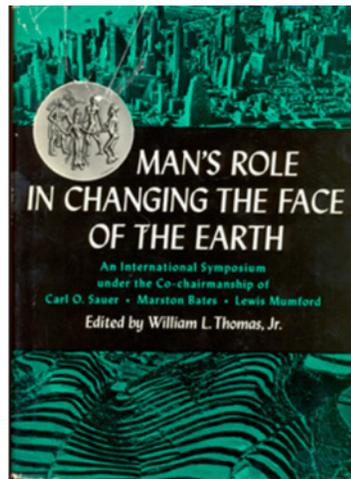


Preface

I FIRST BECAME aware of the impact humans were exacting on the Earth's ecosystems at Michigan State University. The year was 1958. I had heard of landscape architecture as a sophomore in high school and chose to major in it as an undergraduate because it related to my agricultural roots, my desire to make practical and functional things, my love of drawing and the study of nature. Soon enough I learned how much more was at stake.

One professor, Peter Frazier, insisted that all his students read a book that summarized the results of an international symposium held at Princeton University in 1955. The symposium was an interdisciplinary effort that emerged from the fields of anthropology and human ge-

ography; more than seventy professionals from twenty-plus disciplines and three continents explored the impact of human intervention on Earth's systems. The resulting report—*Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, edited by William L. Thomas Jr.—opened my eyes to how directly human actions had resulted in deforestation, erosion, flooding, desertification, and air and water pollution. That book, and Frazier's class, gave me a much clearer understanding of the broad scope, importance, and potential impact of landscape design.



The symposium itself was inspired by a book written nearly a century earlier—*Man and Nature*, by George Perkins Marsh (1864)—which looked at (in the words of its subtitle) “physical geography as modified by human action.” Marsh argued that past civilizations had brought about their own collapse by exhausting their natural resources. He warned his colleagues in the United States that we could share that fate.

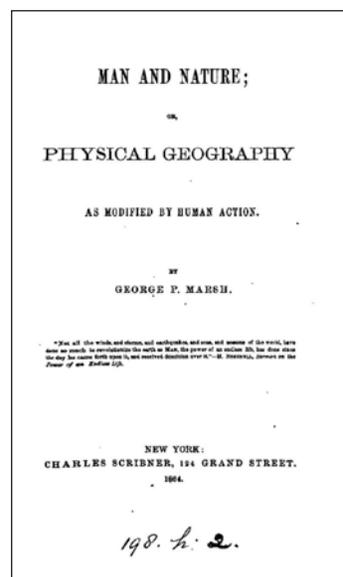
Around the same time that Marsh’s book prompted an era of conservation, Frederick Law Olmsted became renowned for addressing what were essentially engineering challenges with designs that created public parks and greenways. Boston’s Back Bay fens, for example, resulted from Olmsted’s assertive means of diverting sewage then flowing into a broad marshy area of the city. Olmsted understood that large projects, such as New York’s Central Park begun in 1858 with Calvert Vaux, needed to address social needs as well as aesthetic ones.

Olmsted was also an early conservationist; without him, Niagara Falls might have developed into a series of hydroelectric dams serving industry. He persuaded Con-

gress to set aside Yosemite Valley as a public reserve and later campaigned to preserve the Adirondack region of upstate New York. When he adopted the term *landscape architect* in 1863 to describe urban park design, he essentially founded a professional discipline, though people had been practicing design on the land for generations.

This multifaceted, interdisciplinary scope of landscape design is why its practitioners are well placed to address Earth’s considerable challenges. Landscape design is a holistic discipline, one that bridges civil engineering, architecture, land planning, agriculture, conservation, and, increasingly, environmental justice and human-influenced climate change. Indeed, the major issues of our time are fundamentally issues of land use: global urbanism, food shortages, the limits (and impact) of fossil fuel use, rising sea levels, and increasingly severe storms and droughts are all connected to our relationship to the land.

Since beauty is nourishing to the human soul, visual appeal is a legitimate purpose of landscape design, yet we face a far more substantial challenge than mere beautification. The life of the planet is at stake.



Title page from the
1864 edition.

It is my conviction that the human inclination to design—and the mental process described in this book—is essentially biologically driven. As human beings, we are elementally connected to the land and its processes. We are part of the ecology of the Earth. We are not separate from the ecological systems around us any more than we are separate from the human communities in which we live. The design of the land, therefore, must embrace one of the basic principles of bioethics: first, do no harm. Our work must understand what needs to be protected, which may mean not changing a place but conserving it. Further, our work must always look for ways to restore or repair sites.

Quality design is desperately needed in this technologically focused, culturally complex, and environmentally challenged world. The pursuit of quality design is difficult; it requires the designer to train the mind and develop diligence. At the same time, the design process requires using the both sides of the brain: one must be both critical *and* creative, logical *and* inspired. It requires that we write as well as draw. The designer must have a reverence for logic and maintain an open mind; they must have unbounded imaginations and be educators for an ill-informed citizenry.

I have found the field of landscape architecture and planning to be endlessly fun and deeply rewarding. I have dedicated my life not just to the practice of landscape design—responding to unique site conditions while meeting client requests—but also to teaching students of all ages a proven way to design with integrity. This is largely the reason for this book. I hope it provides the tools and procedures to sharpen *your* designer's mind.

There is as well a deeper and more personal motivation for this book. I have worked on and with the land from my earliest years. The roots of my love were nurtured on four acres of productive gardens that surrounded my childhood home in Michigan. I remember basking in wonder at the abundance and beauty of nature, even as I weeded and harvested the flowers and vegetables we grew. This led to work on an adjacent dairy and poultry farm at age 14, through which I developed an empathy with the land. No matter how humble the work, the caring expression of maintenance and management became a touchstone. I believe this expression of love is behind all high quality landscapes. Working intimately with the land—that up close and personal connection to the earth—is a gift, one that nourishes me to this day. Respect and love for the land lies at the heart of landscape design. May you be so blessed.

Late afternoon light makes the maple leaves translucent.