley’s

59 “Questions and answers asked at public meetings regarding Interim plan,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1969); “Questions asked at public meetings about plan for MK at public meetings and at press conference,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1969).
60 Milton Keynes: Introducing the new city; “Tellex reports, 1969.”
61 “Correspondence and papers relating to Public Inquiry and Final Plan for Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1969-1971).
62 Ibid.
“North Bucks New City,” giving a continuity of terminology which risked obscuring the formal differences in each plan’s concept of urbanity particularly with reference to density.63 This carried through in critical responses, with public objections to the designation of Milton Keynes and to the Interim Report regularly used the term “city” with reference to feared Los-Angeles-style erasure of the countryside or concerns of a high-density concrete model such as Pooley’s.64 Invoking the concept of “city” at this stage therefore caused specific additional problems to Milton Keynes’ image even as it was intended to positively differentiate its formal aspirations.

Reading across these responses, then, there was on one level increased accuracy in the representation of the formal aspects of Milton Keynes’ Interim Report, compared to coverage of the designation order in 1967. In this respect MKDC’s combination of “aggression” and educational focus had limited success in shaping the specific content of media coverage. The interpretation of the value of these formal elements, however, continued to reflect preoccupations from earlier media coverage, as well as the increasing articulation of anxieties around Milton Keynes’ role as a containing urban structure, whether arising from its over-deterministic eradication of the rural, or its potential insufficiency in containing population or protecting British landscapes from foreign influence.

**The Plan for Milton Keynes, 1970**

This gap between MKDC’s interpretation of Milton Keynes’ potential function and meaning, and many media and public interpretations of the Interim Report, influenced MKDC’s

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64 “Tellex reports, 1969.”; “Q&A at public meetings for Interim plan.”; “Suggestions and comments from members of the public and organisations regarding Interim plan,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1969); “Questions asked at public meetings.”
approach to the preparation of its final Plan. The most substantial changes to the layout arose as a response to feedback from residents of the designated area, however, rather than reflecting the more diffuse anxieties of print media interpretations.\textsuperscript{65} Substantial public inquiries in the designated area were held throughout February and March 1969 to gauge local responses, from individuals, businesses and official bodies in the designated area and surroundings, with MKDC making extensive records of the types of questions and objections raised.\textsuperscript{66} These were primarily focused on the siting of specific trunk roads relative to existing settlements which were able to be adjusted in many instances.\textsuperscript{67} The Roskill Commission’s interim report was due in late 1969, enabling any findings to be utilised in changes to the master plan, but their findings at the time of the \textit{Interim Report} were inconclusive and could not be fully taken in to consideration.\textsuperscript{68} At the same time, the upcoming General Election raised some concern about the scope of Milton Keynes’ development in future, meaning that the plan needed more substantial promotion to create momentum prior to any potential change in policy.\textsuperscript{69} The plan was completed by January and submitted to the Minister of the Environment at this time, while simultaneously being prepared for its public launch.

Existing MKDC strategy remained influential in the development of a more substantial media campaign for the final \textit{Plan for Milton Keynes}, scheduled for publication in March 1970. The media strategy for the launch of the \textit{Plan for Milton Keynes} again involved consultation with Galitzine and Partners, who drafted a comprehensive strategy for MKDC

\textsuperscript{65} “Revised draft plan for presentation of the plan and subsequent public relations required – November 1969” in “Minutes of Public Relations Committee, 1968-1969.”
\textsuperscript{66} “Q&A at public meetings for Interim plan.”; “Suggestions and comments from public regarding Interim plan.”; “Questions asked at public meetings.”
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{The plan for Milton Keynes}, 1, 25.
\textsuperscript{69} “Revised draft plan for presentation of the plan and subsequent public relations required – November 1969” in “Minutes of Public Relations Committee, 1968-1969.”
to draw upon in promoting the plan across a wide range of media, and balancing a focus on targeting south-eastern England with substantial national promotions.\footnote{Multiple drafts of this document are held in CBS. See final version: “Revised draft plan for presentation of the plan and subsequent public relations required – November 1969” in ibid. See also “MKDC Communications Programme 1971/78.”; “Annexure to MKDC Communications Report “, in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1971).} The Plan for Milton Keynes was published and officially launched on 17 March 1970.\footnote{The plan for Milton Keynes, 1. A black-and-white low quality facsimile of the first volume of the Plan was republished in 2014 with Clapson’s commentary; however for consistency and to make reference to higher quality colour images, reference will be made to the original edition throughout this thesis. Cf. Mark Clapson, ed. The plan for Milton Keynes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). This first volume is the most significant for the history of the reception of Milton Keynes; the second volume of the Plan contained mainly contextual data, with ten additional technical supplements expanding on this data in specialist areas. These volumes are not written in the same vernacular, populist style as Volume One of the Plan, nor were they as widely circulated; for the purposes of this thesis, then, the abbreviation of “the Plan” will specifically refer to this first and most widely referred to volume.} To a much greater extent than the Interim Report, the first volume of the Plan for Milton Keynes adopted a broad, accessible, aspirational tone which contextualised the plan’s formal qualities within extensive commentary on the planners’ goals and motivations. The much longer second volume of the plan, along with its technical supplements, substantiated these with relevant practical detail; yet its almost manifesto-like, concise first volume, with its accessible language, provided the executive summary which received the most substantial national media attention.

The Plan for Milton Keynes’ first volume opens by briefly recounting the policies leading to the town’s designation, and confirms its basic specifications: Milton Keynes was designated over 9,000 hectares in January 1967, and was intended to hold 150,000 people as of 1991.\footnote{The plan for Milton Keynes, 1, xii.} It locates these projections within the early adjustments to the South East Joint Study Group’s population from the initial projections made in 1964. These revised population projections still predicted a substantial, if less than exponential, increase in population in the region and continued to justify the construction of Milton Keynes.\footnote{Ibid., xii, 3-11.}

The Plan then outlines the primary goals for the town’s development as follows:

“i. Opportunity and freedom of choice
ii. Easy movement and access, and good communications

iii. Balance and variety

iv. An attractive city

v. Public awareness and participation

vi. Efficient and imaginative use of resources.\textsuperscript{74}

“Opportunity and freedom of choice” was imagined as necessary in all areas of life; from work opportunities, to consumer choice in shopping and leisure facilities, to education, health care, and choice of transport use.\textsuperscript{75} In a substantial departure from much postwar planning, this was extended to housing styles, in terms of providing varied relative densities and aesthetics for council housing.\textsuperscript{76} “Balance and variety” were conceptualised not only as the goal of residents from varied social backgrounds comingling, but also as capturing a similar range of visual and aesthetic variety to that found in older established cities, “to which almost everybody responds with pleasure.”\textsuperscript{77} This desire to actively incorporate existing historic and even rural landscapes into the Plan to create favourable variety was imagined as creating “a sequence of views changing from buildings to landscape, distant vistas across open space to urban views and curving along the edges of lakes [sic] and past busy industrial complexes and shopping centres.”\textsuperscript{78} This imagery posits a perceived balance between “buildings and landscape”, or artifice and nature, as central to the Plan’s aesthetic, but also its imagination of what constitutes ideal functioning urban space.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 15-16.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
Figure 4: Strategic plan outline, The Plan for Milton Keynes
This tension is primarily managed in the Plan through the notion of using its goals as a framework, an attitude related to the approaches of earlier new town plans which are diplomatically described as “ripe for review.” Flexibility as a guiding principle is justified as a pragmatic method of long-term planning that allows for adaptation and evolution to unforeseen, unpredictable outcomes. Such flexibility is argued for from the perspective of cultural change; the immediate political context of the Plan’s development is described as “increasing demand by individuals and small groups to have a more direct say in matters decided by local and central government.” This also refers to how Milton Keynes’ urban administration and political culture should be organised. Rather than conceptualising this participation as an absence of governance, the intention is to provide structured “education” for Milton Keynes’ citizens to direct their political activity. Indeed, it is explicitly stated that an overtly politicised and overly enabled culture of participation would be both unruly and undesirable. Opportunity was conceived of in this Plan as fundamentally mediated, where the role of MKDC is to educate as well as to facilitate access.

This idea of providing multiple avenues for choice and participation reflected the organisation of space; with each grid-square conceptualised not as a discretely bordered neighbourhood unit, but as interconnected with its surroundings, MKDC proposed that providing a clearly articulated range of choices of shopping, leisure and industrial facilities would provide sufficient structure for residents, while allowing them to exert agency over their individual choices. By intending for social and industrial amenities to be located at the edge of grid-squares rather than centrally, and by providing pedestrian and local road integration between squares, the Plan proposed an integration of facilities which was intended

80 Ibid., 7.
81 Ibid., 10.
82 Ibid., 17.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 9, 17.
to generate organic relationships between and across grid-roads. This interpreted the role of grid-roads less as barriers between local areas, but as means of weaving them together, directing heavy traffic away from local communities without limiting the development of social coherence.

Figure 5: Distribution of facilities within grid-squares, The Plan for Milton Keynes

The goal of “public awareness and participation” paired giving information to residents with the flow of information from residents to the Corporation. This goal in part reflected a wider concern with increasing public participation in planning decision-making, during the late 1960s, seen in the Ministry for Housing and Local Government’s establishment of a Committee on Public Participation and Planning in 1968. The

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85 Ibid., 18.
Committee’s report, People and Planning, also known as the Skeffington Report, made general recommendations for increasing opportunities for community consultation and participation, however it advocated for a much more structured and hierarchical model than can be seen in *The Plan for Milton Keynes*. MKDC’s monitoring and feedback regime was conceptualised as part of a two-directional communicative pattern, with MKDC “educating” residents but also receiving significant flows of information from its residents. This emphasis on education as a dialogue indicates the strong emphasis on the collection of data and the application of sociological analysis and expertise to create the best possible town. While *The Plan* did not specify the exact nature of these proposed communication channels, unlike the tentative tone of the Skeffington Report, *The Plan for Milton Keynes* held the central aim of “allow[ing] the greatest possible scope for freedom and change… throughout the period of building.” Indeed, rather than attempting to cultivate an objectively verifiable balance between the empirical and experiential, the Plan advocates the limits of planning as an ideal altogether, suggesting that the role of planning Milton Keynes is to create “the chance of surprise, the random happening, unplanned meetings and exciting discoveries” through creating settings for unplanned human interaction.

The principle of resident participation was therefore framed as participation in structures which they would shape themselves, rather than taking place wholly within the confines of pre-determined models.

Complicating this idea of planning for the unplannable was the pursuit of legibility: “The city should also speak for itself, through its plan and its architecture. People should be able to acquire a clear working knowledge of the city and its form through direct

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87 Ibid., 18,20.
88 Ibid, 11.
89 Ibid., 17.
experience. This posits a desire to create an intelligible urban experience, while also locating the Plan within a tradition of interpreting meaningful urban landscapes as best understood without words, and through the body. This advocacy of the unplanned and the immediate transmission of meaning through the body, while not central to early marketing of Milton Keynes, would prove crucial in later marketing campaigns; it is significant to note, however, that this idea of mystically transmitted urban value can be located in the Plan even as it is posited in tension with a heavy focus on the collection and analysis of empirical data from the developing town.

The Plan for Milton Keynes, then, represents a unique attempt to negotiate the role of urban planning in a context where determinism was seen as potentially desirable, and potentially dangerous. This careful balance between specific information and future focused speculation, between creating necessary structure and facilitating resident input, points to the significance of reframing the act of planning Milton Keynes in terms that rejected existing models, and which responded to critiques of postwar urban planning.

The Plan in national media, 1970-1971

The Plan for Milton Keynes was launched with an even wider-reaching, more substantial promotional campaign than that which had accompanied that of the Interim Report, again drawing on consultation with Galitzine and Partners. The substantial programme of press launches, exhibitions, advertising literature and films created for the benefit of national media correspondents did lead to a significant level of media coverage of the Plan launch, which was further augmented by targeted media appearances by MKDC representatives.

90 Ibid.
official rhetoric relied both on rejecting historical models, and on developing a newly open-ended form of urban planning, as characterised in this comment by Lord Llewelyn-Davies:

> The main lesson we have learned from a study of early new towns is that the future is rather indeterminate. Of course it’s easy to look back at somebody’s work 25 years ago and criticize it, but in planning of this sort it’s futile to make guesses. You have to design a city with as much freedom and looseness of texture as possible. Don’t tie people up in knots.\(^93\)

Similar metaphors of loosening bounds and freeing residents to make their own choices were frequently used by MKDC figures in interviews and promotions for the Plan.\(^94\) This language was very much in opposition to the negative coverage which had accompanied the designation and *Interim Report*, which framed the potential over-determinism of Milton Keynes as a threat; it also, however, risked reinforcing the alternative negative characterisation of Milton Keynes as too loosely- or widely-spread a city, sprawling its density wastefully over too great a portion of the rural landscape. This was largely navigated by MKDC staff through specifically equating the non-determinism of Milton Keynes with potential for individual agency, rather than using the collective metaphors of flood and submergement which had characterised earlier fearful criticisms. Statements similar to Llewelyn-Davis’ comments above appeared in a wide range of early interviews with MKDC figures in a way which suggests a common framing of the Plan’s message, as representing urban planning as a potentially liberating force rather than an overly determining one.\(^95\)

National media coverage which drew heavily on official MKDC press materials largely

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replicated this focus on flexibility as an empowering force and a potential safeguard against determinism.  

Despite this careful negotiation of the language of determinism and agency, a significant proportion of more sceptical media coverage continued to draw on existing negative metaphorical frameworks. This was especially notable in the resurgence of metaphors of foreignness and alienness to describe Milton Keynes’ form. The increased scale of the equation of Milton Keynes with London was particularly noticeable, with more overt and more negative associations of the two cities; indeed, The Times' editorial position on the launch of the Plan was that Milton Keynes would be “Los Angeles (Bucks).” These were frequently interwoven with metaphors of flooding to evoke a sense that a foreign urban landscape would breach national boundaries and subsume the national, rural, historically imagined landscape. These concerns also continued through human-interest focus on local residents’ protests, such as in the Daily Mirror’s feature on a nine-year-old who wrote a letter of protest to MKDC regarding a road siting. These accounts emphasised Milton Keynes as a destructive force, with its imposition on the landscape understood as violently subsuming a default, idealised rurality.

99 “Los Angeles (Bucks.),” Times March 18, 1970.
100 Margaret Jones, “PROTEST.. with nine kisses [sic],” Daily Mirror April 2, 1970; “Make room for the birds’ plea to city’s planners,” Daily Express April 2, 1971; See other local responses to siting of M1 link roads in “Objections to the Plan for Milton Keynes, Public Enquiry part 1,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1970); “Q&A at public meetings for Interim plan.” “Objections to the Plan for Milton Keynes, Public Enquiry part 3,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1970); “Department of Environment letter reacting to master plan,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1971).
The interweaving of these different metaphors of catastrophe into a single language of criticism helped negative representations of Milton Keynes to be referenced more obliquely and concisely, without being explicated or substantiated. Examples of this transition include John b’Arr’s passing mention of Milton Keynes in his review of Frank Schaeffer’s *The New Town Story*: the town is qualified as a “250,000-population, fully motorised mini-Los Angeles that will expunge every cornfield and farmstead over 22,000 acres of Buckinghamshire.” This type of judgement is now able to appear as a relative aside, with the extreme associations merely stated without need for explication or contextualisation of why these claims are being made about the town. The idea of Milton Keynes as being foreign and virulent is therefore expressed as a norm rather than a contestable fact. This “metonymic slide” can be seen even in more professionally focused discussions of Milton Keynes by specialist architectural and planning correspondents; referring to Milton Keynes in passing is increasingly, at this time, to evoke Americanness and the imposition of unnatural urban forms on an inert, passive rural landscape.

MKDC possibly unwittingly contributed to this symbolic collapse through official responses to the ongoing Roskill Commission into the siting of London’s third airport. The location of two of the proposed sites would locate Milton Keynes directly beneath flight paths, and given the need for the airport to accumulate associated infrastructure and housing nearby, the integrity of Milton Keynes as a distinct urban site was also affected by the potential for “sprawl” from an airport at Cublington or Thurleigh. MKDC had clearly submitted throughout its existence that the lack of resolution around the site of the airport

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not only complicated the planning process but potentially rendered the very designation of Milton Keynes as a new town unfit for purpose. In press coverage following the Plan’s launch, Lord Campbell was widely quoted as having described the Third Airport as a “thunder-cloud” hanging over Milton Keynes’ future, with the potential to render the town a “mongrel” or “half-baked” project unable to perform its designated purpose. While Campbell’s typically colourful and evocative use of language helped guarantee his highly quotable testimony would receive media attention, the use of monstrous metaphors of urban decay nonetheless echoed longer-term patterns of criticising unregulated urban growth, with which Milton Keynes was already adversely associated.

The idea that the “overspill” of Milton Keynes represented the new outward edge of London’s urban sprawl had already helped feed the representation of Milton Keynes as a breach in the green belt “cordon sanitaire”, and would become more entrenched with further Ministry of Environment projections of population increases in the south-east. While these were specifically the kinds of increase which Milton Keynes had been designated to ameliorate, print media visualisations of these reports tended to omit reference to the green belt, representing Milton Keynes as the outward boundary of London’s population growth. Alongside visual similarities between images of outward population pressure, and earlier, more creative representations of a monstrous overspilling London, the overlap between metaphors of being “swallowed” in flood and monstrous consumption was in some cases slipping into outright reference to Milton Keynes’ inherent “monstrosity” in itself. In this

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context, then, similarities between Campbell’s fears of a “deformed” Milton Keynes, and wider criticisms of Milton Keynes’ catastrophic encroachment on the rural, were using strikingly similar metaphorical language to describe the abjectification of the south-eastern English landscape.

(Relative) radio silence, 1971-1972

These challenges would be compounded by MKDC’s deliberate decision to reduce its promotional efforts during late 1970 and 1971. National media coverage of the town during this period was largely focused on the Roskill Commission, which, while it eventually found in favour of the Cublington site in 1971, did so by only a slim majority, with expert consultant Professor Colin Buchanan abstaining from making any recommendation at all. Influenced by this inconclusive expert deliberation, and partly through growing global macroeconomic instability which was throwing the viability of such a large new state infrastructural investment into question, the Third Airport project was shelved indefinitely. This decision was welcomed by MKDC as it created a more reliable context for making planning decisions, which in turn allowed for clearer and more reliable promotion of the town.

The decision to reduce media coverage through late 1970 and 1971, after the immediate flurry accompanying the Plan’s launch, was also intended to maximise returns on MKDC promotions. The position of both Galitzine and Partners and MKDC committees

109 “MKDC Communications Programme 1971/78.”; “Annexure to MKDC Communications Report.”
was that directly promoting Milton Keynes was more difficult when there was less substantial development on the ground, and would only be productive when there was sufficient job creation and housing constructed in order to translate promotion into increased population and investment. As such, fewer press releases, and lower levels of advertising, were deliberately scheduled after the launch of the Plan, with the intention that by 1972 advertising and press engagement could begin again in earnest, when any positive gains could be translated to meaningful population and economic growth for the town. This was not a media blackout by any means, with some promotional material and special reporting particularly appearing towards the end of 1971, but considered relative to the coverage of the Plan, and to planned promotions for 1972 onwards this period saw less deliberately courted press engagement.

Despite these motivations, this deliberate decline in courted media coverage, combined with the mixed response in national media to the launch of the Plan, left MKDC in a difficult position. The increasing ease with which ideas of the supposed foreignness, consumptive capacity, and unnatural deformity of Milton Keynes were becoming collapsed into a single language of critique, even where aspects of these criticisms were factually inaccurate or contradictory, indicates the limited success in MKDC’s promotion of a complex vision of non-deterministic space. By simultaneously encapsulating concerns about under- and over-determinism, media representations of Milton Keynes yoked together elements of longer-term historic critiques of urban planning. This symbolic complexity also highlights the difficulty of MKDC’s position; even while attempting to intervene on longer historical debates around the role of urban planning in creating ideal spaces, the symbolic and conceptual preoccupations of these debates continued to shape and even to misshape

110 “MKDC Communications Programme 1971/78.”; “Annexure to MKDC Communications Report.”
the context into which their Plan was published. As Chapter 3 will discuss, these existing challenges would be exacerbated by the changing macroeconomic context which would increasingly impact attitudes to public spending, large scale state investment, and urban planning in particular. By 1972, then, when MKDC would return to its media promotions, the political context in which it was promoting its revisionist, reimagined form of flexible urban planning would be both increasingly precarious and increasingly hostile to the principles of Milton Keynes’ designation.

The political and economic environment into which MKDC resumed promotions from 1972 was increasingly hostile to the ideological and philosophical foundations on which Milton Keynes was designated. From 1972, critiques of state-sponsored urban planning gained increased media and political prominence, as the existing developing criticisms of tower blocks in particular would become further implicated in ideological critiques of postwar reconstructionist state policies. The rhetorical context of the Heath government, where discrete economic challenges were increasingly filtered through declinist narratives as representative of the state of the nation, created a political climate whereby the notion of the state in crisis due to postwar ideological failings was becoming an established representational trope. Critical language describing Milton Keynes as both under- and over-deterministic, became implicated in this process of linking individual instances of state planning with an overall vision of a deterministic postwar state.

MKDC’s promotions at this time amplified their established rhetoric of Milton Keynes representing a newly flexible, non-deterministic, liberating form of urban planning. In doing so, they actively presented Milton Keynes as the opposite of tower blocks, imagined as adversely deterministic both in terms of form and social effects, and represented their planning process as a complete rejection of the robotic, inhuman planners responsible for earlier postwar landscapes. This ultimately continued to advocate a differentiated view of urban planning as a discipline, whereby problems with earlier urban spaces were attributed to the approach of a determinist subset of urban planning, whose errors could be corrected by an alternative conception of planning practice which retained a future-focused value conception, but allowed for greater flexibility. This view of a reformable and redeemable planning practice, however, remained predicated on the belief that state-sponsored urban
planning was capable of creating ideal landscapes. Such a view was becoming less politically

tenable in an environment where postwar planned urban spaces, particularly tower blocks
but increasingly including Milton Keynes itself, were being understood as symbolic of
totalitarian violence and rejections of sustaining historic ideals. This polarisation which
increasingly viewed state-sponsored urban planning as destructive not only to landscapes but
to the nation as a whole challenged the very principles on which Milton Keynes had been
designated, and meant that MKDC promotions were ultimately mismatched ideologically
with the escalating political context in which they found themselves.

The Heath Government and the ideology of public spending, 1970-1974

The 1960s Wilson governments’ policies of technocratic social improvement presumed
ongoing stability resulting from their ending of “stop-go” economic policy, but this proved
to be short-lived.¹ Increasing inflation led to the devaluation of the pound against the US
dollar and gold standard in November 1967, which in turn drove increased wage claims by
trades unions to correct declining real wages.² Fear of an ensuing inflationary cycle of wage
claims motivated both Conservative and Labour parties to propose new legislative
frameworks intended to exert greater control over strike activity in 1969. While the
Conservative policy advocated a punitive approach outlawing all illegal strikes and increasing
formal policing of union activity, Labour’s paper *In Place of Strife* attempted to balance
increased government discretionary power over strike activity with enhanced workplace

¹Despite replicating some declinist framing, useful economic analysis can be found in Glen O’Hara,
British History* 20, no. 3 (2006): 387; Scott Newton, “The Sterling Devaluation of 1967, the International
Thought* 18, no. 3 (2011): 410. Richard Tyler, “‘Victims of our History? Barbara Castle and In Place of Strife,”
*Contemporary British History* 20, no. 3 (2006): 462. The hostile media response to this is described in James
rights for trade unionists. This did not mitigate negative responses to Labour’s proposed restrictions, which were widely interpreted by unions as overly punitive, driving the paper’s parliamentary defeat in late 1969. This failed attempt to control wage claims, understood as an inflationary risk, along with the devaluation of sterling, helped undermine the perceived economic mandate of the Wilson government, and helped influence the surprise election victory of Edward Heath’s Conservative Party in 1970.

While political rhetoric after 1975 has seen Heath’s government framed as indistinguishable from a Labourite postwar consensus, its economic policy took a wide range of approaches during the chaotic period of 1970 to 1974, some of which differed substantially from Wilson’s approach. From 1970 to 1971, Heath’s economic policy under Chancellor Anthony Barber focused on continued cuts to taxation and high public expenditure, while attempting more overt regulation of trade union wage claims. Resistance to this legislation was widespread amongst union members and officials, while its restraints on wage claims were exacerbated by the global economic destabilisation following the United States’ liquidation of the Bretton Woods agreement, and the ensuing inflationary pressure on real wages. The combination of government antagonism and increased income pressures contributed to the national coal miners’ strike in February 1972. While the wage claims were

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temporarily resolved, it severely undermined the legitimacy of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act as a tool to control inflation.\textsuperscript{10} This would be especially significant in the context of the 1972 budget; in May, Barber attempted to force economic growth through substantial public borrowing to fund new infrastructural projects, financial sector deregulation, and providing tax incentives to the private sector.\textsuperscript{11} Rather than boosting growth, deregulation exacerbated economic instability by driving inflation to unsustainable levels, concentrating wealth through encouraging speculative investment, and failing to curb rising unemployment.

This precarious context would help maximise the impact of the oil crisis of December 1973. The British government was extremely ill-prepared for the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries’ (OPEC) decision to limit exports; inflation escalated substantially, while unemployment increased to levels unprecedented since the Depression; in response to this context, the already alienated and economically pressured coal miners recommenced strike activity in January 1974, sparking drastic government rationing of fuel by implementing a state curfew on energy use, limiting work to a three-day-week.\textsuperscript{12} Moreover, the Heath government repeatedly invoked official states of emergency in response to these economic difficulties, thereby encouraging the increasingly popular media association between union activity, threats to the viability of the state, and illegality or violence.\textsuperscript{13} This combination of extreme political interventionism and rhetorical framing therefore helped cultivate a perception of possibly terminal national “crisis,” whereby the survival of the British state was argued to be under imminent threat.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, Edward Heath’s election


\textsuperscript{13} The classic analysis of this process is Hall et al., \textit{Policing the crisis}, 283-92; see also Hall, \textit{The Hard Road to Renewal}; Toye, “From ‘Consensus’ to ‘Common Ground’.”

campaign of 1974 has become associated with his explicit question “Who governs Britain?”, which equated strikes with a quasi-militant threat to national governance and control, and helped reinforce the idea of a vulnerable, embattled state whose survival could not be guaranteed.15

While these events were significant, they did not threaten the existence of the British state; nonetheless 1974 in particular saw the escalation of declinist critiques into a shorter-term, more acute and immanent diagnoses of a current acute crisis of state.16 This would particularly be the case after Heath’s election loss in 1974 and would come to dominate the ensuing Conservative Party leadership debate, where the concept of a nation defeated by union militancy on a psychological as well as militant level would inform the rhetoric of Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher following Heath’s defeat at the 1974 election.17 Elsewhere this change primarily manifested in an increasingly apocalyptic tone to news reporting and political analysis, which predicted an acute and imminent resolution of the longer national downward trajectory of decline.18 The idea of national crisis as deriving from wholly domestic causes relied heavily on a generalised political symbolism, using broad and impressionistic

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15 Hall et al., Policing the crisis, 283-92; Turner, Crisis? What Crisis?, 103-17; While discussed as an aside, the analysis of this term is useful in Gary Westfahl, “Who Governs Science Fiction?,” Extrapolation 41, no. 1 (2000): 63.
categories to describe threats as pervasive and deeply culturally rooted, drawing on existing categories of “blamed groups” that had characterised earlier declinist political debate.19

The process of intertwining longer-term propensities for declinism with the acute narrative of state crisis was shaping a particular, historically new form of politically conservative rhetoric which sought to distance itself from mainstream postwar Conservative party politics as much as from the Labour party.20 As described in Chapter 1, declinism was by no means an inherently conservative or Conservative ideological position; during the 1960s it had been a dominant centre-left and Marxist point of departure for critiques of the insufficient technological efficiency or ideological radicalism of the state. Even while these declinist narratives were concerned with the reattainment of lost historical status, there was a generally positivist-technocratic inflection to these critiques.21 Following Heath’s election defeat, however, wider forms of declinist cultural conservatism, which explicitly critiqued elements of postwar technocratic state reform as historical aberrations, both increased in prominence in mass (London-centric) elite media and popular culture, and formed the foundations of a generalised antipathy to the perceived “failed experiment” of postwar consensus, a framework into which Heath’s government was quickly assimilated both in the Conservative party and in parts of London political media culture.22

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While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to map this process in its entirety in fine detail, it provides a crucial context for accounting for the drastic change in political attitudes to urban planning expertise during and immediately after the Heath government. While trade unionism were the primary “blamed group” for declinist-crisis political criticism from 1972 to 1975, tower blocks received significant attention in elite national media and popular culture for their ostensible capacity to represent a toxic, even totalitarian form of determinism. By symbolically linking state-sponsored urban planning and by extension, postwar state planning, to a belief in national decline and imminent national crisis, the encoding of tower blocks as symbols of state oppression and even ideological violence helped construct the postwar state as overtly ‘interventionist’, unnatural, and as inherently unable to generate good social outcomes.

**Tower blocks and the planning backlash, 1970-1974**

As described in Chapters 1 and 2, state-sponsored urban planning had been subject to significant critique throughout the postwar period, escalating during the 1960s. These criticisms, from political rhetoric to academic research and popular cultural representation, broadly shared a preoccupation with the instrumental logic of postwar urban planned spaces, from new towns to tower blocks; particularly, the idea that these were imposed “solutions” to a particular set of national social and economic problems, against which their success or failure must be constantly assessed. This framework in turn relied on the preconceptions of landscape’s capacity to retain and enforce meaning on individual and collective psyches as discussed in Chapter 1; assessments, then, which framed residents as inert subjects of experimentation as much as did the elite top-policy development they sought to critique.23

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Tower blocks, however, were subject to more substantial levels of criticism in British media and elite popular culture, partly because of their highly visible role in transforming the aesthetic and function of “historic” British cities, and partly to their pervasive impact nationally. Alongside state-run postwar new town programmes, high-rise urban infill developments had been frequently pursued by British local councils, primarily in English and Scottish cities, to renew and expand housing stock while increasing capacity.\(^{24}\) The 1956 Housing Subsidies Act encouraged this by providing central government subsidies for local authority housing developments over four storeys high, enabling local authorities to pursue low-cost, high-impact solutions to overcrowding and infrastructural decay, while associating their jurisdiction with ostensibly progressive policies of modernist public housing provision.\(^{25}\) Unlike early new towns, tower blocks were highly visible additions to the skyline of Britain’s major cities, which meant that they formed a stronger visual presence for those who did not live in social housing.\(^{26}\) Until 1968, the main criticisms of tower blocks in British print media focused on aspects of visual intrusion and “blight;” after a gas explosion at the Ronan Point tower block on 16 May 1968 which killed five people, negative coverage of tower blocks increased exponentially in national print media, political rhetoric, and popular culture, even though in response to the disaster there was a moratorium on tower blocks for public housing.\(^{27}\)

\(^{24}\) The term “tower block” here refers to high-rise mass housing constructed by British governmental bodies, at or above the four-storey requirements of the Housing Subsidy Act 1956. While some sources use the term “high rise” or “high buildings” to describe these structures, the term “tower block” is more commonly used in the source material under study here and will be used for consistency. The classic survey of the forms and policy motivations for tower block construction remains Dunleavy, *The politics of mass housing in Britain*.


\(^{26}\) Esher, *A broken wave*, 103; Moran, “Housing, Memory and Everyday Life in Contemporary Britain,” 141; *Queuing for beginners*, 414; Swenarton, “Politics, property and planning.”

Reading across critical media representations of tower blocks during this period, the terms of objection were usually the totalising nature of tower block design, a form of inflexibility that was understood as occasioning individual psychological harm to residents, more collective social damage through atomisation and social alienation, and harm to the landscape, through the combination of visual ‘blight’ caused by architectural contrast, and the related programmes of demolition which often accompanied their destruction. This characterisation spanned two bodies of criticism, which in turn spanned left- and right-wing critiques of postwar housing policy: preservationist, anti-demolition attitudes which rejected the erasure of historic urban forms, and active antipathy to the specific forms of tower blocks, whether due to their social or aesthetic effects. It also, crucially, attributed the ostensible problems of tower block design as being inherent to their state-sponsored origins, and to the underlying philosophy motivating state urban planning policy during this period: that the application of elite best practice to landscape management would generate improved social and economic outcomes for individuals and for the nation as a whole.

Milton Keynes, the post-tower-block city? 1972-1975

As discussed in Chapter 2, however, Milton Keynes’ foundational premise and the central theme of its Plan was the idea of a redeemable, differentiated urban planning, where negative planning outcomes were understood as not inherent to the act of planning itself but to the specific way in which it was implemented. The concept of urban planning as a redeemable force, rather than as inherently deterministic, was integral to the way in which MKDC proposed Milton Keynes as a rejection of and improvement on earlier postwar urban planning practice. Yet it was into the context of increasingly virulent critiques of urban

planning, through tower blocks, as inherently totalising, that MKDC would break its temporary promotional hiatus in 1972.

MKDC relaunched its public relations in 1972 using a multi-platformed media strategy, which included advertising and invited ‘special features’ in a wide range of media, television and print media, exhibitions, and leaflets, magazines and book-length reports. These targeted potential residents and industry, using a marketing language that rejected the growing simplification of planning critiques.\(^29\) These promotional materials focused on presenting Milton Keynes as an ideal place to live and work based on its fundamental difference to existing planned urban spaces, illustrating this by presenting Milton Keynes as inherently opposite to the totalising determinism of tower blocks.

This opposition was most explicitly made in print media advertisements which used images of destructive or totalising urban planning, accompanied by explanatory text distancing Milton Keynes from these practices. For example, one newspaper advertisement depicted an oversized boot pressing down on a shovel as if to dig up a thatched-roof cottage, with the headline “That’s no way to build a new city.”\(^30\) Smaller text underneath asserted boldly that “you don’t set aside everything that’s gone before because you’re building something new” and that “quite against the modern trend, there’ll be trees.”\(^31\) Other print media advertisements depicted menacing bulldozers under the headline “Would your voice be heard against it?”\(^32\) Text beneath described a consultation with residents of Simpson village: “whichever way it went, nobody minded quite so much afterwards when they understood the other person’s point of view. Perhaps it’s something to do with making


\(^{30}\) “That’s no way to build a new city,” ibid. March 24, 1972; See photographic variation in “That’s no way to build a new city,” Financial Times November 15, 1972.


\(^{32}\) “Would your voice be heard against it?,” Times May 17, 1973.
yourself heard.” This presented Milton Keynes as flexible to meet residents’ needs, and able to accommodate existing landscape forms without destroying them.\footnote{Accounts of 1970s motorway protests and the iconography of the bulldozer can be found in Moran, \textit{On Roads}, 198-225; Turner, \textit{Crisis! What Crisis?} Cf. the extended satire of motorway protest in Tom Sharpe, \textit{Blott on the landscape} (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975).}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure6.png}
\caption{“Would your voice be heard against it?”, 1973 MKDC advertisement.\footnote{“Would your voice be heard against it,” \textit{Times} May 17, 1973.}}
\end{figure}
More overtly, advertisements from 1974 and 1975 contrasted a *New Scientist* report about tower blocks with an excerpt from Milton Keynes’ *Plan*.35 The *New Scientist* excerpt was edited to read as a litany of problems posed by tower blocks, from cost-inefficiency to social fragmentation. This is contrasted with the quotation from *The Plan for Milton Keynes*: “No building will be taller than the tallest tree.” This principle combines a clear emphasis on low-rise building with the use of trees to invoke a natural order of scale proposed in opposition to high-rise construction. Smaller text further asserted “Milton Keynes is a city being built for the people who live in it”, linking low-rise planning to a human scale of urban design.

Another major print media advertisement from this period used the headline “in our view big is not best,” above a linear graphic comparing the relative heights of skyscrapers, such as the Empire State building and the Centrepoint building, to the new Lloyd’s Court development in Milton Keynes (see figure 7).36 Lloyd’s Court is not actually represented at all, but is indicated to be completely obscured by a low swirl of treetops. The accompanying text exalts this focus as “revolutionary” in its capacity to meet a more human scale; it also attempts to locate Milton Keynes’ forms in a context of iconic architecture, while rejecting the principle that this status is only possible through large-scale construction.37

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36 “In our view big is not best,” *Guardian* November 21, 1975.
37 See a more vibrant, colourfull promotional poster by Phillip Castle, which dwarfs various cultural symbols of Milton Keynes’ urbandity with a foreground looming with trees, in Alastair Donald and Gwen Webber, eds., *A Clockwork Jerusalem* (The Vinyl Factory, 2014), 88.
Figure 7: “In our view big is not best,” 1974 MKDC advertisement.

