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"But where's the art?" I was startled by this reaction, of some readers, to my first book, *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design*. If the book was about sustaining health, safety, and welfare, was it, therefore, not about aesthetics? Their impulse to see the pragmatic and poetic as separate, or even contradictory, troubled me greatly, for it was my motivation to connect the two that had inspired and driven me to write the book. I was also surprised to learn how deep-seated was the resistance of some readers to considering cities part of the natural world; they were not persuaded that natural processes of air, earth, water, and life shape cities. I had failed to take account of how ideas of nature and what is "natural" stem from strongly held feelings and beliefs, how highly personal and varied these views are, and how persuasion is not simply a matter of marshaling compelling verbal arguments, but of reaching both mind and heart.

In response, I was determined to write an entire book about the poetic of city and nature, one that would fuse function, feeling, and meaning. I planned to derive this theory from places that exemplified it, and I hoped the new book would inspire the creation of many more, similarly successful places where people could feel, as well as reflect on, connections, and find them useful. But why propose a theory if argument alone fails to persuade many readers? Because the places I know about are so few and far apart and, further, are seldom perceived as linked. And because theory gives fresh meaning to old places, connects the seemingly unrelated, and guides action. Few people, even if they have seen both Glenn Murcutt’s design for the house in Bingie, Australia, and my proposals for West Philadelphia, would regard the two as analogues, but they are, even though one is built, the home of a single family, the other a plan that may never be built, for a neighborhood of thousands of families. The design for Bingie and the plan for West Philadelphia are connected by the designers' kindred way of thinking and working.

But, in the process of looking, thinking, and writing the book on poetics, I came to realize that the poetics applies to all landscapes, not urban landscapes alone, and to buildings, too, and that defining such an aesthetic theory demanded, first, the description and codification of a language of landscape. But, just as some readers earlier objected to the idea that city and nature are of a piece and that art and function are related, so now I encountered considerable resistance to the concept of landscape as language. Arguments put to me forced me to confront many difficult questions, to reconsider certain proposals, and to respond. This book has, in consequence, taken far longer to write than I ever imagined.
The language of landscape is the principal language in which I think and act; my conviction that there is such a language arises first from that fact. It is also the language used skillfully by designers whose work I most admire. My own work has been a laboratory, theirs a library for me, in exploring and defining the language of landscape. Visual thinking—photography and drawing—my primary mode of thought, was extended through response to other senses, then recorded in my journals. Writing, for me, requires a translation of images and experiences into words and phrases, then a converting of weblike (landscapelike) writing into prose in which sentences follow sentences, constructing a line of reasoning that others can follow. Personally, I find digital web-authoring, with its linked, embedded structure and display of color images a more natural medium of expression than any other. My lectures are always composed of two parallel essays: one spoken, one seen, with the visual essay structuring the verbal.

Landscape architecture has been my sphere of action and service, just as photography is my touchstone and way of knowing. The landscapes I help shape are collective projects most successful when others assume ownership. The landscape architect’s experience helps me see significance; the photographer’s disciplined, feeling way of seeing leads me to deeper insights. I try to see things fresh by ranging broadly, then gradually zeroing in, often drawn to a detail without knowing yet what the whole is, then coming to understand the whole through many significant details. Photographs prompt and push my thinking: I let them speak, work on my feelings and mind, and sort them as images first, seeking connections.

The Language of Landscape began this way.

Places are my primary data, and photographs and travel journals with written and drawn notes of sights, sounds, smells, and reflections are primary source material. For this reason I write primarily about places where I have been. Once, in the space of seven weeks, I traveled from a Philadelphia summer to an Australian winter, then back, in August, to San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Cape Cod, and then to Amelia Island, off the coast of Georgia, in September. The transect across climates heightened my sense of air’s weight, wetness, light, and earth’s texture, from Sydney’s hard, dry ground to Philadelphia’s soaked, soft, spongy soil to the grainy give of sandy beaches in Truro and Amelia. I appreciated why explorers like Lewis and Clark recorded their impressions of an unfamiliar world in vividly sensual terms, slogging through deep mud, the crunch of prickly cactus underfoot.

