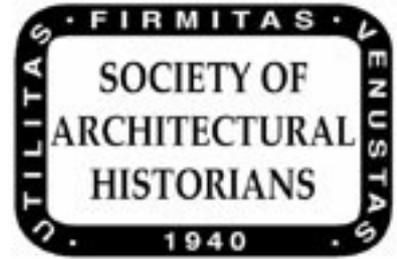




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Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes

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3. Lawrence A. Babb, John E. Cort, and Michael W. Meister, *Desert Temples: Sacred Centers of Rajasthan in Historical, Art-Historical, and Social Context* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008).

Louise A. Mozingo

Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes

Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011, 336 pp., 49 color and 45 b/w illus. \$32.95, ISBN 100262015439

At the beginning of this carefully researched and illuminating study of suburban corporate headquarters, research centers, and office parks, author Louise Mozingo quotes a principal in the offices of well-known landscape architect Peter Walker. Responding to a comment from her about the scale of the landscape of a suburban office project in Texas designed by the firm, he said, "Well, you know, this is the American Versailles." On this, Mozingo writes in *Pastoral Capitalism*: "The comment was professional puffery, to be sure, but this not-quite-offhand remark stuck with me." Years later, the curiosity that was piqued by the encounter eventually resulted in this book. Amazingly enough, despite the way the landscapes she describes were among the most conspicuous products of postwar America and are fast becoming common elsewhere around the world, this is the first serious study of them. Fortunately, author and subject are ideally matched here. Mozingo, a professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning at the University of California, Berkeley, has produced an important book. Carefully researched, well written, beautifully illustrated, and nicely produced by the MIT Press, it is likely to be a standard work on this subject for many years to come.

The core chapters focus on a series of corporate landscapes created during the decades immediately following the end of World War II. Although Mozingo sees prototypes earlier, for example General Electric's Nela Park complex outside Cleveland in the 1920s, she believes that the real start of the story comes after the war, when American corporations perfected their brand of

managerial capitalism and American cities were experiencing a massive shift of population and resources from city centers to the suburbs. Mozingo does a good job describing some of the motivations for companies to move out of cities. To some degree, the moves were motivated by what could be called a push factor: to escape the congestion and pollution of the city and perhaps its messy ethnic and racial diversity. There were clearly pull factors at work as well: employees increasingly lived in the suburbs and the leafy surroundings appeared to create better working conditions for everyone.

The high point in her story involves a group of spectacular postwar complexes, notably the General Foods headquarters in White Plains, New York; the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan; the Connecticut General headquarters outside Hartford, Connecticut; and the Deere & Company administrative center in Moline, Illinois. In each case the buildings, as important and well designed as they might be, were eclipsed by what Mozingo calls a "pastoral landscape" of trees, lawn, meadows, and lakes.

Mozingo sees the Deere headquarters as the definitive example. With its dark, richly patinated central building designed by Eero Saarinen looking out over a series of pools cascading down a grassy valley between newly wooded hillsides, all designed by Hideo Sasaki, this was undoubtedly a major triumph of American design. The same could be said of quite a few of the other corporate complexes described in this book from the Weyerhaeuser headquarters near Tacoma, Washington, on the West Coast, to the PepsiCo Headquarters in suburban Westchester County, New York. Mozingo provides excellent histories and descriptions of these places along with well-chosen images and helpful site plans. Even readers familiar with this subject matter will undoubtedly be surprised by major examples they had never heard of and new information on familiar landmarks.

In addition to the corporate landscapes, Mozingo chronicles the rise of the office park and research park, which allowed companies to have facilities in similar landscapes without developing them on their

own. If the standouts here, including the Stanford Research Park in Palo Alto, California, and the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina, aren't always as impressive as the corporate headquarters as works of landscape and design, they have played an even more important role in reshaping the American city and, increasingly, cities elsewhere. The most ambitious of these parks now contain within them corporate headquarters and sometimes rise to the same level of aesthetic ambition as the corporate parks.

In a book that looks for the first time at such a large and important part of American urban development, there are bound to be things over which a reviewer might quibble. Some of these are suggested at the outset by the provocative title. First, the word *pastoral*. In the long history of pastoral literature and art the term usually maintained some tie to the original Latin word "pastor" or shepherd. Although its use broadened by analogy over the centuries, the connection tended to remain with a specific type of rural landscape that centered on grassy areas kept clipped by the animals and set off against water and woods. An idealized form of this agricultural landscape became the basis for the British landscape gardens of the eighteenth century, which did, indeed, inform many of the designs discussed in this book.

However this pastoral tradition, with its suggestion of escapism and evocation of idyllic rural simplicity and lack of apparent artifice, certainly does not seem to have been the major inspiration for all of the landscapes discussed here, for example the more formal central garden of General Foods in Rye Brook, New York; the campus courtyards of General Electric's Nela Park in East Cleveland; the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan; the terrace and courtyards by Isamu Noguchi at Connecticut General Life Insurance in Bloomington, Connecticut; or the highly abstracted geometries of the Solana Office Park near the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. It also does not seem to be adequate for explaining the design of the freeways, ring roads, parking lots, and other features that figure prominently in the landscapes discussed in this book, some of which were located in rural

areas at the time they were created, others distinctly suburban, and a number of them actually quite close to major production facilities. The main thing that these landscapes seem to have in common is their low horizontal buildings set into landscapes, rather than the architecture as the dominant element. But is that not a description of increasingly large parts of our urban world?