38 “In our view big is not best,” *Guardian* November 21, 1975.
This low-rise, nature-dominated landscape was also represented in terms of its rurality, equating low density with embrace of nature. Promotional booklets for potential residents from 1972 emphasised the pleasures of “woodlands, hedgerows, rivers and streams... things you wouldn’t usually find in a city” as one of the town’s major attractions. It also posited Milton Keynes’ potential residents as being “all kinds of people,” though “many of them will be from London; people trying to get away from the problems of overcrowding and housing nightmares.” Elsewhere this association with escaping London to embrace a bucolic rural lifestyle was explored in a long anecdotal textual advertisement for the Evening Standard titled “Maybe you don’t need to go to Australia after all.” The ideal of low-rise architecture as connected to nature, ease and pleasure was defined in opposition to the unnatural and inflexible qualities of existing cities, allowing MKDC to present Milton Keynes as a potential escape.

These advertisements often appeared alongside journalistic coverage, where MKDC would invite journalists to attend site visits to report on Milton Keynes’ latest stages of growth and development. These would appear in the context of “special reports” on Milton Keynes, which sometimes ran to several pages; while clearly responding to MKDC instigation, these reports were not fully stage-managed, in that journalists presented independent interpretations of MKDC material, alongside additional research, site visits and interviews.

From 1972 to 1975, a number of special reports which depicted Milton Keynes in more favourable terms used the tower block as a central organising motif: the 1972 Times special report, for example, while critical of Milton Keynes’ new build housing, described it as “utterly unlike those nightmare towers... in which the people fit the system, not the other

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39 Note that the image accompanying this text, of the overlapping hands of a white man, woman and child, imply a white heteronormative family identity in spite of the goals of “all kinds of people” living in Milton Keynes. See A new city comes to life, (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Development Corporation, 1972).
40 “Maybe you don’t have to go to Australia after all,” Evening Standard June 10, 1972.
way around.” 41 Similarly, the Financial Times’ 1972 special report ran with the headline “South Britain’s New Jerusalem”, using strikingly similar pastoral imagery to the adjacent full-page MKDC advertisement “That’s no way to build a new city” discussed above. 42 The 1974 Financial Times report continued this pattern, opening with the full-page “No building bigger than the tallest tree” advertisement and following with a range of reports which favourably depict MKDC’s revisionist policies in terms of their rejection of high-rise determinism. 43

Associations between trees, a “human” planning scale, participation and flexibility, as opposed to concrete, high-rise, and determinism, were further cultivated in longer form in two promotional magazines, both entitled New City, circulated mainly to potential residents and businesses but also to university urban planning departments. 44 These lavish, glossy magazines used angular, artistic photography and bold colour to illustrate stories about life in Milton Keynes, from residents, businesses, and the planners themselves. The idea of Milton Keynes’ flexible form as a freeing and liberating social force were central to these stories, from visual juxtapositions of new buildings with open fields, to stories of Stantonbury Campus’ progressive comprehensive schooling, and the supportive community atmosphere provided by the arrivals support team and local community cultural initiatives. In these MKDC publications, Fred Lloyd Roche in particular repeatedly linked Milton Keynes’ flexible form to individual and social empowerment, in opposition to high-rise development:

[In] a low density plan, you have the opportunity to … put in the things that the community want. The alternative is the high density plan which is pre-determined: you build it as a final scheme before the people arrive.45

In other MKDC promotional material, Lloyd Roche and other MKDC staff took these claims further to suggest MKDC’s ultimate goal was “to do ourselves out of a job”:46

The sooner people forget that we ever existed… the sooner it will mean that the people who live in Milton Keynes have adopted their own city and it becomes their city. So the sooner they forget us, the better it's going to be.47

Lloyd Roche in particular repeatedly illustrated this planning-self-erasure through the rejection of “skyscrapers” or high-rise construction, equating the invisibility of Milton Keynes’ planning to the belief that the town would be “softened and one day dominated by trees.”48

This promotion of revisionist, flexible planning as opposed to tower blocks appeared in wider MKDC professional and promotional activities during this period. For Walter Bor, planning consultant to MKDC, this was a logical progression; as deputy planning officer for London County Council in the early 1960s, Bor had advocated for high-density housing to be abandoned as policy, and in 1962 published an article in *Official Architecture and Planning* calling for increased high-density low-rise public housing.49 Bor built on this in his 1972 book “for the intelligent layman,” *The Making of Cities*, which draws heavily on Milton Keynes as

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45 *New city: Milton Keynes 1975*, 11. See the difference between totalising master-planning and planning as process as described in Giddings and Hopwood, “From evangelistic bureaucrat to visionary developer.”
48 Ibid.
49 Walter Bor, “A fresh approach to high density housing,” *Official Architecture and Planning* 25 (1962); Swenarton, “Politics, property and planning.”
an example of best practice.\(^{50}\) Bor’s central argument was that for urban planning to generate desirable outcomes, it must be flexible, which he believed tower blocks could not possibly be due to their formal requirements.\(^{51}\) While stating that tower blocks were not inherently damaging, Bor argued that their swift adoption en masse, combined with demolition of existing urban landscapes to construct them, reflected a “lack of humility” in the face of historical landscapes which was “tantamount to sacrilege.”\(^{52}\) Bor made similar arguments against indiscriminate tower block use at the 1974 conference “Tall Buildings and People?”, suggesting that the failings of tower blocks were “obvious” and should have been avoided.\(^{53}\) Bor’s works associate high-rise with egotism and arrogance as well as forcefulness, to position the flexible “self-erasing” planning at Milton Keynes as humbler and more deferential to both residents and to existing landscape forms.

### Crisis and urban planning, 1973-1975

MKDC attempts to cultivate associations between low-rise, low-density, flexible housing and a humble, human-scaled liberatory urban planning, relied on a specific preconception of what motivated criticisms of tower blocks and earlier postwar urban planning more generally. By setting up a distinction between deterministic and flexible planning, MKDC marketing relied on a continuing faith in the capacity of urban planning to create desirable spaces in theory, and posited the criticisms of deterministic planning as reflecting disillusionment with the specific manifestations of one type of planning approach.

\(^{50}\) Walter G. Bor, *The making of cities* (London: L. Hill, 1972). Saumarez Smith notes Bor was part of a wider group of government-associated planners whose commitment to modernist design was evolving towards lower-rise and less deterministic forms during this period; see Otto Saumarez Smith, “The Inner City Crisis and the End of Urban Modernism in 1970s Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 27, no. 4: (2016): 591.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 32, 39-40, 72-74, 222-33.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 82 ,177.

This rejected the well-established longer-term tendency in national media, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 to view “urban planning” and “planning” interchangeably, as a practice administered by “planners” as a generic group, in singular, monolithic terms regardless of the density of their developments.\textsuperscript{54} This conception of a unified phenomenon of “planning” emerging from a similarly cohesive group of “planners” was in wide currency in postwar British culture, for example appearing in the poetry and films of John Betjeman to the generalised critiques of the industry by Willmott and Young.\textsuperscript{55} Novels and music discussing urban planning in detail had tended to adopt a similar language.\textsuperscript{56} In the immediate context of Milton Keynes’ development, this idea of a unified industrial position amongst “the planners” was commonplace in reportage on the Roskill Commission on London’s third airport, coverage of motorway protests, more polemical critiques of tower blocks, and indeed on Milton Keynes itself.\textsuperscript{57} Crucially, this singular language of “planning” did not differentiate between philosophies or densities, but focused on the positivist application of technical expertise to deliberately shape landscape and demography. This existing generalised definition of urban planning, as an extension of state planning, was also implicated in the postwar reconstructionist ideological context which had allowed it to become politically ascendant.

These themes of a generalised determinism in “planning” associated with concrete and tower blocks can be seen clearly in critiques of postwar planned spaces which used apocalyptic language to link the determinism of planned spaces, particularly tower blocks, with collective psychological damage, a rejection of “heritage” or “tradition”, and perceived

\textsuperscript{54} This generalised language is particularly evident throughout late-1950s issues of \textit{Encounter}; see also \textit{New Society} throughout the 1960s.

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. the analysis of Betjeman in Tewdwr-Jones, “The planning films of John Betjeman.” See also the closing blurbs of Willmott and Young, \textit{Family and kinship in East London}, 197-98; Willmott, \textit{The evolution of a community}, 113-17.

\textsuperscript{56} Examples are discussed in Morphet, “New Towns in the Novel.”; Lupro, “Preserving the Old Ways.”

changes in national status with changes to the form of the British landscape. This trend in political critique of planning spanned political journalism, television, and dystopian fictions, with key motifs being the representation of tower blocks, new towns, “estates” and “planners” as sinister and damaging. Key examples of this include the investigative journalism of Private Eye, particularly by Candida Lycett-King and Christopher Booker, which focused on the role of tower blocks as erasing heritage and thereby wounding or damaging the integrity of British cities, particularly London. Alongside the earnest and apocalyptically toned investigative journalism of Private Eye’s post-Ronan Point coverage of tower block construction, regular satirical features emphasised urban planning as an opposition between representatives of the state, and valuable urban heritage now being characterised as inefficient, “clutter”, or not useful. Throughout 1968 to 1975, the magazine ran regular features along similar lines where state actors argued in favour of ludicrous “planning” proposals, such as the construction of “1 million empty homes”, or which ironically depicted motorways, tower blocks concrete landscapes in the affectionate style of rural travelogues. Such satires relied on the ironic opposition between technocratic, faceless “planners”

58 While the association of concrete with left politics is discussed in general terms in Forty’s Concrete and Culture, English examples are used with reference to a generalised Western European narrative which does not incorporate the role of nationalist heritage narratives in defining concrete as a political and social evil. The ahistoricity ascribed to concrete is also described in general philosophical terms rather than with reference to the political implications of this perception in national contexts. See Adrian Forty, Concrete and culture : a material history (London: Reaktion, 2012), 83-87,147-49.


advocating unnatural solutions, and a “natural” order of heritage, understood as historically
venerated landscapes.

This sense of aesthetic violence enacted by faceless “planning” has been studied
more broadly as a recurring theme in dystopian fiction from this period, from episodes of
Doctor Who such as “The Green Death”, to the novels of J.G. Ballard and the pulp paperbacks
of James Herbert. These texts presented an inevitable progression between interventionist
urban design, individual and eventually collective psychological malaise, and by implication,
economic and political collapse.63 The material of concrete in particular was central to this
symbolism; Ballard’s novels imbued concrete landscapes with actively dehumanising powers,
a theme increasingly common to tabloid characterisations of redeveloped inner-city areas.64
This perception of urban planning as dehumanising applied not only to the dehumanisation
of residents, but also helped construct the dehumanised ideal of “planners”, visible only to
the public through the forms they created, unaccountable through participatory politics, and
as singular as the concrete forms they generated.

The relationship between this generalised, polarised and dehumanised representation
of planning, and faith in its ability to generate positive outcomes, was explicitly satirised in
the December 1972 Monty Python’s Flying Circus episode “The Nude Organist”, which featured
a series of sketches on “modern building techniques”. These included social housing built by
characters from nineteenth-century literature and an M1 interchange constructed by

63 Turner, Crisis? What Crisis?, 27-48; Keith Gildart, “From ‘Dead End Streets’ to ‘Shangri Las’: Negotiating
Social Class and Post-War Politics with Ray Davies and the Kinks,” Contemporary British History 26, no. 3
(2012); Jon Garland et al., “Youth Culture, Popular Music and the End of ‘Consensus’ in Post-War Britain,”
ibid.; Bill Osgerby, “‘Bovver’ Books of the 1970s: Subcultures, Crisis and ‘Youth-Spoilation’ Novels,” ibid.;
Oi!: Class, Locality, and British Punk,” Twentieth Century British History 24, no. 4 (2013); see J. G. Ballard,
Concrete island (London: Cape, 1974); High-rise (London: Cape, 1975); For discussion of Ballard and Herbert,
especially with regard to the erasure of private ownership in the reception of Ballard’s work, see Westall and
urban verticality in 20th-century science fiction literature,” Urban Studies 52, no. 5 (2014); Owen Hatherley,
“Rewriting the past,” Apollo, no. 639 (2016).
64 Ballard, Concrete island; High-rise.
characters from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The final “modern building technique”, located in the new town of Peterborough, was the hypnotist Mystico constructing tower blocks through the power of his mind. This was presented with a significant caveat: “They are as strong, solid and safe as any other building method in this country; provided of course, that people believe in them.” When tenants are depicted ceasing to “believe in the building,” for example remembering that they used to live in a “much nicer” Italian villa, the tower block starts to shake and collapse, only standing upright again when these views are loudly retracted. The references in this sketch cluster around Milton Keynes; the town was located just off the M1, while Peterborough was also expanded under the same New Towns Act of 1965, and the towns shared planning infrastructure. The idea of planning being executed by canonical literary characters satirises general criticisms of planning as opposed to history and culture, which Milton Keynes was also subject to. Blurring the lines between new towns and high-rise urban redevelopment, the sketch presents a shared foundation of “faith” underpinning urban planning projects, whose collapse is less a structural concern than a social one, of disillusionment and critique, with the ongoing survival of planning only possible through the active repression of truth.

While these niche, London-centric satirical representations of planning as a general force were not widely consumed at the time, they highlight and foreground wider cultural trends which can be seen at work in national media coverage of Milton Keynes during this period. Generalised criticisms of “planners” and the perception of planning in general as forceful and damaging can be seen motivating more critical special report coverage,

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65 Broadcast version of sketch is Ian MacNaughton, *The Nude Organist (or The Nude Man)*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus, Series 3* (1972); for ease of reference citations will be made to the published scripts, see Graham Chapman et al., *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Just The Words, Volume 1* (London: Methuen, 1990), 167-69.
66 *Just The Words, Volume 1*, 168.
67 Ibid. The class dimension of this is also significant; to state that a luxury villa was nicer than public housing was part of this challenge which “shook the foundations.”
particularly that which focused on residents’ complaints. Frustrations about delays in service provision, amenity shortages or planning bottlenecks were reported on in terms of how Milton Keynes resembled earlier experiments in urban planning, with provocative headlines such as “Don’t come to new city” emphasising the dissonance between rhetoric and the reality. While the majority of these reported concerns addressed short-term growth imbalances, and delays in implementing some planned social programmes, these were readily assimilated into existing “new town blues” narratives of atomisation and social failure, and therefore of wider structural failings inherent to new towns, rather than being located within specific local contexts. Contrasting MKDC rhetoric with stories of administrative problems and residents’ frustrations, presented the town’s ambitious rejection of earlier urban planning models as not yet translating to residents’ experiences. It also presented the town’s residents as being exposed negatively to the determining forces of “planners”; not of one or other subtype of planners or planning, but “planning” in general.

This perception of Milton Keynes as insufficiently distant from existing urban planning practice was reinforced by the architecture and design of early grid-squares, several of which were poorly received in national media as being inconsistent with the terms of the Plan. Due to a national brick shortage, wider economic stresses and unstable inflationary conditions, early housing construction heavily relied on inexpensive materials such as concrete and sheet metal, often using system-building techniques, in order to reduce overall costs and increase construction speed. This led to early housing estates such as those in

71 Barty Phillips, “New-town living,” ibid. May 26, 1974; Kitchen, “Moving to Milton Keynes,” New Society August 22, 1974; David Crewe, “Labour shortage casts shadow over sunny future,” Times May 17, 1973. It is significant that these accounts usually featured Bletchley and Wolverton residents who believed that more MKDC funding should have been directed to established towns, rather than to constructing the linking “crescent” between the two towns. The issue was one of relative emphasis on different stages of the Plan’s enactment; however it was represented in print media reportage as a potential failure of the Plan in its entirety.
Fuller’s Slade, Bradwell, and Netherfield, being constructed in an inexpensive terraced styles using exposed concrete aluminium or wooden cladding (see Figures 9 and 10.) Moreover, and in complete opposition to the Plan, architects working on several early grid squares located social and economic amenities in the centre of the grid-square, rather than dispersing them around the edges to maximise decentralisation and decrease the atomisation of individual squares.

Figure 8: Flat-roofed, wooden-clad terraced housing at Fuller’s Slade in New City Magazine, 1974.


While later construction adhered more closely to the decentralisation principle and provided a more genuinely diverse range of housing, these early grid-squares were the first new-build areas of Milton Keynes about which journalists had the opportunity to report. In several cases, this aesthetic was identified as being divergent from the Plan, and as representing continuity with earlier totalising models of urban planning and architecture design. While some accounts were more cautious about projecting outwards from specific early estates, these media accounts nonetheless found it difficult to read concrete forms in terms of MKDC’s empowering and liberating rhetoric. While criticism of Milton Keynes’

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early planning implementation was by no means unwarranted, the way in which it drew on
the “metonymic slide” in between concrete forms, dehumanisation of residents, and the
“faceless” imposition of positivist urban planning expertise, helped encode Milton Keynes’
concrete terraces with wider meanings that had become attached to concrete modernism as
a negative social force.

Moreover, particular negative associations of planning as a determining force were
actively reinforced by MKDC representations of tower blocks and earlier urban planning
models: for example, the association between high-rise and inflexibility, the opposition of
“human” and “inhuman” scales and styles of participatory design, and the notion of urban
planning being able to “plan itself out of existence.” These principles, while on the one hand
attempting to distance MKDC from the criticisms that tower blocks in particular were
receiving, also actively reinforced other negative attitudes to planning through agreement.
The primary problem with this approach, then, was that MKDC’s subtle differentiation
between good and bad planning was not only promoted in the context of a wider political
culture which failed to agree in principle, but also relied on reinforcing hostile narratives to
particular planned spaces currently understood to be undesirable. As such, by participating
in the demonisation of the tower block as a force for social and political evil, and by defining
Milton Keynes’ uniqueness and success in terms of the overtly undesirable qualities of earlier
urban planned spaces, MKDC promotional materials actively perpetuated the cultural
hostility to urban planning which it was trying to overcome. The calculated attempt to market
Milton Keynes as revisionist therefore ultimately relied on reinforcing a demonisation and
“loss of faith” in the postwar political settlement as understood through changes to the
landscape, which in an increasingly hostile and politically unstable national climate proved to
help undermine the very kinds of political support which MKDC most needed.
This kind of complicated push-pull relationship where some urban planning is celebrated through demeaning others is best characterised through the attempted satire of dehumanising planning included in MKDC’s New City magazine of 1975. This included a feature on the urban planners behind Milton Keynes, which opened with the following statement:

It is fairly widely accepted that planners are not human but mechanical beings exercising infinite power from subterranean vaults, where they gorge on statistics fed to them by computers and make a series of decisions, couched in peculiar jargon, and contrived to inconvenience the lives of everyone of us.\[78\]

Without any further reference to this dystopian caricature, whose exaggerations and inaccuracy are presumed obvious, the article proceeds to recount a range of anonymised vox-pop type interviews with Milton Keynes’ planners. These include the argument that there is no “particular breed of person called ‘a planner’” but rather a diverse range of technical skill groups that work in collaboration; also, that the role of planning is to facilitate and lead, creating foundations for residents to create their own communities.\[79\] Repeatedly drawing on dynamic metaphors of organic growth, these accounts emphasise that it is “impossible” to be truly deterministic and that attempts to do so would be unfair or violent; yet “cool scientific judgement” is still required in order to negotiate conflicting interests, which must be deployed in the interest of an uncertain rather than a certain future.\[80\] The premise remains, however, that even though “people think of planners as faceless bureaucrats who delight in disrupting their lives,” planning itself is presented as a necessary task which merely needs reform in its implementation.\[81\]

\[78\] New City: Milton Keynes 1975, 58.
\[79\] Ibid., 58-59.
\[80\] Ibid.
\[81\] Ibid.
This combination of satire of planning determinism, and the earnest defence of urban planning as an inevitable and desirable necessity to effective state functioning, exhibits a complex and contradictory relationship to the value of its own discipline. The dystopian caricature of malevolent planner-robots both foregrounds and ridicules existing critiques of urban planning, but then goes on to vindicate them, by arguing for the need for urban planners to overcome their egos and ultimately render their influence invisible for a desirable outcome. The urban planners interviewed are nameless, describe themselves as not really being “planners” at all, and the interview is not illustrated, although elsewhere interviews with Fred Lloyd Roche and Lord Campbell were accompanied with colour photographs (see figure 11).

Figure 10: Lord Campbell (left) and Fred Lloyd Roche (right) in front of the Strategic Plan, New City Magazine 1975.82

82 Ibid.
The accounts include conflicting definitions of planning which are not wholly reconciled; by arguing determinism is “impossible”, but also that it needs to be studiously avoided through flexible urban planning practice, or that organic growth is necessary and valuable, but ultimately that it needs to be contained through the application of objective scientific knowledge. Amidst the tensions between these ideas, MKDC’s revisionist model appears as if to be perpetuating the kind of critique it also satirises; relying on leveraging the existence of negative judgments characterises Milton Keynes in negative terms, defined by what it is not, which thereby perpetuates and reinforces negative criticisms of certain planned urban spaces to legitimate its own difference.

Such a complex relationship to postwar planned urban spaces would not necessarily be inherently problematic in all political contexts. Indeed, in terms of the classic Milton Keynes “success” narratives, the town successfully met its population and investment growth targets throughout this period. In terms of the rhetorical success of the town’s establishment of a coherent media identity during the early years of its development and growth, however, the effectiveness of promoting a binaristic model of “good” and “bad” urban planning practice is less certain. Not only did this rely on a greater degree of political differentiation between urban planning types and motivations than was politically or culturally widespread during this period, it also was partly self-defeating of planning promotion that relied on advocating its own erasure, perpetuating ideas of its own negativity, in an attempt to render the depiction of a planned space as desirable both for its planned and unplanned aesthetic. Given the profound cultural influence of negative symbolic readings of generalised “planning” during the early-to-mid-1970s, and the growing culture of criticism of high-profile state investments on economic as well as ideological grounds, this

83 Bendixson and Platt, Image and reality; Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes.
subtlety carried further risks of symbolically encoding Milton Keynes with deterministic planning by association.

One significant early example in 1974, however, of the style of more overt and extreme negative media representation which was to come, can be seen in the post-*Private Eye* work of Christopher Booker. Booker visited Milton Keynes in 1974, and significantly his response shares both symbolic language and an ideological framework with his criticisms of tower blocks. His work during the early- to mid-1970s also makes the most explicit linkage between urban planning and national decline, an association which he and others would develop in the later 1970s as described in Chapter 4 in the context of ever-escalating financial crisis. While Booker is keen to predict that Milton Keynes will be abandoned and fail, he also suggests that any continued development of the city would represent the worst kind of dystopian environment, not only for its citizens but on a broader scale. Akin to those “dinosaur” projects of “Concorde, Maplin and the Channel Tunnel” which to Booker were wisely cancelled or postponed, he suggests that Milton Keynes is “more expensive, more grandiose and potentially more disastrous than any of them.” The reasoning for this is specifically due to the large scale of Milton Keynes and the way that its plan, in seeking to address the sociological criticisms of tower blocks and early new towns, facilitates greater state control over leisure provision and parks. In a town where even the trees are controlled and endorsed by planned intention, Booker argues that any claims that the town provides freedom of choice can only be false.

Booker argues that the MKDC image of the town as a place “derived from the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants” is inherently fraudulent. This is described as emerging from the very act of planning a city according to ambitious futuristic goals. By contrast, he suggests

85 Booker, *The Seventies*, 146.
that “the sprawling, leafy, affluent suburbia of a Los Angeles [sic]”, with its slow development and supposed aesthetic derivation from the choices of its inhabitants, is a more positive style of living which precludes the involvement of the state.\textsuperscript{86} This opposition between the planners and “the poor people who actually have to live there”, a mainstay of the above critiques of tower blocks is here presented as making Milton Keynes no less deterministic or more desirable than any planned spaces which went before, either in high-rise or low-density forms. The dystopian element which unites all planned spaces is, for Booker, the inevitable determinism that derives from any and all executive large-scale decision-making about the way that cities should look and its inhabitants should live.\textsuperscript{87} The act of planning, for Booker, cannot do other than represent “an intellectual pre-conception of life” to which its inhabitants must mould. Whether in the form of “the “city in the park” or “the anthill of shining towers”, the effect must be in this conception the “utterly depersonalized nightmare which haunted Aldous Huxley in \textit{Brave New World}.\textsuperscript{88} The evils at Milton Keynes, then, are the same as those which underpin tower block development, with any difference in aesthetic less significant than the shared conceptual premise of state intervention.

As such Milton Keynes is not only a “monument” to a type of urban planning Booker predicts is unsustainable, but also a site where general social and political evils at work in Britain as a whole can be seen most clearly at work.\textsuperscript{89} This type of association and the grand sense of scale Booker imparts to Milton Keynes’ ostensible ills is an early precursor to the more extreme and apocalyptic critiques of the town in the late 1970s, and specifically arises from the rejection of MKDC’s differentiated view of urban planning. Whether in tower block or new town form, Booker interprets a shared ideological basis to urban planning for mass housing that links it to an insidious form of state intervention which he specifically rejects.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 147. \\
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 148.
Booker’s response to Milton Keynes reflects a much more sinister linkage of Milton Keynes’ development to a generalised, inherently deterministic urban planning than has been analysed thus far. Media reports on the town were, however, by the mid-1970s, clearly rejecting the post-tower-block redemptive vision of urban planning which Milton Keynes’ marketing relied upon, and questioning the capacity of any planned space to transcend determinism. Moreover the broader popular cultural trends towards viewing planning as a singular unified phenomenon, which was contingent on collective faith for its survival, were forming another challenge to the differentiation between planning ideology and form promoted by MKDC material. The foundations were laid for the escalation of criticism of Milton Keynes during the next wave of economic crisis in the late 1970s. In such a context, Milton Keynes’ revisionist positioning laid the town open to ever more virulent critiques as representative of and contributor to the nation’s decline.
Chapter 4: Mirroring England, Mirroring Decline, 1976-1978

All of a sudden, it seemed, that new towns were no longer the nation's most successful postwar planning achievement, but one of the main causes of its urban malaise.1

This chapter locates the changing representation of Milton Keynes in British media and popular culture through a wider examination of declinist cultural preoccupations with landscape. The exacerbation of earlier patterns of association of planning with dystopia and declining national status during the years 1976 to 1978 was part of a wider cultural pattern of spiralling moral panic in media and political culture regarding Britain’s economic stability, national cohesion, and national status. Far from being a sudden change without a traceable history, depictions of urban planning became increasingly invoked in an apocalyptic political discourse which drew on declinist traditions to project an imminent national crisis. Such rejections of postwar landscape change drew upon established nostalgic conservative cultural narratives to legitimate blaming state planning for the crisis and ultimate failure of the British state. By contrast, MKDC marketing and positive representations of Milton Keynes retreated into essentialist readings of the town’s value, refusing to make wider claims for its relevance and success. This rationalist, paternalist educational approach not only failed to integrate Milton Keynes into powerful wider social narratives in the same way as critiques of urban planning had, but also helped perpetuate negative readings, by refusing to acknowledge or engage with Milton Keynes’ symbolic functions in this wider political context.

Following Edward Heath’s decision to call a general election on the question of “who governs Britain?”, the Labour Party under Harold Wilson was re-elected by a slim majority in February 1974, consolidated by a further election in October 1974. These elections were fought on the basis of a singular, cohesive corporatist economic management strategy, the Social Contract, laid out in Labour’s 1973 programme. This policy platform reflected “[a] conception of socialist planning [which] was entirely top down and corporatist,” despite internal opposition from the Labour Left. While incorporating incomes policies and commitments to trade unions, the Social Contract presented these as part of a singular synthetic platform of welfare provision, regional planning, nationalisation and infrastructural investment. Regardless of internal challenges and difficulties of implementing these policies in government, the idea of Labour’s integrated Social Contract policy had wider media and political implications in a context of ideological polarisation. The Social Contract rhetorically integrated a wide range of policies under a singular framework of state planning which was unabashedly and explicitly “Socialist”. Through the singular language of “The Social Contract,” Labour policies were cast not just as coherent, but as totalising; to detractors, it was increasingly easy to frame Labour policy as becoming more systematically paternalist. Moreover, awareness of minority support for Tony Benn’s Alternative Economic Strategy, which advocated import controls and extended nationalisation, drove critical media
representations of the Social Contract as concealing a hidden, potentially destructive radical left agenda to be implemented by stealth.⁷

This uneasy relationship between Labour party policy and the media was exacerbated by difficulties in implementing the Social Contract in office, with Treasury introducing cuts to public spending, including to new towns, in response to external macroeconomic pressures throughout 1975.⁸ This proved insufficient to bolster sterling values, however, which had remained unstable since devaluation in 1966 and which were particularly impacted by global post-Bretton Woods and post-oil crisis fluctuations in global currency markets. Despite successfully reducing post-oil-crisis inflation after the 1974 election, declining currency values also exacerbated existing income pressures, leading to increased pressure from trade unions regarding wage claims. In this context, with quickly eroding currency reserves and sharp drops in the value of sterling, Chancellor Denis Healy negotiated an immediate loan on short notice from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to stabilise the value of the pound.⁹ The terms of this loan required significant accountability measures to satisfy the IMF regarding use of the funds, while also imposing controls on money supply; this overt requirement of monetarism as an economic policy has been considered a significant step towards the normalisation of neoliberal economic policy and the official abandonment of Keynesian economic management by the British state.¹⁰ Prime Minister James Callaghan, who had succeeded Harold Wilson after his resignation in March 1976, further underlined this perception of ideological change enforced by changes in the

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wider global economy in public statements which argued that austerity, rather than welfarism, was the new appropriate response to economic challenges.

‘Signification spirals’: mapping urban planning into the crisis

There has been significant historical and economic debate regarding the extent to which any IMF loan was actually required, and whether IMF-mandated policy marked any end to “Keynesianism” in the British Treasury. The most striking feature of the IMF crisis, however, was the extent to which the rhetorical construction of “crisis” developed in media and political responses without reference to economic reality, framing it as a critical moment in national survival. While understood and framed as an economic crisis at the time, the actual crisis around the IMF loan application was concentrated around belief systems and ideologies about economics, the role of the state, and British national prestige. This built on the narrative of a vulnerable, embattled state that had been central to Heath’s antagonism of trade unions, and tied the declinist culture of insular diagnostic blame for lost status to projections of terminal threat. It is this dimension of the way that “crisis” was understood and represented at the time, rather than being experienced purely as an imposition through hindsight, which is significant for understanding the way in which declinism impacted crisis culture, and how this informed the changing representation and understanding of symbols of the postwar state during this period.

The work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), particularly in its 1978 work *Policing the Crisis*, remains crucial to theorising changes in political symbolism

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during this period. Nominally a study of media moral panics around mugging, *Policing the Crisis* remains a significant study of the wider rhetorical and media construction of the idea of a nation in crisis during the 1970s, and how the specific panic around mugging was part of this wider phenomenon. This process is partly accounted for by the development of a “signification spiral”, a model of cultural representation whereby mutually reinforcing political and media rhetoric allows discrete and otherwise unrelated moral panics to be understood firstly as analogous to each other, then increasingly as part of a wider, singular crisis befalling the whole state. This is presented as an incremental process of cultural repetition, which draws in ever more disparate elements into a singular narrative by applying a metonymic framework, positing individual difficulties or subjects of criticism as essential of and representative of an entire cultural state.

This theoretical approach, and the closely related earlier theory of ‘moral panics’ by Stanley Cohen, have been widely utilised by historians seeking to both challenge and account for the development of “crisis” narratives through popular culture and media representation during the 1970s. A useful analysis of this process of “mapping together” in apocalyptic mid-1970s political commentary, remains Joe Moran’s 2010 article contextualising the live political outburst made by *Opportunity Knocks* host Hughie Green. Made at the conclusion of the December 1976 episode of BBC light entertainment programme *Opportunity Knocks*, Green’s unusual political monologue made an impassioned plea to viewers in response to the IMF loan. Green described the nation as “old and worn, on the brink of ruin, bankrupt in all but heritage and hope, and even those [are] in pawn”; the origins of this loss of prestige are presented as the humiliating “transfusion” of the IMF loan, a form of weakness which

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15 Hall et al., *Policing the crisis*.
16 Ibid.
risks “los[ing] our freedom for ever”. While framing the IMF loan as a collective humiliation, Green also suggests individualised psychological and moral remedies to the crisis: “determination, hard work, freedom from strikes, better management, and from all of us: guts!”

Green’s speech is a useful example of how politicised metonymic symbolism was becoming during the IMF crisis. His speech clearly and overtly locates individual failings, collective economic crisis, and then relative levels of national heritage and value, as links in a causal, metonymic chain. This pattern of projected causality can be traced in earlier examples, such as *Suicide of A Nation?* discussed in Chapter 1, and in the right-wing Conservative manifesto 1985 discussed in Chapter 3; yet Green’s speech marks a further escalation of this approach. It models a particular relationship between heritage as value, and heritage as commodity, which would be crucial for understanding national status discussion during this period. This symbolism locates heritage and prestige in an economic circulation of value, imagining them as discrete commodities that can be invested, traded, or overspent, and indeed stored in particular repositories of meaning and identity.

Popular cultural representations of postwar landscape change, 1976-78

This reading of postwar social policy as having produced the 1976 crisis was far from being specific to Green’s speech, but was a typical trope of media analysis during this period, with the same metonymic logic of cause, effect and blame playing out in characterisations of landscape change which built on the critical tower block literature described in the previous chapter. In particular, critical media and political representations of postwar landscape and social changes increasingly posited causal links between changes to British urban spaces,

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20 Moran, “‘Stand Up and Be Counted’,” 175.
22 Moran, “‘Stand Up and Be Counted’.”
changes in British culture, and the perceived decline in national status which was currently culminating in a state of national crisis. This trend has been studied particularly with reference to the emergence of punk subcultures, whose origins were frequently blamed on postwar “permissiveness” or hostile “concrete” landscapes, while their effects on British culture were projected as threatening signifiers of social breakdown.  

While these criticisms focused on changes to “historic” existing urban landscapes as having engendered psychological damage particularly on working-class inhabitants, criticisms of postwar landscape change more broadly conceived were also being made during this period, making similarly extreme claims regarding its causal role in having brought the nation to a state of potentially terminal crisis. A useful entry point into this type of causal symbolism is Margaret Drabble’s 1977 novel The Ice Age. This work has received passing attention in histories of declinism, for its dramatic, almost millenarian representation of Britain during the IMF crisis, but its focus on landscape change as a cause of that crisis has received less attention. 

The Ice Age traces the lives of architects and property speculators who grew rich during the early 1970s, interpreting national decline as reflected by the cumulative effect of individual moral failings. Postwar landscapes are described in The Ice Age as inherently cruel, representing property developers’ and planners’ moral betrayal of national heritage as measured through landscape continuity. This is most systematically explored through a scene where the protagonist, Alison, attempts to navigate the redeveloped town of Northam. In a scene evoking the plot of Ballard’s Concrete Island, Alison finds herself trapped on a traffic island between concrete flyovers. The language used is combative; Alison is ‘confronted’

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24 Tomlinson, Politics of Decline, 90; Turner, Crisis? What Crisis?, 104.

by roundabouts and unfinished flyovers, ‘walled in’ by an underpass, ‘deafened and sickened’ by the ‘monstrous offence’ of the city’s redevelopment, which is perfumed with the ‘stink of carbon monoxide’. Unlike in Ballard’s novel, Alison escapes, only to harangue her developer partner for his role in destroying British cities. This attitude to landscape change is built on with lengthy authorial asides which describe how “the new bright classless enterprising future of Great Britain” as manifest through the postwar state, had collapsed into “jail”, subsumed and poisoned by “the noxious oily tides of fatigue and contempt that washed insistently against her shores.” In these recurring monologues, which extrapolate on critiques of characters who have invested in property development, the cause of this process is constantly identified as the commodification and radical change of postwar landscapes, which have sold the “semi-precious stone” of “our heritage”.