In an unfamiliar place, senses sharpen, a survival instinct; in familiar territory, senses dull, and it takes an effort to refresh them. Trying to read a foreign landscape is, for me, like reading Dutch, with English as my native language, Danish my fluent second, German limited: I may not understand everything, but I get the gist. Still, missing the meaning of a single key word or landscape feature can mislead. The language of landscape makes significant details stand out and helps me frame questions, but reading landscape deeply requires local knowledge. On foreign ground, one needs an interpreter.

I believe that we are imprinted with the landscape of our early childhood. I am a creature of the Eastern Deciduous Forest. Except for brief excursions into desert, prairie, and dry woodland, I have spent my life in the temperate forest of North America and Western Europe. I feel a sense of coming home every time I return to northwestern Connecticut, though my family moved away when I was two years old, first to Massachusetts, then to Ohio. Memories of my first place are layered: brief visits separated by long absence. I remember a landscape of steeply rolling hills and valleys, big rocks, swiftly flowing streams, thickly growing second-growth woods, houses and barns of weathered wood, stone walls, and white churches where my father and grandfather were ministers. The summer when I was eight and we drove from Cincinnati to stay for a month in Connecticut, I studied drawing with a local painter, sketching outdoors, in a nearby town, on a farm. A few years later, I was photographing river, rocks, and woods there. The light in those photographs is the low, weak light of November, and it is this light that I associate with the place, for in college and after Connecticut became, for my family, the landscape of Thanksgiving.

When I was six, we moved from Massachusetts to a suburb of Cincinnati, where we lived for the next twelve years. There my landscape broadened, progressively, from yard and street to neighborhood, town, city, and region. What I now know makes sense of what were mysteries then. There was a large vacant lot down the street with a meadow, a grove of trees, and a little stream—The Wilderness. I once dug a big hole there; as I dug, the dirt changed from dry, dark brown, to dense, yellowish brown, to sticky bluish-grey. One year, I drew charts of clouds. A bike ride away there was a forest with a creek whose bed was filled with tiny stone twigs and shells—fossils. Downtown Cincinnati was a twenty-minute bus ride away. There, green hills framed the Ohio, a broad, brown river that flooded the sloping stone landing where the Delta Queen, a steamboat like the one Twain piloted, was moored.

This book’s philosophical foundations, like its landscape roots, were imprinted in childhood. Dialogues—with people, places, and self, between thinking and doing—were how I learned to learn. I was raised by the Socratic method, led by questions through response to insight, taught to frame questions, in turn, and listen to the answers. When I read John Dewey’s Art as Experience in college and William James many years later, it was with a start of recognition, for I had absorbed the ideas, unattributed, as part of my family’s atmosphere. My relationship to Emerson and the Transcendentalists is also cultural rather than scholarly; the texts I read in Unitarian Sunday school, and the hymns we sang, were steeped in their ideas.

At seventeen, I lived for a year with a family on a small farm in Denmark and attended school, a gymnasium, in a nearby town. There I learned landscape as livelihood, following my Danish father around, helping to feed and talk to the pigs, milk the cows, hoe sugar beets, polish eggs. I watched sows giving birth, made them roll over when they lay on their babies, loaded grown pigs onto the truck.
from the slaughterhouse, pulled a calf out of its mother's womb when its time came. The only hot water was in the barn where it was needed to sterilize milk cans. There was none in the house, except in winter in a room off the kitchen. Mornings began with a cold shower; a hot bath meant hauling in water from the barn. I learned the difference between standard of living and quality of life, between nature as poetic idea and natural phenomena as complex, unreliable reality.

I went to college expecting to major in art only to find that in Harvard's Fine Arts Department one studied the history of art not its making. In sophomore tutorial, I learned to see, to read works of art—drawings, prints, paintings, sculptures, buildings (but not landscapes!)—without the aid of written texts. Original drawings, prints, and paintings hung in pairs on the wall, confronted me each time I walked into the classroom in the Fogg Art Museum: landscapes by Rembrandt and Van Gogh, portraits by Rubens and Ingres, others by Picasso, Klee, as well as by their students and forgers. I had ten minutes to examine one pair of works, five to present my findings and reasoning: What artist, time, and place? Both by the same artist, or not; study and finished work; master's work and student's copy? or forgery? The culmination of the year was a thirty-page essay on a single work of art: mine was on El Greco's portrait of Fray Hortensio Felix Paravicino y Arteaga in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Many short papers led to that final product: on materials and techniques, formal analysis, style, subject, iconography, relation to other works, provenance, significance. I found a book of Paravicino's poetry in Widener Library, published in Spanish in 1650, and held my breath as the librarian checked it out to me; as I remember, the last borrower had been in the 1800s. I fell in love with scholarship that year and often wandered among the stacks of Widener, surrounded by books in so many different languages, feeling the condensed knowledge contained there, taking books off the shelves and paging through them. I feel the same way, now, in landscapes layered with deep, varied history. There is no Widener, no British Library of landscape literature, though; the texts are dispersed in places, in landscapes, around the world.

