

## ***The Relationship between Place and Publishing***

by George F. Thompson

A series of three articles commissioned by  
the Vernacular Architecture Forum  
for publication in its  
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in 2010, 2011, and 2012

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Part One  
*Our Place in the World:  
From Butte to Your Neck of the Woods\**

Not very long ago, perhaps it was ten years or so, I read a piece in the newspaper that caught my attention: a boy from Harlem in New York City was being interviewed about his views on nature. He was quoted as saying that the blade of grass at his feet, the blade of grass that was emerging from a seam in the concrete sidewalk, was, to him, the embodiment of nature. It was all he needed from the natural world. Here was a sign of wildness along his city street, his home place. The blade of green grass, somehow managing to survive a half-mile away from Central Park to the south, provided that elementary presence of nature in the urban world that was his comfort zone.

In his interview with Bill Moyers that was broadcast on June 26, 2009 on PBS, W. S. Merwin, the acclaimed poet and translator of literature, also spoke of the importance of a blade of grass in everyday life: a blade of grass which, to him, conveys a deep message associated with the meaning of life that begins in the stars and then casts its shadow upon our yards and streets and neighborhoods and communities here on Earth. Merwin went on to say that, should he be given the gift of one last act on Earth, it would be to plant a tree. It would not matter where, though it might well be at his

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\* This is the first of three articles by George on the relationship between place and publishing. They were commissioned by Warren Hofstra for the *Vernacular Architecture Newsletter* (aka *VAN*), a publication of the Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF). This article first appeared in *VAN*, Number 123 (Spring 2010): 1 and 3-6. It was updated slightly for the GFT Website on October 17, 2012.

home on Maui, but it would provide a gift of hope on behalf of our Earth, even as the prospects grim for the health of the planet in this, *our* particular place in a human and geologic time.<sup>1</sup>

What about you? What is your blade of grass? Where was it found? How has your life intertwined with the places where you were born, raised, and educated, have worked, explored, and visited? How do these experiences influence the professional life you lead?

In June 2009, travels took me to Butte, Montana, happily with my wife, Cynthia, and our then eleven-year-old daughter, Haley. I was there to exhibit and sell Center for American Places books at an annual conference of the Vernacular Architecture Forum.<sup>2</sup> The keynote speaker was Edwin Dobb, a fourth-generation descendant of Cornish tin miners and Irish copper miners who was born and raised in Butte, left for a while, and then returned about fifteen years ago, about the time he began co-authoring and co-producing the feature-length documentary film, *Butte, America*, already revered as a documentary film classic about people's relationship to place.<sup>3</sup>

Dobb, in his eloquent and persuasive presentation, showed a slide of Butte during its heyday, when it was the world's largest underground mine and a city of 90,000, in which ninety percent of its people were males under

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1. See W. S. Merwin, *The Shadow of Sirius* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2008), which won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. To hear and see the interview, go online to [www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06262009/profile.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06262009/profile.html).

2. The Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF) is an academic and professional group of about 800 members whose work and careers surround the understanding and sometimes preservation of historic buildings and landscapes but with a twist: with an emphasis on the commonplace; that is, the vernacular or common places where most of us live and work.

3. The film premiered on Saturday, January 17, 2009, at 8:00 p.m. MST in the Mother Lode Theater in downtown Butte. Its television premiere was on the "Independent Lens" series on PBS, broadcast October 20, 2009.

twenty-five and most of them foreign-born and most of them working in the mines. Butte was rightfully called the "Pittsburgh of the West." It was, after all, the first American metropolis in the Interior West to be created solely for the purpose of extracting copper, gold, lead, molybdenum, silver, zinc, and other key ingredients that made possible an emerging middle-class way of life in the United States of America that included such modern discoveries as the telephone—and the telephone was thirsty for copper.

In showing historic photographs by some of the world's greatest-ever photographers, Dobb revealed images that one could easily mistake for Midtown Manhattan at night during the 1930s and 40s. Everything about the photographs made in downtown Butte suggested that this was a real urban place, rough-and-ready but full of glitter and promise and red lights, *because of* the relationship between the home and the workplace and jobs and ethnic enclaves that were part and parcel of the new America. Finns, Irish, Slavs, you name the group from Europe, they were all there, along with their respective brand of religion and politics, attitude and drink.