This language is very similar to Hughie Green’s political outburst during Opportunity Knocks, which defined Britain as “bankrupt in all but heritage and hope, and even those [are] in pawn.” This idea of landscape as a symbolic receptacle for heritage, which thereby reduces heritage to a commodity which can be lost, frames both Green’s and Drabble’s understanding of the IMF crisis as a blow to national identity, in that the value of the nation is seen through an ideal of heritage which has been overspent and corrupted through being treated as equivalent to money, and thereby lost or poorly invested. Drabble goes further than Green in locating this transaction of heritage to money as occurring through spatial transformations, through the acts of buying and selling land, and changing historically venerated forms and functions in order to pursue personal profit (in private sector development) or more ambitious social improvements (in public sector urban planning.)

27 Drabble, The Ice Age, 168.
28 Ibid., 215.
29 Ibid.
30 Moran, “Stand Up and Be Counted,” 173.
This understanding of landscape as playing a role in both retaining identity and value is also central to the spatial logic of Stephen Poliakoff’s play *Strawberry Fields*, first performed in 1976 and published in 1977.\(^{31}\) The play uses the postwar landscape form of the motorway as setting and framing device for an exploration of the relationship between conservative landscape values and Powellite ultra-racism, through its’ characters’ relationship to ‘The English People’s Party, presented as a conservationist National Front.

Their ideology is represented as centering around the historic reimagining of Britain as ethnically white, which interprets the English landscape as a container of this meaning in both an ethnic and racial sense. In an emotional tirade at the play’s end, Kevin suggests that should one ‘scrape back the grass’ in England, the bones of generations past are perceptible beneath the soil; this vitalist reading of national cohesion reads landscape as a mystical bridge between past and present.\(^{32}\) Kevin’s mysticism is presented critically, with his readings of landscape heritage deliberately evoking Enoch Powell’s apocalyptically organicist political rhetoric.\(^{33}\) This ultra-conservatism is heightened and partly accounted for through the play’s settings along anonymous motorways, evoking newly efficient forms of movement and transition which in turn provoke Kevin and Charlotte’s discomfort. The motorway landscape is a definite, totalising, seemingly irrevocable intervention in space, which cannot be “scraped back”; its functionality resists integration into Kevin’s fascist reimagining of the English landscape as a guarantor and receptacle for “ethnic purity”.\(^{34}\) The motorway, a planned, progressive, future-focused intervention in space, therefore exposes the limits of Kevin’s vision of landscape-as-history, by interpreting the recent past as a rupture in meaning and continuity.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{33}\) Through this Poliakoff points to wider political redefinitions of national identity and citizenship occurring throughout the 1970s and which would continue into the 1980s, where legal definitions of British immigration status turned increasingly towards bloodline based definitions, away from the more inclusive and dynamic right of abode obtained through sustained proximity to British landscapes, whether colonial or domestic. Gardiner, *The Return of England in English Literature*.

\(^{34}\) Poliakoff, *Strawberry fields*, 48.
Milton Keynes and the crisis of over-absorption

Reading these texts together in the context of the IMF panic helps to highlight the specific ‘mapping together’ of culturally conservative spatial narratives of nationhood, and positivist technocratic ones, through the specific context of the IMF crisis denoting a failure of the postwar state. The impact of this attitudinal change on Milton Keynes’ development was significant through changes to government policy as well as through more general attitudes to postwar landscape change. The culture of political crisis significantly impacted national urban planning policies, and the willingness of the Treasury to fund national investment programmes. While this was partly due to the terms of the IMF loan which required reductions in public spending, earlier in 1976 there had already been some experimentation with cuts to public funding for major infrastructural programmes including new towns. The main targets for these were large programmes which had been recently planned but not yet fully implemented; these included investment in Concorde air travel, motorway expansions, the Channel Tunnel, and the construction of London’s third airport, which had been subject to the lengthy inquiry process that had jeopardised Milton Keynes’ planning integrity in the late 1960s. This “last in, first out” policy most notably affected Stonehouse, the new town designated in 1974 for the Strathclyde region; in 1976 this town was completely “de-designated” as a new town, well after planning and promotional materials had been

35 This is not to say that there are no historical precedents for overlap between these conceptions of ideal landscapes, nor to say that they are interchangeable at this point, but rather to emphasise the political significance of this convergence at this historical moment.
36 “In confidence: Cost effectiveness of new towns,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1976); “Press notice 384: Third Generation New Towns, Department of the Environment,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1976).
developed for the programme. At the same time, the Environment Minister Peter Shore announced a five year moratorium on the construction of further new towns.

These cuts were also partly motivated by pragmatic reassessments of the late 1960s population studies which formed the basis for the third wave of new town development. By 1976, *The South East Study*’s ambitious population growth projections were proving to be significantly higher than actual measured growth, particularly in London itself. Moreover, due to population movements and changing inner London land use patterns, mid-1970s reassessments saw the population of inner London in decline over this period.

While this was the purpose of new town and overspill policies, which interpreted inner London as being overcrowded, population decline intersected with wider land use changes in London. Significantly, many of these were driven by shifts in global capital investment, which have been generally theorised as the shift to post-industrialism, but which in Britain has consistently been theorised strictly in terms of the loss of heavy industry, or “deindustrialisation”, rather than its replacement by financial and service industries. In London’s case, decentralisation programmes of the period 1945-1975 were designed to reduce the overall concentration of industry in the south-east; however these policies of deliberate redistribution in many cases exacerbated the impact of the increasing globalisation of heavy industries, and the longer term impact of the 1973-74 oil crisis on manufacturing. These trends created a wider media narrative of “inner London’s decline”, which was in turn

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40 Christopher Booker, “Mr Silkin’s Fantasy,” *The Spectator* 2 July 1976.


viewed as both an index of and as partially to blame for a wider economic and social experience of “crisis.” Rather than differentiating successful new town decentralisation policies from industrial decline, a lack of investment in urban infrastructure, or immigration and demographic change, the general concept of “urban decline” located London’s changing economic function in a narrative of lapsed prestige and status analogous to that of national decline.

Within this reporting of urban decline, Milton Keynes was especially singled out as having contributed to the drain on London’s resources. Some of this was direct coverage of Conservative Housing spokesman Hugh Rossi who was especially critical of new towns, and directly blamed them for having fed a culture of neglect of established cities. Much of it reflected Labour’s own evolving policy on new town investment, however, and the desire to distance the party from a seemingly extravagant new town legacy. Peter Shore was particularly active in this in his role as Environment Minister, and specifically made the link between halting new town developments and redirecting funding towards established inner cities. During 1977, the Ministry of the Environment revised the population of third wave new towns substantially. Milton Keynes, which had been designated on the basis of taking a population of 250,000 by 1990, was revised to the goal of 150,000 people by the mid-1980s through “induced growth,” projecting “natural growth” would level out at 180,000 by later in the decade.

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43 Internal Ministry of Environment studies from 1976 showed, however, that while under-resourcing of urban areas and new town development did occur at the same time, that they were not causally linked; see “In confidence: Cost effectiveness of new towns.” Saumarez Smith discusses the way in which these “concurrent” policy goals symbolically coincided in Saumarez Smith, “Inner City Crisis,” 595-596.


Moreover, the extent that Milton Keynes could sustain cuts to funding or population targets without endangering the viability of the town was limited at this point. The first phase of the plan’s construction involved linking the towns of Stony Stratford in the north with Bletchley in the south, using a crescent-type curve to create a temporary linear city which would then be filled outwards to the west and east with subsequent developments.\footnote{Information for the Royal Town Planning Institute, (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Development Corporation, 1974); Cf. Martin Wainwright, \textit{Guardian} May 25, 1977.} By 1976 this left Milton Keynes with construction and infrastructure concentrated in this thin “crescent” of the designated area, and, significantly, with major infrastructural features needing completion for the town to function effectively.\footnote{Information for the Royal Town Planning Institute.} Unlike Stonehouse, then, Milton Keynes was spared complete dedesignation, due to the perception that Milton Keynes “requir[ed] continued investment to make any sense of what has already been done on the ground” (see figures 12 and 13.\footnote{Judy Hillman, “Expansion of new towns in doubt,” \textit{Guardian} February 4, 1977.})
Figure 11: 1972 projections of the phased construction of Milton Keynes; the coloured areas of the map indicate the first phase of development along a “crescent” shape which would link existing settlements. \(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) A new city comes to life.
Nonetheless, media representations of Milton Keynes during this period continued to focus on the town as having taken more than its share of finite, scarce urban resources. As the town necessarily remained in an expansionist phase, this was represented with criticism and concern by sources which interpreted the town’s growth as being too extravagant. Some of this focused attention on the town’s association with the 1960s, and thereby with a now-defunct culture of “permissiveness” or utopianism which appeared in the “new austerity” of the 1970s to be “increasingly obscene.”

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reportage of the problems besetting some of its newly constructed estates. The death of over a hundred thousand new tree saplings in the hot summer of 1976, and ongoing problems with moisture, rising damp and leaks in some of the earliest estates at Netherfield received especial attention, forming some of the only significant reportage of the town outside of the “special report” format which reflected MKDC involvement. More widely, national Gallup polls on happiness levels throughout Britain were reported on specifically with reference to Milton Keynes’ residents being disproportionately “disappointed with life”, even though it was noted that this was likely to reflect the “national economic situation” rather than anything to do with the town specifically. While Milton Keynes’ population loss over this period was low, some newspaper reportage covered people choosing to move out of Milton Keynes due to “new town blues”; The Guardian’s reportage of this specifically contrasted the great expenditure of the development corporation, especially on marketing and promotions, with residents’ perception of the lack of resources and funding on the ground. This type of reportage presented the town’s extravagance of expenditure and space as nonetheless creating insufficient outcomes.

This extravagance, however, was no longer represented through the metaphorical language of flooding the countryside, as had been the case earlier in the decade. Rather, Milton Keynes’ extravagance was now interpreted in its over-capacity, and its ability to take too much, rather than to withhold it too ineffectively. Such language of decline and decay attributed agency to new towns which had rendered London “hollow” and had led to the “loss” of London’s population. This was presented in opposition to those new towns so

recently justified by their absorption of “overspill,” and which in doing so had taken too much. Milton Keynes in particular, as a low density and decentralised town whose adequate containing powers had been widely questioned, was now being interpreted as overtly containing, too absorptive and finite; in this sense it was taking on more of the qualities that had been used to describe tower blocks, as described in Chapter 3, as absolute impositions of structure that had the ability to drain their surrounds of productive elements.

“The Facts”
This political context placed additional pressure on MKDC to ensure that Milton Keynes continued to expand at the appropriate rate not only to meet its targets but also to make up potential shortfalls in government funding to ensure the town was functional and viable for industry as well as for residents. Marketing and promotions were crucial to this. Throughout 1976 and 1977, MKDC official marketing of the town further developed the empirical, factual approach that had characterised promotion of the town since its designation. This was consistent with the promotional programme proposed by Galitzine and Partners for the period 1971 to 1978. The implementation of this programme, however, changed substantially during the period 1976 to 1978, making a distinct shift away from the style described in the previous chapter. Instead of presenting Milton Keynes as representing an experimental, reformed model of urban planning, MKDC promotions increasingly used concise depictions of the town’s value and “success” as measured purely by statistical, empirically verifiable data regarding its rate of growth. This did not involve rejecting the basic premise of MKDC advertising, which remained focused on education about the town’s

59 “MKDC Communications Programme 1971/78.”; “Annexure to MKDC Communications Report.”
merits, but rather involved presenting this information in essential terms reducible to the town’s formal development.

This shift can be seen most overtly in the newspaper advertisement from 1976 simply entitled “The Facts” (see figure 14).60 This consisted of text describing statistics about Milton Keynes’ growth rate, excerpts from its plan, and evidence of various resourcing and development policies. Careful to present the “immense task” of constructing Milton Keynes as “the largest single development programme in Britain today,” this advertisement does not invoke the ideological inflections of socialist state planning or postwar reconstructionism, and even rejects the term “new town”, instead adopting the favoured MKDC framing of the New City of Milton Keynes. This succession of information was followed by the statement that “Milton Keynes is a story of great success”, suggesting that this was a proven empirical assessment; rather than closing with this, however, the text concludes that “these are the facts, judge them for yourself and then decide if Milton Keynes is the right place for you and your business.” This approach not only posits the audience of the advertisement as a rational subject responding to education, but implies that this subject will inevitably come to the same conclusions. This appeal to “facts” as impartial constructs implicitly opposed to “myths” or misinformation is explicitly non-ideological, and refuses to speak for Milton Keynes, implying rather that it will speak for itself.

Figure 13: “The Facts,” 1976 MKDC advertisement.61

This essentialist, educationally focused approach can be seen at work in other MKDC advertising and promotions from this period, with a number of newspaper advertisements presenting statistical information about the rate of Milton Keynes’ growth as inherently demonstrating the town’s benefits, value and “success”. From 1975, a series of full-page advertisements used the sheer rate of Milton Keynes’ growth as evidence of this “success”, claiming “by the time you’re home tonight, we’ll have built another ten homes in Milton Keynes.” Later slogans continued this empirical language Milton Keynes was presented as “the logical place for your business”, a claim substantiated by quotes from the Guardian’s 1975 special report on Milton Keynes. Further blurring this line between journalism and advertising, many MKDC advertisements using this “factual” approach deployed textual advertising styles, aesthetically presented as blocks of text similar to short reports or even newspaper articles, which described particular policies regarding factory construction or business development resources.

Where wider references were made to Milton Keynes’ place in historical or social narratives, these were chosen very differently from earlier advertising. From 1977 onwards in particular, MKDC advertising located the town within a classic garden city rhetoric with roots in nineteenth-century industrialism, rather than in any contemporary or even postwar narrative of state reconstructionism or state planning. The primary reference point, rather than the present state of British landscapes or cities, was a generalised, anachronistic critique of industrial urbanism rooted in the “best of both worlds” rhetoric as modelled by Ebenezer...

62 “By the time you're home tonight...”, Guardian November 21, 1975; “By the time you're home tonight...”, Guardian July 7, 1975; “By the time you're home tonight...”, Guardian January 20, 1975; “By the time you're home tonight...”, Economist January 25, 1975.
Howard’s vision of the garden city. The clearest depiction of this was in a series of advertisements depicting gloomy, dark, smoke-saturated factory sites. While the headline proclaimed “There’s no doubt about it, the industrial revolution made this country what it is today,” the juxtaposition of this statement with the ominous factory imagery indicates that the industrial revolution produced polluted cities as much as it produced national “greatness”. Asserting that “50% of British industry still lives and works under virtually the same conditions that the Victorians did,” the advertisement depicts British cities as fundamentally in need of a garden city solution to essentially unchanged problems of industrialism and overcrowding that had prevailed since Howard had first written To-morrow (see figure 15). Despite rejecting “using a bulldozer” to create a new city, and stating that Milton Keynes used a “new philosophy”, there is deliberately little evidence in this advertisement of how Milton Keynes was modelling anything new or outside of established garden city thinking.

This anachronistic use of Victorian urban imagery to legitimate Milton Keynes’ development was used in a number of other campaigns, including more whimsical pencil sketches used to advertise the July 1978 exhibition at London’s Design Centre. These imagined businessmen sharing “facts” about Milton Keynes’ successful development in front of a London skyline wreathed in smoke from billowing factories. Elsewhere, depictions of “the city” as opposed to “the countryside” as eliciting a Jekyll and Hyde response from a bowler-hatted businessman encouraged a similar abstract association with garden city ideals.

65 “There’s no doubt about it, the industrial revolution made this country what it is today,” Sunday Times February 27, 1977; “There’s no doubt about it, the industrial revolution made this country what it is today,” Financial Times February 8, 1977; “There’s no doubt about it, the industrial revolution made this country what it is today,” Sunday Times January 9, 1977.

66 Building on this theme, a less widely used advertisement drew urban London as populated by the rats from Kenneth Grahame’s Wind in the Willows; see “Aren’t there some things you would plan to avoid?,” Sunday Times March 12, 1978.

that was not rooted in contemporary political rhetoric.\textsuperscript{68} Using established garden city imagery to promote Milton Keynes as a typical new town, empirically constituting the “best” of city and countryside, posits the town as representative of a particular utopian planning tradition, rather than reimagining or revising it. It does so, however, by invoking a quasi-Dickensian smokestack urban imagery, inconsistent with London’s actual experience of “deindustrialisation,” which can only be resolved through the garden city model.

\textbf{Figure 14: “Aren’t there some things you would plan to avoid?”}, 1978 MKDC advertisement.\textsuperscript{69}

While this renegotiation made sense in the political context of the late 1970s, it also meant that taken as a whole MKDC promotions lacked a single consistent approach over the course of the decade. Not only was there a switch between overtly advocating for a reimagining of urban planning practice, towards locating Milton Keynes within an established garden city tradition, but within advertisements themselves at this time there was

\textsuperscript{68}“Mr Jekyll. Mr Hyde.,” \textit{Sunday Times} August 13, 1978; “Mr Jekyll. Mr Hyde.,” \textit{Financial Times} June 23, 1978. Similar imagery is used in “Some people can always see beyond the trees,” \textit{Sunday Times} March 5, 1978. \\
\textsuperscript{69}“Aren’t there some things you would plan to avoid?,” \textit{Sunday Times} March 12, 1978.
a tendency to undercut the town’s own claims to relevance and success. In several
advertisements, after providing long and detailed information about the town’s “success” as
measured through various sets of statistics, summary statements are made which overtly
undermine potential claims of success. While readers of “The Facts” were urged to “judge
[the facts] for yourselves before deciding if Milton Keynes is right for you,” the anti-
Industrial Revolution advertisements were also deliberately circumspect: “we’re not saying
Milton Keynes is the answer to everyone’s problem… [but] at least it’s a start.”\(^70\) Refusing to
categorically assert Milton Keynes’ value, and insisting on “facts” to speak ostensibly innate
truths, was ultimately a poorly calculated assessment of the hostile political context in which
MKDC were operating. While such quasi-humility allowed MKDC to defer to the authority
of “facts” rather than potentially biased arguments, it also encouraged readers to stand in
judgement, by characterising them as rational subjects and even potential authorities.

The primary problem with this approach is that, as described above, this kind of
value judgement, with or without “the facts”, was already taking place with significant
political stakes being invoked.\(^71\) It is significant to note that as Mark Clapson has described,
Milton Keynes was successfully growing and meeting its population and investment targets
at this time.\(^72\) In a narrowly considered measurement of promotional “success”, these rates
of growth are noteworthy. In terms of wider political and cultural representations, however,
actively encouraging judgement in an adversarial political context indicate a failure to
recognise the political function of negative symbolic readings of Milton Keynes during this
period.

\(^70\) “There’s no doubt about it,” *Sunday Times* February 27, 1977; “There’s no doubt about it,” *Financial Times*

\(^71\) “Publicity Steering Committee minutes and papers,” in *Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers* (Centre

\(^72\) Clapson, *Social History of Milton Keynes*, 95-100.
Dissenting voices: Jack Trevor Story

This problem was further complicated by the ‘promotional’ activities undertaken in national media by Milton Keynes’ artist-in-residence Jack Trevor Story during this period. Milton Keynes’ artist-in-residence programme grew from the town’s commitments to developing officially sponsored cultural programmes which would allow new residents to participate in community-building activities, while empowering and teaching skills to working-class residents in a number of creative outlets. This was a relatively widespread local council policy amongst progressive local authorities by the late 1970s, as a way of curating and facilitating residents’ participation, fostering a sense of solidarity and creative possibility amongst working-class residents. MKDC’s model of community arts was to hire artists-in-residence who would be paid to make art for public consumption during a tenure of living and working in Milton Keynes, but who were also employed specifically to create participatory community programmes in their particular creative field. This dimension of mentorship and creative facilitation was intended to allow residents to actively shape and participate in Milton Keynes’ cultural development.

As part of this programme, Jack Trevor Story was hired as Milton Keynes’ writer in residence from January 1977. Story was a prolific fiction writer and newspaper columnist, most known for writing the novel on which Alfred Hitchcock’s 1955 film The Trouble with Harry was based, and more recently for the novel Live Now, Pay Later (1963). During his tenure he was particularly active in collaboration with local writers and artists, including Bill Billings whose art will be discussed further in Chapter 5; he also made significant contributions in curating and contributing to local publications, holding writing workshops.

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74 Wetherell, “Painting the Crisis,” 236-42.
75 The plan for Milton Keynes, 1, 20-21.
contributing content to experimental local cable television station MK 40, and individually mentoring residents in writing.\textsuperscript{77}

Additionally, Story used his existing media profile to promote his views on Milton Keynes in national media. Unfortunately for MKDC, however, Story was extremely critical of the town’s administration, aesthetics, and the political philosophy on which it was designated. Story gave an interview to the Observer in January 1977, where he described Milton Keynes as “look[ing] like a bad Avengers script” and as a result of “the middle class deciding how the working-class ought to live.”\textsuperscript{78} This was followed by a prime-time ITV feature programme based on Story’s writing, one of a series of Personal Reports by writers and artists, which aired on several dates in August 1977.\textsuperscript{79} The full title of his episode of this series was “Jack Trevor Story: ‘I’d turn back if I were you, Dorothy,’” evoking both the utopianism of Milton Keynes’ planning through reference to L. Frank Baum’s The Wizard of Oz, and his perception of its failure.

While like many light entertainment programmes of the period, film of this programme is not archivally available, it was widely reviewed, with many reviewers recounting his criticisms of the town in order to agree with them. These reviews indicate that while Story included some positive reflections on the rural areas around Milton Keynes, and expressed some affection for the town’s residents, his attitudes to the town’s planning and aesthetics were particularly extreme. A number of reviews directly quote his “absolute horror” of living in “the biggest building site in the world” with “mud everywhere”, and “no middle”\textsuperscript{80}. Story’s criticisms of newly completed areas were also reported, with terraces characterised as “peacetime barrack blocks” in the style of “little boxes”, which elicited the

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\textsuperscript{77} “Correspondence relating to writer in residence at Stacey Hill Farm, Jack Trevor Story,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1976-1977); Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes, 3.
\textsuperscript{79} Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes, 3.
\end{flushleft}
sense that “new towns made one feel that England was left behind on entering them.” Story was also quoted as describing the town as an “alien moonscape” with a “post-holocaust feeling”, an “open prison” in which he was employed as a form of diversion for the inmates, “like a pianist in a brothel.”

Story’s criticisms not only contradicted official MKDC promotional narratives, but undermined their claim to truth and “facts”. Further complicating this, however, is the question of Story’s and indeed MKDC’s perceptions of Story’s role as writer in residence. Story’s papers from this period are held with the official MKDC archive for this period at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury; in a letter in these files written at the end of his tenure, Story writes that his brief as writer in residence was “to knock the place to pieces as quickly as possible and see what happened.” He ascribes this comment to Nick Waterlow, from MKDC social development; he also recounts being complimented by “someone” from MKDC after his ITV special aired on having elicited a defensive community spirit amongst residents through publically criticising the town:

> Until now, during all these long years and planning and building and bringing to life a whole city, nobody has made a sound. Now, suddenly, after your film particularly, the town has become … fiercely patriotic …. I’m afraid you are on the wanted list on most estates, Jack, but it is in a good cause.

Story went on to reflect that having fulfilled his brief, it “hurt him” to do so; and that he no longer wished to criticise the town: “I have stirred enough anger in this peaceful city.”

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83 “Correspondence relating to writer in residence.”
84 Despite clearly remembering the content of the speech, Story could not remember who gave it, ascribing the comments to “David Crewe[,] Roger Kitchen, perhaps, or Peter Waterman.” See ibid.
85 Ibid.
Judging from the responses in Milton Keynes’ local community newsletters at this time, many residents were indeed outraged at Story’s criticisms. Yet even if this was Story’s official remit, or if he was unofficially advised to take this approach by an MKDC representative, the function of such criticism was very different at a local level than at a national one. In itself, the goal of hiring a writer to be belligerently critical in order to foster a sense of enraged local solidarity could be considered a curious, risky policy; in a political context where there was already significant levels of national media criticism of Milton Keynes which was available to residents of the town, the motivations for encouraging even greater criticism from an internal official source appear even less clear. This is particularly the case considering that unlike many of Story’s locally-based community projects, that *Jack on the Box* was designed to be broadcast to an audience outside of Milton Keynes. This granted it a different context, where Story’s official role and local credentials would legitimate his alleged criticisms and reinforce an already existing pattern of media criticism through doing so. In this way, Story’s views and his position as an ‘insider’ functioned to reinforce and corroborate a broader critical culture which was eager to interpret Milton Keynes as part of a wider failed postwar utopian state project.

“A Mirror of England,” 1978

By 1978, while the immediate aftermath of the IMF crisis had abated, and some of the apocalyptic edge had faded from political journalism, the critical culture of diagnosis and blame was continuing to impact representations of postwar landscapes, using similarly extreme language to that which Story used, but without the alleged community-building intentions. Indeed, 1978 saw two of the most extreme and overt media criticisms of Milton

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86 Clapson, *Social History of Milton Keynes*, 3; “Folder of local newsletters,” in *Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers* (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1974-1977); ibid.
Keynes published in British media, which drew on opposing ideological traditions but arrived at strikingly similar judgements about the town’s inherent totalitarianism and ideological violence on its residents.

The first of these was published by long-time critic of postwar planning, and indeed of Milton Keynes, Christopher Booker, who published a series of articles in The Spectator in 1978 entitled “Urban Rides”. These used the premise of re-enacting Cobbett’s Rural Rides to contribute to the now well-established journalistic genre of white middle-class male urban domestic travelogues, seen in the works of Priestley, Orwell, and Ian Nairn. Booker’s shorter tour took in a range of cities and towns, from redeveloped industrial cities to rural villages and finally culminated in Milton Keynes. This developed themes from his 1974 analysis and placed them in a new context, and used still more extreme language to present Milton Keynes as both a failure and a cautionary tale in totalitarian state planning.

Booker’s continued objections to Milton Keynes were fundamentally on ideological grounds; the specific forms that Milton Keynes was to take were less important than the fact that the city was planned on a large scale and administered by the state. This hostility to “socialism” transcends a purely partisan or even a Cold War context, however, with his criticisms of planned spaces being specifically framed in terms of a belief in national decline and threat to the viability of the state arising from a failed experiment in state control. In this context planned spaces and social and economic decline are inevitably intertwined, because of the depersonalising effects of top-down government intervention. The cumulative effects of generations of individuals exerting their own choices about how and where to live, creates cityscapes and towns that are populated by more “cheerful” people, who feel linked to tradition while also feeling that they can exert control over their own lives. Any type of restriction exerted by government about housing styles and living arrangements are linked

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causally by Booker to social decay, despond and hopelessness. The language of violence with which Booker describes urban planning suggests the scale of this violation; it is “vandalism,” “brutal,” “aggressive,” exerting a hurtful force upon those who experience it. The idea that Milton Keynes could represent a modified form of planning, a “loose-textured” and less deterministic new city where individuals could exert greater degrees of choice is dismissed as a contradiction in terms. Planning in all forms, for Booker, is “unimaginative authoritarianism,” especially in Milton Keynes, where he sees it “fatally” culminating. Indeed, Booker argues Milton Keynes is best understood as “a last fitting memorial to the past thirty years of British planning,” whose innately oppressive forms represent the last throes of an “authoritarian” and interventionist state.

Despite its overt conformity to the kind of proto-neoliberal heritage narratives Stuart Hall identified at work in early Thatcherite political rhetoric, Booker’s interpretation of Milton Keynes as overtly deterministic was shared by vocal left-wing critic of new town planning, Jeremy Seabrook, albeit with differing justifications. Seabrook had published extensively throughout the late 1960s and 1970s on the impact of urban redevelopment and new town planning on working-class people, and it was in this vein that he visited Milton Keynes in 1978 for a feature for the Observer Magazine entitled “Milton Keynes: A Mirror of England.” This glossy feature, heavily illustrated with grim darkly-lit photography of Milton Keynes’ brutalist-style terraced housing, was extremely critical of MKDC paternalism and argued that disjuncture between promotional rhetoric and residents’ lived experiences was creating psychological distress for residents (see figure 16.) In similar words to Jack Trevor Story’s 1977 interview with the Observer, Seabrook presented Milton Keynes as a site where

89 Ibid.
90 Hall, “The Great Moving Right Show.”
working-class people were being “imprisoned” in a middle-class suburban aesthetic, causing “pain and bewilderment.” Despite these claims, Seabrook nonetheless concluded that Milton Keynes was a “success,” and that while requiring reform, MKDC’s policies were ultimately “benevolent” in intent.

Figure 15: Photograph of Beanhill in Seabrook’s “A Mirror of England” for the Observer magazine.

Any such moderation, however, was abandoned in the expanded form of the article, included as the closing section of the chapter “London and Beyond” in the bluntly titled

93 Ibid.
collection of essays *What Went Wrong? Working people and the ideals of the labour movement*. His article on Milton Keynes is given the title “Starting Afresh” and there is an implied causality here; having spent the previous chapters describing “What Went Wrong” in the London area, readers are then presented with Milton Keynes as an attempt to “start afresh,” to erase the problems of the past. Additions included more extensive interviews with despairing residents, from unemployed school-leavers to a member of the National Front, all of whom describe feelings of trapped hopelessness. Seabrook uses these additions to refocus his argument on the determinism belying Milton Keynes’ ostensible multiplicity of choice. Choices of suburbs, schools or houses, for Seabrook, push residents into a range of predetermined possibilities that reinforce new structures of post-industrial capitalism, from the marketisation of leisure to increased consumerism. This latter point is central to what has “gone wrong” in British working-class life in Seabrook’s view; Milton Keynes is a “carceral” site, which illustrates the wider “remodelling and perfecting” of working-class people. Far from his earlier description of MKDC as “benevolent,” in *What Went Wrong?* Seabrook depicts them as enforcing a collective “assimilat[jion]” into “dehumanized inauthenticity.”

Like Booker, then, Seabrook finds the notion of Milton Keynes as providing greater choice to its inhabitants at odds with its totalising act of planning. In doing so, both journalists use extreme language to describe Milton Keynes as representing the worst and most profound versions of national failings. In both cases, however, the origin of the town’s failings are seen as inescapable, inherent to the paternalism of postwar reconstructionist social policy and the elite imposition of urban planning on landscapes and populations who are imagined as inert and vulnerable. Planning, both in terms of a general economic state planning and the specific urban planned forms which emerged from it, are understood as violent impositions, in opposition to idealised natural states; not only is it not reformable, as

95 Ibid., 239.
per MKDC’s earlier rhetoric, nor is it understandable in terms of an idealised garden city narrative of producing the best of both worlds. The drastic political and cultural shift against technocratic state policies now cast these kinds of behaviour as interventionist in a negative sense; moreover, the act of positivist intervention was located in causal, metonymic chains that linked individual psychological distress and constraint with collective social malaise, and there onwards to failures of economic and national status and prestige.

This type of journalism indicates profound, intractable ideological hostility to the very principles on which Milton Keynes had been designated, and moreover, from late 1978 onwards, this already extreme, apocalyptic style of political critique would escalate still further as the Winter of Discontent unfolded and the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher would be elected in May 1979. This would place MKDC in the position of needing to change its promotional style and actively reimagine Milton Keynes in accordance with a new ideological environment that interpreted state involvement as linked to perceptions of imminent national crisis.
Chapter 5: The Concrete Cows, 1978-1979

It was not for several weeks after I moved to Milton Keynes from Melbourne that I first became aware of the Concrete Cows. By become aware, I had already seen a set of cow-shaped statues of cows at the Midsummer Boulevard Shopping Centre, and knew of an identical set located at Stacey Bushes, which were referenced in several local business names, but the idea that these had any political significance had not yet arisen. Such accessible, child-friendly, animal-shaped public art was familiar to me as a standard urban design feature, not least through the sculptures in Melbourne’s City Square.¹ Through this same space, I was aware of the hostile cultural politics which public art could crystallise; Ron Robertson-Swann’s Vault, or “The Yellow Peril,” had been placed in the new Square in 1980 only to be removed the following year, exiled to liminal urban sites due to outrage at its boldly coloured, deliberately non-representational form.² Yet these concrete cow sculptures were representational artworks; that they could function in the manner of Vault did not appear self-evident. In this they seemed more similar to the 1992 addition to the City Square, “Larry La Trobe”, a life-sized bronze sculpture of a dog, who elicited more fondness than controversy.³

Yet when I visited other parts of England, I would frequently be asked what I thought of the Concrete Cows. The question itself was not as striking as the way in which it was asked; partly as if I were being quizzed, and partly as if being told a joke. At first I would

¹ My partner, who grew up in Milton Keynes, recalls some of his earliest memories being of climbing the Concrete Cow sculptures at Bancroft in order to sit on their backs; this must have been in 1983-1984, five years after the sculptures were first installed. When I have visited them in recent years I have seen many young children doing the same thing.
ask what they meant; the only explanation given was that Milton Keynes was home to some concrete sculptures of cows. The mode of delivery implied that these two things were causally related, and that this represented something funny, even ridiculous. What exactly was so funny, however, seemed to resist being put into words.

The point of this personal reflection is to highlight the contingent symbolism of the Concrete Cows, which are often held to possess inherently controversial, humorous characteristics, but which are not immediately perceptible to those outside of a historically and culturally delimited context. As Darnton noted in his discussion of the Great Cat Massacre, “when we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something”; the “something” this chapter will trace is the historically specific encoding of the Concrete Cows as symbols of postwar state-sponsored urban planning which developed from 1978 onwards. Beyond merely escalating the kinds of criticisms traced through Chapters 3 and 4, through the Concrete Cows, Milton Keynes and urban planned spaces more broadly were derided as not only serious failings, but as self-evidently ridiculous. Through such symbolic distancing, criticisms of the Concrete Cows participated in the wider ideological work of precluding the “postwar consensus” as a viable political option which would come to dominate media and political narratives during the Winter of Discontent.

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4 Darnton, *Great Cat Massacre*. 5.
Concrete community art in Milton Keynes

As discussed in Chapter 4, MKDC’s artist-in-residence programme was part of a broader trend of community arts programmes organised by local authorities during the early 1970s. These were intended not only to develop skills but to develop community cohesion through collaborative creative practice and through allowing working-class residents to participate in shaping their environment.\(^5\) As part of this programme, Liz Leyh was hired in late 1974 as artist-in-residence.\(^6\) Leyh was a Canadian artist, who had trained in New York before working in special schools in Sussex and taking developing community art programmes in York and Camden focused on children’s sculpture.\(^7\) Her work frequently used concrete deliberately as a cheap, accessible and durable material. Leyh’s works were frequently intended as part of

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\(^5\) “Correspondence relating to writer in residence.”; Clapson, *Social History of Milton Keynes*, 3; Wetherell, “Painting the Crisis,” 236-42.


