## The End of a Totalitarian Vision

The fragmentedness and openness of both the material and the social world makes us aware that unifying strategies of reducing the world under one vision, both in architecture and communication electronics, are destructive. We need a culture of respect for the diverse and with that comes the end of the totalitarian vision of old.

In 2015 the *Heritage Consulting Group* filed an entry for Bell's Holmdel laboratory as a historic site. This is fitting not only because Eero Saarinen's design has been an important masterpiece of Modernist corporate campus architecture but also because his plans are an expression of the spirit of a time that is long gone now: the abundant optimism in centralised corporate planning and an expert-only approach to solve societal problems through technology.

The philosophy behind Holmdel is not only outdated, it is also potentially dangerous. In an op-ed in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, the art historian and cultural theoretician Jörg Scheller analyses the world view behind right-wing terrorism. He argues that the danger of terrorists lies in their closed and internally coherent world view as well as in their willingness to use extreme violence to make the world conform to that image:

> We all are looking at the world through ideological lenses, but […][w]e know through reason and sensibility that our picture of the world is just a mosaic piece in the image of the world. As liberal persons we are searching for what John Rawls called an "overlapping consensus" between different world views. […] Right-wing terrorists on the other hand want to turn their image of the world into the world itself. They want to eradicate the difference between the image and the world, or, if you want, that between art and life […] It is therefore worth noticing that the first radical avant-garde movement of the

> 20th century, the Italian futurists, worked together with fascism in order to overcome the separation between art and life* (Scheller 2019, p. 42).

This struggle for a total conformity between art and life, or rather between artistic vision and the real world, is also visible in the designs of famous architects. Eero Saarinen is by no means a very radical person – he listened to the needs of the building's inhabitants – but he had a vision and a view of the world which he expressed through his buildings. If we add to that the world view of his client, namely that *The Bell Telephone Company* could improve society through its monopoly of "one universal service," we find that the Holmdel campus sought to express one coherent world view with little room for divergence.

## The Corporate Campus Lives on Today

*Figure 17: Apple Park, Sir Norman Foster (2018)*

> An image of Apple Park opens Karissa Rosenfield's reprint of Max Tholl's interview with Norman Foster at *ArchDaily*: Norman Foster's interview with The European: "Architecture is the Expression of Values".

On a more subtle level, such coherent world views, that emphasised a science knows best – or rather tech-company knows best – approach, are discernible in the contemporary campuses of Apple, Google, and Facebook as well. The corporate campus, whose architectural vision and material basis I have described above, is not merely a style of the past. The architectural might of that style lives on in the new Bay-View Headquarter of Google in Mountain View by Bjarke Ingels (BIG) and Thomas Heatherwick (Heatherwick Studio), in the new headquarter of Facebook in Menlo Park, and in the Apple Park in Cupertino, designed by Sir Norman Foster. All of these corporate headquarters are located in the Bay Area of California and exhibit the same bold architectural statement, a striking style with high-tech materials set in a green and tranquil environment.

Eva-Maria Seng describes the architectural vision of these corporate campuses by reference to the earlier buildings of architects such as Eero Saarinen. She

also fundamentally asks what kind of utopian world view is being expressed in these corporate campus buildings.

In her assessment Seng distinguishes between two different ideal types of utopian architecture. There are *archistic*, i.e. ruler-centred and centralised utopias, which find their architectural expression in large buildings with identical uniform units. The utopian idea behind them is a uniformisation of and control over the lives of the building's users. This architecture embodies a collectivist lifestyle (cf. Seng 2017, p. 386). Although not intended as a model for social control, Le Corbusier's Unité d' Habitation is an impressive example for that type of building.[1]

*Figure 18: Group of Slumless Smokeless Cities, Ebenzer Howard (1902)*

Howard's plan can be found at *Wikimedia Commons* under the title: "Garden City Concept by Howard". It was originally used in a 1902 reprint of Howard's "Garden Cities of To-morrow" by *Sonnenschein Publishing*.

The other type of utopian architecture Seng describes is the *anarchistic* type, i.e. the simple hut set in nature which then developed into the garden city. Ebenezer Howard further developed that model to scale it up for the industrial age (cf. ibid., p. 389). This type emphasises the small-town community as an anti-model to the sprawling cities. Another noteworthy trait of anarchistic utopian architecture is the use of impromptu structures and recycled materials which sometimes borders the amateurish. The architect Wang Shu for instance calls his firm the "Amateur Architecture Studio" and alludes to the "Chinese reality of spontaneous, illegal, and provisional house building"* (ibid., p. 393).

Modern corporate campuses encompass elements of both the archistic and the anarchistic type since they exhibit elements of uniformity as well as impromptu architecture. From a politically sensitive position it is important to note that with the link to utopian and dystopian models of society, the architectural styles lose their innocence. Now it is not so much the wonder and marvel at the technological advancements that companies like Bell and IBM promoted in the middle of the 20th century and the optimism they displayed in their corporate

1 Seng links Le Corbusier's building in Paris to Moissej Ginsburg's and Ignati Milini's *Dom Narkonfina* in Moscow.

campus architecture. Rather, such types of architecture are increasingly viewed from a critical angle as the mistrust in the tech industry grows, e.g. the fear of total surveillance and the misuse of data (cf. Lanier 2014). This potentiality of the corporate campus to be both a symbol for positive developments and for the growth of an industry built on personal data, evokes Bloch's dialectical materialism. The Google headquarters and the Apple smartphone can be both, beneficial and detrimental to society's advancement in how much they foster or hinder social cohesion or individual freedom.

We must therefore be very aware of the moments when the old company-knows best ideology is presented to us as the solution to society's problems. In their essay *The Californian Ideology* Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron argue:

> [At times] of profound social change, anyone who can offer a simple explanation of what is happening will be listened to with great interest. At this crucial juncture, a loose alliance of writers, hackers, capitalists, and artists from the West Coast of the United States have succeeded in defining a heterogeneous orthodoxy for the coming information age – the Californian Ideology. […] the Californian ideology promiscuously combines the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies. This amalgamation of opposites has been achieved through a profound faith in the emancipatory potential of the new information technologies. In the digital utopia, everybody will be both hip and rich (Barbrook and Cameron 1996).

This all-encompassing ideology of a "hip and rich" tech start-up-culture masks the existing social and economic inequalities which still exist, in California as well, and which are by no means alleviated through the advent of technology and the tech industry. The seemingly open and "free-wheeling" culture is not fundamentally different from the old corporate campuses on the East Coast. Rather, it follows the same tradition of large-scale planning and centralist infrastructure which tends to favour the entrepreneurs and lab engineers but not the ordinary city dweller. But it is to the people of the city that theology must answer. Thus the following third part will focus on the political implications of new approaches to materiality. This will have an impact on theologies, mostly in the tradition of the theology of liberation, as well.