Dobb made special note of one photograph by Russell Lee (1903–1986), one of the now-famous FSA (Farm Security Administration) photographers who journeyed to Butte during the New Deal. In the right frame was a classic worker's house, two-story and solid. To the left, in the foreground, appeared a young girl of about four or five. She was playing just outside the fenced-in yard—an early challenge to authority, Dobb conjectured, perhaps an early imprint of the pioneering unionism that was prevalent in the city. Behind her, behind the picket fence and *her* few blades of grass, in an adjacent side-yard, hung the laundry, drying in the sunny but dusty sky with a slight breeze evident in the billowing clothes. Behind all of this activity, in the upper left quadrant of the picture, was the massive head frame of the active mine, where the girl's father and very likely her

grandfather, uncle, and older cousins were working deep underground, where there were 10,000 miles of tunnels under five square miles of surface-ground.

The relationship between work and home was "natural," Dobb claimed. Like the lad's street in Harlem, this place was Edwin's familiar ground; he and his boy friends would scamper in and out of Butte's renowned residential and industrial enclaves, which rubbed against each other, as if no other form of living existed anywhere else on the planet. It was fun living in Butte, he said, but one needed to learn quickly how to run away from security guards at the mine and how to jump fences to escape capture like a deer.<sup>4</sup>

And so the autobiography of a place such as Butte is intertwined with the autobiography of a human life such as Edwin Dobb's. Perhaps this connection explains why some servicemen who served in the Pacific, European, or African theaters during World War II came home, took advantage of the GI Bill, and majored in geography. They wanted to learn more about the places where they had engaged in war and ended up in universities or, in J. B. Jackson's case, as independent scholars/writers.<sup>5</sup> Some of them became our authors. Other authors, who later served in Vietnam, have said that visiting the gardens of Kyoto in Japan saved them from the psychological burdens of that war, literally keeping them alive spiritually during their time of leave, preparing them for a return to the war

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4. To understand Butte during its heyday, see Ivan Doig, *Work Song* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).

5. John Brinckerhoff (J. B.) Jackson (1909–1996) was the founder and publisher of the landmark *Landscape* magazine (1951–1968) and the author of many seminal essays and influential books about architecture, geography, landscape, and the evolution of place. His work was key in making "landscape studies" a legitimate academic and artistic field of study. Jackson's influence on photographers is especially noteworthy.

zone and combat. And they became enthralled with the idea that a landscape—even a garden in Kyoto—can heal and inspire, and so they, too, came home, took advantage of financial aid programs, and became landscape artists and photographers in addition to historians and geographers.

My earliest recollection for wanting to learn more about *landscape* and *place* is of an experience my brother, David, and I had one summer when we were boys. The family was loaded down in a maroon 1963 Chevrolet Impala, headed from our home in Connecticut for Tennessee and Alabama to visit my mother's family. Interstate 81 had recently opened in Virginia—replacing U.S. 11 as the main highway and creating a literal slice through the lush, verdant Shenandoah Valley that behaved, at least to us, much like a ride in an amusement park—and David and I spent hours in the car's back seat interpreting with pad and crayons the farm landscapes and buildings and crop rotation arrangements we could see plainly. We were enamored with the land, more with how it worked than with the scenery, though admittedly it is hard to separate the two. We were old enough to comprehend color and shadow and two-dimensional scale and a beauty in the land's organization; its purpose and design were transformed with great concentration to colorful drawings on paper, which we proudly presented to our parents in the front seat. In hindsight, that was *landscape study*.<sup>6</sup>

After returning home from twelve magnificent days in Butte, western Montana, and northwestern Wyoming with Cynthia and Haley—where in Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks we stayed in the great historic lodges and saw grizzly bear, coyote pups, deer, elk, moose, ground squirrels, yellow marmots, eagles, hawks, a great horned owl, pelicans,

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6. With the exception of a few tweaks, this paragraph is nearly identical to the one I wrote in *Landscape in America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 289.

