There is a third question, however: Was Mariemont a community for wage earners? Rogers does not have a persuasive answer. The correspondence shows that Livingood intended the “town to be for all classes of people” (24), but did things turn out that way? Rogers wants to think so, and he points out references to “people of small means” (50) and the use of philanthropy to keep Mariemont “within reach of wage earners” (52), but his accounting of the occupations of household heads is anecdotal and other evidence sheds doubt on the affordability of the suburb’s housing. Lots sold for $1,800 to $3,600 and houses, “predicted to range from $3,000 to $7,000,” went “higher in actual sales” (177). “Rents were scaled from $25 to $120” a month (177), more appropriate for a middle-than-a-working-class budget. During the 1940s, Rogers admits, the “village gradually evidenced an upper-middle class population” (183). Livingood characterized residents as “a picked class, the discerning kind” (193), making Mariemont, like Forest Hills Gardens, sound like a planned, exclusive suburb. The issue is important because of what a planned, working-class community might have to teach us about affordable housing. Rogers strives but fails to make the case that Mariemont succeeded in any sustained way in providing working-class families the opportunity “to produce local happiness” (203).

Both Klaus and Rogers make special claims for the historic importance of their communities. In Forest Hills Gardens, the combination of “physical plan, architectural design, landscape treatment, and progressive real estate policy was unique” (145). Regarding Mariemont, Rogers claims that “in the United States, no real estate or neighborhood development had approached this one” (51). Such boasts have been the stock in trade of planned, exclusive suburbs since the post–Civil War era, and most have a distinctive feature or two on which to base the assertion. The question both books leave unanswered is what is truly original and valuable in the planning and design of the places under discussion. Neither Klaus nor Rogers can resolve this issue because they do not frame their studies sufficiently in relation to the scholarly literature on planned, exclusive suburbs and suburban planning history. Nor do they engage with precedents created by early planning professionals, such as H. W. S. Cleveland, or by enlightened developers, including J. C. Nichols of Kansas City Country Club District fame (1905) or Dr. George Woodward of Philadelphia, whose planned development in St. Martin’s (1903) Livingood must have known, since he commissioned housing groups from Woodward’s entire stable of talented architects.

Both Forest Hills Gardens and Mariemont contribute features of distinction to the long history of planned suburbs, to be sure. In the New York suburb, it is the town center that combines commerce, a transportation hub, parkland, and a range of attached housing. In the Ohio community, it is the integration of shops and housing in the high-density Dale Park section and of industry in the Westover section. Each place, like other planned, exclusive suburbs, can point to a dazzling array of design amenities, high-quality landscaping and architecture, and comprehensive planning. Assessing the value of what has been achieved in a planned suburb is a complicated matter, in other words. What, if anything, in our planned communities is actually unique? We must tackle these issues, but we can do so only if we engage with a wider range of scholarship, and think critically about what our definitions of planned communities and professional planners encompass.  

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Landscape

Marc Treib, ed.  
The Architecture of Landscape, 1940–1960  

This is the second of two collections of essays on twentieth-century landscape design edited by Marc Treib to have appeared in less than a decade. Given the ostensible comprehensiveness of the first in including the acknowledged pioneers in the field, one assumes that the second, restricted to a narrower time-span, is intended to treat material left to one side in the first volume, although the distinguished Swedish landscape architect/scholar Thorbjorn Andersen is represented in both publications with essays on different aspects of the Swedish modern movement.

Treib is experienced enough as a landscape maven to know that anything approaching a comprehensive history of twentieth-century landscape architecture can scarcely, as yet, be contemplated, let alone achieved. As he puts it in his introduction:

[This book] suggests the scope of efforts to design, on an internationally linked field, viable and vital landscapes around the middle of the twentieth century. The authors included demonstrate that the issues were complex, involving questions of home ownership, materials, artistic movements, political programs, educational curricula, relations to architecture and urban form, spiritual quests, mobility, and a nearly continual questioning and re-evaluation of landscape architecture in the lives of its users, makers and owners (x).