\(^7\) Ibid.
children’s play areas, or designed to appeal to children, and she frequently made concrete sculptures in collaboration with children, encouraging them to participate actively in shaping their surroundings. Leyh saw this as a liberatory experience especially for working-class children; rather than instructing them closely in specific tasks, a “travesty” she saw as being “one step from… the assembly line”, Leyh saw her work as facilitating children’s agency and allowing them to express ownership of their environments.8

The terms of reference for Leyh’s tenure included establishing a community art studio, “encouraging and helping residents to develop ideas and implement them in their local areas,” and “developing … and implementing her own ideas as an individual”.9 Leyh developed a programme in consultation with residents to involve local children in the design and construction of concrete public sculptures, including a giraffe, the Wizard of Oz, Pinocchio, and the Owl and Pussycat after the Edward Lear poem.10 In addition, Leyh held classes and workshops at her studio and local community centres, which were consistently in high demand.11 Leyh also constructed concrete representational sculptures as “solo ventures” for public display around Milton Keynes. These included a snowman, completed in 1978, and a collection of 15 cabbages, each “eight or nine feet in diameter,” which she intended for display along the verges of one of Milton Keynes’ grid roads.12 Her intention was to create a “cheering human presence in a landscape that can be a bit barren and impersonal,” creating visual interest and a landmark for drivers. This work was subject to

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8 Elizabeth Leyh, Concrete Sculpture in the community (London: Inter-Action Inprint, 1980), 4.
9 “Papers relating to artists in residence including Liz Leyh,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1978-1979).
10 “News Release: Artist in Residence.”; Concrete Sculpture in the community, pp. 58.
11 “Report by Liz Leyh, Artist in Residence, Stacey Hill Studio, Milton Keynes, on Activities from October 1975-October 1976”, in “Papers relating to artists in residence including Liz Leyh.”; Concrete Sculpture in the community, 58-63.
some resistance from MKDC, who after lengthy deliberations throughout 1977, eventually “lost interest” and refused to decide on a site.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite this friction, however, Leyh’s tenure as artist-in-residence was prolific, and successfully encouraged local artists. June Bowyer would construct a concrete model village for a school playground in 1977, while Lesley Bonner, initially employed as Leyh’s assistant, would succeed Leyh as artist-in-residence creating similar sculptures.\textsuperscript{14} More notably, local poet and artist Bill Billings, who would also go on to work with Jack Trevor Story, constructed several concrete sculptures of dinosaurs on MKDC-owned land during the mid-1970s. These included two brontosaurus near Netherfield and Bleak Hall, and a triceratops at Peartree Bridge. Billings worked with Leyh on a number of official projects, however his dinosaur sculptures were deliberately constructed on MKDC land without permission, using materials “scrounged” from local housing construction.\textsuperscript{15} Billings’ sculptures were deliberately imposing, built adjacent to housing and major roads; while the two brontosaurus sculptures were “destroyed” by MKDC due to perceived safety risks, the Triceratops was permitted to remain standing and has become a significant local landmark, with MKDC even using the sculpture on official promotional postcards. Billings would go on to become heavily involved in MKDC-sponsored community art projects, including officially maintaining Leyh’s sculptures.\textsuperscript{16}

This wider participatory concrete public art culture in Milton Keynes during the late 1970s is significant, in that it illustrates that there was no innate quality which would make the existence of concrete public sculptures in Milton Keynes politically notorious in national

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Leyh, \textit{Concrete Sculpture in the community}, 64-65; Turner and Jardine, \textit{Pioneer Tales}, 36.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Pioneer Tales}, 36.
media. Rather, this would specifically become associated with Leyh’s gift to the town at the close of her tenure in August 1978. This was a set of six sculptures of cows, constructed of a mixture of “scrounged” materials, using concrete cladding over a steel frame stuffed with newspaper and other debris. Leyh’s official name for these were simply “Cows” (see figure 18.) These were roughly life-sized, painted in lifelike colours, and posed as if grazing. Leyh’s intention for these works, similar to her undisplayed Cabbages sculptures, was that

the cows, visible from both road and railway, are realistic enough to get by at a passing glance. The double take comes after three or four trips when you realise that they have stayed in exactly the same positions.

Although Leyh reported “hesitance” from MKDC representatives, the sculptures were installed in a field adjacent to the London-Birmingham train line in late August 1978, during the final month of Leyh’s tenure.

18 Leyh, Concrete Sculpture in the community, 69.
20 Ibid. This site is at the south-western corner of Bancroft grid-square, east of where the West Coast Main Line railway passes over A422 / H3 Monks Way road; as this is adjacent to the boundaries of both Stacey Bushes and New Bradwell grid-squares, the sculptures are sometimes described as being located in these areas.
The sculptures first appeared in national print media in a *Daily Mail* feature by Jon Ryan on 31 August 1978. Entitled “Now pull the udder one!”, this article opened with a lengthy description of driving through bucolic English countryside, listening for “the gentle lowing of cattle”, only to be faced with silence. Ryan stretches this dramatic irony further, describing these cows as “much quieter” than expected and “[not] eating much either.” This builds to the eventual realisation that these are “concrete cows [sic]”. Unlike the fairly innocuous double take Leyh described above, Ryan characterises this as an “illusion shattered” and a “Big joke”, describing the Cows as “a sort of monument to what was as the constantly expanding concrete of Milton Keynes swallows up the countryside.” The justification for this is one quoted Bradwell resident stating that “Everyone treats them as a

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21 Leyh, *Concrete Sculpture in the community*, 69.
great joke, a laughing stock. We can’t see the point of them.” Leyh’s defensive response is reported alongside a less effusive defence to an unnamed MKDC spokesperson, who concedes that while “perhaps some people do think they are rather silly” that “we are confident they will give pleasure to both adults and children.”

![Image of the newspaper article](image_url)

**Figure 18:** Jon Ryan, “Now pull the udder one!”, Daily Mail, August 31, 1978.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
This narrative of ludicrous local governance opposing a natural order relies on actively misrepresenting Milton Keynes’ form, and the origins of the sculptures. It defines Milton Keynes as “concrete sprawl”, and therefore describes the Cows as located in a field “near” but not in the town itself. Rather, the Cows were located in a park within Milton Keynes’ designated area, as was the local “village” of Bradwell.\(^{25}\) This reality of Milton Keynes as a low-density town with green spaces and fields structured into the plan, however, does not fit the ideologically charged notion of “constantly expanding concrete… swallow[ing] up the countryside,” and so the idea of a bemused, embattled rural village threatened by concrete imposition is used instead. Similarly, the participatory community art culture at Milton Keynes, with its goals of enabling residents to shape their surroundings, is instead characterised as the forceful imposition of concrete on non-consenting locals. To substantiate this, Ryan even invokes the resident protests at Billings’ unauthorised dinosaur sculptures, suggesting that they reflected MKDC imposing large-scale sculpture without resident input; rather, MKDC’s removal of Billings’ unauthorised works due to safety concerns reflected a specific response to community concern.\(^{26}\) In order to frame the Cows as a “joke”, the deterministic encoding of concrete as a violent imposition on landscapes and populations is ultimately given more weight than the specific form, culture, or intentions of Milton Keynes’ and its creative culture.

Subsequent coverage of the Concrete Cows took its cues from this framing of the sculptures as a “joke”. The next day’s *Daily Mail* cartoon depicted a dazed bull being attended to by a veterinarian, who explained “he keeps … going after those concrete cows.”\(^{27}\) The

\(^{25}\) Indeed, had this area been outside of Milton Keynes’ designated area, MKDC would not have had authority to locate the sculptures there.

\(^{26}\) The dinosaur sculpture which MKDC eventually permitted to remain standing, the Triceratops, was located much further away from housing and roads, meaning that it posed less of a potential concern. Turner and Jardine, *Pioneer Tales*, 36-38.

\(^{27}\) Mac, “‘He keeps getting out and going after those concrete cows,’” *Daily Mail* September 1, 1978; see also in “Cartoon Archive: ‘He keeps getting out and going after those concrete cows,’” University of Kent Cartoon Archive, https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/TreeBrowse.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&field=RefNo&key=32452.
associations of concrete, forceful determinism, and sterility born of artifice inform this idea of Concrete Cows as a deceptive replica of the original; as concrete cows cannot reproduce, so too are concrete urban spaces characterised as sterile. The same day, a cartoon of Chancellor Denis Healey quoted him describing “concrete” as a “sacred cow”; despite substantial cuts to new town funding under the Callaghan government, this suggests an ideological association of concrete with the “socialist” Labour party rather than reflecting its current policy. While The Times’ coverage was less overtly polemical, it also framed the artworks as expressing a humorous tension between concrete and rurality, even in their more serious coverage of economic challenges to Milton Keynes’ development.

The Electric Whale

The majority of late 1978 media coverage of the Concrete Cows, however, would appear in the context of their relationship to a planned fountain which the Daily Mail called “the electric whale.” As part of the construction of balancing lakes to drain boggy areas around the Ouzel River and Grand Union Canal, a number of artificial lakes had been proposed for Milton Keynes’ designated area. These lakes were envisaged as providing opportunities to encourage local water life and to function as recreational parks; in aid of this latter goal, MKDC proposed installing a large fountain in the centre of Willen Lake, which would be lit up at night as a local landmark. MKDC officially described it as “a floating illuminated water spout.” Unlike the Cows, mainly constructed of scrap material at minimal cost beyond Leyh’s salary and studio overheads, this fountain was reported to cost £20,000, a perceived

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30 “£20,000 ’up the spout’, Daily Mirror November 17, 1978.
31 The plan for Milton Keynes, 1, 66-67.
financial extravagance which local borough councillor David Taylor was strongly opposed to.\textsuperscript{33} By reporting on this fountain as “the electric whale”, the \textit{Daily Mail} and later the \textit{Daily Mirror} were able to construct a wider narrative around the Concrete Cows, in which they formed part of a wider pattern.\textsuperscript{34}

It was this dimension that the \textit{Daily Mail} focused on in their editorial on the issue, which opened with the statement “Once again the new town of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, leads the way into Britain’s very own Brave New World.”\textsuperscript{35} Similar to Booker’s referencing of Huxley’s dystopian novel, this locates the town as being an ominous sign of things to come; however their substantiation of this claim is completely made through satirically justifying the “advantages” of synthesising nature:

Concrete cows don’t need fences. They don’t make messes. They never get foot-and-mouth. They create no milk mountains and they leave the grass just as they found it…\textsuperscript{36}

The logic behind this satire is not explicated; rather, it is used as a foundation for further caricatures of technocratic improvement of nature, through retelling \textit{The Wind in the Willows} in a way it purports would be “credibl[e] to the new generation of Milton Keynesians,” featuring Mole using an efficient mechanical digger and wearing a “washable plastic space outfit.” This use of futuristic dystopian imagery echoes the serious critiques discussed in the last chapter, but also introduces a distinct form of rejection: that of outright ridicule. Locating

\textsuperscript{33} “Whale of an idea from the concrete cow men,” \textit{Daily Mail} November 17, 1978; “£20,000 ‘up the spout’,” \textit{Daily Mirror} November 17, 1978.

\textsuperscript{34} This dichotomy is particularly clear given the lack of reference to the lake being artificial as well; the joke of the electric whale relied on the tension between natural lake and unnatural fountain.


\textsuperscript{36} “Boom, boom—it’s only Toad getting out of a hole, children,” \textit{Daily Mail} November 18, 1978. The choice of imagery may have been inspired by the MKDC advertisements which also drew on \textit{The Wind in the Willows} from earlier in 1978; see Figure 15 and “Aren’t there some things you would plan to avoid?,” \textit{Sunday Times} March 12, 1978.
in the Concrete Cows the perceived contradictions of technocratic state improvement, the response is no longer earnest condemnation but is reframed as laughable. Later Mail coverage reduced this into a simpler opposition between the sculptures and “the locals” who find them a “laughing stock”. ³⁷

Moreover, representation of the Cows as a “joke” was not restricted to formally archived material. In addition to this print media coverage, there are substantial reports that the Concrete Cows were repeatedly targeted by comedians and radio DJs throughout 1978 and 1979, broadcast via radio and other light entertainment programming which has not been formally archived. Reports vary on to whom this repetition is attributed, but BBC Radio One DJs Terry Wogan and Noel Edmonds have been variously reported to have made almost daily, if not daily, mention of the Concrete Cows on their respective national programmes.³⁸ Two early 1980s articles attribute Milton Keynes’ reputation as a “joke” to its ongoing mocking by “disc jockeys”.³⁹ Other comedians who have been named as taking part in this process include Kenny Everett and Jasper Carrott, while stand-up comedian Dick Emery has also been reported as making Concrete Cows jokes during this period.⁴⁰ Within these recollections, it is significant to note that the specific jokes themselves are not recorded.

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³⁹ The near-constant ridicule of unnamed “disc jockeys” is discussed in David White, “What’s Really So Bad About Milton Keynes?,” New Society April 17, 1980; Jack Trevor Story, “Endpiece,” Listener March 18, 1982.; note that the author is Jack Trevor Story, whose critiques of Milton Keynes and their possible motivations are discussed in Chapter 4.

⁴⁰ White, “What’s Really So Bad About Milton Keynes?,” New Society April 17, 1980; “Questel Qualitative Studies Ltd: Project Wish,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, August 1988).
but rather just memory of the punchline, that the Concrete Cows and by extension Milton Keynes were laughable, if not ridiculous.

Further complicating this less formally archived history is the way in which Concrete Cow jokes developed a participatory dimension amongst English audiences outside of Milton Keynes. This will be traced further in chapters 7 and 8, but it is significant to note that through audience replication, the impact of initial “jokes” described above was not restricted to their immediate publication and reception. During the late 1980s, MKDC-commissioned qualitative opinion surveys reported that individuals asked about their thoughts about Milton Keynes referenced the Concrete Cows as a primary negative association with the town, and that they attributed this reputation to hearing repeated jokes from comedians and radio DJs, as well as hearing these jokes repeated by friends and colleagues.41 Ruth Finnegan, an anthropologist based at the Open University in Milton Keynes, integrated her own experience of hearing these jokes within her study of other Milton Keynes residents:

Phone up to give your address for the gas bill and get the response – “And how near are you to the cows then?” Again and again people laugh when Milton Keynes is mentioned and allude to the concrete cows. Milton Keynes residents, well acquainted with this pessimistic story of their town, brace themselves when asked where they live and wait for the mention of the cows.42

Finnegan suggests these “informal channels” of joke repetition interpret the Concrete Cows as a “disruption of the natural order”, where the new town “artifice” is seen

41 See surveys of South Eastern English target audiences in “Questel Qualitative Studies Ltd: Project Wish.”; “Audience Selection: Qualitel Report, Impressions of Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1988); “Audience Selection: Milton Keynes, Presentation of results, pre and post stage,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1988); “Audience Selection Report, Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1990).
42 Finnegan, Tales of the city, 46.
as irreconcilable to more valuable rurality.\textsuperscript{43} Her account hints at the tension generated through repetition of these jokes; the need for residents to “brace themselves… and wait for the mention of the cows” points to the visceral experience of derision, and its function as an exclusionary and Othering tactic. Finnegan suggests such experiences can be seen motivating grassroots counter-histories of Milton Keynes, some of which celebrate the Cows, others which explicitly reject them.\textsuperscript{44} This participatory, derisory dimension to Othering Milton Keynes helps account for the resilience of the Concrete Cows “joke”, and the symbolic collapse of the Cows into a metonym for Milton Keynes itself in later media coverage.

**Media context: The Winter of Discontent**

Not only have media representations of the Concrete Cows not yet received historical attention, through being dismissed as a variant of “knocking copy,” the specific political purposes that this coverage achieved have not yet been considered historically.\textsuperscript{45} This is particularly striking given the clear evolution of negative representations of Milton Keynes in this coverage, and the precise overtly ideological work which it seeks to perform. By

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.; Moran, *Reading the Everyday*, 118, 21. While the participatory local history of the Concrete Cows will receive some further commentary in chapters 7 and 8, this area requires further historical investigation in terms of Milton Keynes’ social history. Billings oversaw the construction of a replica set of sculptures, allowing one set to remain in Bancroft/Stacey Bushes and another to be located in the centre of town at Midsummer Place Shopping Centre, later Intu:MK; they have also been displayed at the Milton Keynes Bowl, the sports stadium which opened in 1981. The sculptures have not only been subject to “vandalism”, but have also been frequently used by local artists as a blank canvas, with unauthorised repaintings of the sculptures ranging from whimsical themes to more overtly political commentary. While beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that these sculptures have had a distinct, active symbolic life within Milton Keynes which developed from the participatory, collaborative culture of 1970s Milton Keynes community art. For wider discussion of 1970s grassroots cultural participation see Finnegan, *The hidden musicians*. See an Open University community history project survey of this history in “Concrete Cows: The Open University”.


examining the political context of 1978 specifically, the role of ridicule can be seen contributing to an iterative political process, constructing the idea of an organic failure of the postwar state.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the 1974 Social Contract policy bound the Wilson government and British trades unions to a form of transactional governance, where explicitly socialist taxation and public investment policies were proposed in return for trade unions bearing the brunt of inflationary control policies through restricting wage claims. This was further complicated by the Wilson Government’s limited implementation of the promised socialist policies while dealing with high rates of inflation; while Treasury was initially able to successfully curtail the worst of the inflationary spike in 1974, it continued to exert pressure on incomes, while unemployment continued to rise. Prior to the IMF crisis, Treasury was attempting to address this through cutting public funding and controlling money supply; the terms of the IMF loan, however, formally mandated such monetarist economic policies, reinforcing and legitimating a pre-existing trend. This reduced the Social Contract to purely an income control policy, concentrating responsibility for inflation control onto organised labour, without providing social policies to offset this income pressure.

The Callaghan government held a reduced electoral majority through a Liberal coalition from 1977; in this context, Chancellor Denis Healey’s July 1978 proposal for a voluntary but low cap of 5% on union wage claims was widely perceived amongst union

48 Indeed, based on this, Hay has suggested that the IMF crisis marked the failure of both Keynesian and neoliberal macroeconomic policy to defuse the impact of the disintegration of the Bretton-Woods agreement. Burk and Cairncross, Goodbye, Great Britain, 215-18; Clift and Tomlinson, “Negotiating Credibility.”; “When rules started to rule.”; Colin Hay, “Review Essays Symposium: The Winter of Discontent,” Historical Studies in Industrial Relations, no. 36 (2015); earlier version of this article published as “The Moment when ‘Then’ became ‘Now’.”
leaders and membership, as sufficiently punitive as to require a renewed electoral mandate. At this time the Labour Party held a strong lead in opinion polls; when Callaghan did not call a general election at September 1978’s Labour Party Conference, this failure has been widely interpreted as inspiring widespread strike action from November 1978 until March 1979 when an election date was set. Official statistics indicate that the overall number days lost to strike activity during this period was substantially lower than in 1974, in 1977, and during the first two years of the Thatcher Government. Despite this, the media and political response to these strikes as an acute civic breakdown understood as The Winter of Discontent framed these events as the final death throes of the postwar consensus and of Keynesian economic management more broadly.

The conflation of these strikes into a singular narrative of “The Winter of Discontent” was not, however, a purely retrospective imposition. Rather, it reflected how many people experienced the events at the time, with pre-existing media and political narratives providing an organising framework for understanding the strike activity as a failure of state power and functioning. While Colin Hay has extensively studied the types of rhetorical framing which reinforced this process, what has been less extensively studied is how these media practices can already be seen at work at the time of the Winter of


Discontent’s commencement. While the strikes of 1973-74 and the IMF crisis formed two important precedents for the hostile media coverage of the Winter of Discontent, these were not isolated, but rather more acute phases of longer term, diagnostically focused declinist media narratives which interpreted the state as embattled and vulnerable to potential crisis.

This ideological priming was not only achieved through the overt, apocalyptic language of 1978-1979 political analyses, but was embedded in longer-term processes of iteration, as traced through Chapters 2 to 4 of this thesis. Constant reiteration of spatialised metaphors of vulnerability and threat implicated postwar state-sponsored urban planning, along with other “usual suspects” of declinist social critique, in the rhetorical construction of an embattled state. The coverage of the Concrete Cows illustrates this narrative convergence between declinism, postwar state planning critiques, and the conflation of the history of the postwar state into a singular narrative of technocratic socialism. By invoking an ideal rural landscape as a historically venerated default, technocratic socialist concrete is framed as deviant from this norm and therefore destructive. The strength of this narrative convergence allows it to override conflicting evidence, from the agrarian capitalist and imperialist shaping of rural British landscapes, to the material structures of Milton Keynes.

Note the periodisation in Hay, “Narrating Crisis: the Discursive Construction of the ‘Winter of Discontent’.”; Thomas, “‘Bound in by history’: The Winter of Discontent in British politics, 1979-2004.”; Shepherd, The Callaghan government and the British ‘winter of discontent’; Martin Lopez, The winter of discontent: myth, memory, and history; Lyddon, “Striking Facts about the ‘Winter of Discontent’.” Thomas’ wider-focused work on newspaper representation of the Labour Party is an exception to this narrow focus, and is particularly useful for its tracing of the escalating conservatism of national print media during the 1970s; see especially the role of the Daily Mail traced through Thomas, Popular newspapers, the Labour Party and British politics, 77-81.

Useful context can also be drawn from early to mid-1970s media modelling of CCCS studies in Hall et al., Policing the crisis; Hall et al., Culture, Media, Language.

Noted examples include Harold Wilson, The Governance of Britain (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976); King, Why is Britain becoming harder to govern; Patrick Cormack, ed. Right turn: Eight men who changed their minds (London: Leo Cooper, 1978); Patrick Huther, What’s wrong with Britain? (London: Sphere: Sunday Telegraph, 1978); Boyson, 1985: An escape from Orwell’s 1984; See also articles from this period in Peter Jenkins, Anatomy of decline: the political journalism of Peter Jenkins (London: Cassell, 1995).


See discussion of normalising imperial and capitalist landscapes as “natural” in Wood, Pristine culture of capitalism; Baucom, Out of Place; Gardiner, The Return of England in English Literature; The Constitution of English Literature.
its actively participatory leftist community art culture, and MKDC’s goal to “plan themselves out of a job.”

The primary beneficiary of this narrative convergence, and active participant in its development, was the Conservative Party under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher from 1975 onwards, which would manifest in its election victory in May 1979. Stuart Hall argued in late 1978 that Thatcher’s primary victory, over and above any potential electoral victory, was rhetorical, in that the Conservative Party’s explanatory narrative for the Winter of Discontent not only helped construct the notion of an organically failed postwar state, but posited itself as the only remaining legitimate political option. This is not to say that the Conservative Party itself was overwhelmingly supported, but that its explanatory narrative for the events of 1978-1979 was rooted in wider understandings which had been cultivated through years of declinist media representation wherein the postwar state was continuously depicted as vulnerable and embattled; this reading is borne out through studies of memory of the 1970s and the political function of its mythology. This narrative would be used to present the reimagining of state functioning as legitimate and necessary; the idea of technocratic socialism having already demonstrably failed was central to this.

As will be explored in greater detail in chapters 6 to 8, this explanatory framework actively rejected postwar reconstructionist governance models, constructing petit-bourgeois values of individual enterprise as norms through which national greatness can be reattained.

59 “Milton Keynes: a village city.”
60 Hall, “The Great Moving Right Show.”
62 Given that classic macroeconomic neoliberalism also drew on a rhetoric of historical return, this was not a substantial ideological stretch; however at this point the Conservative party’s macroeconomic policy was far from rigorously theorised, and was more focused on rhetorically framing particular elements of neoliberal macroeconomics as the ‘natural’ and historically venerated response to the ostensible failures of the postwar
The impact of this process of political redefinition for Milton Keynes was profound. Not only did it potentially threaten its ongoing viability as a state-sponsored investment, it also indicated the normalisation of a political value system which actively opposed the terms on which the town had been designated. Given that the town had become so symbolically associated with the ideologies that had produced it, this ascendant rhetorical framework “stuck” meanings to the town from which MKDC could not escape without radically reimagining the entire language through which it expressed the concept of valuable space.

**MKDC responses: “Our nation needs a new shop window”**

The political functioning of criticism of the Concrete Cows did not escape official MKDC recognition. Immediately following the publication of Ryan’s article, the minutes of the MKDC marketing committee noted that for the immediate term “no further support should be imagined coming from the Daily Mail [sic].” MKDC had occasionally responded to more seriously critical national media coverage through corrective press releases, including one addressing Christopher Booker’s Urban Rides features, which was also noted in the minutes of the marketing committee. There had not been a minuted conclusion, however, that *The Spectator* as a whole should be dismissed even temporarily as a potential source of promotion as a result of Booker’s feature. This response suggests a recognition that to a greater extent

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64 Minutes of meeting held 4 July 1978, Item 6: Spectator, in ibid.
than in Booker’s case, the active mockery of the Concrete Cows functioned within a different political context to differences in interpretation of “The Facts” about Milton Keynes.

Nevertheless, as seen in Chapter 4, MKDC promotions through to early 1979 generally continued to focus on a singular message of Milton Keynes value as demonstrated by empirically verifiable data, wherein the “Facts” could “speak for themselves.”65 Despite this public continuity, less public promotional activities undertaken by MKDC at this time indicate the emergence of an alternative narrative, promoting Milton Keynes as a concept and a brand which needed specific promotion, rather than as the sum of empirically verifiable data. This includes the prominent role of MKDC within the Department of the Environment’s British Urban Development Study Unit (BUDSU) programme established on December 1975.66 This programme, established by John Silkin under the remit of the Department of the Environment, sought to sell new town expertise to foreign governments seeking to construct new towns. This involved BUDSU seconding staff from new town Development Corporations, including MKDC, to develop feasibility studies and in some cases potential plans for new town developments, in a process primarily administered from the MKDC offices.67 From 1976 to 1984, Milton Keynes Development Corporation staff were involved in providing “technical assistance” for potential projects in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Bermuda, Lagos, Oman and Algeria, which explicitly drew on their expertise as new town planners at Milton Keynes.68 BUDSU intended


67 “OD 68/48.”

68 “Papers concerning MKDC consultative work in Alexandria, Egypt,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1976-1978); “Correspondence and papers concerning visit to UK of party from Thailand and possible follow up work for the World Bank in Thailand,”
to balance the commodification of expertise for “the UK’s commercial advantage”, with the provision of pure “technical expertise” between governments; the administrative costs of the unit were high, however, leading to a net financial loss over its life.\textsuperscript{69} After BUDSU was formally “wound up” in December 1978, subsequent consultative relationships continued to draw on development corporation expertise, but were managed by existing Department of Environment committees and directorates.\textsuperscript{70}

BUDSU and its subsequent related programmes have not yet received substantial historical attention, partly due to much relevant archival material only being released from 2013 onwards.\textsuperscript{71} The establishment of BUDSU in the context of the IMF crisis speaks to a potentially proto-neoliberal attempt to commodify the state’s new town expertise in an

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\textsuperscript{69}“FJ 2/15.”
\textsuperscript{70}A substantial contribution to this expense appeared to be administrative costs of negotiating secondments from existing departments; see “FJ 2/16.”; “FJ 2/20.” Cf. Anthony Bevins, “Golden goose is just a lame duck,” \textit{Daily Mail} July 17, 1978.
\textsuperscript{71}This is despite some contributions to later histories of privatising new town expertise, for example Stephen Ward, “Consortium Developments Ltd and the failure of ‘new country towns’ in Mrs Thatcher’s Britain,” \textit{Planning Perspectives} 20, no. 3 (2005).
\end{footnotesize}
international market. At the same time, its target markets were primarily newly decolonised nations, including those from the Commonwealth, indicating a potential reframing of colonial power relationships in terms of the commodification of technical expertise. While further investigation of these relationships is needed, for the purposes of this thesis, MKDC’s active role in BUDSU indicates that from late 1975, MKDC were involved in a programme which conceptualised its technical expertise, but also its reputation, as a saleable product for export. The project necessarily relied on verifiable claims of expertise, but also overtly sought to sell new town success as an aspirational commodity. While technical information was a crucial aspect of this process, perceiving the idea of Milton Keynes as sellable necessitated a different perspective to the empiricist approach of letting information speak for itself. While the audience for these promotional activity was highly specialised and neither public nor domestic, it provides important context for accounting for evolving MKDC thinking about branding and meanings of Milton Keynes.

Further reconceptualisation of Milton Keynes as a brand can be seen at work through MKDC’s pitch to the Department of the Environment to be selected as Britain’s formal bid to host the 1986 Commonwealth Games. A number of British cities, including Belfast, Birmingham and Edinburgh, developed cases to pitch to the Department of the Environment from 1976 onwards, which planned to decide on a single city to make a formal bid in August 1980. MKDC’s motivations for the pitch appear to have been partly rooted in an attempt to leverage additional government funding, seen in the frequent assertion that the bid was wholly “conditional upon the Government providing financial support” and that...

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72 “Borough of Milton Keynes Specialist Meetings and working groups minutes and papers, including Commonwealth Games working party,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1973-1978); “AT 60/67 Possible UK Bid for 1986 Commonwealth Games: Belfast; Birmingham; Milton Keynes “, (The National Archives, 1976-1979); “Commonwealth Games working party.”; “AT 60/172 1986 Commonwealth Games: proposed bids from Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Edinburgh,” (The National Archives, 1979-1983); “AT 60/172 1986 Commonwealth Games: proposed bids from Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Edinburgh,” (The National Archives, 1979); “AT 60/67 “.
cost would not be passed on to Milton Keynes’ residents.\textsuperscript{73} In the context of post-IMF-loan funding cuts, and especially in the wake of criticisms of new towns having absorbed too much at the expense of inner cities, this suggests MKDC adapting to a straitened economic situation by laterally appealing to alternative government funding sources.\textsuperscript{74}

Beyond this, however, pitching Milton Keynes as a potential Commonwealth Games host indicates a shift in MKDC promotional logic. Although the content of the draft pitch documents is necessarily heavy on budgetary and statistical data, MKDC lobbying correspondence rationalised the pitch based on Milton Keynes’ inspirational and uplifting potential:

Our nation needs a new shop window which displays a new attitude to life as well as sport. You have seen what we have achieved since 1971. By 1986 it really will be something to shout about.\textsuperscript{75}

It is difficult to assess the extent to which this sentiment would have been reflected in media promotions for the Games themselves, given that the bid had limited support within the Department of the Environment, and was formally rejected on 19 September 1979.\textsuperscript{76} Such thinking would, however, appear as a crucial feature in promotions of the town’s Shopping Building, which would be opened less than a week later on 25 September 1979 by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Promotions for the Shopping Building and for Milton Keynes overall from this period onwards would adopt a distinctly aspirational consumerist rhetoric, departing from earlier styles, but clearly operating in a similar framework to the uplifting vision of “our nation[‘s]… new shop window”. This actively rejected interpretations of

\textsuperscript{73} “Commonwealth Games working party.”; “AT 60/172 “; “AT 60/67 “.
\textsuperscript{74} This appears to have been a contributing factor in the Department of Environment’s eventual refusal to support Milton Keynes’ bid, such that Treasury was not even approached to put together a budget for it. “AT 60/172 “.
\textsuperscript{75} “AT 60/67 “.
\textsuperscript{76} “AT 60/172 “.
Milton Keynes as defined by its state-sponsored socialist origins, directing Milton Keynes’ official media representation away from the technocratic socialism so ridiculed in coverage of the Concrete Cows, and towards the embodied pleasures of consumer capitalism.
Chapter 6: “You’ve never seen anything like it”: the aspirational turn, 1979-1986

This chapter explores the bold and aspirational advertising strategy introduced by MKDC in 1979 to accompany the opening of the Shopping Building. By reconfiguring Milton Keynes’ image away from its postwar “socialist” origins, and towards consumer capitalism and the sensory pleasures of private consumption, MKDC reframed its presentation of the town’s value not as deriving from empirical facts but from intangible, bodily-mediated sensations which could only be understood through direct presence and immediate experience. Accompanied by the radical expansion of private sector investment in Milton Keynes leisure, housing and even its administration, this image realignment reflected the town’s adaptation to drastically different political circumstances to those of its designation by reconceptualising the town itself as a commodity to be sold. This change, while helping safeguard Milton Keynes against hostility from central government, raised problems of its own, generating new critiques of Milton Keynes’ rejection of its founding values and embrace of consumer capitalism. Even while MKDC marketing was able to reframe the parameters of the town’s representation, it could not correct or replace ongoing narratives of Milton Keynes’ inauthenticity as a negative, damaging cultural force.

The Shopping Building and the marketing shift

A central feature of the Plan for Milton Keynes was its decentralisation of work, education, shopping and social amenities throughout the designated area, intended to enable the greatest
range of choice and flexibility for residents.\(^1\) Despite this focus, however, a new “city centre” was also planned for the Bradwell Common area, intended to “concentrate” administrative and leisure facilities to create a sense of cohesion through generating “intense” social interaction the planners associated with urbanity.\(^2\) Identifying this central hub as “Milton Keynes city centre” was intended to provide an anchor to the decentralised plan, and help create a sense of local identity.\(^3\) Moreover, creating a central precinct was intended to provide a hub of social, shopping and business concentration which would draw business and patronage from outside of Milton Keynes, competing with Oxford and Cambridge in the west and east, Aylesbury and Buckingham in the south-east, and Northampton in the north.\(^4\)

Central Milton Keynes was designed around three wide, plane-tree lined boulevards, with the central Midsummer Boulevard following the alignment of the midsummer solstice sunrise, and the two adjacent boulevards named after the prehistoric monuments of Silbury and Avebury.\(^5\) The area was planned to combine diverse land uses, including substantial office space and some higher-density housing (see figure 19). On the highest ground of Midsummer Boulevard, a central shopping centre known as the Shopping Building, was planned to emulate the social functions of a traditional high street or market square, while functioning as a local landmark and visitor attraction.\(^6\)

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1 The plan for Milton Keynes, 1.
2 Ibid., 41; Walker, The architecture and planning of Milton Keynes, 17. The relative merits of decentralisation as opposed to a new cohesive urban centre were subject to debate within MKDC. See Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes, 38-39.
3 The plan for Milton Keynes, 1, 41.
4 Ibid., 68.
The Shopping Building was only the second British mall, after London’s Brent Cross, to be built along the Gruen or “dumbbell” model, which differentiated it from earlier covered shopping precincts by locating major retailers at opposing ends of a single linear form. Designed by Stuart Mosscrop, it sought to encapsulate in miniature the key aspects of the town’s plan, with separated car and pedestrian access, flexible internal design, and expansive use of space allowing for infill and adaptation. These were arranged in a single-floor development of twin mile-long promenades, with 14-metre-high ceilings and long curtain-walls of windows opening onto courtyards filled with public art and markets. The promenades were populated with abstract modernist sculptures and extensive use of indoor plants, especially palm trees. The intention was to contain, concentrate and elevate high-

Figure 19: Development plan of Central Milton Keynes showing development as of September 1980.

7 “The Shopping Building: Central Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1980).
9 Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes, 37; Walker, The architecture and planning of Milton Keynes, 17, 67.
10 The architecture and planning of Milton Keynes, 67.
11 Jewell, “The fall and rise of the British mall,” 322.
street shopping by creating a controlled, luxuriously-finished environment (see figure 20.) Development began in earnest from 1974, but progress was hampered by the straitened economic environment, with securing major retail tenancies proving difficult, pushing back the opening from 1977 to 1979. While the Shopping Building was sufficiently completed by June 1979 to host the Queen and Prince Phillip on an official visit, it was not officially opened until Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s visit on 25 September 1979.

12 W.O. Rueter, “Article entitled ‘Central Milton Keynes. An appreciation by one American architect’,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, July 3, 1974). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss aspects of Milton Keynes’ plan which did not come to fruition and which were not represented in national media during this period, it is important to note that the City Club project from the mid-1970s acted as a precedent in MKDC thinking for this kind of spectacular, multi-sensory landscape. The City Club was intended as an entertainment precinct combining funfair and carnival style entertainments with an indoor beach, large-scale indoor gardens, retail and leisure facilities; this ambitious project is well documented in MKDC records but its ambitious scope was ill-matched to the economic environment and it did not prove viable. See overview in Walker, The architecture and planning of Milton Keynes; Donald and Webber, A Clockwork Jerusalem, 70.


Thatcher comes to Milton Keynes

As discussed in Chapter 5, the election of the Thatcher government created a political environment hostile to new town developments. While MKDC had already undergone substantial funding cuts under the ostensibly more sympathetic Callaghan government, the new government’s rhetoric was now consistently hostile to the ideological premises under which MKDC had been established and under which Milton Keynes had been designated and planned, and specific moves were underway to restrict the funding of the Commission for New Towns. The Shopping Building was opened by Margaret Thatcher on 25 September 1979 and her visit to the town was carefully stage-managed by MKDC in a way

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which indicates a deep consciousness of the potential for this visit to become an ideological flashpoint.

The itinerary for the day focused on MKDC chairman Lord Jock Campbell, who was also a Labour peer, guiding Thatcher through a tour of Milton Keynes accompanied by a press junket, culminating in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Shopping Building. This would provide extensive potential for comment by Thatcher on Milton Keynes’ development in the presence of media representatives and MKDC clearly saw the potential for critical responses. In preparation, scripts were developed for Campbell which posited the types of criticism Thatcher might make, and gave lengthy prepared answers to present the town more favourably. These scripts posit Thatcher’s major potential criticisms of Milton Keynes as being its ongoing receipt of taxpayer funding, and that if Milton Keynes was so business-friendly, that it could thrive without government funds. MKDC responses argue that the role of the state is to create opportunities for the free market to thrive. Significantly, Campbell’s responses also suggested that Milton Keynes’ suburban form would create Conservative voters from working-class migrants, as “voting patterns tend to change” as new residents become more affluent and “join the middle class”. This presented Milton Keynes as an engine for economic growth and conservatism, which relied on seed investment from the state that would return maximum outcomes.