swans, great blue herons, and even a wolf chase an antelope at full speed directly in front of our car—I once again turned for inspiration and reflection to one of the great American land classics, the memoir by Gretel Ehrlich, first published in hardcover in 1985 and now in its 34th paperback printing. Its opening

chapter shares the book's title, *The Solace of Open Spaces*. Everyone has favorite memoirs that depend in part on the presence and influence of place; this happens to be one of my favorites. Here's a sampling (presented in italics) of how a place—Wyoming—can transcend physical and cultural geography and intertwine with one's self:

*It's May and I've just awakened from a nap, curled against sagebrush the way my dog taught me to sleep—sheltered from the wind. A front is pulling the huge sky over me, and from the dark a hailstone has hit me on the head. I'm trailing a band of two thousand sheep across a stretch of Wyoming badlands, a fifty-mile trip that takes five days because sheep shade up in hot sun and won't budge until it's cool. Bunched together now, and excited into a run by the storm, they drift across dry land, tumbling into draws like water and surge out again onto the rugged, choppy plateaus that are the building block of this state.*

*The name Wyoming comes from the Indian word meaning "at the great plains," but the plains are really valleys, great arid valleys, sixteen hundred square miles, with the horizon bending up on all sides into mountain ranges. This gives the vastness a sheltering look.*

*Winter lasts six months here. Prevailing winds spill snowdrifts to the east, and new storms from the northwest replenish them. This white bulk is sometimes dizzying, even nauseating, to look at. At twenty, thirty, and forty degrees below zero, not only does your car not work, but neither do your mind or body. The landscape hardens into a dungeon of space. During the*



winter, while I was riding to find a new calf, my jeans froze to the saddle, and in the silence that such cold creates I felt like the first person on earth, or the last.

Today the sun is out—only a few clouds billowing. In the east, where the sheep have started off without me, the bench-land tilts up in a series of eroded red-earthed mesas, planed flat on top by a million years of water; behind them, a bold line of muscular scarps rears up ten thousand feet to become the Big Horn Mountains. A tidal pattern is engraved into the ground, as if left by the sea that once covered this state. Canyons curve down like galaxies to meet the oncoming rush of flat land.

To live and work in this kind of open country, with its hundred-mile views, is to lose the distinction between background and foreground. When I asked an older ranch hand to describe Wyoming's openness, he said, "It's all a bunch of nothing—wind and rattlesnakes—and so much of it you can't tell where you're going or where you've been and it don't make much difference." John, a sheepman I know, is tall and handsome and has an explosive temperament. He has a perfect intuition about people and sheep. They call him "Highpockets," because he's so long-legged; his graceful stride matches the distances he has to cover. He says, "Open space hasn't affected me at all. It's all the people moving in on it." The huge ranch he was born on takes up much of one county and spreads into another state; to put 100,000 miles on his pickup in three years and never leave home is not unusual. A friend of mine has an aunt who ranched on the Powder River and didn't go off her place for eleven years. When her husband died, she quickly moved to town, bought a car, and drove around the States to see what she'd been missing.<sup>7</sup>

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7. Gretel Ehrelich, *The Solace of Open Spaces* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 1–2.

*I came here four years ago. I had not planned to stay, but I couldn't make myself leave. John, the sheepman, put me to work immediately. It was spring, and shearing time. For fourteen days of fourteen hours each, we moved thousands of sheep through sorting corrals to be sheared, branded, and deloused. I suspect that my original motive for coming here was to "lose myself" in new and unpopulated territory. Instead of producing the numbness I thought I wanted, life on the sheep ranch woke me up. The vitality of the people I was working with flushed out what had become a hallucinatory rawness inside me. I threw away my clothes and bought new ones; I cut my hair. The arid country was a clean slate. Its absolute indifference steadied me.<sup>8</sup>*

*Space has a spiritual equivalent and can heal what is divided and burdensome in us. My grandchildren will probably use space shuttles for a honeymoon trip or to recover from heart attacks, but closer to home we might also learn how to carry space inside ourselves in the effortless way we carry our skins. Space represents sanity, not a life purified, dull, or "spaced out" but one that might accommodate intelligently any idea or situation.*

*From the clay soil of northern Wyoming is mined bentonite, which is used as a filler in candy, gum, and lipstick. We Americans are great on fillers, as if what we have, what we are, is not enough. We have a cultural tendency toward denial, but, being affluent, we strangle ourselves with what we buy. We have only to look at the houses we build to see how we build against space, the way we drink against pain and loneliness. We fill up space*

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8. Ibid., 3-4.