The appearance of the word *capitalism* is equally curious. It suggests that, for better or for worse, the phenomenon visible in these business landscapes was driven by some kind of internal need of the capitalist system. This assumption seems to have given the book what sometimes seems a schizophrenic tone. In most cases Mzingo relies heavily on the literature produced by the corporations and by the architectural and landscape press, most of it extravagant in praise of the complexes she is describing. For example, she cites evidence that when companies moved to leafy complexes on the urban periphery, workers approved the move, enjoyed their new workplace, and were more productive and more likely to stay in their jobs. Oddly enough, she reports these conclusions but does not seem to offer her own opinion about the validity of the claims. This is curious because it would seem to be a central issue for a book about landscape design. Do heavily landscaped decentralized work environments really contribute to the productivity and well being of their occupants?

It appears that perhaps the author is reluctant to reach this conclusion because, as much as she obviously admires these landscapes, she feels that she cannot approve of them. The reader only becomes aware of this gradually when, suddenly and without warning, a sentence or two appears suggesting that a major reason for these beautiful landscapes was, in fact, an attempt to escape civic responsibility, to conceal a nefarious corporate practice, to call attention away from a bid to monopolize an industry, to obscure the fact that a company's products were damaging health or harming the environment, or to make it easier to stop workers from unionizing. These claims are sometimes attributed to someone else, usually a critic of

free-market capitalism or an environmental advocate, but sometimes they are just reported as fact. The last part of the final chapter of this book takes up all of these negative strands and weaves them together to suggest that all of the landscapes described in the book were and are inherently inequitable and unsustainable. It is a jarring conclusion to a book that seems largely celebratory.

Another oddity in a book with the word *capitalism* in the title is how little is said here about money, the cost of these landscapes, and about the role of architects and landscape architects in the business of creating them. Surely these enormous landscapes must have been accompanied by a similarly large increase in the number of practicing architects and landscape architects and in the size of their billings. It is not clear, though, whether the author feels the famous designers she discusses were comfortable working with large corporations or whether they were conflicted in their role.

Perhaps the key question about the use of this word in the title is whether capitalism actually did play the key role claimed for it in this book. If cities all over the world have decentralized dramatically since World War II despite all kinds of geographic, economic, and political differences, is it logical to finger capitalism or, specifically, American attitudes as the chief driver of the phenomenon? Or, within the United States, is it persuasive to attribute these changes to market forces when many non-profit and governmental entities have followed exactly the same route moving government offices, military bases, arsenals and laboratories, public and non-profit universities, and airports farther and farther out from downtowns and housing them in large, heavily landscaped complexes on the urban periphery?

Precisely because this is such an important and pioneering study, I thought I would make some suggestions for scholars who might want to continue research on this topic. The first suggestion might be to take a closer look at the period before World War II. I suspect the trends discussed in this book, while they undoubtedly reached their climax in the postwar years, were well underway in the interwar period. Long before World War II, many

American corporations had developed the basic tools of managerial capitalism that reached its fullest flowering after the war. During these years, and particularly in the most dynamic cities like Los Angeles and Detroit, there was an enormous growth in affluence, automobile ownership, and outward expansion. This trend was accompanied by the move of many commercial functions from multistory buildings at the historic city center to more spacious, landscaped grounds far outside the old downtown.

The goal of locating workplaces far from traditional old cities to marry the advantages of rural and urban was a key idea of the Garden City movement, and it animated many companies without any utopian ideals as well. Looking at pictures of factories in the 1920s and 1930s, it is conspicuous how many of them had large sites with open space to allow for future expansion, detached administration buildings with wide lawns in front of them, and playgrounds and other recreational facilities adjacent. At his enormous Ford complex in Dearborn, Michigan, Henry Ford pushed this dispersal even further. Not far from the giant River Rouge factory, but clearly separated from it, was a world of spacious lawns dotted with buildings housing mostly white-collar works, including the Ford headquarters, research laboratories, and other related facilities. In addition to complexes owned by single companies, the idea of a speculative park that would include numerous businesses was already launched at the turn-of-the-twentieth century at the Trafford Industrial Estates outside Manchester and at the central Manufacturing District in Chicago.

For companies that were not involved in manufacturing, notably insurance, the move into low-density landscaped setting was well underway by the 1920s. In Hartford, for example, well before Connecticut General moved to the suburbs, many of the largest insurance companies had already abandoned the downtown for large, landscaped campuses west of the historic city center. Was what happened after World War II really different in kind or just a shift in scale?