This language shift indicates a desire to recontextualise Milton Keynes towards an investment and consumption focus which was seen to be more in tune with Thatcher’s politics. As it stood, the main conflict arising from Thatcher’s visit to Milton Keynes was not due to her objections to the town, but that her presence attracted a substantial, noisy protest

16 Appendix H: Imaginary Dialogue Between the Chairman and the Prime Minister, in “Report of opening of CMK by the Prime Minister (Mrs. Thatcher),” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1979).
17 Appendix H: Imaginary Dialogue Between the Chairman and the Prime Minister, in ibid.
from several hundred trade union activists.\textsuperscript{18} The bulk of her speech dealt with justifying monetarist policy to control inflation, and criticising trade union wage claims; she delivered it shouting over the loud protest outside.\textsuperscript{19} Where she did refer to Milton Keynes at the beginning and end of her speech, it was in order to praise the town’s commitment to selling MKDC properties to sitting tenants, and to encouraging the development of new businesses.\textsuperscript{20} To this extent, MKDC’s concerns that it would be publically criticised were not borne out, and indeed they were singled out for praise for those areas where their policies coincided with those of central government. Such a detailed preparatory dossier, anticipating combative responses, nonetheless indicates that this praise was not considered to be a given, and indicates MKDC’s preparedness to defend its existence through adopting language of the private sector.

\textbf{Marketing the Shopping Building}

This reconceptualisation of Milton Keynes’ potential value as a site of business and consumption was not purely developed for private political lobbying, but rather reflected the development of the notion described in Chapter 5, of MKDC presenting Milton Keynes as an aspirational commodity whose intangible pleasures and value transcended the “Facts” of its formal development. The opening of the Shopping Building provided an opportunity for MKDC to reorient marketing around the embodied pleasures of consumption as an avenue for individual fulfilment, rejecting the claims of technocratic determinism critically ascribed to the town in Chapters 4 and 5. The central theme of this advertising was that the Shopping


\textsuperscript{20} “Speech opening Central Milton Keynes Shopping Centre.”
Building engendered unique, inherently desirable bodily sensations and emotional pleasures that could not be fully represented textually, but which needed to be experienced through immediate presence.

MKDC advertising in 1978 and early 1979 largely continued to emphasise the town’s benefits through verifiable claims, using statistics, and using an educational tone heavy on textual exposition.\(^{21}\) In June 1979, *The Financial Times* ran a special report on Milton Keynes emphasising the forthcoming opening of the Shopping Building, which featured a colour advertising liftout alongside the journalistic content. These advertisements marked a crucial step towards what would become a new advertising style, juxtaposing individual local testimonies about Milton Keynes’ pleasures with full-colour, full-page photographs of sunsets and lush green landscapes.\(^{22}\) These advertisements continued to present verifiable testimony emphasising “facts” about Milton Keynes’ business benefits, such as their rates of business growth.\(^{23}\) Some of the testimonies also described private sensory experiences, most significantly in the first advertisement in the liftout. This depicted Michael Heelas, Managing Director of Volkswagen Great Britain, sitting casually on his desk looking out a window. His testimony in bold text explains “Why did we move to Milton Keynes? A choice of seven 23-acre sites, room to expand. And the view.” The view itself is not shown or described, yet Heelas is shown transfixed by it, with the implication that it is not simply pleasant, but that its beauty is somehow mesmerising.\(^{24}\)

By September 1979, this approach evolved into more assertive statements of sensory pleasure and value. The major print media advertisement announcing the formal opening of


\(^{23}\) Examples include “We set up from scratch in five weeks, thanks to Milton Keynes,” *Financial Times* June 27, 1979; “Sales are up 50% in 6 months,” *Financial Times* June 27, 1979; “Commuting’s a ten minute drive now we’re in Milton Keynes,” *Financial Times* June 27, 1979.

the Shopping Building used full page images and newly bold assertions of Milton Keynes’ value and attractiveness (see figure 21.)

Its text was still relatively lengthy, listing the conveniences of the complex with regards to range of stores, access, and parking. Yet this exposition appeared under a map of south-eastern England which had been redrawn to place Milton Keynes in the centre, indicated by the Shopping Building, while London was represented by anachronistically bellowing smokestacks. The slogan advised “A word of advice to people who don’t live on this map. Move.” This presented the Shopping Building and Milton Keynes as interchangeable, and both as needing to be seen to be fully appreciated. For readers who could not do so, the advertisement concluded “we’re sincerely sorry if we’ve spoilt your breakfast.” The idea that Milton Keynes was desirable to the extent that being unable to visit it would engender distress, is unprecedented in MKDC advertising, and suggests that despite the town’s rational benefits, that the pleasures of Milton Keynes were so great that direct experience was not only required, but should even be craved.

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25 “A word of advice to people who don’t live on this map,” *Daily Mail* September 26, 1979; “A word of advice to people who don’t live on this map,” *Daily Express* September 26, 1979.
Figure 21: “A word of advice to people who don’t live on this map,” 1979 MKDC advertisement.

These themes of bodily proximity and sensory pleasure can be traced through some of the most widely circulated advertisements from 1979 through to the mid-1980s. The major

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26 “A word of advice to people who don’t live on this map,” Daily Mail September 26, 1979; “A word of advice to people who don’t live on this map,” Daily Express September 26, 1979.
television advertisement for the Shopping Building ran from 1979 and featured a jingle which
was also released to radio stations. The television advertisement was made up of a
succession of fragmentary scenes of consumers at the Shopping Building, referred to by
synechdoche as Central Milton Keynes; never lingering more than a few seconds before
moving to the next scene, these scenes were often non-specific, showing facial expressions,
shoppers heavily laden with bags, or close-ups of money changing hands. The juxtaposition
of these visuals with the repeated refrain “you’ve never seen anything like it” presents the
transactions as the origin of this pleasure and wonder, while the Shopping Building is cast as
the structure which contains and elevates consumer experiences.

The closing line of the jingle, “shopping as it should be,” confirms this ideal of
shopping being elevated from the mundane into an ideal. It also implied a corrective; rather
than just providing more shops, or a different environment, “shopping as it should be”
suggested that the Shopping Building was redressing the failings of existing retail
environments. This theme would be developed in a series of posters and print
advertisements from 1979 which negatively characterised high street shopping as oppressive,
undesirable sensory experiences. This campaign featured high street shoppers oppressed by
dark, stormy skies and driving rain, including a man struggling to hold an umbrella and juggle

27 “You’ve never seen anything like it”, as referenced in ‘CMK shopping building promotion’, MKDC, board
minute 79, 6 April 1979, quoted in Bendixson and Platt, Image and reality, 147; Ronnie Bond, Central Milton
Keynes “You’ve Never Seen Anything Like It”, vol. SFI 463 (Sound for Industry, c. 1979). Publicly viewable
version can be found at “Central Milton Keynes advert,” Youtube.com,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH_3Hz2pC0s; “Video: For all the Christmas shoppers at centre:mk
today .. The Central Milton Keynes song,” Onemk.co.uk, http://www.onemk.co.uk/christmas-shoppers-

28 This was central to the marketing of the Shopmobility programme to expand disabled access to the
Shopping Building. See “Press Release: Shopmobility,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton
Keynes City Discovery Centre, June 1979). Further examples of this include Shopping at Central Milton Keynes,
(Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Development Corporation, 1978); “Application for the ’Come to Britain Trophy 1980’ in respect of Central Milton Keynes Shopping Area,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation
papers (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1981); “Marketing posters and advertisements:
shopping,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, c.1979-1980);
“Marketing posters and advertisements: Christmas shopping,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers
(Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, c.1979-1980).

29 “Marketing posters and advertisements: Christmas shopping,” “Marketing posters and advertisements:
shopping.”
his Christmas packages, and a woman with several small children being issued a parking ticket by a grim policeman (see figure 22.)\textsuperscript{30} This latter image was captioned with the ominous bold text “The End,” signifying the end of oppressive high street shopping.\textsuperscript{31} Other photographs were captioned “Only another 26 rainy, crowded, frustrating, exhausting shopping days to Christmas...” while the facing page continued “unless you’re one of the lucky ones” able to visit the Shopping Building.\textsuperscript{32} Whereas the high street was described as full of “crowds, the roaring traffic, the pelting rain, the sheer exasperating horror of it all,” the Shopping Building was emphasised as a controlled, heightened environment, a “minor miracle,” “where there’s space, light and room for you to breathe.” This assertive rhetoric not only actively characterised the Shopping Building as a superior form of urban space, but one whose pleasures were fundamentally mediated by the bodily sensation rather than the intellect.

\textsuperscript{30} “Marketing posters and advertisements: Christmas shopping.”; “Marketing posters and advertisements: shopping.”

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} “Marketing posters and advertisements: Christmas shopping.”
Figure 22: “The End,” MKDC poster, c. 1979.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
This bodily-focused emphasis on individual pleasure can be seen in print visual advertisements and promotional material from 1979 onwards, especially in early artist impressions of the Shopping Building with its emphasis on a range of small interpersonal vignettes playing out against the backdrop of the Shopping Building. Children playing, young couples hand in hand, families of different ages were each represented immersed in their own experiences against the backdrop of a wide range of recognisable storefronts; not jostling against each other, these vignettes were spaced out as if to heighten their individual qualities, presenting not a chaotic environment but one which facilitated varied, simultaneous self-contained experiences and interactions, with no one set prioritised over any other. In this way, the Shopping Building was represented as contributing a framework for heightened, magnified sensations, which were hinted at rather than strictly defined, and enumerated to suggest a variety of freely chosen possibilities.

This idea of the Shopping Building as an ideal space, which concentrated and intensified individual sensations and experiences, would be central to MKDC’s submission for the 1980 Come to Britain Trophy. This award, given by the British Tourism Authority to sites which attracted international tourism in recognition of their ambassadorial role for Britain, received an application from MKDC on 27 March 1981 on behalf of the “Central Milton Keynes Shopping Area”. Enclosed with the application, along with copies of Architect’s Journal’s glossy feature on the Shopping Building’s architecture, was a silver flexi-disc record of the “You’ve Never Seen Anything Like it” advertising jingle. The application

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34 These images appeared in many MKDC publications up to the late 1980s but a complete collection of this artwork can be seen in *Shopping at Central Milton Keynes*.
36 “Application for the 'Come to Britain Trophy 1980'.”
37 Ibid. MKDC also entered the Shopping Building into a number of international trade and architectural awards during this period, generally focused on innovation in steel construction. See local coverage in “New city to represent Britain,” *Milton Keynes Express* July 11, 1980.
form focused on the wide range of international visitors, from so many countries that “the
full list reads like an atlas”; however in keeping with the supplementary material, the specific
benefits of Central Milton Keynes were expressed in terms of sensory pleasure, and the
capacity of the centre to excite and induce wonder. From describing the site as “at the centre
of a diamond formed by London and Birmingham, Oxford and Cambridge” to the
“sparkling mirror glass,” the Shopping Building was cast as a pleasurable spectacle, a “unique
development” which “visitors have come from all over the world to marvel at.”

Significantly, rather than attempting to conceal or downplay the newness of the
development, the application describes Central Milton Keynes as “an exciting contrast to the
historical buildings of other city centres” and as a “unique development that has grown out
of green fields in the Buckinghamshire countryside.” Rather than trying to rationalise or sell
the empirical contributions of Milton Keynes’ difference, this application casts it as a sensory
novelty, where perceived contrasts are exciting rather than cause for concern. This
celebration of novel shopping experiences evokes the language of the “new national shop
window,” described in the private lobbying correspondence for Milton Keynes’
Commonwealth Games Bid in 1979, discussed in Chapter 5.39 While the Trophy application
was not successful, it was predicated on the idea that the Shopping Building had the potential
to perform this national shop window role, with its novelty providing enticement and
inspiration.

These principles of Milton Keynes’ desirable qualities performing as a national
benchmark for excellence informed business-focused advertisements, which also
emphasised that the specific benefits of Milton Keynes could not be represented textually
and like the Shopping Building, must be seen for themselves to be understood. This extended

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39 “Commonwealth Games working party.”; “AT 60/67 “; “AT 60/172 “; “AT 60/173.”
on and built on the early examples from the June 1979 Financial Times Special Report. These newer versions of personal business testimonial advertisements focused on needing to experience the benefits of Milton Keynes directly rather than arguing for their existence empirically, often using deliberately vague language. This was developed further in a 1982 series targeting business investment, using vivid colour representations of Milton Keynes’ central landscape and Shopping Building, juxtaposed with quotations from local businesspeople describing Milton Keynes as a wondrous place whose specific benefits could not be fully defined. Vaguely describing an indefinable “air of confidence about the place” and the need for “more businessmen to go and see what is going on,” these advertisements alluded to desirable feelings which needed to be experienced through bodily proximity.

Elsewhere, business-targeted advertisements used photographs of businessmen alongside written testimonials and oversized signatures that not only approved but emphasised their bodily presence in the town as verifying their authority. This style of advertising asserted the existence of qualitative pleasures, declaring these could only be comprehended in person rather than through text; one advertisement went so far as to advise “Don’t believe everything you read in The Guardian. Come and see for yourself what Milton Keynes has to offer the businessman [sic].” By framing journalistic accounts and even

40 “Commuting’s a ten minute drive now we’re in Milton Keynes,” Financial Times June 27, 1979; “Sales are up 50% in 6 months,” Financial Times June 27, 1979; “Why did we move to Milton Keynes?”, Financial Times June 27, 1979; “We set up from scratch in five weeks, thanks to Milton Keynes,” Financial Times June 27, 1979.
42 “Attracting people like Abbey National is a habit of ours,” Financial Times May 11, 1982; “Milton Keynes is ideal for small businesses,” Daily Express June 15, 1981; “How they all got where they are today,” Daily Express June 22, 1981; “We believe in Milton Keynes,” Daily Mail September 11, 1981; “If we were into diamonds we’d go to Hatton Garden,” Guardian August 9, 1983; see collection in “Marketing posters and advertisements: Commercial & Industrial,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre).
advertising itself as insufficient to convey the specific benefits of the town, this appeal for
the “businessman’s” presence implied an alternative, superior framework of understanding
through direct experience.

The varying aspects of this approach were fully realised in the most famous and
enduringly referred-to representation of Milton Keynes, known as the “Red Balloons”
advertisement.  In 1982 MKDC brokered a deal with the newly-established television
Channel 4, purchasing substantial airtime in regular, frequent timeslots during prime-time
weeknights and all day at weekends. This heavy rotation in the London Weekend
Television, Anglia, TBS and Central catchment areas, helps explain its long-term impact;
throughout the 1980s Red Balloons polled in market research surveys as one of the most
widely held popular associations with Milton Keynes, long after it had ceased airing.

“Red Balloons” follows the journey of a small boy running through Milton Keynes
clutching a red balloon. He starts in the Shopping Building, which is shot from below with
its windows backlit as glowing pools of light (see figure 24.) Given a red balloon by a clown,
he runs through the Shopping Building, past peaceful tai-chi classes held in the main halls,
and out into quiet villages and fields, over aged stone bridges and along the sunlit Grand
Union Canal. He passes idyllic fishing scenes accompanied only by birdsong and a backdrop
of stirring orchestral music (see figure 25). The boy reaches a fête held in a field; there are
hundreds of people each holding a red balloon like his, and they release their balloons into
the sky with a joyful cheer. A calm, even-toned voiceover concludes: ‘Wouldn’t it be nice if
all towns were like Milton Keynes.”

44 “Red Balloons,” (BFI National Archive, 1983); “Milton Keynes red balloon advert,” Youtube.com,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfSoZ6_x7kk.
45 “Viewpoint no.2 : Marketing Special,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Centre for
46 “Audience Selection Report, Milton Keynes.”; “Questel Qualitative Studies Ltd: Project Wish.”; “Qualitel
Report, Impressions of Milton Keynes.”; “Audience Selection: Milton Keynes, Presentation of results, pre
Figure 23: Still from “Red Balloons” showing interior of Shopping Building, 1983.47

Figure 24: Still from “Red Balloons,” 1983.48

47 “Red Balloons.”; “Milton Keynes red balloon advert”.
48 “Red Balloons.”; “Milton Keynes red balloon advert”.
Not only was Milton Keynes now presented as fundamentally desirable in a way that necessitated direct bodily experience to comprehend, the quality of this experience was such that it rendered the town the best of all possible ones, an absolute ideal for urban experience. It reflects the pervasiveness of this shift towards emphasising Milton Keynes as a source of desirable and as yet undefined positive outcomes. The sentimental images of the boy and the released balloon are blatantly hopeful and aspirational, while the range of sites he visits indicates a reconfiguration of garden-city best-of-both-worlds imagery through the child’s bodily proximity and witnessing. The emphasis on changing visuals and soundscapes, the kinaesthetics of the child running through the countryside, and the minimal use of words and text, capture the sense that Milton Keynes’ positive qualities are sensorily mediated and cannot be adequately represented but must be directly experienced to be understood. At the same time, the enumeration of experiences is an interpellative tactic, curating a wide range of uplifting, awe-inspiring scenarios and implying the desirable sensory experiences into which the audience is encouraged to insert their own more specific desires and hopes. These associations would be further cultivated through the adoption of the Red Balloon as a motif in MKDC advertising, and in campaigns that used children’s drawings of idyllic Milton Keynes life.49

Explaining the change

MKDC’s initial marketing programme proposed by the consultancy Galitzine and Partners had run from 1971 to 1978, reflective of the staged development approach proposed in the

49 “All About Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, c. 1984); “Milton Keynes Added Up,” Financial Times October 21, 1985; “Contact the Commercial Director, Milton Keynes Development Corporation,” Financial Times October 1, 1985; “Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, c. 1987).
Plan for Milton Keynes. From 1976, however, the minutes of Milton Keynes’ Publicity Steering Committee note the intention to move away from “background confidence-building exercises,” and as discussed in Chapter 5, the 1978 minutes trace MKDC’s transition from away from attempting to factually disprove negative media coverage. MKDC Commercial Director Bob Hill expanded on these assessments of early MKDC marketing in a 1984 interview with The Times, suggesting that “our early advertising tried to convey facts and it was a bit of a failure.” The nature of this failure was seen to be that audiences were “aware of [sic] Milton Keynes, but not what Milton Keynes was”; or rather, that in allowing the facts to “speak for themselves,” MKDC’s interpretation of their meaning was not being overtly conveyed. While, as noted in Chapter 5, changes in MKDC definitions of Milton Keynes’ value can be seen in internal promotional and lobbying documents from 1976 through to early 1979, the opening of the Shopping Building provided a new symbolic centre for these ideas to be organised around. At the same time, the unique architecture of the Shopping Building, and its grand scale, immediately transformed Milton Keynes’ industrial landscape, both in terms of production by creating hundreds of retail, logistical and management jobs, but most significantly in terms of explicitly organising its central landscape around individual mass consumption.

Neither this substantial change to Milton Keynes’ economy, nor the perceived “failure” of earlier campaigns, were in themselves sufficient to account for the decision to market the town in terms of the sensory pleasures mediated by capitalist exchange and by the presence of consumer choice. Rather, MKDC’s redefinition of its own role during this

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51 This coincided with a new working relationship with private advertising agency Cogent Elliot, which would continue through to 1992. “Publicity Steering Committee minutes and papers.” See survey in “Milton who? Well now just about everyone knows MK,” Insider March 26, 1992.
52 Alan Hamilton, “The joke that the big firms come to enjoy,” Times October 29, 1984. note the representation of the town itself as a joke in the headline.
period changed the object and tone of its marketing materials, by moving towards the role of “selling” Milton Keynes as a “product”. This can be seen as a response deeply embedded in the particular context of the late 1970s; where criticism of new towns and postwar urban planning in general continued to escalate in national media, and was being accompanied by a reduction in political support, both in terms of funding cuts but in terms of the perception of new towns having overdrawn scarce financial and political resources and thus weakened established inner cities. This erosion of the town’s support base both politically and culturally was compounded by further funding cuts implemented soon after the 1979 election, and by Department of Environment investigations into asset sales to improve Milton Keynes’ short-term profitability.

Bendixson and Platt’s *Milton Keynes: Image and Reality*, which draws on closed MKDC board records and oral histories, describes MKDC as attempting to ensure its survival by deliberately “turning the warm-hearted, motherly, public-service-oriented Milton Keynes into a slim-jim, self-financing, property investment machine designed to suit the commercial disciplines of the 1980s.” While MKDC’s immediate survival was not under threat, its receipt of much reduced levels of public funding became contingent on extensive asset sales, refinancing of government loans, and shifting its construction efforts towards profit-making exercises, from building housing exclusively for sale, to shifting its marketing into a more “aggressive” form to attract private sector investment.

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56 Image and reality, 201.

In this context, the evolution of the idea of selling Milton Keynes, not just as a product, but as one whose benefits were best understood through the mystical exchange relationships of consumer capitalism, indicates a broader adaptive shift by MKDC which drew on the original flexible rhetoric of the Plan for Milton Keynes, but also reframed it within a marketised logic. The growing ease with which MKDC’s marketing steering committee encouraged the deliberately “aggressive” marketing of Milton Keynes as a “product” through its 1981-1982 minutes indicate the consolidation of this approach, while by 1984, Hill comfortably defined his role publicly as “trying to sell an image.”

The central theme of Milton Keynes’ meanings only being perceptible through bodily presence and not through intellect indicates the way in which marketing was not only rejecting the “facts” model and the technocratic logic underpinning it, but also the wider ideological associations of MKDC as a state sponsored organization. Selling an idea of Milton Keynes as a place whose benefits were intangible, mediated through deeply individual bodily experiences that could not be fully defined cast MKDC in a non-determinist light. By refusing to specifically define the empirical bases and specific nature of Milton Keynes’ pleasures, MKDC cast itself as facilitating a non-deterministic environment full of possibilities, where the point was to sell the breadth and range of potential experiences, and the idea of choice itself. By tailoring Milton Keynes’ original planning rhetoric of flexibility and choice into a more narrowly marketised logic, the town was emphasised through its capacity to facilitate private pleasure, both in terms of individual bodily pleasures and in terms of consumer expenditure and business growth. By exhorting its audience to not

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“believe everything you read”, MKDC’s individualistic rhetoric not only rejected the empiricist language of technocratic positivism, but sought to replace it with an embodied, individualistic celebration of consumer capitalism.\(^\text{59}\)

The Point, Energy World, and novel landscapes

Through cultivating increased private sector presence in Milton Keynes, MKDC consolidated its narrative of the town as a novel, liberatory consumer landscape. One of the most drastic additions to the Central Milton Keynes landscape, The Point multiplex, was opened in 1985 by American Multi Cinema (AMC), as Britain’s first multiplex cinema.\(^\text{60}\) This also gave the town another towering glass architectural landmark across the road from the Shopping Building on Midsummer Boulevard. The multiplex model had been well established in America by the 1980s, but British cinemas tended to be at most triple screen facilities, often converted theatres or halls, which lacked independent projection abilities or new surround sound technology.\(^\text{61}\) As such by the mid-1980s it had become a truism of British print media that cinemagoing was in a possibly terminal decline, attributed to home video technology, aging infrastructure, and decreasing investment.\(^\text{62}\) While AMC saw Britain as a potential growth market, British planning regulations restricted their potential construction in the vicinity of existing cinemas.\(^\text{63}\) Central Milton Keynes therefore offered a unique opportunity for AMC, with the closest cinemas being small facilities in Bletchley and


\(^{63}\) Hanson, “A ‘Glittering Landmark ...’,” 270.
Newport Pagnell. This combination of conceptual and logistical incentives meant Milton Keynes was an ideal site for Britain’s first multiplex.

As with the Shopping Building’s improvement on existing British shopping malls, the distinctive quality of the multiplex was its increased capacity and range of facilities concentrated in one building. The Point offered more, larger and higher quality screens, showing a wider range of films, at a much wider range of times. Its purpose-built structure was intended specifically to cater to film viewing, using state-of-the-art projection and sound facilities, and more spacious and comfortable seating.\textsuperscript{64} By including a bingo hall and range of restaurants and bars, however, The Point intended to market itself as more than purely a cinema but as a destination in itself, providing a breadth of complementary facilities under one roof to appeal to the widest possible audience (see figure 25.)\textsuperscript{65} Moreover, like the Shopping Building, the multiplex which was to be named The Point was designed in a distinctive architectural style. The main structure was held within a large silver ziggurat-style pyramid whose contours were lined with red pylons and neon lighting; the effect was designed to form a landmark visible from long distances (see figures 26 and 27).\textsuperscript{66}

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\item \textsuperscript{64} Bendixson and Platt, \textit{Image and reality}, 146
\item \textsuperscript{65} ““Pyramid Landmark for Milton Keynes entertainment”: Press release,” in \textit{Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers} (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, July 20, 1983).
\item \textsuperscript{66} \textit{Image and reality}, 141.
\end{itemize}
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Figure 25: Interior of The Point, as depicted in the AMC Press Kit, 1985.67

Figure 26: Promotional artwork of The Point, c. late 1984.68

67 “Press Kit: The Point.”
68 “All About Milton Keynes.”
MKDC advertised for tenders for the Midsummer Boulevard site in early 1982, specifying “a major entertainment complex [with] extremely widespread appeal” which would resonate with the “enormously successful Shopping Building” across the road. AMC’s successful bid was announced in July 1983, and was promoted officially by MKDC. The press release described the planned complex as “a glittering landmark for a 21st century entertainment center [sic] in Central Milton Keynes,” emphasising not only its innovative form and grand scale, but also its historically unprecedented concentration of cinema facilities in one complex. Bob Hill is quoted describing The Point as an extension of the ideas

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69 “Press Kit: The Point.”
and approach behind the Shopping Building; “complement[ing] the high standards of Central Milton Keynes” and sharing a “bold and unconventional” commitment to innovation.

The language used in the press kit to describe the Point mirrors that MKDC used to describe the Shopping Building, with the glass and chrome used in its form cast as “mirrored crystal” and with the contrasts between natural and artificial elements cast as creating a “dynamic and dramatic” tension which encapsulates a range of potential visitor experiences.72 By presenting a range of elements within the building in contrast with one another, from the “childrens’ entertainments” to bars, and from “lush landscaping” to the “hi-tech structure” of the building, The Point’s value was represented through its potential for concentrating and facilitating a wide variety of embodied consumer experiences.73 Drawing on similar contrasts, the distinctive architecture of The Point would become a recurring symbol in MKDC promotional materials. Even where The Point was not explicitly referred to in text, photographs of The Point were frequently used alongside descriptions of the town’s dynamic economic growth, and of the concentration and breadth of potential consumer experiences held within the central precinct.74

These associations with sensory novelty and private sector consumption were further cultivated by MKDC through two major exhibitions of innovative, energy-efficient housing which were specifically focused on promoting private sector relationships. In 1981, the Homeworld exhibition based in Bradwell Common opened 35 privately constructed homes to public display prior to their sale; these detached homes were largely conventional in appearance, but demonstrated unique and innovative energy-conserving designs.75 The 1986

72 ““Pyramid Landmark for Milton Keynes entertainment”: Press release.”
73 This emphasis on technology creating a seamless, natural-feeling comfort would be central to AMC’s own press release for The Point’s opening. See “Press Kit: The Point.”
74 “All About Milton Keynes,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1982); “All About Milton Keynes.”; “Milton Keynes.”
exhibition Energy World received the most media attention, partly due to its large scale, and to heavy MKDC promotional activity. Energy World was an exhibition of housing entirely constructed by private builders, for private sale, in the grid-square of Shenley Church End in the south-west of Milton Keynes, funded through energy company sponsorship and ticket sales to the general public. These included more formally experimental designs, notably including a glass reimagining of an Iron Age roundhouse. The houses were designed to minimise energy consumption, promoted as cost-saving for homeowners, rather than on environmental grounds.


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While these exhibitions cultivated associations between Milton Keynes and technological innovation, these were private sector investments rather than technocratic state initiatives. The exhibitions explicitly promoted private housing as a commodity through presenting them as spectacles of technical achievement and innovation. This aspect was particularly praised by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during her October 1986 visit to the exhibition; she was quoted as saying she “love[d] Milton Keynes,” and that “I wish I'd seen the houses at this Energy Park before buying my home at Dulwich.”

Significantly, Thatcher’s personal enjoyment of Energy World did not translate to MKDC’s relationship with the Department of the Environment or with Treasury, with ongoing battles to maintain ever-dwindling levels of public funding a primary focus for MKDC during this period.

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81 “I love Milton Keynes!”,” Milton Keynes Gazette October 2, 1986; “Mrs T turns on to city power!,” Milton Keynes Herald Weekly October 2, 1986.
82 “New Town Financing, correspondence and reports.”; “Report of opening of CMK by the Prime Minister.”; “Papers connected with visit of John Stanley, minister for Housing, June 1980 including
Nonetheless, the fact that by 1986 Thatcher was explicitly stating her “love” for a new town’s embrace of the private sector indicates the extent to which MKDC had reimagined its relationship to the state since 1979, and indicates the significance of sensory novelty and innovation to their new rhetoric of individualistic consumption.

**Media and popular culture responses**

The realignment of MKDC’s and Milton Keynes’ relationship with consumer capitalism and its embodied pleasures received some positive media attention. These generally accepted the model posited by MKDC, where the Shopping Building contained and facilitated a concentration of consumer choices, which in turn were understood as mediating a range of potential sensory experiences through the structure of the Building itself. This notion of a containing structure which would heighten and elevate the private choices of individuals was then in turn ascribed to Milton Keynes as a whole. This approach can be seen mirrored in Ray Gosling’s recreation of Priestley’s English Journey which appeared on BBC Radio 4 in 1983. While Gosling’s narrative of his tour was informed by his being accompanied by Jack Trevor Story, Gosling’s overall assessment of Milton Keynes was much more favourable than Story’s accounts discussed in Chapter 5. He especially admired the Shopping Building in an account which emphasises the visual and kinaesthetic pleasures of its awe-inspiring “luxury”, traced through the experience of following an “acre of black glass” opening onto “a huge marble arcade with palm trees and budgerigars [sic]”. This free association and enumeration of pleasurable sensations appears in other positive coverage of Milton Keynes during this period, including Tim Mars’ tour of the town with a *Sunday Times* correspondent.


which focused on the “mystical marvels” of Central Milton Keynes’ layout.\textsuperscript{84} These features shared similar preoccupations with favourable architectural journalistic assessments of the Shopping Building, particularly those which focused on the monumental nature of Mosscrop’s “vision” for the site.\textsuperscript{85}

Even more comfortable with the association between Milton Keynes, novel consumer forms, and a language of immediate and positive bodily sensation, was the use of the Shopping Building as a setting for pop music promotions. In 1980, pop group Duran Duran shot the UK sleeve artwork for their first single, \textit{Planet Earth}, inside the Shopping Building.\textsuperscript{86} While bassist John Taylor credited the Shopping Building for forming “the initial branding of DD [sic]”, the setting is only recognisably Milton Keynes to those familiar with the Shopping Building, and it did not translate to increased media attention for the town.\textsuperscript{87} Cliff Richard’s use of the Shopping Building in the promotional video for his 1981 single “Wired for Sound” would, however, feature the Shopping Building in much more recognisable detail. The video, which showed Richard roller-skating through the Shopping Building wearing a Walkman and accompanied by much younger dancers.\textsuperscript{88} Leveraging associations with innovative technologies and architecture has frequently been used by Richard in attempts to reinvent his image for younger pop music audiences; indeed, his 1973 album \textit{Take Me High} depicted Richard in front of the Spaghetti Junction flyovers.\textsuperscript{89} The dynamic use of the Shopping Building is consistent with this and uses the building as to

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express celebration of a pleasurable excess of bodily sensation. “Wired for Sound” was commercially successful for Richard, reaching number 4 on the single charts, with the album of the same name reaching number 2, while the film clip remains a widely held popular cultural association with Milton Keynes, to the extent of being used to illustrate the Shopping Building’s modernity in the 2014 British Pavilion exhibition at the Venice Biennale, “A Clockwork Jerusalem”.90

Figure 29: Still from “Wired for Sound” music video, as reproduced in the exhibition catalogue for “A Clockwork Jerusalem.”

Richards’ celebration of the innovatory form of the Shopping Building was far from universally shared. Readings of Milton Keynes as dystopian continued during the early 1980s,

91 A Clockwork Jerusalem, 67.
continuing to focus on the town as overtly deterministic, sterile, and as sensorily deadening.

One example of this which ridiculed rather than celebrated Milton Keynes’ innovation, using similar forms to Richards’ video, was the initial book of London productions of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *Starlight Express*. The production opened in the West End in 1984 and ran continuously until 2002; heavily exploiting technical novelty, its loose storyline of competing trains from different nations acted as a showcase for roller-skated choreography and innovative set design.\(^{92}\) The train representing England was initially named Milton Keynes, and far from being a representative of the best of the nation, the character was a comically bumbling, ineffectual train beset by delays and mechanical failures.\(^{93}\) The character would be renamed the Prince of Wales in later international productions, however naming an anthropomorphized depiction of technological inefficiency “Milton Keynes” is predicated on the notion of the town as a recognizable, ridiculous symbol of technological failure.

Elsewhere, more fleeting coverage of Milton Keynes as a “joke” continued to link this notion of technocratic failure or subversion to humorous outcomes, drawing on the sterility and inefficiency references established through the initial Concrete Cows coverage.\(^{94}\) The perceived “joke” of Milton Keynes’ inability to fulfill the ambitious claims of its advertising informed even sympathetic media coverage, with many more sympathetic newspaper reports framing their work as testing and correcting the “myths” of the “land of the concrete cows.”\(^{95}\) While some critical references to the Concrete Cows focused on their publicly funded origins, more broadly they appeared in media coverage through broad references to unnatural and sterile innovations, or the perceived humour in the irreconcilable

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\(^{92}\) John Snelson and Geoffrey Block, *Andrew Lloyd Webber* (Yale University Press, 2004), 34-36.


contradiction between “concrete” and “cows”. Through repeating this framework, the meaning ascribed to the Concrete Cows could also be metonymically ascribed to Milton Keynes, as a town so in the throes of “the newest ideas of the technocrats” that it views “cattle [as] crude, inefficient processors, soon to be redundant,” a judgement so “bizarre” as to be laughable. This perceived contradiction was then used to leverage wider perceived contradictions, such as Milton Keynes’ substantial information technology industry demonstrating a leap from “concrete cows … to computers,” or the contrast between MKDC’s 1985 television advertisement showing idyllic fishing scenes with the “electric whale” of Willen Lake. The juxtaposition of the Concrete Cows with the newly earnest aspirationalism of MKDC advertising therefore repeated and thereby reinforced the rhetoric of unproductive contradiction underpinning the original “joke”.

Many of these accusations of Milton Keynes’ dystopian sterility, and its deterministic effects of generating malaise, were now attributing this influence to the town’s embrace of consumer capitalism. This was central to Beryl Bainbridge’s critique of Milton Keynes, in a 1983 BBC television series and book retracing J.B. Priestley’s English Journey for its fiftieth anniversary. Bainbridge’s account opens with her initially refusing to get out of her car on arrival at Milton Keynes, and her eventual tour of the town confirms her negative preconceptions of its fundamentally foreign, “concrete”, and overtly deterministic design. On touring the Shopping Building with an MKDC representative she is ‘almost’ convinced of the merits of its attempts to elevate the traditional high-street model; however this ambition in itself reawakens her “hatred” for the town, expressed through antipathy to its consumerism as much as through its newness, and its refusal to conform to existing urban

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models. Similarly, Jeremy Seabrook, building on his 1978 critique of MKDC’s “carceral” repatterning of working-class people into middle-class lifestyles, saw this at work in the Shopping Building in particular, where the overstimulating “great halls of replenishment” are where “people are looking for restitution of what has been taken from them; something healing but elusive, which can never be found.” 100 This continued focus on Milton Keynes’ alienating function in Seabrook’s work continued to ascribe some blame to MKDC as an overly determining organisation, yet the main focus of his analysis was now the determining, inauthentic imposition of mass consumption, rather than state paternalism. 101

This concern with Milton Keynes’ over-deterministic landscape continued in media coverage of The Point and its expansion of consumer choice. This particularly manifested through concern that rather than representing a choice of sensory stimuli, The Point was a venue which would bombard the senses without allowing the ability to choose or discriminate, leading to sensory deadening through overstimulation. 102 The unidirectional broadcast of information, the scale of the building, and the broader range of potential consumer choices, particularly of American products, were critically represented in this literature as overwhelming visitors’ capacity to choose. Artists’ depictions of viewers watching multiple screens at once, or consuming a range of American brands all at once with glassy-eyed expressions, linked the sensory-overstimulation to a deadening determinism rather than an uplifting empowerment of individual choice (see figure 31.) 103

100 Jeremy Seabrook, “Poverty as metaphor - or why both Peter and Paul feel robbed,” New Society February 28, 1980.
Other criticisms of Milton Keynes during this period focused less on the specific changes to the town’s landscape and more on the content of the town’s new advertising campaigns. The most detailed critical engagement with MKDC advertising appeared in a 1986 Channel 4 documentary “Bursting the Red Balloon,” which argued that Milton Keynes’ administration had abandoned its founding principles. The documentary extensively quoted The Plan for Milton Keynes and contrasted its goals with case studies of current practice, which argued that MKDC was favouring incoming businesses and high income earners rather than providing for existing residents, unskilled workers, and public housing. This framed the purpose of the programme as “bursting” the idealistic images of the Red Balloons advertisement by replacing them with accounts of grassroots experience. These case studies emphasised the struggles of Milton Keynes’ working-class residents in dealing with the town’s bureaucracy through their physical experiences of exclusion and poverty. The

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105 “Bursting the Red Balloon,” (Channel 4 1986).
programme concluded that the goals of *The Plan for Milton Keynes*, as well as the Red Balloons advertisement, presented unfulfilled utopian promises that disguised the real struggles experienced by Milton Keynes residents.

