

The Didactic Landscape introductory essay

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This special issue journal brings together, for the first time, articles that study the didactic landscape as an artefact from broad spatial perspectives with a particular emphasis on the nineteenth century to the present. The collection originated with a group of design historians who have a common interest in exploring meaning in the design of institutional landscapes. The essays examine how the parks or gardens of institutions express and reinforce their function and agendas. By its very definition, an institution has power over the spaces it inhabits and expresses distinct messages to the users of those spaces – it is a didactic space. The six articles define and explore a typology of institutional gardens and designed landscapes, conceived and designed with agendas, explicit or implicit, to advise, educate, or moralise.

Scholarship on the designs of institutional spaces is chiefly centred on architecture and has overlooked the role of the garden or landscape in the functioning and experience of the institution. A spatial understanding of an institutional building has enabled a study of institutional power and politics.¹ A study of the institutional garden and landscape expands this knowledge to include the role of nature and the outdoors in its design and uses. While the genealogy of institutional landscapes with their functional and metaphorical allusions to divine order and political power have been traced to Antiquity,² the institutional landscape, a didactic space, which became more visible and diverse with the growth of social and

political institutions such as museums, asylums and factories in the nineteenth century, has not so far been examined comparatively and culturally.

These essays contribute to the scholarly literature investigating meaning in landscape and garden design which has proliferated since the 1980s, stimulated by a body of work within cultural and historical geography, landscape archaeology and history.³ The collection also responds to more recent research from a variety of disciplines which has extended knowledge of non-elite gardens as 'sites of cultural contact'.⁴ Within this scholarship of multiple perspectives, debates about the relationships between landscape, power and politics loom large, for as Gailing and Leibenath have recently argued, citing Kenneth Olwig, a landscape does not just express a polity's values, conventions, customs and practices, but above all it is an expression of hegemonic power.⁵ Readers of these essays will be very familiar with examples of those in power using landscape design to impose their authority - from the processional routes of Antiquity, to Louis XIV's garden at Versailles, to General Motors corporate landscape in Detroit. These heroic didactic landscapes are outspoken in communicating their power.⁶ To understand the more nuanced layers of meaning contained within the institutional gardens and parks discussed in this special issue, authors have found not only Michel Foucault's work on institutional power helpful, but also his theory of gardens as 'heterotopias'.⁷ Foucault's ideas on heterotopia, discussed in a lecture in 1967 and finally published in 1984 shortly after his death, have been enthusiastically embraced by scholars interested in the contradictions inherent in the spaces of institutions. However, his notion of a garden as 'a sort of happy universalising heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity' has been less explored.⁸ Two of the essays presented here, have linked the idea of didactic, to Foucault's idea of the garden as a heterotopia, to understand

our underlying and time-honoured responses to the particular ways that design, objects and planting 'superimpose meanings'.⁹

Marc Trieb in his essay 'Must Landscapes Mean' (1995) identifies five 'roughly framed' approaches to landscape design, meaning and significance used by landscape architects and their critics: 'the Neochaic, the Genius of the Place, the Zeitgeist, the Vernacular Landscape and the Didactic'.¹⁰ It is not within the scope of this special issue to reflect on the first four themes, but what did Trieb mean by 'Didactic'? This approach, he says, is the one he finds most appealing as a designer - the idea that landscape design 'should tell us, in fact instruct us about the natural workings of history of the place.'¹¹ A Didactic design, Treib suggests, is sensitive to the Genius Loci, and at the same time critically explains and interprets the place so that the public is informed and understands its meaning in space and time.

In this special issue, we hope to amplify an understanding of didactic in relation to landscape through discussing the ways that designed space not only tells and instructs, but also requires, demands and controls particular attitudes and modes of behaviour. In doing so, we acknowledge that the fundamentals of both design and nature could be regarded as didactic, for the former shapes and informs our actions, beliefs, senses and emotions and the latter will take control if left alone. However, we suggest that distinctive forms and types of didactic landscapes appeared in nineteenth and early twentieth century institutions, shaped by changing social and spatial structures caused by industrialisation, and offering opportunity as well as imposing control. As the built environment expanded and competition for space put pressure on urban space, reformers fought to preserve or

promote new open spaces in an increasingly crowded urban realm. They built institutions, civic and private - parks, museums, factories, pubs, community gardens, hospitals - where landscape design and architecture created narratives of opportunity, underpinned by moral purpose and control. Supported by the church and working within reforming movements such as education and temperance, reformers tried to influence working class life by promoting 'rational recreation'. They discouraged activities they considered degenerate and corrupt, and created attractions and environments they believed to be morally secure and proper.¹²

The Victorian urban park has often been described as a didactic space, with its function to educate through its monuments, museums and galleries, its glasshouses and even its design and planting.¹³ These material forms of social control, often contested by those whose lives they attempted to reform, offered opportunities and empowerment within their frameworks of constraint. The didactic landscapes of institutions can bring enlightenment, a sense of place and belonging, a means to socialise, exercise or grow food. The didactic landscape of the institution can offer spaces to subvert or to protest in, to resist the dominant ideologies, as the Occupy movement so clearly illustrates. We hope that a greater understanding of the constraints and opportunities given by the spaces we inhabit, give us more agency in how we use, champion, or resist the kinds of spaces offered to us.

This special issue brings together a cross-section of didactic landscapes from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The six case studies from Japan, UK and the US, focus on a range of public and private gardens instituted by governments, entrepreneurs, public bodies and community groups, such as a museum, heritage village, public memorial,

factories, public houses and community gardens. The authors examine the ways in which changing social policy and historical events shaped the design, use and afterlife of these landscapes. Fiona Fisher and Rebecca Preston's essay on the public house garden in Britain during the inter-war years studies its design and use inflected by pub and alcohol reform, as well as commercial interest. They argue that while the intended design of the garden was to enable control and supervise customer behaviour, commercial intent and customer experience interrupted this notion.