Another interesting opportunity for further exploration is the way suburban

shopping centers eventually became ringed with multiple office parks and other commercial buildings, creating what Joel Garreau memorably but somewhat misleadingly called “Edge Cities,” like Schaumburg, outside Chicago, or Tyson’s Corner in suburban Washington, D.C. These places are not featured in this book, presumably because they show that recentralization as well as decentralization accompanied the move of businesses out of traditional downtowns. This has been particularly evident in places like Silicon Valley, the discussion of which constitutes some of the most lively and evocative pages of this book. Silicon Valley is an increasingly dense and diverse urban region that may well be more typical of urban development in the twenty-first century than either dense traditional city centers or the landscapes discussed in this book.

Finally, it is striking how much the suburban developments described in *Pastoral Landscapes* mirror contemporary urban renewal programs that aimed at tearing down dense, old fabric, replacing it with more widely spaced buildings and extensive landscaping. It would seem to make sense to pair the building of the Connecticut General campus, for example, with the urban renewal scheme in downtown Hartford that created Constitution Plaza, with its striking headquarters of the Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Company on a landscaped plaza. Likewise, the transformation of the intensely urban jumble at the Pittsburgh Point into a set of office towers set in parkland seems to mirror exactly the impulses visible in many of the examples presented in this book. Moreover, even if the general trend during the postwar years was outward, it is conspicuous that some companies, for example Sears, moved the other direction, from outlying districts back into the central city. In other words, the suburban story told here seems to be part of a much larger story about the restructuring of the entire urban world with declining densities and a new taste for open space, environment, and landscape visible throughout.

It is this latter topic that is perhaps most intriguing. How is it that we have moved so quickly, at least by the standard of the millennial history of urbanism, from cities

that were made up of buildings that formed street walls that defined the relatively small open spaces between them, to urban areas that are mostly open space with buildings interspersed within it? Is this transformation, usually described as part of the aesthetic project of modern architecture or as a reaction to the automobile, actually something much more basic?

In the end, the comment that appears at the start of this book is never really revisited. Is it fair to think of the landscapes described in the book as America’s equivalent of Versailles? It would appear that the author wants to believe this but finds herself conflicted because of a need to express disapproval. In my opinion the evidence in this book does support the contention that some of these places may indeed be an American post–World War II equivalent of Versailles. That does not mean that they represent a just, humane, and sustainable system any more than Versailles did. We do not feel we need to account for the failings of Louis XIV or the *ancien régime* in France when we say that Versailles is one of mankind’s great achievements. Why not allow ourselves the right to say the same thing about these landscapes?

Then there is the other, more knotty question, about whether these places are ultimately good or bad and whether society is served by building any more of them. That kind of judgment requires a much larger inquiry than the author of this book could be reasonably expected to mount. However, it is a pressing question and deserves more attention. In the meantime, Louise Mazingo has given us a splendid introduction to a group of spectacular landscapes and a good many excellent insights into the forces that shaped them.

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Edward W. Wolner

**Henry Ives Cobb’s Chicago:
Architecture, Institutions, and the
Making of a Modern Metropolis**

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, x + 384 pp., 139 b/w illus. \$45, ISBN 9780226905617

Henry Ives Cobb (1859–1931) was well-born and well-educated in Boston. Following

European travel and his employment at the well-regarded Boston architecture firm of Peabody and Stearns, Cobb seemed set for a promising career in his hometown. Yet, instead Cobb moved to Chicago, where he developed an extensive practice and a large office. This period was followed by a move to Washington, D.C., and a diminished practice, and a final move to New York, with even less work.

This reversal of the usual pattern of career development from modest beginnings to final successes plays a role in Cobb’s diminished place in the history of American architecture. However, Cobb suffers from two additional disadvantages. First, in 1896, when Montgomery Schuyler published the monograph *A Critique of the Work of Adler & Sullivan, D. H. Burnham & Co., Henry Ives Cobb*, drawn from his Great American Architects series in *Architectural Record*, Cobb suffered from Schuyler’s assessment that Cobb’s work, while fine, was not characteristic of the distinctive commercial and suburban work of Chicago. This drift into critical irrelevance was reinforced by the emergence of a canonical Chicago School. Second, compounding our ignorance of the architect whose career began in prominence and distinction but ended in obscurity, Cobb’s archive is lost. Cobb’s reputation only began to be reversed after 1976, when the exhibition and publication *Chicago Architects*, edited by Stuart Cohen, appeared as an explicit rejoinder to Chicago’s official bicentennial publication, *100 Years of Architecture in Chicago*, edited by Oswald Grube and others.

More importantly for Cobb’s status is the recent book *Henry Ives Cobb’s Chicago*, in which the author, Edward W. Wolner, has accepted the challenge to bring Cobb, his career, and his context to a broad audience in a monograph of three major sections, roughly the Chicago, Washington, and New York periods of his career. A professor of architecture at Ball State University, Wolner has worked and published on the growth of Chicago since his PhD thesis on Daniel Burnham. With the support of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, which owns Cobb’s 1886 house for Ransom R. Cable, he has brought both expertise and experience to the subject.