This focus on Milton Keynes as a site of negative sensations was compounded by increasing reportage of one of the major infrastructural failures besetting the town prior to 1984: the town’s lack of a hospital. While Milton Keynes had some community health facilities at this time, it lacked adequate accident and emergency and maternity facilities for its growing population, while the Oxford Regional Health Authority in charge of the region was already overstretched in the face of population growth and budget cuts. Local activist groups were unsuccessful in leveraging further funding, although it has been suggested that following Thatcher’s 1979 visit to Milton Keynes, she shared MKDC concerns about hospital provision and pressured Health Minister Gerard Vaughan to bypass standard procedures to speed approval of a new hospital. While construction commenced in June 1980, the Milton Keynes District General Hospital was not ready to accept patients until April 1984. The fact that Milton Keynes had Britain’s largest mall but lacked fundamental healthcare facilities was interpreted by a number of journalists as proof of the triumph of economic ideology over residents’ needs. Such accounts tended to emphasise the pain and suffering of local residents as they waited for their hospital to be constructed, with the *Daily Star* describing the situation as evocative of *Brave New World*. Even after the hospital opened, the lag in healthcare provision remained, with the *Daily Mirror* arguing this fed a culture of “new town blues.”

107 The archival source materials for this are embargoed, however see Bendixson and Platt, *Image and reality*, 146.
One of the most simplistic identifications of Milton Keynes with totalitarian determinism in a capitalist form appeared in The Style Council’s 1985 single “Come to Milton Keynes.” Paul Weller had initially formed The Style Council to play charity gigs during the miners’ strike, and this unabashedly left-wing focus dominated the band’s lyrics. Weller had previously criticised postwar urban planning in broad terms in the song “The Planners Dream Goes Wrong,” which appeared on the 1982 album The Gift by Weller’s previous band The Jam. The Style Council single “Come to Milton Keynes” built on these generalised concerns with specific critiques of MKDC’s glossy aspirational marketing, which it framed as symbolic of wider trends in 1980s British culture. The lyrics contrasted the hopefulness of new residents, generated by “the [advertisements] about the private schemes,” with the suicidal despair engendered by a deterministic suburban landscape. The song suggests that the gulf between the advertising imagery and the reality of Milton Keynes would create “insanity” and drive helpless people to “slash [their] wrists,” while explicitly attributing the failings of Milton Keynes to its embrace of Conservative politics.

Weller later claimed that the song was not specifically about Milton Keynes but was using the town “as a metaphor for the general wearing down of society” under Thatcher. This description is not born out by consideration of the content of the music video, however, which illustrates the song’s lyrics by showing a child carrying a balloon, albeit a blue one, rather than a red one, and featuring a stand selling “Greed Burgers” which is emblazoned with the image of a cow (see figure 32). This choice of imagery deliberately commentates on MKDC advertising and on the Concrete Cows, and these images are contextualised with wider anti-American imagery which evokes the commercial dimensions of Milton Keynes’

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associations with Los Angeles. At the same time, the imagery is heavily commercial; there is no suggestion of Milton Keynes’ ostensibly socialist state-sponsored origins, but only heavily commercial symbolism of credit cards and fast-food sales. In this light, Weller’s decision to use Milton Keynes indicates its potential to be interpreted solely as a symbol of “monetarism, greed and selfishness,” or a particularly Thatcherite version of capitalism.

Figure 31: Still from the music video for “Come to Milton Keynes.” Note the cow and blue balloon.

115 “Paul Weller: The Style Council”.
116 The Style Council, “Come to Milton Keynes: official video”.

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Conclusion

There are striking similarities in the language and tone of these critiques with those discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, even in the context of new and drastic changes in perceived ideological affiliation and origin. Even while late 1970s critiques of Milton Keynes’ determinism attributed this force to the town’s association with postwar socialist reconstructionist ideology, it can be seen above that critiques of the town as overtly deterministic and sterile did not disappear when the town deliberately pursued a more overtly consumer capitalist economic direction. Moreover, this same perception of forceful determinism and sterile unproductivity was now being attributed at least in part to the town’s embrace of consumer capitalism.

Reading across these criticisms, however, even while Milton Keynes’ ostensibly consumerist or socialist trappings are variously represented as driving these detrimental environmental and social effects, these critiques share a preoccupation with the town’s visible newness as an absolute and irrevocably negative force. This can be seen in the hostility to concrete and modern architecture, to straight or mainly-straight roads, to the very attempts to improve on existing urban models through creating Central Milton Keynes or even the technical innovations of Energy World. To this extent, criticisms of Milton Keynes from this period which continue to attribute a deterministic force to the town’s form can be seen as sharing an opposition to the radical action of the town’s formal development. While MKDC promotions necessarily continued to frame the town’s value in terms of the absolute value of innovation, technical improvement, novelty and change, underpinning much criticism of Milton Keynes during this period was the perception of a break with tradition, of a lack of precedent, and an ensuing lack of legitimacy.

The ongoing conflict between frameworks of landscape value therefore not only continued during this period, but through the shifting ideological frameworks of critique,
indicate the intractable opposition between their definitions of valuable and desirable English landscapes. It also indicates the ongoing disparity of scale between MKDC-approved narratives of Milton Keynes’ meaning and more critical readings; even while MKDC was broadening its reference points to leverage a more individualistic, mystical concept of Milton Keynes’ value, it was encouraging the immediate perception of novelty and sensory innovation, necessarily involving the perception of a break from established models. Narratives of Milton Keynes’ uniqueness, however ideologically aligned, were by their nature irreconcilable to ideals of landscape value which privileged historical authenticity. Moreover, culturally conservative value models were in themselves building on longer, resilient narratives, repeating and reinforcing a critical symbolic language both specific to Milton Keynes, and working more broadly. While MKDC’s attempts to reorient Milton Keynes’ marketing, economic and political associations helped safeguard the town’s survival during the early Thatcher governments, these were necessarily insufficient to override resilient critical narratives which could not accommodate novel landscapes as desirable.
Chapter 7: Milton Keynes and “the middle”, 1980-1988

Once upon a time politicians fell down and worshipped a God named Keynes… and the economy was soon in a parlous state. So they worshipped another God named Milton Freedman… and once again the country was in a parlous state. ¹

We must combine the best of Keynes… with the best of Milton Friedman, which is what lies ahead of you! So forward to the promised middle land!²

The common metaphor for political norms as forming a “landscape” is particularly relevant to the changing ideological structures of 1980s Britain. The first three terms of the Thatcher government saw fierce and protracted contestations over relative party political alignments, between regions and central government, and between the state and those declared to be the “enemies within”. These contestations drew heavily on relative spatial metaphors of left and right, or radical fringes, as opposed to an imagined centre, an ideological as well as a spatial definition which aligned heavily with the social policy of the Conservative party. Through framing the postwar state as an aberrant episode of radicalism, political and elite culture was focused on “rolling back” and thereby restoring an imagined historical norm outside of socialism and ideology. This process played out through enforcement of central state power against regional Others, and through the increasing political and media influence of culturally conservative postwar declinism, including through hostility to postwar architecture and state planning. In this manner, the ideals of political radicalism were redefined during the 1980s, through constant reference to the ideals of moderation and the centre. Redefining the

² Ibid. October 31, 1980.
metaphorical political landscape through relative spatial metaphors of left and right, extreme and moderate, therefore took place through reference to the built environment and regional politics, enacted and encoded in the real spaces of the “middle” opposed to the “radical fringes”.

This chapter traces how Milton Keynes’ meanings and representations were caught up in this ideological redefinition of moderation during the 1980s. Alongside narratives of the town’s ideological excesses, Milton Keynes also became a symbolic touchstone in debates around the new political “middle ground”. Through media narratives which interrelated the concepts of political centrism, moderation, geographic centrality, middle-class politics and aesthetics, and representative shared values, Milton Keynes was both constructed as representative of a particular suburban, middle-class social and landscape norm, and yet held to be irreconcilably outside of typical and ideal landscape forms by virtue of its planned origins and newness. These tensions between typicality and aberrance, exceptionalism and typicality indicate the limits to Milton Keynes’ ability to assimilate into cultural narratives hostile to its perceived ideological origins.

The shifting centre in British politics

On 13 October 1980, the long-running comic strip Flook, then published in the Daily Mail, began a month-long series responding to the recent Labour and Conservative party conferences. Flook, drawn by Wally Fawkes, had run in the Daily Mail since 1949 and described an androgynous fantasy character interacting with caricatures of political figures. Flook’s frustration at “left wings and right wings going for each other’s throats” led them to propose “a centre party that’s content to take the middle course”, reasoning that “if the

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country keeps lurching first to the left and then to the right, we’ll never see the light at the end of the tunnel.” Flook calculated the geographic centre of the country and went there to find a group of moderates, all “searching for the middle ground”, who joined Flook’s new political party of the Dead Centre (see figure 32). These “middletants” proved difficult to administer, with its members avoiding putting forward left or right feet by hopping, and booing at any use of relative spatial terms. To get rid of them, Flook led them to a place they called the “promised middle land”, which “combined the best of Keynes with the best of Milton Friedman”; which turned out to be Milton Keynes (see figure 33).

Figure 32: Flook offers to lead the Middletants, 22 October 1980.

Figure 33: Flook leads the Middletants to the Promised Middle Land, October 31 1980.

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8 Ibid. October 22, 1980.
This narrative of political moderation as an antidote to the dangers of extremism derived from understandings of the Winter of Discontent as a crisis of state that had arisen from the Labour Party’s “failure” to control overly radicalised trade unions.⁹ Within this context, the role of consensus politics and moderation as a political ideal became crucial to the process of political realignment after the 1979 Conservative electoral victory. Debates around the ideological direction and relevance of the Labour party were particularly heated during the period immediately following the May 1979 Conservative victory, with long-standing conflicts between left and right party factions coalescing around the relative merits of a robust old-left style opposition to government policy as opposed to a more concessionary centrist economic position.¹⁰ This debate, however, while part of a longer conflict between Labour’s left and right, was occurring in the context of a recent electoral loss to a Conservative party which presented its opposition as having presided over a political consensus which had caused economic crises and a declining, ungovernable state.¹¹ The 1979 electoral defeat therefore exacerbated existing factional divisions in the process of debating the Labour party’s future and the form of its opposition policy. The election of left-aligned Michael Foot as party leader, and the adoption of key Bennite left policies on withdrawal from the European Economic Community and unilateral nuclear disarmament, led to criticisms from the Labour Right that the party was being coopted by far-left interests.¹²

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This context, described by Flook as “left wings and right wings going for each other’s throats” was one of disgust at the idea of further political polarisation, “if the country keeps lurching first to the left and then to the right, we’ll never see the light at the end of the tunnel.” This understanding of polarisation as an inherently deficient political attitude was shared by many in the Labour right, including the “Big Four” group of Labour party politicians Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams, David Owen and Bill Rodgers. These politicians left the Labour party in March 1981 to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The SDP sought to capture voters who, like Flook, were in search of “a centre party that’s content to take the middle course” and who perceived that the political centre in British politics had been vacated. In practice, despite the SDP initially distancing itself from the Liberal Party, the SDP formed an electoral alliance with the Liberals which presaged their eventual merging in 1988. At the same time, despite the old-left allegiances of later Labour leader Neil Kinnock, by 1990 the Labour policy position had come to resemble more of a classic “European social democracy” centre-left set of concerns than one with any substantive relation to socialism.

Relative spatial metaphors, and the relative positions of political parties, were therefore highly significant during a period in which was widely believed that the political centre had been abandoned for the politics of radical fringes. The Conservative Party’s reconceptualisation of the political centre, however, had been ongoing since Margaret Thatcher’s election as leader in 1975, in an attempt to differentiate the party from Heath-era policy as well as from the Labour party. This process drew heavily on Keith Joseph’s conceptualisation of “the middle ground” as opposed to “the common ground” as

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Case of the Manifesto Group and Labour’s 1970s "Third Way," "Labour History Review (Liverpool University Press) 79, no. 2 (2014). For discussion of the influence of this period on Neil Kinnock’s relation to centrism and to see
14 Blackburn, “Facing the Future?.”; Turner, Rejoice! Rejoice; Meredith, “Rethinking Revisionist Social Democracy.”
16 Phillip Allmendinger and Huw Thomas, eds., Urban Planning and the British New Right (London: Routledge, 1998), 5; Stewart, “Preserving the ‘Contentious Alliance’?.”
conflicting ideological directions for the party to take. Joseph defined the “middle ground” as a site of political compromise and diluted convictions, whereas “the common ground” was associated with a vision of “the people and their aspirations,” an imagined apolitical space outside of ideology and rooted wholly in a natural economic order. For Joseph, the “middle ground” represented postwar consensus politics which had engendered national “malaise” and a “lowering of resolve”. Rejecting this “middle ground” therefore meant rejecting “socialism and state control.” Joseph advocated turning towards the “common ground,” an imagined space outside of ideology preoccupied by the “stable expectations” of a mass populace characterised by inherent individualism, cultural conservatism, and antipathy to state intervention.

This imagining of a natural, even automatic cultural mandate for the reversal of postwar state policy would prove an ongoing touchstone for Conservative Party policy development to 1979 and beyond. This would help justify and conceal the extent of more radical macro-economic policies, including monetarism pursued as an absolute article of faith, by framing them as remedies for already-existing postwar radicalism, rather than as radical departures in themselves. While the term “middle England” would come into wider usage during the 1990s to describe Joseph’s “common ground”, this terminological slippage towards describing the “middle” as the Conservative Party’s projected support base can be seen as early as in Thatcher’s 1979 electoral rhetoric.

class conservatism” as an economic and a moral model for policy development, and as a historical norm which must be rehabilitated, helped yoke together and conceal tensions between macroeconomic neoliberal policies and a normalising, historically legitimating narrative.\textsuperscript{21}

**Thatcherite spatial politics: the middle against the radical fringe**

The tension between radical change, the correction of earlier radicalism, and the natural, apolitical territory of the “common ground” would continue to preoccupy Conservative Party definitions of its policy direction after 1979.\textsuperscript{22} The process of differentiating the Conservative Party position from “radical fringes” was a crucial aspect of the government’s self-definition during its first three terms. These fringes were both geographically and politically conceived of as forces opposed to and constantly threatening the projected norms and values of a naturally Conservative majority.\textsuperscript{23}

The Miners’ Strike was a primary example of this spatialising of class and political conflict. The 1984-1985 conflict between the National Union of Mineworkers and the Thatcher government was sparked by government decisions to close up to 70 coal pits.\textsuperscript{24} However, the strikes provided the government with an opportunity to mete out exceptional quasi-military punishment on the heavily unionised industry, modelling an alternative,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Joe Moran, “The fall and rise of the expert,” *Critical Quarterly* 53, no. 1; “The Strange Birth of Middle England,” 233; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, “Neo-liberalism and Morality in the Making of Thatcherite Social Policy.”; Jackson, “Thatcherism and the seventies.”
\end{itemize}
“stronger” response than the Callaghan government’s response to the Winter of Discontent strikes.\textsuperscript{25} This militancy was encapsulated by Thatcher’s conceptualisation of the strikers as the “enemy within” British society; this deliberately divisive language explicitly located the conflict as one outside of domestic political debate, however heated, and constructed it in terms of the infiltration of a national whole by hostile ideology.\textsuperscript{26} Through these conflicts, the Miners’ Strikers and the communities and industries associated with them were at once radicalised and marginalised as “fringe elements,” overtly defined as outside of a political base which constructed white, south-eastern-English, middle-class cultural conservatism as an absolute norm. This association was leveraged not only from the perspective of government attack, but also in generating bonds of solidarity: the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners movement (LGSM) built on shared experiences of political Othering while also spanning geographical boundaries between London, Manchester, and pit communities.\textsuperscript{27}

This rhetoric of attack from radical fringes had a wider utility in state military interventions, which projected cultural coherence to transcend geographic distance.\textsuperscript{28} By framing Falklanders or Unionist communities in Northern Ireland as irrevocably culturally “British,” military interventions to preserve the remnants of empire were framed as forms of self-defence as well as preserving the self-determination of geographically distant, yet ultra-British minorities.\textsuperscript{29} This relied on a “stretchy” notion of culture where imagined

\textsuperscript{29} Stephen Howe, “Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post-colonial Trauma,” \textit{Twentieth Century British History} 14, no. 3 (2003); Arthur Aughey, “From declinism to endism: exploring the
cultural similarities could transcend distance, while the political radicalism of striking miners or of the Provisional IRA were more easily marginalised.\textsuperscript{30} The spatial politics of inclusion was thereby flexible, framing particular social groups as like or unlike imagined norms in ways which could exploit or negate existing physical distances. Associations with middleness, normality, and typicality were thereby deployed to justify and conceal explicitly partisan politics.

This opposition between a Thatcherite centre and radical fringes also manifested through the centralisation of power at the expense of Labour-aligned regional governments, and imposition of Urban Development Corporation. In practice, this meant curtailing and then abolishing Labour councils, reducing support for Labour-associated new towns and insisting on the early dissolution of their development corporations, while effectively privatising substantial urban brownfield land in key Labour-supporting cities under the public-private partnerships of the Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) which were rolled out into major urban areas from 1987.\textsuperscript{31} In the case of London, for example, the Greater London Council was abolished in 1986, while London’s Docklands were simultaneously opened up to private redevelopment which would completely transform their economic functionality as well as demography.\textsuperscript{32} At the same time, Liverpool and Sheffield
city councils were actively targeted due to their long opposition to Thatcherite policy, through abolition and legal constraint. This reduced regional urban agency and consolidated political and economic power in south-eastern England, ensuring that they remained in forms more amenable to Conservative policy interests.

Milton Keynes and the middle

The history of Milton Keynes’ media representations from 1978 onwards, as traced through Chapters 5 and 6, can be seen as one of competing narratives of extremes. While the Winter of Discontent escalated criticisms of Milton Keynes’ determinism into a symbol of socialist dystopia, MKDC responded with an ideologically opposing narrative of Milton Keynes’ consumer-capitalist individualism and the liberating sensory freedom of marketised choice. Alongside these competing narratives of utopia and dystopia, however, Milton Keynes was also used as a touchstone in political debates around the geographical and political space of “the middle” throughout the 1980s.

The interpretation of Milton Keynes as representative of the middle ground between the extremes of its socialist and consumer-capitalist reputations, and therefore as a place of compromise, was central to its representation in Flook during 1980. Flook’s rejection of “left and right going for each other’s throats” leads them to the geographic centre of Britain, in the middle of a road marked by a literal north-south divide. Flook encounters a group of “middletants”, who are scouring the ground with magnifying glasses yet are unable “to find

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the middle ground”. Flook decides to lead them towards “the promised middle land”, a journey fraught with difficulties as the middletants refuse to make any movement which might be seen to favour left or right. Eventually, the party arrives at Milton Keynes. Flook justifies this with reference to the town’s name:

once upon a time politicians fell down and worshipped a god named Keynes… and the economy was soon in a parlous state[,] So they worshipped another god named Milton Friedman .. [sic] and once again the country was in a parlous state.

The solution Flook poses is “to steer a middle course … [sic] we must combine the best of Keynes … [sic] with the best of Milton Friedman… which is what lies ahead of you!” Flook then instructs his party to enter the “promised middle land” of Milton Keynes, at which point they leave, exhausted by constant compromise and debate. Their final reflections are that insisting on absolute moderation is unworkable, with Flook deciding to write a memoir of their leadership called “The Middle of the Road is no place for a Party.”

Figure 34: Flook arrives in Milton Keynes, October 29 1980.

The punchline in these comics is essentially a pun on the name of Milton Keynes. This joke was one was increasingly made throughout the early 1980s, either claiming that Milton Keynes represented political centrism because it shared names with the economists Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes, or suggesting that it had been named after both of them. Media coverage of the late 1970s economic crises and the growing influence of monetarist thinking in the Conservative party, had given these economists a recent high media profile, with their names often used as shorthand for broadly rendered versions of their respective theories. The idea of Milton Keynes as a compromise between Keynes and Friedman drew on this type of simplistic and loose association. Rather than giving any substantive image of what a compromise between Keynesianism and monetarism would look like, more important was the idea that Milton Keynes, through its name, represented compromise itself in the reconciliation of two seemingly opposing ideas. The ideal of moderation was thereby privileged over the actuality of what such moderation would resemble.

Such a privileging of moderation as an ideal was also exemplified through media reportage on Milton Keynes which sought to navigate the extremes of the town’s representation. These reports opened with descriptions of extreme representations of Milton Keynes, such as the “laughter and massed raspberries [sic]” elicited by MKDC advertising, or the “cooling … enthusiasm” of businesses lured by bold MKDC claims. These reports would then be criticised as overtly extreme, after which the journalist’s own more moderate


and therefore ostensibly more neutral account would be put forward. These assessments associated the town with elements of both Labour and Conservative policy, or with both socialism and capitalism, and thereby read it as a town of compromise. By using negative coverage as a launching point for further, more nuanced coverage of the town, however, this coverage maintained its moderate credentials by replicating views judged to be extreme, and then orienting itself relative to them. In doing so, however, these articles consistently asserted that these extremes were the necessary starting point from which audiences were operating; often ascribing ridicule and laughter to their audiences, several of these features even explicitly ascribed extremely negative views to their readership. The claims of moderation and corrective readings were thereby predicated on the replication of extremes as a positional tactic, normalising them by treating them as a point of departure.

The term compromise has multiple related meanings; to moderate between extremes, and to puncture and dilute the integrity of a singular meaning. As Flook found when they tried to lead the Dead Centre party, the practice of extreme moderation could hinder progress and create stagnation. It was this latter dimension of “compromise” which can be seen underpinning many of the dystopian readings of Milton Keynes during the mid-1980s. As discussed in Chapter 6, texts such as ‘Come to Milton Keynes’ by the Style Council, and the Channel 4 television documentary ‘Bursting the Red Balloon’ characterised Milton Keynes as dystopian based on perceived excesses of consumer capitalism. Underpinning this criticism, however, were not only critiques of Milton Keynes’ current form, but of MKDC’s...
perceived abandonment of its progressive social plan in order to more readily conform to the new political status quo. Layered alongside the critiques of Milton Keynes’ consumerist excesses in these sources was a sense of its having been compromised through compromise; that the pursuit of political and economic conformity had necessarily weakened its ideological cohesion and intention.

Two novels from the mid-1980s which represented Milton Keynes’ compromised ideals are James Rodger’s novel *War and Peace in Milton Keynes*, and Jack Trevor Story’s 1984 novel *Dwarf Goes to Oxford*. Rodger’s novel is a fairly straightforward mass-market satire of technological futures, interweaving loose narratives of sentient robots on rampages with individual psychological decay under the pressures of technological advances. The rationale for setting the novel in Milton Keynes is never fully explicated, but rather implied through the narratives of robotic dystopias, bureaucratic alienation, and psychological malaise akin to the “new town blues”. Operating within very different generic conventions, but with a similar sense of emplacement, Story’s novel is much more muted in tone than his public statements about Milton Keynes discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. *Dwarf goes to Oxford* is heavily stream-of-consciousness and autobiographical, describing his estrangement from his much younger girlfriend who leaves Milton Keynes to study at Oxford. Within this narrative, the setting of Milton Keynes as a placeless dystopia is part of a pathetic fallacy of Story’s emotional life, interwoven through stream-of-consciousness prose into the story of his failing relationship. Through this, however, Story also locates Milton Keynes’ status as reflective of wider national characteristics; as representative of his own inner life, but also of broader national traits, in particular what Story terms the British decline into a “little offshore

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50 Rogers, *War and Peace in Milton Keynes*
51 Story, *Dwarf goes to Oxford,* see discussion of this novel in Clapson, *Social History of Milton Keynes*, 3. As is consistent with Clapson’s treatment of negative representations of Milton Keynes, this source is introduced as an example of negativity needing to be disproved, rather than to explore its specific content.
island.” Unlike Drabble’s The Ice Age, however, published eleven years previously, these claims of national decline read through postwar planning are not described in apocalyptic tones warning of an imminent national crisis. Rather, in both novels, Milton Keynes is imagined as an acute representation of wider social malaise, but one which has been produced by overt political, economic and aesthetic compromise rather than any absolute doctrine. In these novels, the absence of authenticity is interpreted as generating sterility, as if through compromising between ideas the town itself had become compromised.

“Best of both worlds?”

This definition of moderation as failure was in direct opposition to the technocratic modernist language of improvement which had been integral to Milton Keynes’ planning and the politics of its designation. Indeed, this principle was inextricable from the formative theories of British urban planning as a discipline, in part through the garden city concept of the “best of both worlds”. As described in Chapter 1, the garden city concept, as represented in Howard’s thinking, relied on combining the best of the urban with the best of the rural to create a new form of utopia characterised by moderation. Chapters 2 to 4 trace how this trope was used in MKDC marketing during the 1970s, with concepts of improving existing urban and rural spaces complicated by intentions to improve existing urban planning practice. Even in the extremely assertive advertising rhetoric described in Chapter 6, however, the “best of both worlds” concept can be seen at work in advertisements of Milton Keynes as a whole, which sought to balance the consumerist urbanism of the Shopping Building with quasi-rural village life, and thereby to create a new, elevated urban form. This utopian conceptualisation negotiated tensions between ideals of elevation and excess, and

52 Story, Dwarf goes to Oxford, e.g. 67, 85, 139.
53 Drabble, The Ice Age.
the ideas of moderation and compromise from which these excessive pleasures were seen to have derived.

The fraught relationship between exceptionalist and moderate values in Milton Keynes’ representation was a central theme of Jeff Bishop’s 1986 study, *Milton Keynes: The Best of Both Worlds? Public and professional views of a new city*. This work was the product of an investigation by the School of Advanced Urban Studies (SAUS) at the University of Bristol undertaken at the behest of MKDC’s Planning Directorate undertaken from 1979. The remit of the programme was to interrogate the relationship between resident attitudes towards the town, the Corporation’s implementation of the Plan, and the message of promotional materials. SAUS found that Milton Keynes’ residents related to their grid squares as discrete village communities clustered around Central Milton Keynes, which performed urban functions such as centralised leisure and administrative provisions. SAUS indicated that this was generally understood by residents in actively positive terms, where the lack of perception of a singular coherent urban identity offered a desirable village experience.

Not only did this diverge from MKDC internal and promotional rhetoric, however, it also did not reflect the substantial body of critical responses to Milton Keynes’ form from external media and popular culture. They introduced this concept with an example which particularly resonates with the media history of journalists walking through Milton Keynes:

At the outset the research team were told that people find MK [sic] confusing and get lost. This was patently not true of the residents so what was the source of this rumour? A chance encounter provided the answer: that those who get lost seem to be predominantly visiting architects and planners who come with a preconceived idea

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55 Ibid., 133-41.
of what clues and landmarks a ‘city’ should offer … [sic] and then are confused when such clues are not apparent.\textsuperscript{56}

The authors located this experience of disjuncture as central to accounting for how Milton Keynes was being misrepresented, through narrow standards which interpreted “‘scattered’ and ‘dissimilar’ [as] bad and ‘integrated,’ ‘comprehensive’ and ‘coherent’ [as] good.”\textsuperscript{57} Through imposing this system of values, the report notes that there is little capacity to interpret a decentralised, “fragmented” city as one which functioned effectively or could be positively experienced by residents.\textsuperscript{58} Bishop ascribed this in part to the professionalisation of architecture and urban planning as disciplines, where such limiting value judgements had formed part of the codification of their intellectual “territory” and therefore were functioning dogmatically as signs of their professional expertise.\textsuperscript{59} More broadly, however, Bishop posited this in relation to broader cultural norms, including “traditional urban models” and an opposing “‘roses around the door’ notion of country living which is assumed to be our [sic] national birthright.”\textsuperscript{60}

While noting that “MK [sic] residents do not appear to have been totally seduced by romanticised ideas,” Bishop’s work gestures towards the tensions underlying Milton Keynes’ broader cultural relationship to historic landscape norms.\textsuperscript{61} Even while the concept of moderating the extremes of urban and rural had historical precedent through the garden city tradition evoked in the title of Bishop’s study, the association of this tradition with postwar new towns emphasised the incongruent ahistoricity of such attempts at technocratic

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 148-49.
\textsuperscript{60} Milton Keynes - the best of both worlds?: public and professional views of a new city, 153.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
improvement. Milton Keynes’ deliberate refusal of landscape forms considered to be historically venerated, combined with its overt and visible historical newness as a form in itself, necessarily located it outside of the privileged cultural categories of urban value Bishop described.

**Postwar landscapes in 1980s Britain**

Milton Keynes’ inherent inability to erase or fully conceal its planned origins therefore remained a political liability which constrained the terms in which it was represented and understood nationally. As has been discussed throughout Chapters 2 to 4, throughout the 1970s particularly visible changes to the British landscape, especially tower blocks, Brutalist architecture, and new towns, became metonymically linked to discussions of national status and prestige. This framework for ascribing value to landscape aesthetics and functionality did not disappear after 1979 but adapted to a new context. The ongoing need to ensure that ‘there [was] no alternative’ to Thatcherite policy meant that postwar government policies around landscape use expanded into general narratives of precluding postwar social policy as a political option. To this end, ‘what had been a relatively limited critique of particular elements of the human-made environment in the immediate postwar period had now broadened out into a general objection to state ‘planning’ and modernist building.’

This simplified critique of postwar landscapes was predicted on existing patterns of conflation and causal presupposition which were central to 1970s declinist political narratives and which became especially weaponised against the postwar state, as described in Chapters 4 and 5. The extent of the political rejection of postwar reconstructionism’s landscape forms can be seen through the two-part approach to erasing its visibility: through undermining or 

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reversing policy, and through attempting to reassociate the forms of postwar state planned landscapes with markers of individualism and the private sector. One of the major and most sweeping erasures of the postwar state housing settlement would come through vast implementation of the Right to Buy policy, introduced through the 1980 Housing Act, under which sitting council housing tenants were offered the opportunity to purchase their homes from the government at a heavily discounted price. The motivations of the Right to Buy were therefore not purely focused on financial returns on state investment, but in incentivising and expanding the “property-owning democracy” as an absolute good in place of the ideal of state social housing. The effect of this policy was self-fulfilling, in that detached homes with greater financial value were purchased at a much greater rate than tower-block flats, concentrating existing state housing provision within less valuable investment sites, which were often more likely to be held by tenants for whom even the discounted rate of purchase was too high. By exerting downward pressure on class demographics of social housing, this retrofitted a veneer of legitimacy to already existing antipathies to state housing and to the classist and, particularly with regards to inner-urban housing estates, racist narrative preoccupations with the occupants of “undesirable areas” as

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objects of concern. The stripping away of social housing was therefore part of stripping away the social, as much as it was about stripping away state-owned housing assets.

This association between modernism, a refusal of history, and psychological malaise, would also inform the work of Alice Coleman, a Kings College London scholar whose book *Utopia on Trial* was published in 1985. Coleman argued outright for absolute causalities between human exposure to concrete modernist buildings, state ownership of social housing, and individual psychological malaise causing wider social and economic dysfunction. Indeed, Coleman’s findings were framed as restatements of “an eternal, unchanging fact about the relationship between living beings and space – one that transcended time, place and even species.” To this end Coleman’s work, despite its academic origins, conformed more closely to neoliberalised ideological statements of policy as “fact” which can be seen at work in Joseph’s theorisation of the apolitical “common ground” above. These logical leaps were widely criticised in academic circles, but the wider success of Coleman’s book relied on its ability to appeal to both Conservative politicians and conservative media outlets, providing an academic veneer of legitimacy to pre-existing antipathies to postwar housing by repeating declinist tropes as absolute truths. Coleman’s ideas were well received by Thatcher personally and from 1988 the Department of the Environment funded her department to help retrofit individualised ‘defensible spaces’ on state housing estates along the lines proposed in *Utopia on Trial.* These involved the transformation of communal entryways and shared public spaces to privately accessible spaces with restricted access, and

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69 Ibid., 6, 17-18.
70 Wetherell, “Pilot Zones,” pp.80.
72 The Design Improvement Controlled Experiment (DICE): an evaluation of the impact, costs, and benefits of estate remodelling, (London: Department of the Environment, 1997); “Estate Regeneration in Practice.”
the replacement of unifying design features with more varied features, conceived of as being more individualised. While the Department of the Environment found at the conclusion of the trial that it had failed to meet goals in improving social outcomes, its roots in an “inevitable logic” of eternal truths about human living had an ongoing ideological resonance with critiques of postwar state failure.\textsuperscript{73}

Using a similar culturally conservative language of imperial nostalgia, the Prince of Wales, Charles Mountbatten-Windsor, attracted high levels of media attention throughout the 1980s with his increasingly polemic commentary on behalf of preserving historically venerated landscapes against modernist architecture. While his opening of the glass-curtain-walled modernist Milton Keynes Railway Station in 1982 was not accompanied by negative public commentary, by 1984 his publically expressed views on modernist architecture were extremely forthright.\textsuperscript{74} Typical of these was his May 1984 presentation to the Royal Institute of British Architects’ 150th anniversary gala, in which he made a wide-ranging critique of London’s postwar landscape.\textsuperscript{75} His speech focused on the overshadowing of historical architecture by modernist forms he interpreted not merely as unsympathetic to their surroundings, but as ‘like a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much loved and elegant friend.’\textsuperscript{76} He linked the growth of modernist architecture in London explicitly to a reinforcement of the damage caused by the Blitz, and a culture where architects were taught to ‘tear down’ rather than to conserve. The effect of this cultural failing, however, was moral as well as visual; not only did the proposed extension to the National Gallery risk ‘deforming’ Trafalgar Square, but also reinforcing a dictatorial culture whereby the simple desires of

\textsuperscript{73} Design Improvement Controlled Experiment (DICE), 7.
\textsuperscript{74} “Court and Social,” \textit{Daily Telegraph} May 15, 1982.
\textsuperscript{76} “Speech to 150th anniversary of RIBA, 30 May 1984.”; see discussion with reference to imperialist landscape norms in Baucom, \textit{Out of Place}, pp. 180.
individuals for recognisable, traditional forms were overridden by the functionalist philosophies of an unrepresentative and out-of-touch elite. Such public intervention was not restricted to speeches and invited commentary but would extend into activism, both in terms of creating books and documentary films expounding the inherent value of imperial-era landscape heritage as opposed to modernism, and through ongoing private lobbying of government ministers and official regulatory bodies.

Central to this preoccupation was the perception of an inherent moral value in individuals and communities to be able to perceive continuity with the past in their surroundings, the absence of which would occasion psychological damage individually and collectively. This would be seen in his development of Poundbury, the Prince of Wales’ privately-funded and developed new town designed by Leon Krier from 1988 for a site on Duchy of Cornwall land in Dorset. Poundbury’s quasi-feudal aesthetic and replication of the village models of the landed estate interwove idealised pre-modern agricultural land models with a contemporary emphasis on middle-class amenity. Krier explicitly planned Poundbury to be the aesthetic and political opposite of the functionalist modernism Prince Charles publicly decried, through architecture and planning forms which were ornate, sometimes deliberately inefficient or anachronistic, and which actively attempted to conceal their newness.