The texts comprising The Architecture of Landscape fall, broadly speaking, into two genres. A number of relatively normative historical essays fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the field for the period in question, hence Andersen’s
balancing of his emphasis on the pioneering work of the Swedish landscapist Erik Glemme in the first volume with his focus here on the essential, complementary contribution of Holger Blom, who was director of the exemplary Stockholm Park System from 1938 to 1971. Another group of critical, not to say polemical, pieces compels the reader to examine the more disturbing contradictions and sometimes even perverse impositions of landscape agendas in the mid-twentieth century, bringing attention to the aesthetic, ideological, and political connotations that invariably lie embedded in any approach to landscape.

In this respect, the three most provocative essays in the collection make one acutely aware of the spiritual gulf that still obtains between American and European scholarship. These are the two seemingly objective but ultimately ultra-liberal glosses on the evolution of American domesticity over the decades under discussion, namely, the essays by Catherine Howett and Dianne Harris, and Gert Groning’s brilliant but remorseless, informative critique of the vicissitudes of German landscape design before and after the catastrophe of World War II. It would be hard to imagine two modes of beholding that are as far apart as, on the one hand, Groning’s critical dismissal of the racially distorted Blut und Boden (blood and soil), fantasy-laden landscapes of the Third Reich, along with his admiration for the relatively unknown, socially democratic, scientific landscapist of the Weimar Republic, Georg Bela Pniower, and, on the other hand, Howett’s patrician championship of Elizabeth Lawrence’s Edenic upper-class gardens and Harris’s acritical assessment of post-1945 American middle-class suburban values as filtered down through what Treib calls the “plain modernism” of Thomas Church’s innumerable suburban gardens and the shallow, pitched-roof domesticity of William Wurster and Quincy Jones. While Harris is only too aware of the class-bound, even racially loaded values that were to inform Elizabeth Gordon’s influential House Beautiful magazine from 1941 to 1964—its antimodern stance on the hyperindividualized American house and garden—Harris is reluctant to draw any parallel between Gordon’s anticivic chauvinism and the reactionary, paradoxically protofascist values underlying the McCarthy era as a whole.

By way of contrast, among the more synoptic accounts of various national movements, mention should be made of the contributions by Philip Goad, Malene Haaxner, Alan Powers, and Rossana Vaccarino for the light they cast on the landscape cultures of Australia, Denmark, England, and Brazil, respectively, extending in each instance from the very early 1930s to around 1960. These essays feature a number of major landscape architects, including Robin Boyd, Karl Langer, Paul Sorensen, and Edna Walling in Australia; G. N. Brandt, Sven Hansen, and C. Th. Sorensen in Denmark; Sylvia Crowe, Geoffrey Jellicoe, and Christopher Tunnard in England; and Roberto Burle Marx, Waldemar Cordeiro, and Mina Kabin in Brazil. That most of the Australian pioneers were architects rather than landscape architects testifies to the retarded emergence of the profession in that country, although its adidact practitioners were none the worse for that. As though to stress the point, Treib has used Langer’s somewhat vulgar parody of Marx as the cover image for the book. Haaxner’s essay is particularly informative because it puts us in touch with a boldly generous, more Homeric aspect of the Nordic landscape that is all too easily ignored, especially as represented not only by figures like Brandt and Sørensen, who despite (or even because of) their neoclassical training used trees in a strikingly dense and sculptural way to shape space, but also by less well known, more tectonic figures who were expert at structuring the foreground of an architectural work, such as Sven Hansen or Arne Jacobsen, who gave a quasi-bonsai scale to his garden in Klampenberg (1950).

Alan Powers describes how British, post-1945 landscape policy emerged out of many converging influences, from the late cultivation of the British picturesque on the part of The Architectural Review in the 1950s to the emergence of a national landscape policy as concerned with maintaining agriculture and healing industrial blight as with the self-conscious cultivation of specific landscape settings. Powers notes, when touching on Brenda Colvin’s canonical Trees for Town and Country (London, 1947), written with Jacqueline Tyrwhitt and illustrated by S. R. Badmin: “Trees were almost a symbol of the spirit of reconstruction since it was noted that much felling had taken place during the two world wars and stocks needed replenishment” (70).