*as if it were a pie shell, with things whose opacity further obstructs our ability to see what is already there.*<sup>9</sup>

The autobiography of a place intertwined with the autobiography of a person . . . that is an obvious lesson in comprehending our place in the world. We are born, we grow up, we go to school, we pursue jobs, careers, relationships, partnerships. We learn from our environments, even as we deal with our DNA. We, hopefully, listen to those closest to us and to the so-called sounds of silence, even as we know there is no absolute silence in cities or in nature.

So listen and look around you—to your own heart beating and your own lungs sighing; to the young girl in Butte learning how to play in her yard; to the young boy in Harlem looking at an urban world as if it were a natural oasis; to the crickets and bird chatter of summer and to the aspen and cottonwood crackling in an autumn breeze; to your own voice and its passionate seeking; to your own blade of grass.

My world is one of family and friends, and I've ended up being a bookman. But I also love to read, to write, to travel, to take photographs, to listen to music, to garden, to be alive, to contemplate through my publishing career the interaction between our built and natural and social environments. Our place in the world depends on many factors, but we are inescapably a part of it. How we translate our sense and knowledge of *place* into our everyday lives and professional careers certainly affects the way we choose to be remembered. Thus, it is especially meaningful to work with authors who find ways to integrate autobiography into their respective works of art, literature, and scholarship. Take, for instance, a sampling (presented in *italics*) of Andrew S. Dolkart's award-winning biography of a tenement

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9. Ibid., 14–15.

house in New York City, in which he writes:

*I trace my ancestry back to the Mayflower. Not to the legendary ship that brought the Pilgrims to Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, but to the more prosaic tenement on the southeast corner of East Broadway and Clinton Street named the Mayflower, where my father was born in 1914 to Russian-Jewish immigrants. The Mayflower, with its name carved in the frieze of its entrance portico, was built in 1907—commissioned by a Jewish developer and designed by Jewish architects, with apartments rented to poor Jewish immigrants. Yet somehow it is also a metaphor for the experience of immigrants and the children of immigrants from many backgrounds as they became part of the fabric of American life. Almost 100 years after its construction, the Mayflower and nearby Lower East Side tenements continue to house new immigrants, many from China, who face some of the same challenges as did their predecessors.*

*The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, housed in a tenement at 97 Orchard Street, celebrates the individuality of the immigrants who came to New York City in order to recreate their own lives and those of their families and the universality of the immigrant experience from the mid-nineteenth century to today. The museum examines the lives of individual immigrants of the past—Irish, Germans, Jews, Italians, and others—each of whom contributed in a small way to New York City's diverse character, while also serving the educational needs of current immigrants who continue to invigorate the city.<sup>10</sup>*

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10. Andrew S. Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Santa Fe and Staunton: The Center for American Places, 2006), vii.

Having himself grown up in a tenement house in New York City provided Dolkart with that extra-special incentive in coming to know the life-history of the tenement house at 97 Orchard Street and why it is not only a special place unto itself—with its own architectural ingredients and memories of life within—but also emblematic and representative of a type of residence for immigrants to America's largest city. The layers of architectural information that Dolkart provides integrates well with the social histories he reveals of the tenement's dwellers, allowing the reader to comprehend the relationship between the autobiography of a building and its people and the biography of a place: Lower Manhattan.

Most authors share with Edwin Dobb and Gretel Ehrlich and Andrew Dolkart a personal investment in their scholarly, literary, or artistic work. And they seek to find that necessary balance between observation and imagination, archival and field work, artistry and analysis, storytelling and picture making, social history and personal perspective. Because our understanding of place must contend with the full range of settings—urban, social, rural, and wild—and of scale—from dwelling place to planet Earth—knowing our place in the world is a jumping off point for the creation of memorable work.

