



Downloaded from: <http://bucks.collections.crest.ac.uk/>

**Ecological humanism and the design of corporate environments.
Paper delivered at the annual Design History Society Conference, University of
Oslo, September 7th - 10th, 2017**

This document is protected by copyright. It is published with permission and all rights are reserved.

Usage of any items from Buckinghamshire New University's institutional repository must follow the usage guidelines.

Any item and its associated metadata held in the institutional repository is subject to

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Please note that you must also do the following;

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
- a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

You may not

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

If you need further guidance contact the Research Enterprise and Development Unit
ResearchUnit@bucks.ac.uk

Ecological humanism and the design of corporate environments.
Paper delivered at the annual Design History Society Conference, University of Oslo, September 7th - 10th, 2017

Dr. Helena Chance, Buckinghamshire New University
(copyright restrictions do not allow me to include the images)

[Slide 1 heading] [Slide 2] Dave Eggers, in his book *The Circle*, published in 2013, imagines a giant tech and social media company of that name, which he bases on a combination of Google, Facebook, You Tube and other internet behemoths that have changed the way we communicate and access information. The story opens as the heroine, Mae Holland, arrives at 'The Circle' campus for her first working day.

[Slide 3] 'My God', 'Its heaven', she breathes as she walks through the lushly-planted and manicured grounds, her first impressions shaped by the landscape. But we soon learn that *The Circle* is Orwellian, its mission to intrude into our privacy on the false premise of openness. **[Slide 4]** (These slogans are part of the company's brand.) But Mae is blind to this, with tragic consequences and the 'perfect' landscape is implicated in the unfolding dystopia.

[Slide 5] In the same ways that the owners of private estates have long used landscape design and planting to denote power and control, so Eggers uses land, landscape and nature as symbol and metaphor to seduce the heroine and his readers with a sense of security and awe, an Eden or Paradise of corporate social responsibility through beauty, space and opportunity. **[Slide 6]** In a design that materialises the fictional 'Circle', Foster and Partners use the Platonic ideal of form and proportion for their new Apple campus, currently under construction. [Copied in the recent film of the book, starring Emma Watson] From factory villages to corporate campuses and business parks, corporate space has been conceived as elite, isolated and controlled and emblematic of corporate ethos, and brand.] **[Slide 7 General Motors]**

In this paper, I discuss a new typology of suburban corporate campus, exemplified in designer Thomas Heatherwick's and architect Bjarke Ingels' design for the new Google campus and in OMA's plans for a new Facebook campus in Silicon Valley, California. **[Slide 8]** According to advance publicity, these private landscapes of power will offer permeability between public and private space, improve the local ecology and provide more humane environments for living and working. Borrowing from landscape theorist Ian Thompson's concept of 'ecological humanism'¹ and from Paterson and Connery's model of ecological design parameters for suburban development², I show how these environments represent a paradigm shift in the history of corporate landscape design, from their primarily didactic social functions of the nineteenth to late twentieth centuries, to an ecological and community-focused approach to an environment under threat in the twenty-first century. The

¹ Ian Thompson, 2009

² Douglas Paterson, Kevin Connery 'Reconfiguring the edge city: the use of ecological design parameters in

defining the form of community.' *Landscape and Urban Planning* 36:4, (1997) 327-346

discussion takes a long perspective, tracing corporate landscape typologies from the eighteenth century and it builds on the conclusions of my book *The Factory in a Garden. A History of Corporate Landscapes from the Industrial to the Digital Age*.³ This new research adds a fresh perspective to landscape design for corporate space today in a state of rapid change, a subject that has received little research attention.⁴ I am in the early stages, therefore, the conclusions are tentative. The historical context reminds us that despite an apparent shift into a more ecological and communitarian approach to planning for office parks and campuses, corporate landscapes, as spaces of power, will remain forever paradoxical and problematic. As Anne Whiston Spirn has reminded us, 'every landscape is inherently paradoxical, a fusion of the managed and the wild'.⁵ But the corporate landscape, a rhetorical, didactic, heterotopia, presents complex and contradictory relationships in the interweaving of nature and culture, work and leisure, freedom and control in the working environment.