While Vaccarino does not add much to what we already know about the spectacular landscape achievements of Marx, save perhaps for the plug she gives to Kabin, the wife of the Russian émigré architect Gregori Warchavchik, for being an early pioneer of the Brazilian cactus garden, she introduces us to the subtle transcultural idea of Brasilitade, which is best summed up in her own words (229–30):

The notion of brasilitade, as discussed in this essay, should not be seen necessarily as the expression of the desire for a fixed cultural “essence.” In fact, rather than the result of a cohesive or reconciliatory practice of assimilation, Brazilianism can be the outcome of an ambivalent and polymorphic condition of identity. Expressing cultural difference from an established hegemonic or monolithic form of nationalism, this condition reflects the transposition, intersection, and overlay of multiple and often contradictory cultural modes and practices. The construction of cultural identity through the inclusion of diversity and difference is one of the most important themes of Latin American cultural discourse in postcolonial societies.

One of the more incisive contributions is Dorothée Imbert’s condensed overview of modern landscape in Belgium and France between 1922 and 1958, beginning with the new towns designed after World War I by the Bel-
gian pioneer Louis van der Swaelmen, who adapted and refined early British garden city models to somewhat different ends. In the first and most interesting part of her essay, Imbert focuses on the seminal Belgian landscapist Jean Clae Canneel, who with his British colleague Christopher Tunnard did much to establish a convincingly abstract modern garden syntax in the interwar years. In his heyday, Canneel made his name with an abstract, maintenance-free approach to garden design, brilliantly exemplified in his own house and garden realized in 1930 in collaboration with the architect L. H. De Koninck. Here Imbert points out that Canneel’s habitual use of his aerial axonometric enabled him to order precise swatches of plant material to play off linear formations of trees against orthogonal flowerbeds. Throughout the 1930s, Canneel dominated the scene in Belgium and internationally, overcoming the international prestige of the jardin à la française to establish—in 1938, with Tunnard’s assistance—the International Association of Modernist Garden Architects, modeled after the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, founded a decade earlier. Canneel’s work in the 1940s during the occupation was more pragmatic in character than his abstractions of the 1930s, even though he momentarily returned to his aesthetic mode in 1946 in a garden designed for his distinguished architect colleague Huib Hoste.

The collection of essays ends with Treib’s own contribution, which addresses the development of Japanese landscape design after World War II. In this uncharted domain, Treib shows us how symmetrical planning directly served the imperialistic ideology of the Showa regime, although occasionally he verges on overstating the case with a somewhat biased interpretation of specific examples. It is surprising, for instance, how little credit he grants Kunio Makeawa for the intelligently “revisionist” aspects of his new town plan for Manchuria of 1940. Far from a mere reiteration of Le Corbusier’s Radiant City, this plan was one of the first exercises in low-rise high-density housing and an ingenious reinterpretation of the American garden-city principles first formulated by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright for Radburn. Stressing how alien the character of the occidental public park was relative to the Japanese garden tradition, Treib is oddly reluctant to acknowledge those distinguished Japanese modernists of the pre- and immediate postwar period, who made extremely subtle efforts to integrate traditional Japanese landscape concepts with abstract spatial paradigms inspired by the Western modern movement. Thus, while Junzo Sakakura’s Kamakura Modern Art Museum (1951) is warmly appreciated for its reinterpretation of the Heian palatial style, the pioneering sensitivity of Sutemi Horiguchi’s synthesis of occidental and oriental paradigms, as evident in his Okada Garden, Tokyo (1934), is given rather short shrift. Treib is at his best documenting the transcultural Japanese-American exchange after the war, starting with Isamu Noguchi’s partially censored contribution to Kenzo Tange’s Hiroshima Peace Park (1949) and his fully consummated design for the garden surrounding Antonin Raymond’s Reader’s Digest Building, Tokyo (1951). He shows with considerable precision how these delicately hybrid initiatives came to a surprisingly early maturity in the garden attending Tange’s Prefectural Offices, Takamatsu (1958).

Treib, with the help of an array of emergent scholars in the field, now appears to be working systematically toward a comprehensive history of the culture of modern landscape in our time, in all its perplexing diversity. This is an undertaking of the most fundamental importance, of consequence not only to landscape architects and architects, but also to environmentalists of all stripes and powers, from politicians to ecologists and laypeople, for the fundamental issue today, at both a cultural and a sustainable level, is the “greening” of the planet. It is self-evident that not all landscape is literally green nor should be, but the key here is our overall sensibility, attitude, and know-how, to which landscape has much to contribute. I would go so far as to claim that it is the central metaphor today, and our only hope for mediating the apocalyptic conditions of the average megalopolis.

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Note