Ian McHarg's book *Design with Nature* introduced me to landscape architecture. His manifesto in the catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania, where he was chairman of the department of landscape architecture, promised a career of action bridging the arts and sciences. It stirred, then lured me. In graduate school at Penn there were no textbooks or reading lists for most courses, but rather field trips within the physiographic regions of the Delaware River Basin—from Coastal Plain to Piedmont, Ridge and Valley, to Appalachian Plateau—where we dug soil pits, collected rocks and leaves, interviewed people, and learned to read landscape. It was a surprisingly small step from discerning differences of style and quality in the lines of Old Master drawings to reading line, shape, and structure in trees, rivers, and gardens, and then a longer leap to using this knowledge to design new landscapes. Understanding relationships between process and material, form, and space was the key. I knew little landscape when I started grad-
critics who recognize and value design that serves their needs and expresses their dreams. Furthermore, they are often quicker to grasp the devastating impact and potential value of natural features like buried streams than are the professionals responsible for planning the city. If community gardens are indeed communities, could the gardeners not apply their understanding of successful design and respect for natural processes to help plan the larger neighborhood and region? Watching, listening, talking, photographing, drawing, writing, I searched for a common language with which to shape and share visions for the future.

All my work—photography, writing, teaching, design, and planning—is devoted to helping people recognize the good and beautiful that exist in the world, to bolster and build from them, and to recognize the ugly and the dangerous, to avoid them. I want to demonstrate the commonalities among landscapes of natural beauty, those designed by trained designers and artists and those crafted by ordinary people, and to inspire the making of new places with extraordinary qualities and significance. And I want to trace the legacy of others who have built and written in this tradition.

This book is written out of my life as author and reader, performer and critic, artist and scholar of landscape, out of fieldwork and archival research. I use practice to develop and test theory, and theory to critique practice, alternating between engagement and detachment, passion and dispassion. Making things happen is a messy process full of unfoseen obstacles and opportunities, disappointments and joys. Unexpected events challenge theory, demand revision; refined, theory holds. As actor and author, I have both a pragmatic and a poetic sensibility. When I look at a designed landscape, I calculate the difficulty of the task, judge the intentions implicit in others’ deeds, applaud or condemn the risks they take, and admire the grace with which multiple demands are fulfilled. As an artist, I respond to light, detail, and presence with the empathy for living and nonliving things that landscape photography demands. As a scholar, I document the tradition within which I think and act, compare what other authors do to what they say, study the context of their actions and writings. Art and action push me at times to take poetic license or to venture beyond the point where the scholar might stop.

My conviction that landscape is language has startled some people and outraged others, but it seems natural to many landscape architects, for landscape is a language derived from the core activity of landscape architecture: artful shaping, from garden to region, to fulfill function and express meaning. The roots of this theory are strong, deep, and varied, grounded in many fields—anthropology, geography, geology, ecology, history, art history, literature, linguistics, and landscape architecture, among others. It is a radical theory: in the sense of being rooted in the basic elements of nature and human nature; in the sense of offering a fundamentally different perspective than from any one individual root; and in demanding and enabling radical change in how we choose to think and act.

Landscape architecture is a profession I discovered by chance soon after college. Most of my students come to it much later in life, often after other careers. Despite its scope and the significance of the discipline, it is, in many respects, an invisible profession compared to the related fields of architecture and engineering, and this reflects the greater problems described in this book. If this book inspires others to enter and contribute to this wonderful, crucial profession, I will be happy.
Prologue: The Yellowwood and the Forgotten Creek

Once a yellowwood stood by an old library, leafing, flowering, fruiting, setting seed; roots grabbed hold, sucked air and water from beneath a plaza of brick. Its skin-smooth silver trunk bore knobby limbs. Floppy leaves clung to long stems, catching wind, moving green shadows across red bricks. Students sat each spring under the yellowwood, listening to names named, glad for green shade, walked under it to the library, breathed musky June flowers, kicked yellow leaves of October across red bricks.