I have argued in my book that from the late eighteenth century, industrialists began to provide employees with outdoor space for recreation such as allotments, walks, and gardens and later, constructed sports grounds within, or close to the workplace, to improve employee health, motivation and raise productivity. Industrialists from Robert Owen in the early 1800s, to George Cadbury in the early 1900s improved their factory environments partly motivated by the theory of environmental determinism, that people's behavior and character are shaped by environment. **[Slide 9]** One early example, the Royal Saltworks and village at Arc-et-Senans, France, designed in the 1770s by Claude-Nicholas Ledoux, reminds us that the circular plan for the Apple office is not original in corporate planning. In his original plan, Ledoux used the ideal circular form, to include allotment gardens so that workers could supplement their incomes. **[Slide 10]** The Saline predates Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, but its rigid plan is similar, allowing for maximum surveillance of employees.

A century later, allotment gardens became the agents of social engineering through landscape at the National Cash Register Company, a firm well known for its sophisticated sales and marketing practices.⁶ The Olmsted Brothers designed a high-status environment to recast the engineering company and the whole neighborhood as respectable. **[Slide 11]** The company's flagship project, the 'Boys' Gardens', gave

³ (Manchester University Press, 2017)

⁴ Kathryn Colley, Caroline Brown and Alicia Montarzano 'Restorative wildscapes at work: an investigation of the wellbeing benefits of greenspace at urban fringe business sites using 'go-along' interviews' *Landscape Research* 41:6 (2016), 598-615. See also Louise Mazingo *Pastoral Capitalism. A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes* (Cambridge, MIT, 2011) and Helena Chance *The Factory in a Garden. A History of Corporate Landscapes from the Industrial to the Digital Age* (Manchester University Press, 2017)

⁵ Anne Whiston Spirn *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven, Yale, 2000), p. 230

⁶ See Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2004 and 'John H. Patterson and the Sales Strategy of the National Cash Register Company, 1884 – 1922' *The Business History Review* 72:4 (Winter 1998), 552-584. Elspeth H Brown. 'Welfare Capitalism and Documentary Photography. NCR and the Visual Production of a Global Modern Factory' *History of Photography* 32:2 137-151 (June 1 2008), p. 139; Dayton History website, <http://www.daytonhistory.org/magiclantern.htm>, accessed 12 April 2007 in Brown *Welfare Capitalism.*, p.

local boys training in the art of gardening, as ‘the right way to form character’ and to ‘Make good men for the factory’.⁷ [Slide 12]

The concept of environmental determinism had been discredited by the 1920s,⁸ although discussions on the value of gardening in shaping effective working practices persisted.⁹ Between the Wars, the public health movement promoted the benefits of exercise to the national economy,¹⁰ [Slide 13] employees were beginning to expect better conditions at work, and companies increasingly emphasized the benefits of sports and other recreations to company social life and recruitment.¹¹

After 1945, public health and social stability continued to be factors in corporate landscape design, but in the UK, rampant industrial development, which was seen to threaten the countryside, and in the USA, the rapid growth of suburban corporate parks and campuses, gave further impetus to corporate landscape planning which, as Tim Strangleman has argued, became a means to negotiate a solution between the rural and pastoral on the one hand, and modernity on the other.¹² [Slide 14] As land and landscape were unmade by development, so landscape architects and horticulturalists remade them in the company image.

I have begun to trace the evolution of an ‘ecological humanism’ in the design of corporate space, an approach which emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century and appears to be manifest in Silicon Valley. According to Ian Thompson (2009), ecological humanism is an approach to landscape planning which shifts away from anthropocentrism and technocentrism, towards a community-based ecocentrism where community and ecology are interdependent. Thompson is one of many critics of twentieth- and twenty-first- century urban and landscape planning who call for ecological and humane approaches to development to reverse the negative impacts on biodiversity and on human ecology and culture.¹³ Elite and manicured corporate campuses and business parks (like this one in New Jersey) are just such developments, dependent on automobiles, they corral office workers in privatized space, isolating them from communities at the expense of plants and wildlife.¹⁴

⁷National Cash Register Company ‘Art, Nature and the Factory’ (1904) and ‘The Boys’ Gardens’ (no date) p. 139

⁸Frederick Steiner *Human Ecology. How Nature and Culture can shape our World* (Island Press, 2016), p. 2