## Part Two

### *Getting the Word Out through Books\**

Imagine for a minute that you live in a world without books. Imagine that bookstores and libraries do not exist, that there is only television and the screen on your personal computer or iPad or other reading device with which to learn (valuable in their own right as they may be). Imagine how your life would change if you did not have the reward and pleasure of reading, and re-reading, the following classics: *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, *Storyteller* by Leslie Marmon Silko, *The City in History* by Lewis Mumford, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Design with Nature* by Ian McHarg, *Arctic Dreams* by Barry Lopez, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* by Aldo Leopold, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Americans* by Robert Frank, *The Solace of Open Spaces* by Gretel Ehrlich, *Nature's Metropolis* by William Cronon, *My Ántonia* by Willa Carther, *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, *The Outermost House* by Henry Beston, *The New West* by Robert Adams, or the collected poems of Elizabeth Bishop, Gwendolyn Brooks, Emily Dickenson, W. S. Merwin, Mary Oliver, and Gary Snyder.

I could go on and on with such a list. So could you. Although I cannot imagine a world without books, we live in a time when the welfare and even survival of book publishing (in particular, the scholarly book) is questioned weekly, if not daily, in the print and electronic media. Is the book dead?

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Absolutely not. Is there value in books getting the word (or picture) out?  
Absolutely: Books inform, books inspire, and books enlighten.

The book, as an artifact, also matters. For starters, even when a publisher is contemplating the release of an electronic book, a minimum number of official copies (often 75–150) is printed on acid-free paper and professionally bound for archival use by the Library of Congress and other libraries, archives, collections, and outlets. More to the point, even as e-commerce and e-books have opened up a new marketplace for publishers, booksellers, and the IT (Information Technology) industry, the printed and bound book that is designed well and produced beautifully seems to be of increasing importance and value. This holds true especially for the illustrated book. Authors, booksellers, book collectors, and general readers really appreciate the way a book is designed and produced, and this separates certain presses from others.

The book, as an artifact, is not going away, but people are learning to read and to produce books differently because of computer technology. The change has been rapid: about twenty to twenty-five years. When I began my book career as an assistant acquisitions and paperback editor at the Johns Hopkins University Press in 1984, all manuscripts were prepared on a typewriter (or even handwritten), copyedited with a colored pencil, cleaned up on a typewriter, and then typeset by hand, a medieval practice with up-to-date machinery used for printing and binding. By the time I founded the Center for American Places in 1990, most manuscripts at Johns Hopkins and other university presses were prepared on a computer and then copyedited, cleaned up, and typeset electronically. The most recent technological innovation in book publishing and the Computer Age is the digital reader: notably the Sony Librie (introduced in 2004), Kindle (2007), Nook (2009), and Nook Color (2010). These devices are the new pioneers in how

publishers present a book, and hopefully improvements will continue to be made to accommodate and improve high-end reproduction of artwork for the illustrated e-book.<sup>1</sup>

Even as the book as an artifact is not endangered, its share of the marketplace, industry-wide, is in decline; e-book sales are making up, to greater or lesser extent, the difference, at least with trade and professional publishers leading the way.<sup>2</sup> Marketing connections to Websites and the Internet are also of increasing significance in the selling and promotion of the book, whatever the format, because sometimes the best way to promote and sell a book is through social media, electronic advertising, and getting to know the author. As new technologies for reading books develop, publishers will be required to adjust to any new challenges and treat them as opportunities for promotion, publicity, and sales to their core markets.

During my twenty years as the president and publisher of the Center for American Places, we strove every day to make a difference through the books we developed and brought to publication under our own imprint and in association with twenty-four publishing partners. Our mission was simple and uncomplicated: to enhance the public's understanding of, appreciation for, and affection for the spaces and places that surround us, as revealed in our natural, built, and social landscapes. The mission was derived, in part, as a response to a pivotal statement provided by geographer/writer Yi-Fu

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1 An earlier example of technological innovation in book publishing is the audio book that emerged out of the New York City trade houses during the 1980s and cultivated an important niche in the marketplace, especially for commuters and the visually impaired.

2. It is important to recognize that some university presses aggressively entered the e-book market but found sales to be disappointing after a few years. Why? It turns out that most readers who buy a university press book prefer to own a hard copy, once again confirming the importance of the book as an artifact.



