Book Review of *Between Garden and City: Jean Canneel-Claes and Landscape Modernism* by Dorothée Imbert. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Kim Freeman

The idea of “greening” is of course central to our contemporary conception of the environmental movement. However, the word has a longer, and different, history. “Greening” or *verduration*, is also the term for the idea that that landscape is essential in urban planning. Such “greening” was one of the main tenants in the work of Belgian landscape architect Jean Canneel-Claes (1909-1989). In the lucidly written and beautifully illustrated *Between Garden and City*, Dorothée Imbert reconstructs Canneel’s career, revealing his connections with key figures, such as Christopher Tunnard, Victor Bourgeois, and Le Corbusier in the European modernist movement in architecture, landscaping, and urbanism. In doing so, Imbert firmly establishes Canneel’s importance within landscape architecture, as well as examines the broader social, political, and aesthetic contexts reflected in Canneel’s work. As such, Imbert’s book would be of interest not only to those interested in landscape architecture but also those interested in urban planning, the history of twentieth-century Europe, and modernism.

As a new discipline in Canneel’s day, landscape architecture occupied a unique space between architect and gardener, seeking not only to link the two but to carve out its own theoretical space, raising visibility with both the public in general and with architects. This effort to establish the profession is reflected in the founding of organizations such as *the Association Belge des Architectes de Jardins* (ABAJ). However, Canneel was unique in calling for an interdisciplinary approach to the profession which emphasized architecture, urbanism, and art, reflected in his decision to study at La Cambre, Belgium’s equivalent to Walter Gropius’ Bauhaus school in Germany, known for its focus on functional and simple design. As the first graduate of garden design, he emphasized landscaping as an art and a profession, explains Imbert.

Imbert demonstrates how Canneel viewed the garden as an integral part of architectural design rather than a separate feature or ornamental afterthought. Enacting modernist theory, Canneel was unique among landscape architects for stressing “the seamless transition between inside and outside” (29). Images of Canneel’s own house, his first “commission,” illustrate this symmetry

between indoor and outdoor space. One is reminded of shapes of Mondrian: linear rows of poplars, square patterns of flowerbeds, geometrically patterned walkways, wide windows and glass doors that join interior and exterior spaces, and roof terraces with windows that frame the surrounding landscape. Canneel's work reflects the modernist self-consciousness of form as well. Imbert argues that Canneel's use of axonometric views, drawings showing three dimensions but without perspective, "show things as they are known by the mind, not as they are experienced by the body," thus they are an intellectual construct. His drawings sometimes surpassed the actual gardens themselves in beauty. He even altered some of the images of the actual gardens in order to emphasize what the garden should look like. The drawings and images "stood as representations of, and as symbols for, the avant-garde landscape. . . .they recorded the garden as it should be, or should have been—beautiful, efficient, and occasionally productive" (59).

In addition to the focus on design, and also in accord with modernist architectural ideas, Canneel promoted the "functionalist" garden, which balanced "vegetation and architecture" and structured "space with function—with a special focus on productivity" (73). Specific examples include orderly orchards, groundcover that avoided mowing, playboxes that could be replaced with pools or flowerbeds as toddlers grew. Canneel's functionalism embodies ideological views of the structure of society: "Canneel's list of outdoor spaces reflected the period's concern for hygiene, ventilation, solar exposure, and exercise. Although the cult of healthy living was rooted in the Victorian era, the idea of architecture as a mechanism for improving health and the body developed in the 1920s and early 1930s" (33). While the functionalist design of Canneel's gardens declined in popularity during and after World War II, this belief in the role of landscape—the greening of the city—was still attractive to both anti-urban Nazis and urban planners reconstructing Belgium.

Canneel's career, demonstrates Imbert, also reflects the "shift in focus from the private to the public" during the 1920s and 30s due to modernization (107). He takes on fewer private commissions and becomes more involved in public projects, such as parks and cemeteries. While Cannell resisted the national organizations, he did work with Tunnard in the *Association Internationale des Architectes de Jardins Modernistes* in 1937. Core to their mission, notes Imbert, was the idea that "the well-being of society was tied to rational garden design, an idea that mirrored the ambition of modernist architects, to improve life through design" (116); they went so far as, in very modernist fashion, to publish a manifesto. Canneel's participation in public expositions, such as The Exposition of Waters in Liège in 1939, illustrate his shift from working with functionalist precepts in private gardens to the "greening" of public space.

After the war, retaliation against Nazi collaborationists resulted in the isolation of those in charge during the occupation. While Canneel didn't face direct retribution, his association with urban planning organizations during the war, as well as his hesitancy to join a number of professional organizations and his move to the Belgian Congo, led to his effacement from the annals of landscape architecture. Nonetheless, as Imbert's book testifies, Canneel's legacy is important to the history of landscape architecture: "From the garden to the 'rational organization of the city,' from the design of cemetery to that of factory, he devised a landscape system both timeless and of his time. True to his education as a design generalist concerned with the house, garden, city, and countryside, Canneel equated urbanism with the spatial planning of human habitat at all scales. All was landscape" (227). As Imbert notes, many of the issues central to Canneel's career remain pertinent, the recognition and role of landscape architecture as a discipline, and in the role of garden in the city. While Imbert's book doesn't outline specific ways in which Canneel's ideas might contribute to our current use of or understanding of the "greening" of public space and the environmental movement, the history she provides suggests how important this connection is.