⁹Tim Strangleman *Imagining Work in the Twentieth Century: Guinness and the Transformation of Employment* (unpublished typescript, chapter 3). See also Lord Verulam, G.P. Youngman ‘Factory Gardens’ (Industrial Welfare Society, 1955) and *Chance Factory in a Garden*

¹⁰‘Recreation in Industry. A Guide to existing facilities’ (London, Industrial Welfare Society, 1938)

¹¹ Mozingo in Strangleman *Imagining Work* p. 21

¹² Strangleman *Imagining Work* and Verulam and Youngman *Factory Gardens*

¹³ Steiner *Human Ecology*

¹⁴ Some communities have been displaced by business park development. See Mozingo *Pastoral Capitalism* 145, 219-223

While, according to Jan Woudstra, the idea of ecological planting has a long history and was pioneered in Germany between the Wars,¹⁵ my research suggests that discussions about the impact of corporate development on ecology and the environment emerged in the 1960s.¹⁶ As the environmental movement gathered pace in the 1970s, a handful of landscape architects and planners, such as Max Nicholson of Land Use Consultants (LUC) began to lobby for ecological design and planting principles to be adopted in new developments.¹⁷ However, in England, little progress was made in developing ecologically and socially-useful corporate space [that is useful to the wider community, not only employees] until legislation and the concept of sustainable architecture expedited change in the 1990s.

In Britain, Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, gave local authorities 'planning gain' for public services in new developments. **[Slide 15]** A precedent had been established when in 1988, the London Borough of Hounslow granted planning permission for a substantial new business park at Bedfont, on condition that the developer funded the construction of a new public park for the borough. The developer reclaimed a vast and contaminated landfill site for the 72.5 hectare Bedfont Lakes Country Park, which became a 'Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation', and in 1996, was given by the property developer to the local authority.¹⁸ Through planning gain, other business parks built on reclaimed land, such as Stockley Park near Heathrow Airport, gave recreational space for the local community and improved degraded environments. However, despite these gains for local people, the fundamental form of office campuses and business parks remained unchanged with a strong division between private business space and public recreational space.¹⁹

In the 1990s and early 2000s, new systems of certification for sustainable architecture, together with growing evidence of the benefits to employees of healthy workspaces, gave incentives to companies to provide green space at their sites with an emphasis on biodiversity. **[Slide 16]** At the Vodafone campus near Newbury, UK, storm water is collected in ponds that articulate a campus with generous green space, and on the roof of Nomura Bank in the City of London, a large vegetable allotment, beehives and pollinating plants improve biodiversity, while rain and grey water are collected and recycled. **[Slide 17]** However, like business parks, these office landscapes, designed for employee recreation and aesthetic appeal, whilst popular with employees, remain elite spaces, closed, inaccessible or of little use to their local communities. Similarly, pockets of green space in inner city office developments tend to be used mainly by a social elite of office worker, and suburban

¹⁵ Jan Woudstra 'The Changing Nature of Ecology. A History of Ecological Planting' in Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough *The Dynamic Landscape: Design, Ecology and Management of Naturalistic Urban Planting* (London Taylor & Francis, 2007)

¹⁶ Strangleman *Imagining Work* p. 28. Here Strangleman interprets descriptions of the Guinness gardens at Park Royal from issues of *Guinness Time*, the company magazine, published in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁷ Interview with Richard Flenley, Landscape Architect and employee of LUC, August 9th, 2017

¹⁸ London Gardens online (www.londongardensonline.org/gardens-online-record.asp?ID=HOU006) accessed August 17th, 2017

¹⁹ Flenley, 2017

office parks, with a few exceptions, do not provide attractive social amenities for public access. Even though these developments claim to be environmentally and socially responsible, they are a long way from the principles of ecological design.

The theory and practice of ecological design parameters in urban planning have been around for at least twenty years. In 1997 Connery and Paterson argued that urban planning should be based on an intimate understanding of local and regional ecosystems. They proposed using design parameters for new and re-developments which conserved land and energy, reduced car dependence, used local materials, protected water patterns, required local food production and used green waste systems. Despite evidence that ecological design has a positive effect on civic responsibility, and creates a stronger sense of community and place,²⁰ even today, a holistic approach to ecological design is rarely adopted for new developments in Britain. **[Slide 18]** The developers of Chiswick Park in London have paid lip service to 'sustainable design' in providing cycle pedestrian routes through the park, gyms open to all and hosting public events, but the park, which retains a 'sharp business image' with its expensive planting and manicured lawns, remains above all a corporate space, a monoculture, not an ecologically and socially diverse urban space of mixed use development.