For many years the yellowwood grew; red stone blackened, the building decayed. Then men came one day to fix the library, piled stacks of tools, tiles, and sacks around the tree, sealing soil under bricks. Two years later, the library reopened, leaded glass gleaming, blackened stone brightened, furnace fixed. How elegant, people said. That fall the tree lost its leaves in September.

Next May, the yellowwood flowered early and profusely. Thousands of fragrant white blooms hung in long clusters; petals covered bricks, blewed across grass. How beautiful, people said. How sad, though. Several years' bud scars bunched up against each twig's growing tip. Abundant flowers signaled a dying, and seeds found no purchase in the plaza. People admired the tree and walked on; they had lost the language that gives tongue to its tale. Once a yellowwood stood. No more. And few knew why.

One day a street caved in. Sidewalks collapsed into a block-long chasm. People looked down, shocked to see a strong, brown, rushing river. A truck fell into a hole like that years back, someone said. A whole block of homes collapsed into a hole one night a long time ago, said someone else. They weren't sure where. Six months later, the hole was filled, street patched, sidewalks rebuilt. Years went by, new folks moved in, water seeped, streets dipped, walls cracked.

Once a creek flowed—long before there was anyone to give it a name—coursing down, carving, plunging, pooling, thousands of years before dams harnessed its power, before people burried it in a sewer and built houses on top. Now, swollen with rain and sewage, the buried creek bursts pipes, soaks soil, floods basements, undermines buildings. During storms, brown water gushes from inlets and manholes into streets and, downstream, overwhelms the sewage treatment plant, overflowing into the river from which the city draws its water.

Vacant lots overgrown by meadows and shrubby thickets near boarded-up homes and community gardens filled with flowers and vegetables follow a meaning line no one seems to see. In a school that stands on this unseen line, the gym floods every time it rains. Once a year, teachers take students on buses to a place outside the city to see and study "nature."

On a once vacant lot, brand new houses—red brick, yellow siding, green silver of lawn out front, gates open—rise in contrast to nearby older, shattered houses and land laid waste: "First Time Buyers, own this home for less than you pay in rent," a sign urges. The houses have been built by churches from coins and foundation funds, the land a gift from the city. How beautiful, people say. No one wonders why the land was free, why water puddles there, why the name of the place is Mill Creek.

Signs of hope, signs of warning are all around, unseen, unheard, undetected. Most people can no longer read the signs: whether they live in a floodplain, whether they are rebuilding an urban neighborhood or planting the seeds of its destruction, whether they are protecting or polluting the water they drink, caring for of killing a tree. Most have forgotten the language and cannot read the stories the wildflowers and saplings on vacant lots tell of life's regenerative power; many do not understand the beauty of a community garden's messy order. They cannot hear or see the language of landscape.

Architects' drawings show no roots, no growing, just green lollipops and buildings floating on a page, as if ground were flat and blank, the tree an object not a life. Planners' maps show no buried rivers, no flowing, just streets, lines of ownership, and proposals for future use, as if past were not present, as if the city were merely a human construct not a living, changing landscape. Children's textbooks, from science to history, show no nearby scenes, suggest or demand no firsthand knowing, just formulas and far-off people and places, as if numbers and language had no local meaning, as if their present had no past, no future, the student a vessel not an actor.

The yellowwood was the first yellowwood I ever saw, its perfumed flowers an amazing surprise my first year as a graduate student, the same year the hole and the river emerged near my apartment. The yellowwood, gone, is still on my daily path; the forgotten creek is now the heart of my work. Back then I knew nothing of dying trees or buried rivers. Now I have learned to read what sloping valleys and sinking streets tell, what bud scars say. Landscapes are rich with complex language, spoken and written in land, air, and water. Humans are storytelling animals, thinking in metaphors steeped in landscape: putting down roots means commitment, uprooting a traumatic event. Like a living tree rooted in place, language is rooted in landscape.

The meanings landscapes hold are not just metaphorical and metaphysical, but real, their messages practical; understanding may spell survival or extinction. Losing, or failing to hear and read, the language of landscape threatens body and spirit, for the pragmatic and the imaginative aspects of landscape language have always coexisted. Relearning the language that holds life in place is an urgent task. This book is dedicated to its recovery and renewal.