Helena Chance's article studies how our private institutions have employed designed landscapes to promote civic and corporate responsibility and health. It compares the corporate gardens of Cadbury's in Bournville, UK, and Hershey in Pennsylvania, US, and highlights the complicated intertwining of commerce and consumption with idealistic intent embedded within their design and use. A study of the two corporate gardens highlights the ways in which the subjects in the landscape are commodified and commoditised. Chance approaches these landscapes as heterotopic – as sites where power, nature, consumption and technology coalesce. Both, Fisher and Preston, and Chance's articles argue that while didacticism in landscape design is intended to control and impose particular ideologies, a close study reveals disjuncture and fissures. They show how the performance of loyalty, belonging and citizenship is enabled, challenged and resisted in the institutional landscape.

Megha Rajguru's article studies the outdoor space as an extension of the institutional building and its interior space, designed for the subject to be one with nature, promoting bodily freedom, leisure and education, yet simultaneously controlled through its design and use. It examines the contemporary Horniman Museum garden in London, US, which forms

part of the museum's anthropology and nature trail. It argues that while the role of didacticism is to control bodily movement and construct ethnographic meanings, these meanings are, in fact, resistant to the production of cultures as historic. As a live entity, the role of the garden in this example is to produce the idea of coeval lives.

Similarly, George Entwistle's study of the Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede in the UK studies the role of the designed landscape in the production of myth and how an interrogation of the myth creates fissures within our reading of the landscape. Both, Rajguru and Entwistle's articles discuss movement through space, whereby the design of the landscape channels the experience of the visitor, creating particular meanings and narratives. Entwistle's article observes the 'latent meaning' in the landscape that mediated John F. Kennedy's controversial history. It examines the designer Geoffrey Jellicoe's intentions and approaches its current function from the perspective of symbolism and phenomenology. The civic landscape is a state-sponsored memorial to the US President instituted as a gesture of a transatlantic historic relationship.

Yasuko Suga's article examines the heritage landscape of the Omiya Bonsai Village in Japan. It approaches it as a green heterotopia, with complex and contradictory meanings. It critically examines the relationship between the design of the Village and the growing of Bonsai plants invested in nationalist and idealistic non-commercial sentiments with branding. In 1925, the Village landscape was designed as a didactic space with regulations aimed to create an idealistic 'clean, ordered and aesthetic' place. Yet, as Suga highlights, the principled ambition of the bonsai village, has, over the years been shadowed by market values.

The final example of the didactic landscape is the contemporary community garden.

Produced not by public or private institutions, but by community gardeners in community groups, the gardens contain similar ideological formations as institutional landscapes.

Amanda Rees and Bertram Melix examine educational, neighbourhood and therapeutic gardens in the Columbus-Phenix area in the United States. They trace the rise in community gardening and analyse their designs through the lens of Richard S. Schien's landscape discourse analysis. They argue that implicit in the design of the community gardens are ideals held valuable by communities.

The study of the designs of gardens and landscapes in each of these articles reveal ideologies at work and emphasise the important role designed landscapes play in institutional histories and practices. The design historical approaches undertaken by the scholars have brought to the fore complex entanglements of relationships between the patrons, designers, policy-makers and the subjects or users within the spaces. While the landscapes examined in this collection are all didactic, human agency, the part played by nature and conflicting social conditions, make interaction with them negotiable, producing alternative meanings than intended.

¹ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (London, Routledge: 1995); Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (London, Pantheon Books: 1977), first published by Gallimard, Paris, in 1975.

² Katharine T. von Stackelberg 'Meaning' in Kathryn Gleason (ed.) *A Cultural History of Gardens in Antiquity*, 2013 Vol 1 of Michael Leslie, John Dixon Hunt *A Cultural History of Gardens* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)

³ Marc Treib 'Must Landscapes Mean?', in *Theory in Landscape Architecture. A Reader*, ed. by Simon Swaffield (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 89 - 104 and Richard Muir, *Approaches to Landscape* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999).

⁴ James Beattie 'Gardens at the frontier: new methodological perspectives on garden history and designed landscapes', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 36/1, 2016, 1-4.

⁵ Ludger Galing and Markus Leibenath 'Political landscapes between manifestations and democracy, identities and power' *Landscape Research* 42/4, 2017, 337-348, citing K. Olwig and D. Mitchell 'Justice, Power and the political landscape: from American space of the European Landscape Convention' *Landscape Research*, 32, pp. 525-531.

⁶ For a discussion of how power is expressed in landscape through time, see Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press: 1998), pp. 78 (257-59).

⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (October 1984), pp. 46-4 available online: <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>. The essay was not reviewed for publication by the author and is therefore not part of the official body of his work. However, the manuscript was released for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Foucault's death in June 1984.

⁸ See for example Solmaz Mohammadzadeh Kive 'The Other Space of the Persian Garden' *Polymath: An Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Journal*, 2/3, Summer 2012, 86-96, Chris Steyaert, 'Queering Space. Heterotopic life in Derek Jarman's garden', *Gender, Work and Organization* Special Issue 'Sexual Spaces' 17/1, January 2010, 45-68.

⁹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 6.

¹⁰ Treib, 'Must Landscapes Mean', p. 92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹² Bailey *Leisure and Class in Victorian England. Rational Recreation and the context for control 1830-1885* (London, Methuen: 1987), p. 5.

¹³ One recent example being Carole O'Reilly's article 'A blot on the landscape. Civic memory and municipal parks in early twentieth century Manchester' *Landscape History* 38/2 (2017) pp. 63-75.