A humanist corporate landscape, with productive space for community recreation, and engagement with landscape ecology for biodiversity, could provide a more just and permeable space for nature care-taking and citizenship. **[Slide 19]** The publicity and media interest surrounding Heatherwick's and Ingel's design for the new Google campus at North Bayshore, Mountain View, California and OMA's design for the new Facebook site, at Menlo Park, suggests a more humane and ecological approach to workspace planning and design. The architecture, based on architectural projects of the 1960s, such as Buckminster Fuller's Geodesic domes,²¹ implies a non-monolithic social utopia, the antithesis of a gleaming glass and steel box signifier of corporate capitalism.²²

[Slide 20] The plans suggest a desire to integrate employees and local residents on the sites, with space between residential suburb and corporate landscape that is permeable and includes public recreational space.²³ Facebook even claims to include housing, including affordable housing, on the site. Sources of information on these sites are not objective and further research is needed, but the designs appear to address ecological design principles of energy self-sufficiency, ecosystem protection and enhancement, and civic and community improvements to elicit a stronger sense

²⁰ Douglas Paterson, Kevin Connery 'Reconfiguring the edge city: the use of ecological design parameters in defining the form of community.' *Landscape and Urban Planning* 36:4, (1997) 327-346

²¹ New York Times 'Google and Apple's new headquarters resemble hippie communes' March 28th, 2016

²² Janice Bitters 'Mountain View approves huge Google canopied campus in North Bayshore. *Silicon Valley Business Journal*. March 8, 2017. Available online www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2017/03/08/google-mountain-view-north-bayshore-campus.html (accessed 18th July 2017) See also Heatherwick Studio website www.heatherwick.com/google-charleston-east (accessed 18th July 2017)

²³ Including at Google a 2-acre public plaza on the site and an indoor 'green loop' walking path furnished with art installations, and environmental initiatives of the type I witnessed at the Google campus in 2015.

of place, or an 'ecologically based urbanism'.²⁴ The planting schemes suggest an anti-gentrified, semi-natural aesthetic, with wild-flower meadows and plants left to their own devices, now becoming common in civic parks, but not in business parks or campuses, even though recent research suggests that semi-natural designed open spaces in business parks supports employee wellbeing.²⁵

Google's and Facebook's motivations for commissioning elite architecture and landscape for their new sites are no different to those companies in the past and in fictional accounts such as *The Circle*, that used design for its marketing opportunities and to attract the best employees.²⁶ Despite their apparent offer of more ecological, humane and accessible corporate landscapes, they remain companies whose powers are unaccountable. And although publicly accessible, these spaces are private and therefore as paradoxical as much so-called public space today, accessible but managed, where our freedoms are compromised by corporate surveillance and secrecy.²⁷ Yet will future corporate patronage of landscape and urban design, providing a more permeable relationship between public and private space, or 'corporate commons', make companies more accountable, provide essential funding to protect the environment, drive ecological design and provide community ecological education? Will Google and Facebook shape a new era in ecological humanism? Will they be successors to chocolate manufacturer George Cadbury, who laid foundations for the Garden City Movement when he constructed Bournville Village and 'The Factory in a Garden' in the 1890s?

END

Endnote, if time: This paper also proposes that the history of design for corporate landscapes, until recently a neglected area of study, remains rich in opportunities for design and landscape historians. For example, the role of landscape design in post-war industrial development and the impact on the urban landscape of lost landscapes of industry in post-industrial development, are waiting to be explored.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Geoff Vigar, School of Architecture Planning and Landscape Newcastle University, UK and Richard Flenley, Landscape Architect for their help in researching this paper.

²⁴ Paterson and Connery, 'Reconfiguring the Edge City' p. 328

²⁵ Colley et al, 'Restorative Wildscapes' (2016)

²⁶ See Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell (2002) 'An-Aesthetics and Architecture' *Tamara: journal of critical postmodern organisational science* 1, 77 – 90. As Burrell and Dale have argued, architecture and landscape play a key role in management systems and labour processes

²⁷ See Anna Minton *Big Capital. Who is London For?* (London, Penguin, 2017)