Tuan, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, when he accepted my invitation to become a founding member of the Center's Board of Directors. Yi-Fu issued forth the following challenge:

"Americans are woefully ignorant of geography and of place—ignorant, that is, of the natural and humanly constructed worlds that have nurtured us, inspired us, and sad to say, too often frustrated us. It is hard to imagine concretely how we can envisage the good life (the humane life) and plan for the future, unless we have some clear idea as to the sort of places that we wish to exist."<sup>3</sup>

At the Center for American places we were guided by the belief that books, especially illustrated books, provide an indispensable and affective foundation for comprehending—and caring for—the places where we live, work, commune, and explore. Books live. Books endure. Books make a difference in how we perceive and come to know land and life. Books are gifts to civilization. Again, imagine a world without the books mentioned above and the many other titles that not only engage us through the knowledge and insights they convey, but also the means by which we can celebrate life and even improve the quality and health of our communities, hamlets, towns, cities, and regions in this country and abroad.

Books have the uncanny ability to get a message out, and once published their impact can be great. Take, for instance, *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson. Do you believe for one moment that this book was irrelevant to the welfare of our environment and to the safety of our wildlife and our foods? Or take, for instance, *Design with Nature* (1969) by Ian McHarg. Do you believe that contemporary city and regional planning

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3. Private correspondence between Yi-Fu Tuan and GFT, 1990.

throughout the world would exist as it does today without this book?<sup>4</sup> Consider the impact of *The Americans* (1958) by Robert Frank and *The New West* (1974) by Robert Adams on photography during the past fifty years or *Greenways for America* (1990) by Charles E. Little, with which we had a hand in developing and bringing to publication through Johns Hopkins. Would the modern greenway movement in America have taken off as it has without this book? Unlikely. Even in the small city where I used to live—Harrisonburg, Virginia, in the beautiful but conservative Shenandoah Valley—local citizens were able to enlist the support of businesses, community leaders, government officials, philanthropists, and private property owners to establish the Blacks Run Greenway through the heart of town and into the surrounding county. *Greenways for America*, in conveying the historical precedents of greenway developments and sharing the more recent success stories of the past forty years (from Raleigh, North Carolina, to St. Louis and San Francisco), provided the necessary confidence in allowing Harrisonburg as a community to join the twenty-first century in this kind of landscape celebration, preservation, and in-town redevelopment. A visit to downtown Harrisonburg today is a far richer experience than before the greenway was established there.

Of course, *landscape* and *place* are complicated terms whose meanings have evolved from their traditional core roots. *Landscape*, for example, to the chagrin of some purists and art historians, is much more than a pastoral

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4. And, as an aside, did you know that it was McHarg who advocated in this book for the immediate development and application of a geographic information system, or database, for future planning initiatives, the very G.I.S. (Geographic Information Systems) initiatives that today dominate city and county planning agencies and even academic departments such as geography? See page 28, note 4, for a definition of G.I.S.

view or vista of rural scenery with linguistic ties to the Middle Dutch word *landschap* and with artistic ties to the landscape renderings by Rembrandt and others. Landscape study, in the tradition of J. B. Jackson (1909–1996), involves a complicated array of scholarly, literary, and artistic interests focused on the interpretation of the various physical and cultural components that constitute a place, space, or region—to the point where scholars, writers, and artists have a responsibility up front to delineate their own meaning and usage of the term in order not to confuse or overpromise in their respective analysis or viewpoint. Nonetheless, the landscape—whether urban, social, rural, or wild—is grounded in the land.

*Place*, on the other hand, has fewer restrictions placed on it, and to some it is a more democratic evocation of what *landscape* can mean. The opportunity for such freedom lies in the notion of scale. For that reason, during the past three decades I have developed and brought to publication nearly 400 books (which have won more than 100 best-book awards, honors, and prizes) about various kinds of places—from the alleys and great urban parks of Chicago to the Civil Rights memorials of the American South, from the suburban backyards and jackrabbit homesteads of California to the architectural history of Sag Harbor on Long Island, from the sacred lands of Indian America to the neon signs of Las Vegas, from the beautiful Sandhills of Nebraska to the urban fabric of New Orleans, from an immigrant tenement house in Lower Manhattan to Frank Lloyd Wright's "Gardener's Cottage" in historic Riverside, Illinois, from the building of Route 66 and America's newest interstate in western North Carolina to the completion during World War II of Alaska's Alcan Highway by the African-American 97th Army Corps of Engineers regiments. *Place*, then, as a concept, embraces *landscape* even as it allows for greater latitude (and longitude) in the areas of scholarly, literary, and artistic inquiry.