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77 “Speech to 150th anniversary of RIBA, 30 May 1984.”.
in landscape more broadly, as a form of violence can be seen in his reported description of Milton Keynes as being “children of the same parents [as] Auschwitz” in 1988.\textsuperscript{82} Krier’s conflation of state-sponsored urban planning with totalitarianism and genocide was extreme, but drew on a longer tradition of associating postwar landscape change with the obliteration of national heritage in a manner that was both totalitarian and morally reprehensible, described above.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, the Prince of Wales’ public commentary frequently posited the equivalence of London’s wartime bombing by Nazi Germany as equalled if not surpassed by the damage caused by postwar demolition of historical buildings and their replacement by modernist forms. Krier’s commentary can therefore be seen as a more extreme extension of an existing posited equivalency between postwar “socialist” landscapes and the violence of Germany’s National Socialism which had been modelled by the Prince of Wales himself.\textsuperscript{84} Krier’s comments therefore drew on the well-established symbolic associations which interpreted positivist landscape interventions, broadly construed as modernist architecture and postwar state urban planning, as not only forceful but as damaging interventions on a vulnerable national heritage.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The process of redefining and contesting the political centre during the early and mid-1980s in British political culture drew heavily on spatialised logics of inclusion and exclusion, moderation and excess, to express ideas of typicality and reject the unacceptably radical. Yet within this process, representations of Milton Keynes as representing ideological

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Quoted in Robert Cowan, “A mirror of the times,” \textit{Financial Times} July 20, 1989.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} “Speech to Corporation of London Planning and Communication Committee, 1 Dec. 1987”; “Speech to 150th anniversary of RIBA, 30 May 1984.”.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Complicating this was Krier’s public defences of the neoclassical architecture of Albert Speer as a preferable alternative to architectural modernism. Albert Speer and Leon Krier, \textit{Albert Speer: architecture, 1932-1942} (Bruxelles: Archives d'architecture moderne, 1985).
\end{itemize}
compromise continued to frame the town as exceptional, atypical, and even aberrant, even through its qualities of moderation and compromise. These tensions derived from critiques of perceived inauthenticity and ahistoricity. MKDC’s very attempts to remedy and conceal its ideological origins and bring Milton Keynes politically and aesthetically closer to the new political “centre” marked it out for further critiques of inauthenticity, which rendered its political compromise as a compromise of integrity. As the ongoing necessity of precluding positivist state planning as a political option perpetuated the demonisation of postwar landscapes as symbols of national decline, needing remedy and erasure, Milton Keynes was therefore caught in a double bind. Unable to erase the facts of its newness and historical origins, these tensions rendered Milton Keynes’ association with ideas of “the middle” both partial and incomplete. Its capacity to be understood as representative were fundamentally constrained by the ongoing political rejection of its origins as politically and even morally unacceptable.

These tensions would form the central platform of MKDC’s final and most comprehensive public relations campaign undertaken from 1988 to 1992. As the town’s development corporation faced dissolution, Milton Keynes marketing and media presence took on an unprecedented sophistication and coherence of message that sought to appropriate and redeploy the town’s negative cultural meanings, while driving a moderate and cautious underdog narrative that presented a final assessment of Milton Keynes as both successful and victorious. Combining exceptionalist and moderate motifs, MKDC’s final media campaign depicted a town humbled by its negative reputation yet able to laugh at and transcend it, and which despite not fulfilling all of its utopian goals, was nonetheless a success.
Chapter 8: The wind-up: 1986-1992

One day in Milton Keynes is enough for anyone.¹

There’s no incentive to move to Milton Keynes.²

The further you get from Milton Keynes, the better it looks.³

The late 1980s saw two major shifts in MKDC promotion of Milton Keynes, in the context of the impending ‘wind-up’ of new town development corporations and the dissolution of their assets by the Major government. The first took an ironic approach to existing cultural narratives about Milton Keynes, such as its dystopian qualities and the town’s status as a “joke,” described in previous chapters, and attempted to neutralise them by undermining their claims. This style of advertising was followed by a more carefully stage managed and comprehensive media campaign developed in the lead-up to the 1 April 1992 dissolution of MKDC. This final media drive created a comprehensive narrative of the town’s development and success from MKDC’s perspective, both ensuring a positive legacy for their administration and vindicating the new town programme in a political climate that was hostile to such large-scale public investment.

³ “The further you get from Milton Keynes the better it looks,” Sunday Times November 27, 1988; “The further you get from Milton Keynes the better it looks,” Economist November 12, 1988.
This chapter examines media coverage of Milton Keynes from 1988 to 1992, locating it within a longer context of MKDC’s humorous advertising throughout the 1980s. By 1984, MKDC was regularly actively appropriating negative media representations of the town and redeploying them as part of an underdog narrative of success over adversity. This took as its starting point the assumption that Milton Keynes’ negative reputation, in the style of media narratives described in Chapters 4 and 5 in particular, was widely known and believed; presenting Milton Keynes as having triumphed over these odds located the town explicitly within a hostile context even while it suggested its resilience. Despite the sophisticated nature of this final media campaign, and despite a lasting influence on early academic historical study of Milton Keynes, it is significant to note that the official MKDC narrative of Milton Keynes as embattled but successful did not completely supplant negative readings of the town. While by no means as extreme in tone as in the late 1970s, the political and cultural context of early 1990s Britain remained hostile to the association between new towns and state-planned socialism. Moreover, the longer-term cultural conservatism which privileged ideals of tradition as determining value continued shape representations of Milton Keynes, indicating that despite attempts to reappropriate and redefine the town’s meaning, its very “newness” and formal innovation continued to pose challenges well into the 1990s.

**In on the joke?**

Wordplay, irony and jokes have long been established tropes in advertising, and despite the overarching “factual” drive of early MKDC promotions described in Chapters 2 to 4, some minor 1970s advertising campaigns adopted these conventions to promote Milton Keynes. Far from the conceptualisation of Milton Keynes as a “joke” used to deride the town’s political viability discussed in chapter 5, these simple wordplay-based text advertisements made limited reference to a broader context, and continued to focus on educating readers
about Milton Keynes' facilities. For example, the bold text caption of the 1979 advertisement “It's All a Big Plot!” referred literally to large plots of land for building. Some of these advertisements played on the idea of Milton Keynes' futurism, such as describing flexible factory space initiatives as “Milton Keynes' space programme”.

After 1979, however, there was an increase in the use of this style of advertising, and it was increasingly accompanied by a more visual, less text-based, and more aspirational style, which ironically juxtaposed text and visual content. This distinctive approach overlapped with some of the material discussed in Chapter 6, and can be seen most clearly in business-focused advertisements which first used a statement seemingly deriding Milton Keynes, followed by a qualifying, more positive statement. Examples include “After seven years in Milton Keynes we just had to move. To a bigger Factory in Milton Keynes,” and “Milton Keynes is ideal for small businesses. We should know, we used to be one.” This use of ironic juxtaposition remained allied to the overarching focus of MKDC marketing at this time, as discussed in chapter 6, which was to emphasise that Milton Keynes could only be understood fully by direct experience, and that media representation was ultimately inadequate to convey the town’s good qualities.

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After 1981, however, this use of ironic juxtaposition and wordplay became a much more significant trend in MKDC marketing, and began to more explicitly address the contrast between negative media representations and the official MKDC narrative. The timing of this is significant, in that from 1981 onwards, and escalating from 1982, the newly established London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) drove an aggressive anti-new-town advertising campaign.\(^7\) LDDC had been formally established in 1981 under the 1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act, with a remit to refashion industrial brownfield sites and low-income residential areas in London’s Docklands area into forms more profitable for contemporary investment.\(^8\) LDDC’s business model was explicitly focused on public-private partnership, with the LDDC itself effectively functioning as a coordinator of private contractor investment; in this way the LDDC was a form of overt state interventionism on behalf of corporate capital.\(^9\) As discussed in Chapter 7, the establishment of LDDC was a way of circumventing GLC policies and powers over housing and planning, and the two bodies had an extremely hostile relationship.\(^10\) LDDC’s unelected powers enabled it to transform the Isle of Dogs area using a deliberate lack of master-planning, instead explicitly encouraging investors’ interests to directly translate into the makeup and functioning of the area to a much greater extent than in new towns.\(^11\)

\(^7\) Bendixson and Platt, *Image and reality*, 201.
\(^11\) Thornley, *Urban planning under Thatcherism*, 165-68.
The success of the Docklands redevelopment, however, ultimately relied on drawing investment away from alternative locations.\footnote{12} Its initial advertising in late 1981 directly quoted brochures from a range of new towns and growth areas, including Milton Keynes, on how convenient their locations were for access to London (see figure 35.) LDDC countered this material with the headline “Follow their advice, come to London.”\footnote{13} This was followed by slogans promoting the “London Bonus” as being close to “Government, the City, big business and the professions,” but which also played on stereotypical media images of London, such as major landmarks, double-decker buses and views of the skyline: all of which being features that new towns could not provide.\footnote{14} This sense that to be outside London was to miss out on both business and personal opportunity was compounded by further campaigns asking “How will you look to your clients if you move out of London?” and “What happens if your company moves out of London and your clients don’t?” (see figure 36.)\footnote{15} These latter advertisements used what was to become LDDC’s slogan: “Why move to the middle of nowhere, when you could move to the middle of London?”\footnote{16} This slogan ran even in campaigns which targeted investment from the City of London, which otherwise made no reference to the “middle of nowhere,” making new towns a constant touchstone in

\footnote{12} Under the 1969 London Government Act, the GLC were prohibited from advertising to attract business in the same way as new towns. While these restrictions were lifted in 1976, the GLC’s Docklands redevelopment plans from that period were unsuccessful. The establishment of the LDDC therefore presented the first substantial opportunity for new town advertising to be counterbalanced by London advertising. “The mouldy core contains… a test bed,” \emph{Economist} January 1, 1977.


\footnote{14} “The London Bonus,” \emph{Sunday Times} October 11, 1981; “The London Bonus,” \emph{Times} October 30, 1981; See also “Try finding these around any other development area,” \emph{Sunday Times} October 25, 1981.

\footnote{15} “What’s the point of moving out if you’ve got to keep coming back?,” \emph{Financial Times} March 10, 1982; “What’s the point of moving out if you’ve got to keep coming back?,” \emph{Financial Times} April 27, 1982; “How will you look to your clients if you move out of London?,” \emph{Sunday Times} June 20, 1982; “What happens if your company moves out of London and your clients don’t?,” \emph{Sunday Times} July 4, 1982; “Everyone who moves his business outside London gets a free joke book,” \emph{Sunday Times} July 18, 1982; “If you’re moving your business out of London, take a look round your new offices,” \emph{Sunday Times} July 25, 1982.

\footnote{16} Bendixson and Platt, \textit{Image and reality}, 201.
LDDC advertising. In some instances, this slogan was used in tandem with earlier advertising targeting Milton Keynes more explicitly.
Figure 36: LDDC advertisement, 1982.  

20 “How will you look to your clients...”, *Sunday Times* June 20, 1982.
This antagonistic attitude indicates a shifting relationship between government-funded development corporations, away from the largely cooperative attitude that had characterised relationships between new towns. The more direct role of state investment in earlier new town administration meant that while development corporations needed to attract businesses, that they did so using funding from central government. This coordinated approach meant that new towns in practice did not need to view themselves as in competition with each other. Indeed, new towns shared expertise and infrastructure, not just in international contexts through BUDSU and its successors but also through cross-corporation committees. By contrast, the LDDC was specifically established in a context where new towns had been recently blamed for draining investment and funds from inner cities.

From the time of its designation, Milton Keynes’ advertising had consistently drawn on the garden city “best of both worlds” ideal which posited both the city and the countryside as being inadequate, with the garden city combining only the best of both lifestyles into a single site. In this sense Milton Keynes’ advertising had long implicitly emphasised the inadequacies of London, usually as a caricature of an industrial-era ideal. Early 1980s MKDC marketing, with its focus on Milton Keynes as a uniquely desirable sensory landscape, was more closely oriented around the intrinsic value of Milton Keynes itself. Alongside this material, however, MKDC developed a more direct and targeted set of

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advertising campaigns that went beyond generic best-of-both-worlds urban critiques, but were explicitly intended to combat LDDC’s claims.\textsuperscript{26} These advertisements adopted the existing minor theme of ironic wordplay and amplified it into a more fully developed subversion of Milton Keynes’ negative reputation, which worked alongside direct assertions of the town’s inherent sensory pleasures.

This advertising campaign also drew on sophisticated multimedia strategies. During the mid-1980s MKDC advertising was displayed in public space in and around London, most notably on the London Underground, in addition to print and television advertising. The campaigns using these methods deployed high-quality visuals evocative of the utopian imagery associated with the Red Balloons advertisements discussed in Chapter 6, combining these with ironic text that juxtaposed negative assessments with enticing visuals.\textsuperscript{27} These new poster campaigns drew on two major themes, either punning on the limitations of London life, or subverting negative cultural associations with Milton Keynes. Both approaches used similar styles of wordplay, with one widely used pair claiming first that “No road works in London”, but that “They do in Milton Keynes.”\textsuperscript{28} Another more controversial poster depicted a long-angled view of a traffic jam on a motorway leading into London from Reading, captioned with the abbreviation “Berks.”\textsuperscript{29} This poster was intended for use both on public transport and more widely as a “96-sheet poster” of roughly billboard size, and presented the commuter experience as an extension of London’s congestion.

Other related poster campaigns depicting peaceful Milton Keynes life, implicitly in contrast in London, combined ironic captions with the bucolic photography characteristic of advertisements discussed in Chapter 6. These series featured imagery such as sunsets over

\textsuperscript{26} This explicit intent is asserted in Bendixson and Platt, \textit{Image and reality}, 201.
\textsuperscript{27} “Milton who? Well now just about everyone knows MK,” \textit{Insider} March 26, 1992.
\textsuperscript{28} “No road works in London,” “They do in Milton Keynes,” “We apologise for the long delays. This is due to normal traffic flow,” in “Marketing posters and advertisements: Commercial & Industrial.”
farmhouses captioned “Concrete Jungle,” made references to “underground disruption” showing a mole burrowing into a field, and a lone policeman on a bicycle described as “Rush Hour in Milton Keynes.” Other examples included a row of canal boats captioned “Bumper to Bumper,” and “The Long Drive Home” down an idyllic country lane. These posters made London appear loud, noisy, crowded and inconvenient, and thereby as the target of wry commentary addressing its limitations. This trend continued in print media advertising, where puns, ironic juxtaposition and wordplay were used more extensively to suggest Milton Keynes’ desirable qualities without the strident celebratory tone associated with Red Balloons, such as the Energy World promotions which replaced the scratched-out equation “E=MC?” with “E=MK.” Advertisements that stated Milton Keynes “makes cents [sic]” and saying “hi!” to “high tech” industry reflected a similar decrease in formality, over instructional or aspirational models of advertising.

30 “Right now someone’s getting off a train in MK…” series in “Marketing posters and advertisements: Commercial & Industrial.”; “Designer city” series in ibid. See advertisement by the privatised Milton Keynes Marketing Ltd immediately after the wind up summarising these campaigns in “And now for something completely similar,” Financial Times April 3, 1992.
31 “Bumper to Bumper in Milton Keynes”, “The Long Drive Home”, “Drive, Stop, Drive, Stop, Drive, Stop, Putt-Putt, Stop,” in “Marketing posters and advertisements: Commercial & Industrial.”
This increase in comfort with multiple meanings and negative associations was also reflected in a more unusual advertisement which linked the town with the 1986 conviction of East German spies who had been arrested in possession of a map of Milton Keynes. The slogan punned on “using your intelligence” to move to Milton Keynes, encouraging readers to obtain further information not by writing to the usual MKDC address but to “sellotape [sic] your name and address to the bottom of the yellow waste bin at … Milton Keynes Central Station.” Willingness to appropriate news of a spying scandal to promote the town was exceptional, but indicates how pervasive the desire to redeploy potentially negative media coverage into more positive MKDC-controlled representations.

Many of these advertisements continued to reflect marketing director Bob Hill’s philosophy that advertisements should merely focus on attracting visitors to Milton Keynes,

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35 “Marketing posters and advertisements: Commercial & Industrial.”
36 “It’s called using your intelligence,” *Guardian* July 12, 1986; Featured quotes taken from Edward Vulliamy, “E. German pair ‘planned spying,’” ibid. July 1, 1986; This advertisement was also promoted by a press release from Cogent Elliot in “Cutting and press release concerning espionage themed advert for Milton Keynes,” in *Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers* (Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, 1986).
assuming that when they arrived that they would automatically be convinced by the experience.\textsuperscript{37} One major advertisement used in full-page newspaper inserts asserted that “one day in Milton Keynes is enough for anyone;” the slogan echoes negative assessments of the town but reframes them to suggest that after only one day, anyone would be convinced of the town’s benefits (see figure 38).\textsuperscript{38} Related advertisements asserted “there’s no incentive to move to Milton Keynes,” in that the town was so successful that there was no need to provide additional enticement (see figure 39); elsewhere “the further you get from Milton Keynes the better it looks” was a direct attack on the “cramped London office, traffic jams and pollution.”\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} Hamilton, “The joke that the big firms come to enjoy,” \textit{Times} October 29, 1984.
Figure 38: “One day in Milton Keynes is enough for anyone,” 1988 MKDC advertisement.40

Figure 39: “There’s no incentive to move to Milton Keynes,” 1988 MKDC advertisement.41

The confident and assertive but nonetheless combative style which had characterised post-Shopping Building advertising was therefore evolving into increasing comfort with intervening in and recontextualising negative claims about the town, in a way which enabled MKDC to present Milton Keynes as “in on the joke.” This performed an important double

function, in recognising and puncturing established critiques of the town. This ironic play with established tropes of Milton Keynes’ negative reputation attempted to defuse their cultural power and associations by exerting control over these aspects of the town’s meaning in a way which did not immediately appear combative and antagonistic. This self-aware recognition of alternative narratives of Milton Keynes meaning outside of MKDC’s control, and attempts to manipulate these meanings, continued to be significant in promotion of Milton Keynes later in the decade, as MKDC developed a media strategy to accompany the wind-up of new town development corporations. Admitting to negative reputation while attempting to reframe it became a central feature of a wider MKDC media strategy which went beyond advertising, but reinforced the same claims and relied on a similar self-aware approach.

**Approaching ‘the wind up’**

While the Thatcher governments had not been quite as antagonistic to Milton Keynes as had been initially feared by MKDC, there had been a predictable and substantial decrease in public funding over the course of the 1980s, which had necessitated a greater embrace of private contracting and investment.\(^42\) This was nonetheless a more favourable outcome than the outright abolition or privatisation of MKDC which had been feared on the election of the Thatcher government in 1979.\(^43\) This may have been influenced by the relative economic success of Milton Keynes during the 1980s, as described in part in Chapter 6. The changing leadership of MKDC may also have played a part in this. The Labour peer Lord Campbell was succeeded as MKDC chair by Henry Chilver in April 1983, who considered himself a

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\(^43\) “Report of opening of CMK by the Prime Minister.”
‘radical Tory’. Under Chilver, MKDC’s profit margin increased substantially such that by 1990/91, the town was repaying its subsidies to the Treasury. This short-term budget improvement was achieved by substantially increasing private sector influence not only in planning and development but also related infrastructure provision, and by minimising MKDC control over the town’s economic development.

Even with this combination of apparent economic success and an increasingly neoliberalised administration, MKDC and central government necessarily and fundamentally remained at odds over the issue of ongoing public funding. By the late 1980s, this debate appeared at a more fundamental level in debates between MKDC and central government around when MKDC was to be ‘wound-up’. The ‘wind-up’ as it was largely known in print media and MKDC correspondence was the process by which the development corporation would be dissolved as a legal entity. The effect of this would be to divide powers formerly held by MKDC between a number of shareholders, with infrastructural, planning and administrative powers being devolved to relevant urban and regional government bodies, and with its assets being handed over to the Commission for New Towns (CNT).

The Commission for New Towns (CNT) had been established in 1961 as a central government body to oversee the longer term development of former new towns whose master plans had been more or less completed. The handover of assets and powers to CNT, while not necessarily meaning that all development and growth in the town had ended, carried some symbolic weight in transitioning away from “new town” status. While CNT’s role was partly administrative, it was also to function as a clearing-house for the sale of

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44 Image and reality, 201, 13; this was despite Chilver’s association with CES during the 1960s, which at that point was a distinctly left-leaning organisation; see Clapson, Anglo-American Crossroads, 44.
46 This privatisation led to significant influence by former MKDC staff in private sector urban planning; see Ward, “Consortium Developments Ltd.”
development corporation assets; the transition to CNT administration thereby represented complete privatisation, as opposed to the piecemeal privatisation that had progressively downsized MKDC under Chilver since 1983.\textsuperscript{48} Negotiations for the wind up date were protracted, with MKDC favouring a 1995 dissolution, and central government arguing for 1989. After substantial local lobbying, the final date was set for 1 April 1992; while MKDC applied repeatedly to the Environment Secretary for extensions these were not forthcoming.\textsuperscript{49}

**The closing narrative**

Despite the clearly more conservative turn in MKDC’s leadership, there remained concern that the town’s plan would remain significantly under-completed by 1992, and that any ensuing lack of unity and functioning would reflect on the legacy of the development corporation itself.\textsuperscript{50} These factors can be seen motivating MKDC’s final push to market Milton Keynes from 1988 to 1992, through its development of an extensive, far-reaching and carefully considered public relations campaign that reached unprecedented levels of saturation.

Archival evidence indicates that from 1988 onwards, there was a significant and concerted public relations drive instigated by MKDC and a number of private public relations firms, which organised substantial numbers of media tours of Milton Keynes.\textsuperscript{51} The major documented example of this strategy dates from early 1992, immediately prior to the wind up of MKDC, but the results of this campaign mirror patterns in existing media


\textsuperscript{49} Bendixson and Platt, *Image and reality*, 257.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 259.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 251; “Milton Keynes in the news 1989.”
coverage from earlier years, suggesting that similar coordination was likely to have taken place from 1988.\textsuperscript{52} The strategy targeted all major national and south-eastern English print media and television news outlets, across the target audience spectrum from tabloid to broadsheet.\textsuperscript{53} These organisations were approached and invited to send journalists to visit Milton Keynes, under the pretext of assessing the town as it approached the wind up of its development corporation. These visits were stage-managed by MKDC representatives through the PR companies, and were staggered in targeted clusters of time, coordinating site visits by their journalists within concentrated periods of a few weeks.\textsuperscript{54} This would then lead to the resulting news coverage appearing at roughly similar times across a range of outlets and across print and television formats, achieving a blanket level of coverage of their highly stage-managed tours of Milton Keynes.

These media campaigns followed MKDC’s commissioning of extensive market research on Milton Keynes’ reputation amongst target audiences in London and the south-east of England.\textsuperscript{55} Archival holdings from 1988 and 1990 indicate that MKDC commissioned private qualitative and quantitative market research reports that explicitly sought to establish how the town was understood by its target audience, and particularly to examine the efficacy of earlier MKDC campaigns in conveying a positive message about the town. Most notable in these reports are interviewees’ responses that continued to reflect the imagery and preoccupations that had featured strongly in negative media reportage of the town that had

\textsuperscript{52} “IPR Institute of Public Relations Sword of Excellence Awards 1992,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1992); “1992 PRCA Awards for Outstanding Consultancy Practice,” in Milton Keynes Development Corporation papers (Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre, 1992).

\textsuperscript{53} Television and radio news coverage from this period is not archivally accessible, however there are sixteen local and national broadcasts listed in “IPR Awards 1992.” These include BBC TV East, two features on BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 5 and Radio Bedfordshire, Thames TV, Anglia TV, Central TV, ITN News, TVam, and a range of other local news sources for the south-eastern and central broadcast regions, all taking place between 22 January 1992 and 24 January 1992.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} “Audience Selection: Milton Keynes, Presentation of results, pre and post stage.”; “Qualitel Report, Impressions of Milton Keynes.”; Hill, “Marketing and selling Milton Keynes.”; “Questel Qualitative Studies Ltd: Project Wish.”
peaked in the late 1970s. Negative perceptions of the town were widespread, as were associations with roundabouts, “concrete jungle” imagery understood wholly negatively, and a focus on the concrete cows as a metonymic joke for the town as a whole, indicating that negative media coverage of the late 1970s continued to impact how the town was viewed by residents of south-east England.\textsuperscript{56} At the same time, more recent MKDC marketing was not seen as being effective in offsetting or correcting these negative responses. There was a notable level of scepticism regarding the advertising campaigns associated with the opening of the Shopping Building and especially of the Red Balloons advertisement itself.\textsuperscript{57} While a range of more positive and more moderate responses featured in these reports, it can be seen that the longevity of influence of earlier media coverage, and a sense that the more extreme positivity of Red Balloons, were two central issues for MKDC to address and attempt to correct in its final campaign.

Print media coverage of Milton Keynes from 1988 to 1992, including those reports arising from MDC-coordinated media visits and those for which no evidence of MKDC input is accessible, is strikingly similar in its formulation, to the extent that they follow a nearly identical format. The first element of this formulaic model is the idea that the need to assess Milton Keynes at this point has arisen organically, with the approaching wind up of the Development Corporation and 25-year-anniversary of the town’s designation, motivating a desire to assess the town in terms of its success or failure.\textsuperscript{58} This sense of an organically motivated drive to assess the town is presented repeatedly as the opening justification for features on Milton Keynes during this period, but the criteria against which such assessment

\textsuperscript{56} Note specific reference to comedians alongside reference to advertising and generalised media coverage in “Audience Selection: Milton Keynes, Presentation of results, pre and post stage.”

\textsuperscript{57} “Qualitel Report, Impressions of Milton Keynes.”

would be undertaken are rarely made clear. These criteria were often implicit through organic metaphors of transition to adulthood, indicating that autonomous functionality was considered “success.” This assessment then manifested through referencing and summarising negative cultural representations of the town. Repeated references to the town’s soullessness, to the symbols of concrete cows and roundabouts, to concrete jungles and “new town blues” were the most common, and were frequently depicted in disjointed statements that implied a potentially limitless enumeration. These were presented in summary usually at the start of the article, and were then followed by a closer account of the on-the-ground “reality” of the town which was ostensibly unlike these negative images. This involved a combination of descriptions of site visits, interviews with residents, and interviews with MKDC staff, with the intention of establishing what Milton Keynes was “really like” for those who lived and worked there. These assessments were rarely completely glowing, and repeatedly suggested that there had been logistical difficulties in the town’s development which had either been overcome or were in the process of being addressed. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement of these problems functioned as a part of depicting a balanced, moderate and rounded assessment, and the extent of difficulties was


invariably represented as being outweighed by benefits which often drew on subjective languages of sensation and qualitative benefit. 

These articles almost universally closed with the same assessment which was couched as deriving from the same logical premise. By virtue of assessing the interviews and site visits, the town was considered to have flaws and problems, but as being a success overall, with any flaws being greatly offset by overall qualitative benefit. Most significantly, this success was understood as being in spite of the town’s negative reputation, thereby intensifying the extent of the town’s actual success, while understanding the central meaning of Milton Keynes as being embattled, but overcoming and transcending the limited and fundamentally inaccurate attitudes of its detractors. This framed the final assessment of the town in direct relationship to the opening references to the town’s negative reputation, as having empirically disproved their claims using a balanced, moderate, and objective model of assessment, which nonetheless incorporated issues of sentiment, sensation and qualitative experience. This sense of overcoming odds was not presented as absolute, however, and recurring throughout this coverage was the sense that “more work needed to be done” to safeguard the town’s plan and its social development. This stressed the significance of MKDC’s work and vision, while implying regret at their inability to oversee the fulfilment of the plan. It also functioned partly as a caution to CNT that the existing successes of the town were not necessarily automatic or a given, and that continued work similar to that performed by MKDC would be necessary to ensure that the current relative good health of the town was not lost.

This was reinforced by a final MKDC print advertising campaign which ran in the weeks leading up to the wind up of the development corporations. Stylistically these advertisements reverted to earlier marketing styles, blending rational exposition and uplifting narratives of possibility, to convey a more serious and assertive image of Milton Keynes’ business credentials and capacity to engender individual “success.”66 By returning to the model of using successful businessmen as case studies, and describing Milton Keynes as instrumental in “how I got where I am today,” MKDC was reverting to a simpler approach which was nonetheless confident and assertive. This approach was largely continued by early advertising from Milton Keynes Marketing after the wind-up.67 Despite the development of a complex narrative of embattlement which acknowledged negative portrayals and attempted to correct and refashion them, this final advertising indicates the importance for MKDC of underlining their primary message; that Milton Keynes was a success and would impart that success to those who moved there.

In addition to these criticisms, a number of print media responses to Milton Keynes report on the town in less strictly favourable terms. Unlike in articles discussed above, which mentioned negative attitudes in order to correct them by presenting local views of the town, these undertook assessments which found that existing negative attitudes to Milton Keynes, as signified by the mythology of the Concrete Cows, “soullessness” and “new town blues,” and sterility engendered by ahistorical planning, were substantially truthful.68 References to


Milton Keynes in passing, often by specialist columnists outside the field of planning or architecture, particularly tended to use this kind of symbolism, presenting Milton Keynes as undesirable, but not quite as terrible as particular aspects of its media reputation might suggest. Milton Keynes’ problems, where they were diagnosed in these articles, were not explicitly linked to wider problems of postwar cultural decline in the same way that they had been in the late 1970s, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Rather, late 1980s and early 1990s negative coverage of Milton Keynes presented the town’s negative features in essentialist terms, linking the failings to the nature of the town’s formal organisation and its state-planned origins.

**Basildon Man and the meanings of new towns**

It is important to note that this shift towards lower-profile, contained critiques did not mean that MKDC’s media narrative of the town had completely triumphed, but rather that negative accounts were not using the acute language modelled in Chapters 4 and 5 to preclude postwar planning as a political option. Rather than focusing on imminent crisis, ongoing rhetoric of “socialist” political failure consistently framed the postwar state as a historical Other as a form of ideological maintenance. While this process less overtly cited Milton Keynes explicitly during this period, it heavily influenced the representation of other new towns, especially Basildon, contributing to wider narratives of new town planning as a failed experiment.

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Basildon became a major site of political debate in the lead-up to the 1992 general election through the media ideotype of “Basildon man.” “Basildon man” was a specific version of “Essex man,” an idea which was common in late 1980s print media but which was first fully codified by Sunday Telegraph columnist Simon Heffer in 1990. Heffer described “Essex man” as an abstract ideal of a particular subset of voters for whom Thatcherite economic policy had proved most fruitful, who shared the values of “ownership, independence, a regard for strength and a contempt for weakness underpin[ning] his inarticulate faith in markets.” Heffer’s work drew on longer tendencies to characterise Essex as populated by a “cockney diaspora” due to the pattern of spontaneous and later planned population dispersal from London’s East End from the 1930s onwards. After the Second World War, LCC overspill estates such as those at Barking and Dagenham were joined by new towns, including Basildon which was specifically designated to alleviate East End population pressure. Media representations of Essex residents during the postwar period drew on this combination of generalised new town aspirational narratives with longstanding tendencies to represent the East End as a “hard” landscape of economic and social deprivation. Drawing on these longer cultural associations, Heffer argued that on the eve of the 1990 Conservative Party conference that the main beneficiaries of Thatcher’s economic policies were a entrepreneurial subset of the working-class, typified by Essex.

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74 Biressi and Nunn, Class and Contemporary British Culture, 26; see commentary on postwar population movement to Essex in Willmott and Young, Family and class in a London suburb; see also longer-lens social analysis of prewar estates at Dagenham undertaken during the 1960s in Willmott, The evolution of a community.
residents: “they worked hard, paid their taxes, stood on their own two feet, had aspirations, and the government let them get on with it.”

The idea of Essex Man was widely adopted in British print media and popular culture, used as shorthand for the main targets and beneficiaries for Conservative policy, and as representing the prime demographic battleground for the 1992 election. The generalised idea of Essex man was often expressed with reference to specific Essex cities, such as Billericay and Chelmsford. The most common city around which Essex Man ideas were generalised, however, was the new town of Basildon. In the lead-up to the 1992 election, the attitudes of Basildon voters received a high level of media coverage, both in the sense that their attitudes might represent a “bellwether” for the wider election outcome, but also due to the specific ideals that Basildon was seen to represent; in this context, Basildon Man became a prominent incarnation of Essex Man as a media reference point for Conservative working-class politics.

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When the generalised aspirationalism ascribed to Essex is localised in the new town of Basildon, it focuses the ideological arguments about the supposed failure of Labour Party policies to cater for the needs and desires of their traditional working-class voter base.\textsuperscript{81} As new town residents, Basildon’s voters were meant to be beneficiaries of an economic policy now viewed as unacceptably ‘interventionist’, marked by massive state investment and exertion of control over population growth, the distribution of capital, and provision of state welfare through housing and job creation.\textsuperscript{82} Yet Essex/Basildon Man was understood as only fully thriving under Thatcherite policies, which enabled them to pursue individualistic politics of wealth accumulation in a deregulated economic environment. In this way the new town programme is specifically cast as a hindrance to the self-realisation of working-class people; Basildon residents were understood as having prospered specifically from the ‘rolling back’ of Labour-era policies, rather than being beneficiaries of them.\textsuperscript{83}

Basildon Man was thereby a reading of Essex Man which more explicitly juxtaposed Thatcherite economic policy with a negative reading of pre-1979 Labour policy, which drew on the political associations of new towns to construct a narrative of organic Keynesian “failure” and thereby of Conservative legitimacy. Moreover, Basildon Man was a live political ideal at the same time that the final new town development corporations were being wound up. The reinvention of media narratives of a naturally defunct Labour policy base, and the

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\textsuperscript{81} ‘Loadsamoney’ refers to comedian Harry Enfield’s character from the BBC comedy programme \textit{Friday Night Live}, which first appeared in 1987. Intended to satirise London East End nouveau riche working-class consumption, Loadsamoney took on wider associations with Essex Man; see above comments on relationship between the East End and Essex. The character was widely adopted by tabloid media in particular, often stripped of its satirical associations; see Turner, \textit{Rejoice! Rejoice!}, 253-54.

\textsuperscript{82} Discussion of 1970s Labour tax policy with reference to Essex Man appear in Anatole Kaletsky, “Labour plants a tax time bomb under would-be middle class,” \textit{Times} March 16, 1992; Andrew Adonis, “Essex man reflects anti-Labour mood,” \textit{Financial Times} May 8, 1992. In the latter example, Milton Keynes’ electoral swing to the Conservative party is compared to Basildon, reinforcing the new town as Labour heartland association.

\textsuperscript{83} This is explicitly linked to the planned landscape in Rusbridger, “The road to Essex is paved with grim warnings,” \textit{Guardian} October 17, 1992.

organic legitimacy of Conservatism, was crucial for the Conservative Party’s slim electoral victory in 1992 under John Major. In attempting to explain this victory, media coverage frequently returned to the idea that the typical voter, as represented by Basildon Man, perceived that the Labour Party did not, and could not, represent their values; a view which ultimately the Labour Party itself would confirm later in the decade by adopting a neoliberalised policy base as New Labour.

The Basildon Man media narrative indicates hostility to new towns which fed into ongoing political justifications for neoliberal social policy. It also signifies that while it is beyond the scope of this thesis to narrate the wider history of new town reception more fully, other examples of postwar state-sponsored urban planning faced some of the same problems of reception and integration into conventional cultural narratives mainly by virtue of their ‘newness’, which was in turn a signifier of postwar socialist policy. As much as Milton Keynes presented unique challenges by virtue of its greater formal experimentation, its explicit revisionism of existing urban planning models, and its large scale, some of the issues around Milton Keynes’ reception more simply derived from the town’s perceived “newness,” and its association with a particular body of Labour party policies, which were not unique.

MKDC’s reliance on foregrounding negative representations of Milton Keynes in order to correct them, therefore appears a pragmatic response to the ongoing political antagonism to new towns which viewed them primarily as symbols of an outdated socialist consensus. While Milton Keynes had successfully adapted its economy and administration to the new political culture of the 1980s, through increasingly neoliberalising its economy and administration.

84 Conservative MP for Basildon, David Amess, described the electoral victory as due to “the organised working class, this is disappearing [sic] as people have more individualistic aims, more privatised aims. They buy their houses, they purchase their shares…” Biressi and Nunn, Class and Contemporary British Culture, 27. Cf. Norman Stone, “Essex Man has seen off socialism,” Sunday Times April 12, 1992; “Majorism has its chance,” Observer May 10, 1992; “Questions, questions,” Economist October 24, 1992.

85 The ideotype of Basildon Man would go on to cast a long shadow of media influence. Elections after 1992 in Britain were suffused with references to similar ideotypes ranging from Mondeo Man to White Van Man. These largely shared the narrative of pre-1979 Labour failure to serve the upwardly-mobile, aspirational and entrepreneurial working-class. See Moran, “The Strange Birth of Middle England.”
administration and by actively pursuing a consumer-capitalist reputation, the lasting resonance of its “newness” consistently called attention to its recent construction at the hands of political agents and policies now viewed as unacceptably interventionist. Moreover, this neoliberal condemnation of state socialism thereby intersected with, and exploited, pre-existing trends in cultural conservatism around landscape form and its role in forming ideas of identity. This suggests that even though MKDC was successful in developing a comprehensive, high profile campaign for its final years that the political context remained hostile enough to the very founding principle of new towns, even a revisionist one such as Milton Keynes, that any narrative of the town’s success was correct to acknowledge this antagonism as a starting point.

**Perpetuating the myths? Image and Reality**

While the MKDC closing media narrative of Milton Keynes as an embattled success might have been necessary in the context of 1990s political culture, it has had wider ramifications for the representation of Milton Keynes in historical writing. This was initially through the “official history” of Milton Keynes, published in 1992 to coincide with the wind up of MKDC, which presented an identical assessment of the town to the formulaic model described above which appeared in print media coverage. *Milton Keynes: Image and Reality* was written by planning journalist Terence Bendixson, who had long been sympathetic to Milton Keynes, along with John Platt of MKDC. The writers had unrivalled access to MKDC archives prior to their moving to BCC collections, at which point they remained completely catalogued according to an internal organisational model. This meant that there are

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86 *Queuing for beginners*, 417.

87 Bendixson and Platt, *Image and reality*. Cf. Bendixson’s involvement in the MKDC publication Terence Bendixson, *Milton Keynes: a new kind of city* (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Development Corp., 1978). Bendixson was planning correspondent for *The Guardian* during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and went on to cover architecture and urban planning news for a range of other print media sources in subsequent
substantial references to minutes of the Board of MKDC, interviews with current and past MKDC staff and board members, and to other private notes and internal materials which are currently under embargo.\textsuperscript{88} This means that \textit{Image and Reality} is an exceptionally useful source through which to access MKDC attitudes unavailable elsewhere, especially with regard to the internal functioning of MKDC and individual recollections of board members.

Considering its clearly partisan origins, it is unsurprising that the book explicitly champions Milton Keynes; in doing so, however, it replicates very closely the above media narrative of Milton Keynes succeeding in spite of its negative reputation.\textsuperscript{89} Self-aware referencing to jokes and negative symbolism recur throughout the text, while its explicit purpose is to interrogate the difference between “image and reality.” The “image” in this sense is largely understood as the negative aspects of the town’s reputation, which are framed as inaccurate, alongside the “reality” of local resident and MKDC experiences.\textsuperscript{90} The overall argument heavily stresses the town as having attained the status of an overall “success,” without fully explicating the criteria against which this is measured, and of having done so in spite of being widely misunderstood. The narrative is therefore intended as corrective as much as it is celebratory, and closes with warning comments about what remains to be done to complete the town’s plan.

This model of representing the “reality” under the “image” of Milton Keynes relied on foregrounding the town’s negative reputation as a presumed shared starting point. While as discussed above this provided a way of attempting to exert power over negative meanings and to appropriate them into a new framework, this nonetheless required official depictions

\textsuperscript{88} Bendixson and Platt, \textit{Image and reality}, viii, x.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., vii, 106, 251.
of the town to replicate negative meanings in order to combat them. In this way, the existence of negative representations of Milton Keynes was codified within the official narrative of the town’s meaning and history, and considered to provide integral and vital information that underpinned any assessment of the town’s success. The potential implications of centralising this within such an “official history” are significant in that a corrective narrative constantly relies on having something to correct to maintain its meaning and power. In order for Milton Keynes to be interpreted according to this embattlement narrative, then, it is necessary to be aware of the existence of negative attitudes and negative representations of the town.

As described above this was a calculated and necessary move by MKDC in the context of early 1990s political attitudes to new towns, especially considering the way in which more earnest early 1980s advertising had widely been viewed sceptically, and the real need for the organisation to combat direct attacks on its policies during a time of decreased central government support. Nonetheless, the impact of including this kind of narrative in a historical work, even a non-academic text which is explicitly aligned with MKDC, has had significant impact on the way in which Milton Keynes has been represented academically since 1992. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide detailed analysis of Milton Keynes’ post-1992 reception, the impact of pre-1992 media narratives on Milton Keynes’ historiography has been significant.

The above model of embattled-but-successful Milton Keynes, despite being rooted in the specific political context of the wind up of MKDC, has been largely reinforced by the first major works of social history and cultural anthropology of Milton Keynes by Mark Clapson and Ruth Finnegan. Again, these works make considerable and path-breaking contributions to the framing of Milton Keynes as an appropriate subject for humanities

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91 Clapson has published extensively on Milton Keynes. Major examples include Clapson, *Invincible green suburbs; Social History of Milton Keynes; Anglo-American Crossroads; “Introduction.”*; Finnegan’s major works on Milton Keynes are Ruth Finnegan, *The hidden musicians: music-making in an English town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Tales of the city.*
scholarship, and as a site of history and culture rather than existing apart from or at odds with these forces. Their foundational premises nonetheless largely replicate this combative, essentialist focus on unearthing the truth of Milton Keynes as a form of defence against inaccuracies and “myths”, which are understood as inherently bad because they are seen as wrong. The existence of inaccurate “myths” about Milton Keynes is understood as central to its cultural resonance, but the content of these myths is understood is less significant than the underlying “truth” of an embattled, misunderstood town which is truly a “success”. Clapson, for instance, dismisses negative responses to Milton Keynes as inherently based on inaccurate information, as “rude” or as “knocking copy.” While Finnegan engages with a thematic approach to Milton Keynes’ cultural representation, this blurs local and media responses as well as historical and contemporary accounts. The persistence of this theme of Milton Keynes’ (negative, external) image versus a (positive) reality (largely perceived by its residents only) therefore precludes significant study of Milton Keynes’ reception and meanings, and the potential purpose and political functionality of these meanings, by insisting on the town’s innate, apolitical and empirically verifiable value.

The success of this historiographical narrative itself, however, has remained limited in much the same ways as MKDC’s various depictions of Milton Keynes having succeeded despite the odds, in that the longer term, more deeply rooted narratives of the town’s newness as aesthetically and ideologically tainted has continued to inform the town’s representation since 1992. A primary example of this from 1993, featured in Bill Bryson’s Notes from a Small Island, is a classic replica of the dystopian concerns of Booker, Seabrook, Bainbridge and so many other mournful journalists traversing Milton Keynes on foot and perceiving a kind of betrayal of national identity through the town’s unique forms. His

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92 Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes, 9-11, 142; Vaughan et al., “Do the suburbs exist?”
93 Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes, 9-11, 142.
94 Finnegan, Tales of the city, 24-41.
95 Bill Bryson, Notes from a Small Island (London: Black Swan, 1993), 190.
opening impression, reminiscent of Bainbridge’s described in Chapter 6, is that he “didn’t hate Milton Keynes immediately, which I suppose is as much as you could hope for the place.” While initially admitting that its cleanliness made it ‘much superior to any new town I had seen before’, this impression quickly changed as he wandered through the town without having consulted a map, assuming that he would soon reach the city centre. In doing so Bryson becomes increasingly “irritated” by the town’s layout, from its walkways to landscaping to the “endless Bovisville” of its housing. As Bryson eventually sets off in the right direction, his main criticism of Milton Keynes becomes clear; that “the planners” whose role it was to “erect a model community” failed by acting according to principles he considers atypical and illogical, such as “putting the shopping centre a mile from the railway station.”

On arriving in the Shopping Building, Bryson’s criticisms grow more severe, with a similar lack of reference to maps rendering him unable to find the ‘food court[s]”, “central gathering place[s]” and even seating which would otherwise have been accessible. His final assessment is that his “worst nightmare made whole … is a place of infinite charm and endless delight compared with the mall at Milton Keynes.”

Again, Jeff Bishop’s astute analysis of the problem of pedestrian expectations, discussed in Chapter 7, applies here. Indeed, Bryson’s account, like those by Booker and Bainbridge before him, is almost a perfect illustration of Bishop’s finding that “those who get lost seem to be predominantly [those] who come with a preconceived idea of what clues and landmarks a ‘city’ should offer … [sic] and then are confused when such clues are not

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96 Christopher Booker, ‘Urban Rides – 2,’ Spectator, May 12, 1978, 12; Seabrook, What went wrong?, 235-40; Bainbridge, English journey, or, The road to Milton Keynes.
97 Bryson, Notes from a Small Island, 190.
98 This is despite it being common for British railway stations to be located on the edge or even some distance away from the towns they ostensibly service, due to changing demography or pragmatic issues of service provision. Ibid., 193; cf. similar description of a pedestrian marooned in an over-planned landscape in Drabble, The Ice Age, 168.
99 Bishop, Milton Keynes - the best of both worlds? : public and professional views of a new city, 150.
For Bryson, the response did not stop at “confusion,” however, but moved quickly to condemnation of Milton Keynes for failure to meet predetermined expectations. A passing joke made in the satirical post-apocalyptic novel *Good Omens* by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, published in 1990, further draws out this tension between expectation and experience:

> Note for Americans and other aliens: Milton Keynes is a new city approximately halfway between London and Birmingham. It was built to be modern, efficient, healthy, and, all in all, a pleasant place to live. Many Britons find this amusing.  

Underlying this wry assessment of British cultural expectations about cities is the disjuncture between the intention of Milton Keynes’ planners, and how the town has been received. While Bryson, like many others, was less “amused” than dismayed, his expectation that a British city is best defined by not being “modern, efficient, [or] healthy,” and certainly not by being “new”. By comparison, places Bryson did celebrate were appreciated precisely for their adherence to set expectations about Britain; parochial accounts of untouched villages, or bustling cities layered with pre-industrial heritage and visible anachronisms which Bryson interprets not only as signifiers of national character, but as defining British landscape as inextricable from the concept of heritage containment itself.  

Bryson’s belief that all English cities should be legible in precisely the same terms, and aesthetically sufficiently similar such that no basic preparation or map consultation should be required, points to the kind of mystical tradition-bound landscape aesthetic which has been described as dominating negative responses to Milton Keynes throughout this thesis. The belief that Milton Keynes’ failure to conform to established urban models was

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100 Ibid.  
inherently a failure implied that the absolute model of urban value was located in immediate coherence according to analogous models. The very concept of innovation or difference in urban space appeared to Bryson, as it did to so many other journalists who visited Milton Keynes, to be irreconcilable to the idea of what constituted a British landscape.

Locating MKDC’s “embattled success” narratives in this context helps highlight the intractable opposition to Milton Keynes on a philosophical level which has informed much of the criticism discussed in this thesis. It also highlights that the problem of accepting Milton Keynes as a valid feature of the British and English landscape, let alone as interesting, desirable, or potentially a model to be learned from, is one with deeper roots in an imperialist culturally conservative tradition of canonicity which has explicitly been reinforced by the backlash against the postwar state since 1979. The explanatory narrative of British neoliberalism from Thatcher onwards has consistently invoked culturally conservative definitions of national identity to conceal, justify and normalise radical economic and political interventions, by explaining the postwar state as a failure and an aberrant interlude in a longer narrative of British “greatness” which must be restored.

This interlocking set of political concerns, with its heavy symbolism of place, inclusion, and heritage as an absolute ideal, was necessarily one with more profound roots than any set of advertising campaigns by a new town could hope to unseat or fully transcend, and so the embattled success narrative of Milton Keynes can be seen as a form of compromise within a hostile ideological environment. Being “in on the joke” allowed MKDC limited scope to intervene on and leverage negativity around the town, while the concept of “embattled success” even while it reinforced the notion of embattlement also introduced the opportunity to see the town in an alternative way. This attempt to coopt, rather than supplant, negative narratives, even as it necessarily replicates them, attempts to redefine existing narratives of exclusion, and thereby to subvert them. In the face of such
profound philosophical and even epistemological opposition to Milton Keynes, and to the idea of new landscapes itself, this can be seen as a necessary capitulation which gestures towards the idea of alternatives to an entrenched ideological status quo.
Conclusion

Since April 1992, Milton Keynes has been administered by Milton Keynes Borough Council and Buckinghamshire County Council; following the dissolution of MKDC, its assets were either privatised or handed over to these authorities. While portions of the designated area had not yet been constructed, these were administered by the council and largely executed by private contractors, though in recent years these have notably diverged in style from the lower-density flexible land use advocated in the original Plan. Milton Keynes’ continued growth has partly relied on ongoing promotional materials, which have been striking for their similarity in tone and content to late 1980s MKDC-sponsored promotions. As briefly outlined in Chapter 8, this continuity can be seen in the immediate aftermath of the windup, with mid-to-late 1992 promotional campaigns using a series of personal testimonies from residents, whose stories of overcoming the odds and achieving their personal goals are used as metonyms for the town’s own development.¹ Recent poster campaigns generated in the months prior to Milton Keynes’ fiftieth anniversary used the theme “Unexpected MK,” leveraging the gap between negative cultural representations of the town by presenting the posters as a corrective. Many of the examples used in this poster series, such as those that focus on “concrete jungle” myths, explicitly replicate the terms and approach of 1980s MKDC poster campaigns.²

In a short occasional paper from 2011, Davinia Gregory argues that continuities in Milton Keynes’ representation after 1992 are more accurately understood as a form of

² “UnexpectedMK,” http://www.destinationmiltonkeynes.co.uk/About-us/UnexpectedMK. See discussion of poster campaigns in Chapter 8, in particular “Marketing posters and advertisements: Commercial & Industrial.”
epistemological stasis. She proposes that the consistency of Milton Keynes’ representation in national media since 1992 is indicative of Milton Keynes’ fraught relationship to the idea of history; that it has been trapped in “MK time”, a form of historical limbo, where it is neither new enough to be understood as malleable and able to be changed, nor seen to be able to retain history despite its advancing chronological age. While primarily a theoretical paper, Gregory’s suggestion that post-1992 objections to Milton Keynes function epistemologically, where competing definitions of time, history, value and authenticity are in conflict, is consistent with the historical arguments of this thesis. As explored in Chapter 1, two major trends in modern British history have defined the value and function of ideal landscapes in opposing ways: as a receptacle of meaning which indexes and forms a mystical connection to a closed historical narrative of nationhood on the one hand, and as best intervened and improved upon by the application of technical expertise to create better future economic and social outcomes on the other.

This opposition, between culturally conservative views of landscape value in which ideal veneration of heritage is absolute, and positivist technocratic attitude which celebrates the active human shaping and intervention on landscapes as creating ideal outcomes, was far from being historically new at the time of Milton Keynes’ designation in 1967. That specific historical moment, however, saw technocratic positivist attitudes to ideal landscapes in a unique position of political dominance, following the 1945 election of the Attlee government and several decades of broad in-principle bipartisan support for the idea of active government intervention to improve social and economic outcomes. While planned landscapes generated by these policies were subject to consistent criticism from both positivist and culturally conservative positions, the Wilson government elected in 1964 drew

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4 Ibid.
on a policy base of renewed commitment to technocratic improvement. It was this context which drove the designation of Milton Keynes, and which motivated the innovative commitments of its Plan to a newly flexible and non-determinist form of planning which would improve on and learn from earlier postwar new towns.

This thesis has argued, then, that as the global macroeconomic settlement on which Britain's postwar reconstructionism relied upon was eroded, that support for the positivist ideals of reconstructionism also faltered. As traced in Chapters 3 and 4, this hostile cultural shift was exacerbated by the tendency for these global economic problems to be interpreted in media and political rhetoric as purely domestic forces with avoidable causes, reinforced by longer patterns of declinism which interpreted postwar geopolitical and economic power changes as stemming from domestic social and political failures. These metonymic cultural tendencies, preoccupied with postwar cultural change as signifying national decline, were hostile to the idea of positivist technocracy itself. In this context, the technocratic future-focused origins of Milton Keynes were increasingly interpreted as representative of the form of state power which created it. As described in Chapters 4 and 5, this technocratic positivism was reframed by Conservative Party electoral rhetoric as inherently socialist, allowing it to present its radical macroeconomic neoliberalism as a form of historical return to “greatness” through undoing the policy basis of postwar reconstructionism and the welfare state. Given that MKDC's promotional materials had focused on educational campaigns throughout the 1970s, seeking to inform media and the British public of “The Facts” about Milton Keynes' development, its failure to operate on the level of political symbolism meant that by 1979 its promotions had proved ineffective in combating the ideological encoding of the town as a socialist dystopia.5

Chapter 6 traces the way in which, despite the hostile environment of the late 1970s, MKDC reoriented its promotions following the opening of the Shopping Building, using individualistic, consumer-capitalist aspirationalism rather than empirical technocratic logic. At the same time, through embracing increased private-sector influence in planning and construction, MKDC adapted its administration to the political climate of the Thatcher governments such that even while levels of state funding were an ongoing point of contention, it was periodically secured until 1992 at which point the majority of the town’s Plan had been enacted. As discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, however, negative representations of the town as epitomising the most extreme forms of both socialism and consumer capitalism continued, focusing on the shared problem of the town’s perceived lack of authenticity, particularly through its newness and its planned origins which no advertising campaign or administrative reorganisation could conceal. Milton Keynes’ newness continued to locate it outside of ideal definitions of British landscape which celebrated unbroken historical continuity and the ideal of heritage as a mystical binding force and repository of national identity, and as 1992 approached, the idea of Milton Keynes as being outside of historical models of urban value persisted in shaping the terms in which the town could be understood.

It was MKDC’s adaptation to this ongoing epistemological hostility which informed its final media drive in 1992, and shaped the early historiography, with its focus on Milton Keynes as having succeeded in spite of misrepresentations and hostility. This combined an essentialist appeal to absolute truth from early promotions with the aspirationalism that defined its 1980s promotional materials, to create a cohesive narrative of Milton Keynes’ value that was founded on the idea of correcting false preconceptions. Such an attitude leveraged hostile representations and attempted to reclaim and thereby correct them; nonetheless it could not, and did not, respond to the fundamental problem which Milton Keynes posed and has continued to pose for its critics in British media and politics: that it
was designated as an explicitly experimental town, designed from the outset to challenge and improve upon existing models, rather than to emulate or venerate them. The very fact of its newness, and its inability to conceal its experimental technocratic values, consistently underpinned criticisms of Milton Keynes as inauthentic and therefore as outside of national norms, whether for being too socialist or too consumerist, too deterministic or too indeterminate.

Rather than tracing and accounting for these continuities and changes in Milton Keynes’ reception in British media and popular culture more broadly, the existing historiography of Milton Keynes has tended to only obliquely reference the existence of particular hostile attitudes, in order to then correct them. This has been an understandable and a necessary task, particularly given the extent of negativity expressed towards Milton Keynes and the misrepresentations upon which it often relies. Such an approach, however, has not yet accounted for why Milton Keynes has been represented in particular negative forms, how this has evolved over time, and what wider political and cultural functions such representations have had. Focusing on Milton Keynes’ essential meaning in terms of its “success” or “failure” in this way therefore perpetuates the town’s separateness from wider historical narratives, and reinforces the sense that the town’s meanings are intrinsic to its forms, rather than reflective of any wider political or cultural forces.

Contributions

The purpose of this thesis, and one of its primary contributions to the historical literature, is to widen the scope of Milton Keynes’ historical representation by moving beyond essentialist

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6 Typical examples of this have been included Clapson, Dobbin, and Waterman, Best Laid Plans; Clapson, Invincible green suburbs; Finnegan, Tales of the city; Clapson, Social History of Milton Keynes; Anglo-American Crossroads. Cf. Vaughan et al., “Do the suburbs exist?”
measurements of success or failure, and instead to locate Milton Keynes within national-level cultural and political histories. This thesis is the first systematic, longitudinal study of Milton Keynes’ meanings and representations in British national media and popular culture. It is also the first sustained engagement with the issue of integrating Milton Keynes’ meanings within wider national histories, by working between and across subdisciplinary boundaries to conceptualise the political and cultural history of landscape ideals in postwar Britain in general, and postwar England in particular. This approach to integrating postwar planning history not purely within the subdisciplines of planning history or social history, but within a longer and broader cultural history of landscape values, posits a synthetic cross-disciplinary approach to understanding the cultural politics of postwar British landscapes and their representations. In pursuing this approach this thesis has drawn on and worked across existing subdisciplinary boundaries of social, cultural, planning, and political histories, while drawing on human geography, critical theory and cultural studies.

Through the case study of Milton Keynes, this thesis has addressed the question of what has been understood to constitute a “good” landscape in British media and popular culture throughout the period under study. That question has consistently been answered in the source material in the negative, as not being Milton Keynes. Rendering the reasoning and motivations behind these judgements explicit has therefore necessarily involved close attention to silences, elisions, implied references, and assumed frames of reference. The very act of historicising attitudes to landscape value has been one which has been resisted by much of the primary source material, which has appealed to the essential nature of Milton Keynes’ meanings, and this assumption of the town possessing a singular truth embedded in its forms has also informed the subsequent historiography.

This thesis has argued, however, that rather than interpreting Milton Keynes as having an ahistorical, unchanging essential value, historicising the town’s meanings and
tracing their evolution over time helps account for wider processes of ideological change. Milton Keynes’ very existence is contingent; its historical newness reflects vast investments of money, land, time and energy, underpinned by a belief in the capacity of technical expertise to generate ideal landscapes and social outcomes. Not only does its grand scale transformation of the Buckinghamshire countryside render it a highly visible experimentation in urban form, its active rejection, and celebration of the rejection of historical forms as absolute ideals necessarily reflect the political ideologies of the last stages of “White Heat” revisions of technocratic reconstructionism, which was shortly to fall from political favour. This thesis has therefore argued that one major trend in the representation of Milton Keynes has been its function as a testimonial to late-stage postwar reconstructionism, and the belief that paternalist state economic intervention could create positive social outcomes. To this extent it has functioned as a testimonial and relic of earlier political orthodoxies, a stubborn and persistent reminder of political alternatives in a time where none are meant to exist.

While this accounts for much criticism of Milton Keynes from the mid-1970s onwards, it does not account for early anxieties about the town’s potential insufficiency, nor for later criticisms of MKDC’s overt embrace of consumer-capitalist industries and private sector development. Through the longitudinal scope of this thesis, however, it has been possible to trace continuities between the ostensibly conflicting criticisms of Milton Keynes as too indeterminate, as over-determinate, as too socialist and as too capitalist. Underpinning these disparate attitudes to Milton Keynes has been a consistent antipathy to the town’s historical newness which has deeper philosophical roots in ideas of what a good landscape, and what a good British landscape in particular, should be. Criticisms of Milton Keynes’ excessive adherence to particular ideologies, or to function as too ineffective or too powerful a containing urban force, have been concerned at their root with the issue of authenticity, with the capacity of Milton Keynes to adhere to existing intelligible urban models, and
therefore to conform to narrowly conceived national ideals. This thesis has demonstrated that Milton Keynes’ newness has been consistently interpreted as being opposed to the ideal of heritage itself, and therefore as locating the town outside of national ideals. By locating the history of Milton Keynes and postwar urban planning more broadly within this longer history of attitudes to landscape and landscape heritage as a receptacle of national identity, this thesis has added a new perspective to the changing political fortunes of urban planning as a discipline during the 1970s and 1980s in Britain. By locating attitudes to urban planning within longer imperial cultural logics, this thesis positions the study of postwar urban planning as part of longer historical processes of defining and redefining the role of ideal landscapes and their symbolic power. By locating postwar landscape politics within a longer historical lens, this thesis also gestures towards more explicitly post-imperial histories of British postwar urban planning, which locate postwar debates about new urban landscape forms within wider cultural anxieties about Britain’s changing geopolitical status.

**Further directions**

Building on the methodological approaches and arguments of this thesis, there are several key directions for future historical research arising from this study. First, further integration of postwar British urban planning histories within longer and broader historical contexts is a crucial direction for future historical research. This would help to overcome the subdisciplinary exclusions that have treated postwar planned spaces, especially new towns, primarily in terms of their essential forms, rather than as sites of meaning and historical action in themselves. This could be undertaken through lateral application of the primary approach of this thesis, that is to say tracing the cultural history of reputations of controversial postwar planned spaces. Differentiations and comparisons between planned spaces on the basis of their phases of construction (such as Mark 1 as opposed to Mark 2
new towns) or of height and density (such as between high-rise tower blocks and overspill estates within or between cities) would enable a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the specific impact of different local contexts, administrative and formal characteristics on shaping the changing reception and meanings of postwar planned spaces in Britain.

Secondly, future research which integrates British postwar urban planning within broader historical narratives must, as suggested above, explicitly address the colonial and imperial contexts of British culture, and how these have shaped attitudes to ideal landscapes in the metropole. While this thesis accounts for declinist political culture’s role in shaping attitudes to urban planning through the case of Milton Keynes, more nuanced research through a range of case studies and source materials would contribute a broader perspective on the cultural politics of spatial inclusion and exclusion at work in responses to postwar planned spaces. By continuing to historicise definitions of ideal British landscapes within global political contexts, such research would make vital contributions in foregrounding the role of spatial and landscape symbolism as narrative tools to define the borders of national identities. This, in turn, creates possibilities for intervention and challenge on tacit cultural criteria and symbolic exclusions which are often understood as innate, ahistorical, and immutable.7

The relationship between radical action and the idea of heritage has been one of the main concerns of this thesis, and further consideration of this tension for the recent history of British spatial politics is a crucial concern for future research. Where implicit antipathies to the idea of newness inform assessments of valuable, desirable or functional urban spaces, heritage narratives remain focused on canonicity rather than admitting histories of radical action and intervention.8 This creates situations where closed historical narratives perpetuate

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8 Gardiner, The Return of England in English Literature. See also Wood, Pristine culture of capitalism.
exclusions and resist any kind of intervention and reform. The practice of tracing and interrogating the limits of these narratives is therefore an ethical concern for recent British history, and it is one which is of ongoing political relevance in a climate where the erasures of the postwar state and of Britain’s imperial past continue to drive mainstream exclusionary political rhetoric.

It is in this way that the history of postwar urban planning in general, and Milton Keynes in particular, have received such disproportionately low levels of historical analysis relative to their geographical, demographic and economic impacts. The idea of what can have history, or where history is located, is not only concerned with the formation of what is considered nationally valuable, but is necessarily an exclusionary process, and for the history of Milton Keynes and attitudes to it to be perceived as outside of history has been to deliberately downplay and even overlook the extent to which postwar planned spaces transformed Britain, instead interpreting them as aberrant and in need of erasure or exclusion.

One significant recent attempt to challenge this narrative was made by the British Pavilion exhibition at the 2014 Venice Biennale, entitled A Clockwork Jerusalem. The exhibition presented a narrative history of British landscape interventions from Stonehenge to postwar planning as representing a coherent story of innovative, forward-thinking interventions in landscape as shaping a uniquely British identity. The term used for this theme was “electric pastoralism”; a fusion of techno-futurism with nostalgic pastoralism, understood as a singular principle which not only reconciled but explained the contradictions of British urban planning and architectural history as products of a single coherent philosophy of space and identity. Through this principle, conflicts between technocratic

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9 Baucom, Out of Place; Gardiner, The Return of England in English Literature; The Constitution of English Literature.

positivism and pastoral conservatism in British political and cultural history could be presented in terms of a common goal, a unique and coherent vision of national relationship to landscape. In order to symbolise this principle, the exhibition drew heavily on representations of Milton Keynes, including Cliff Richard’s video for “Wired for Sound,” and most significantly, the Concrete Cows, the original set of which were shipped to Venice to appear as an exhibition centrepiece.11

The exhibition presented a bold and ingenious narrative, but one which necessarily divorced architecture and urban planning from their political and historical contexts in order to maintain its cohesive vision. Its remit was necessarily strictly design history, however its narrative coherence relied on not only omitting but also obscuring the deeply political contestations of urban planning and architecture and their relationship to wider political changes throughout the twentieth century which this thesis has traced.12 By presenting conservative and modernist-positivist attitudes to urban planning and architecture as two sides of a single approach, the fundamentally opposing attitudes of each to the function of landscape with regards to national identity were necessarily obscured, or put down to changes in fashion rather than to wider political and economic changes. Its smooth unbroken narrative of a singular British technocratic vision is only possible through maintaining the kind of subdisciplinary boundaries this thesis has sought to challenge: by interpreting urban planning history as a discipline wholly divorced from political, cultural, intellectual and social


12 Owen Hatherley, whose work on postwar urban planning has been explicitly concerned with broader political and ideological contexts, was originally part of the team developing the exhibition but left the project several months prior to the exhibition launch. Some discussion of the potential implications for the exhibition content can be seen in Rory Olcayto, “Venice Biennale spat points to a deeper rift in architectural culture,” https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/comment/venice-biennale-spat-points-to-a-deeper-rift-in-architectural-culture/8660381.article. While some of Hatherley’s writings are reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, in the context of his broader architectural criticism the political commentary of the chosen piece is relatively constrained. Compare Owen Hatherley, “A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain,” (Verso, 2010); “A New Kind of Bleak: Journeys Through Urban Britain,” (Verso, 2012); Donald and Webber, *A Clockwork Jerusalem*. 
histories, and as primarily focused on technical and formal innovation rather than on the cultural functions and interpretations of those forms.

Yet despite the exclusions of A Clockwork Jerusalem, it marked a significant attempt to contextualise Milton Keynes within not only planning history, but which proudly included it within a national history of landscape forms, alongside Stonehenge and the architecture of Christopher Wren. Norwithstanding the limited impact of the exhibition outside professional circles, it is significant to note that the decision to use the Concrete Cows as symbols of a visionary British technological tradition received little negative media representation. Moreover, at the time of writing, further developments in the representation of Milton Keynes in national media have made similar gestures towards viewing the town as possessing historical value, and as able to be viewed as part of broader national narratives.

The fiftieth anniversary year of Milton Keynes’ designation has been commemorated with significant local festivities, and has thus far been marked by a number of high profile national media features, including BBC Breakfast broadcasting a birthday cake-cutting ceremony on 23 January. While much of this coverage has utilised the “embattled success” narrative at least obliquely as a starting point, this has as yet not been the dominant motif relative to the outright celebrations of the town’s history. The idea of Milton Keynes as having a history which is of national significance, which does not wholly need to be understood in terms of negative preconceptions, is a noteworthy development in Milton Keynes’ representations in British national media and popular culture. Given the extent of

the antipathies described in this thesis, it was far from a given that the anniversary celebrations would confer onto Milton Keynes the possibility of being viewed as an authentic landscape, or as being able to retain historical value.

Nor is it necessarily the case that this view will continue to shape attitudes to the town once the wave of anniversary commemorations have passed. Political antipathy to postwar planned spaces, and to a loosely Thatcherite conceptualisation of 1970s Labour policies as constituting “the bad old days,” consistently informed Blair, Brown and Cameron government policy positions, and became more explicit and overt under the May Government.14 Transport Minister John Hayes gave a speech in November 2016 in which he “declare[d] war on Brutalism” and declared “the overwhelming majority of public architecture built in my lifetime [to be] aesthetically worthless”.15 That such militant rhetorical hostility to postwar landscape change, and such active desire to rehabilitate imperial-era architecture in its place, has resurged during the post-Brexit-referendum environment where narrow and exclusive narratives of national identity are politically ascendant, is not coincidental, in that it shares a preoccupation with ideas of historical return and against radical action.

This established norm, however, has been challenged once more by the 2017 general election and its aftermath, in which the memory of postwar social housing programmes appear to be taking on new and different symbolic forms than has been the case since 1979.


When the 2017 Labour election manifesto leaked to the media on 11 May 2017, the decision to build “new towns” explicitly resembled the type of commitment to housing and infrastructure seen in Labour policies from 1945 to 1975. The overarching media response, predictably, was to interpret this as “Corbyn’s desire to return Britain to the bad old days of the 1970s,” with the mythology of state crisis invoked in an attempt to scare voters in the present. Significantly, however, this mainstream media narrative appears to have been less successful than in previous decades, with Labour returning a vastly increased vote share in the 2017 general election and forcing a hung parliament, thus conferring a greater legitimacy to policies which had been assumed to echo the “suicide note” of the 1983 manifesto.

Moreover, following almost immediately from the election, the public outcry over the fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington on 14 June 2017 has overwhelmingly focused on the role of austerity and Conservative policies more broadly in facilitating the tragedy. While, as after Ronan Point, some commentators have called for the demolition of high-rise social housing, Labour MPs previously considered to be on the centre or even centre-right of the party have called for the public requisition of vacant housing in the area to house

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16 Leaked draft version which occasioned the most media response can be found in full at “Leaked draft of Labour 2017 manifesto – full text,” Spectator, https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/05/leaked-draft-of-labour-2017-manifesto-full-text/#; while the full version is available at “For the Many Not the Few: Labour Manifesto 2017 “, Labour.org.uk, http://www.labour.org.uk/page/-/Images/manifesto-2017/Labour%20Manifesto%202017.pdf; see one of the few positive direct responses to the announcement of new towns in “The leaked Labour manifesto is full of good ideas - will it be enough to get them elected?,” Daily Mirror May 17, 2017.


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Grenfell Tower’s displaced residents. The impact of the political instability following the Brexit referendum in 2016 continues to play out in unpredictable, and even unprecedented ways, around the role of the state; yet within these debates social housing, and landscapes created by the postwar state, continue to act as symbolic reference points for wider issues of policy and identity.

In this political climate, it can be seen that sites like Milton Keynes hold testimonial power as a stubborn reminder of unabashedly utopian social policies, memories of which haunt the present filtered through fearmongering narratives of state collapse. Milton Keynes testifies to its planners’ intentions, to create flexible, inclusive, empowering planned spaces, “not based on any fixed conception of how people ought to live,” and to “to get [themselves] out of a job as quickly as possible.” Their ideas were intended to challenge established expectations and practices, and they remain challenging in this very different political and economic environment. This thesis has argued that integrating Milton Keynes in particular, and postwar urban planning more broadly, into political and cultural histories of Britain enriches historical understanding of tacit cultural values of ideal landscapes, and evolving criteria of nationhood and cultural inclusion. While this thesis has made a significant contribution to this process, the work of exposing and challenging such elisions and essentialised judgements is necessarily an ongoing task, whose remit extends beyond the academy, and which is all the stronger for including multitudes of contributions. Doing so not only diversifies and expands the boundaries of postwar British history, but also

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20 See approving comments by Harriet Harman and David Lammy in favour of requisitioning empty Kensington mansions in Harriet Harman, “Loads of empty flats (land banks) in Kensington. @jeremycorbyn right that govt should requisition to rehouse Grenfell survivors,” https://twitter.com/HarrietHarman/status/875343713207189506; David Lammy, “Lots of homes left vacant in Kensington & Chelsea by overseas investors. I would like to see them requisitioned by Govt to rehouse victims,” https://twitter.com/DavidLammy/status/875357553110257664; Jeremy Corbyn’s reiteration of these claims can be found Patrick Grafton-Green, “Jeremy Corbyn renews calls for Grenfell Tower victims to be housed in luxury Kensington homes,” Evening Standard June 18, 2017; while Simon Jenkins, whose anti-public-housing commentary has been noted throughout this thesis, makes the case for the demolition of all tower blocks in Simon Jenkins, “The lesson from Grenfell is simple: stop building residential towers,” Guardian June 15, 2017.

21 The plan for Milton Keynes, 1, 23; “Milton Keynes: a village city.”
challenges the political exclusions perpetuated by narrow and closed definitions of what, and where, history has been seen to reside.
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Piko, Lauren Anne

Title:  
Mirroring England?: Milton Keynes, decline and the English landscape

Date:  
2017

Persistent Link:  
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/194242

File Description:  
Mirroring England?: Milton Keynes, decline and the English landscape

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