The original source of all geographic knowledge about *landscape* and *place*, according to geographer Cotton Mather (1918–1999), is, not surprisingly, to be found in the very places where we live, work, commune, and explore.<sup>5</sup> They are right before our eyes and other senses. Place-based books that do not rely on field research and field observation often miss the point. Cotton preached that message far and wide on all seven continents right up to the last years of his productive life.

After all, landscapes and places, as physical realities, do not lie. They lay before us as evidence of our deeds, aspirations, and shortcomings. If we fail to appreciate our respective geographies—those natural and humanly constructed worlds that represent Earth and our personal homes—then we are doomed to repeat the environmental and imperialist failures of other cultures and nations, both ancient and (unfortunately) contemporary. Through place-based study, through the development and publication of place-based books, we give ourselves (as individuals and as a part of the community and region in which we live) the chance, the very opportunity, to comprehend and appreciate land and life both here in North America and elsewhere in the world. It is to that sense of an integrated community of all life-forms that Aldo Leopold espoused his *land ethic*, and it was his book, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949), that pioneered the path to a new understanding of land and life that millions of its readers aspire to today.

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5. Cotton preached this message throughout his career as a distinguished geographer. His sentiment was recorded officially in an epigraph that appeared in my book, *Landscape in America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 2: "Clearly, we can make two observations about landscape in America—first, the original source of all geographical knowledge is in the field and, second, this is going to be a great country once we get it all paved."

I was born in Colorado and raised in Connecticut. For twelve years, I entered the same school whose entrance was laden with a heavy challenge over its doors. Every day I began school by reading the following passage from a very influential book: "With all thy getting, get understanding."<sup>6</sup>

Books give us a head start toward knowing our places and the world's great heritage of diverse architecture, landscapes, habitats, and cultures. And a quest for knowledge inevitably results in a celebration of our own geography and the human imagination. As Charles E. Little has so eloquently conveyed in his writings, celebrating *place* gives us a renewable sense of hope for the land and, thus, hope for our future.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Proverbs 4: 7, from *The Holy Bible* (multiple authors, editors, translators, and publishers).

7. See Charles E. Little, *Hope for the Land* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, in association with the Center for American Places, 1995).

## Part Three

### *Field Notes:*

#### *What Publishers and Authors Are Facing in the New Market Society\**

##### *Preamble*

As part of my new publishing company, I now serve as Publisher-in-Residence at numerous universities throughout the nation, in addition to developing and publishing books under the George F. Thompson imprint and in association with other publishing partners, some old and some new: Liveright/W. W. Norton in New York City, Radius Books in Santa Fe, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Denver Art Museum, and Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, among other university presses. As many authors, publishing colleagues, family members, and friends have said, I am free once again to pursue my vision. And I am doing so in a more comprehensive way.

During the past year and a half, I have conducted multiple group seminars on publishing and upwards of 150 one-on-one consulting sessions with senior and junior faculty, post-doc fellows, recent and current Ph.D. candidates completing and mining their dissertations, and administrators from department chairs to deans and provosts, representing multiple departments and divisions in the humanities, physical and behavioral sciences, and social sciences. I have just served the second of three years as the writing and publishing expert at the annual week-long workshop for international and domestic faculty members and chairs known as GDFA

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\*This is the third of three articles by George on the relationship between place and publishing, commissioned by Warren Hofstra for the *Vernacular Architecture Newsletter* (aka *VAN*). The article first appeared in *VAN*, No. 132 (Summer 2012): 15–21. It was updated slightly for the GFT Website on October 17, 2012.

(Geography Department Faculty Alliance) that is hosted by the University of Colorado Department of Geography and co-sponsored by the National Science Foundation and Association of American Geographers. And I have recently accepted invitations to serve as Publisher-in-Residence for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa and for the seventy-plus Presidential Scholars and Fellows of the Graduate School at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

Being around so many aspiring, junior, and senior faculty has been a rewarding experience that has enabled me to gain firsthand knowledge as to how faculty members today (many of them in leadership roles) are facing the multiple and often overwhelming challenges of succeeding in the classroom as teachers, in research and publishing as authors, and in university and community service while trying to maintain some balance between their professional and personal lives. Not an easy task, but who has time to change the rules and expectations?

Also, during the past year and a half, I have worked to establish my new GFT book imprint and to realign some of my editorial work toward meeting the needs of other publishers, both professional trade and scholarly. This has brought me increasingly into the inner world of high executive management: directors, executive vice presidents, associate directors, marketing directors, editorial directors, and design and production managers working for university presses and trade houses; presidents of philanthropic foundations; curators of major art museums and galleries; heads of domestic and international marketing and distribution firms; owners and managers of independent, museum, and chain bookstores; editors and publishers of scholarly and commercial journals and media; and so on.

Being around so many seasoned professionals in the unique world of publishing in which I reside has been an eye-opening experience that has

enabled me to gain firsthand knowledge as to how everyone is trying to succeed in what all but a few perceive to be a highly depressed and changing market and, thus, an uncertain future. For the perceived marketplace is influencing decision-making at every level, from the book proposal to the launch of a book in whatever form or medium. As one director of a large university press recently confided in me, "The future? With the uncertainty of the euro, we don't even know what the book business might look like in six months, much less a few years." The immediacy of the market is upon us all, especially during the ongoing transition from a market economy to a market society.<sup>1</sup>

Given the amount of professional fieldwork I have conducted during the past year and a half, I thought it appropriate to conclude my three-part series on the relationship between place and publishing with some thoughts about what place-based publishers and authors are facing in a rapidly changing world and how this might affect not only the publishing outlook and expectations for individual authors, but also the needs of universities as they seek greater academic output and achievement from their faculty in order to enhance their academic ranking and brand name as far and wide as possible. Alabama, for example, spends a noticeable amount of its public advertising budget (often during televised Alabama football games) in sharing the news

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1. See Thomas L. Friedman, "This Column Is Not Sponsored by Anyone," *The New York Times* (13 May 2012): SR 13, in which he reviews Michael Sandel's new book, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London, UK: Allen Lane, 2012). As Sandel writes: "Over the last three decades, we have drifted from having a market economy to becoming a market society. A market economy is a tool—a valuable and effective tool—for organizing productive activity. But a 'market society' is a place where everything is up for sale. It is a way of life where market values govern every sphere of life." The repercussions of this



change are far-reaching, for "market values are crowding out civic practices." that the university has ranked second only to Harvard for a number of consecutive years in attracting National Merit Scholars to campus in Tuscaloosa and, in 2012, surpassed Harvard.

Not surprisingly, even in a global society that is regionally based but increasingly dependent on emerging technologies without geographical boundaries, there is the primary need to return to the basics of research, writing, artistry, and public service and the secondary need to integrate the core and periphery of our ideas, to make the necessary connections between "kindred spirit" ideas and their manifestations in socio-economic settings. For example, at the 2012 Book Expo America convention held in New York City, I had coffee with an old friend and colleague from Johns Hopkins days, Doug Armato, for many years now the director of the University of Minnesota Press. We were talking about VAF (Vernacular Architecture Forum), because it has been a key organization and a receptive and contributing audience for our lists, beginning with our days of working together in Baltimore and then in Minneapolis. Doug observed that, for vernacular architecture to advance beyond its very loyal and growing membership of scholars and professionals, books about buildings and landscapes need to convey even more links to the contemporary world than to the past. For example, Doug said, one reviewer, in praising an excellent book on the architectural history of the YMCA, also noted that there was no mention of homosexuality in the manuscript, a small but important omission given the larger context in which buildings live.

### *The Topic and Research Question*

Everything starts here for an author and a publisher, and the success and failure of most books and articles begins with the title (and, often, the

subtitle). A title must clearly and succinctly convey what the manuscript is about. It should also be interesting; that is, be able to generate an immediate curiosity on the part of the reader, reviewer, or editor. For example, *The Gas Station in America* or *Measure of Emptiness: Grain Elevators in the American Landscape* or *Like No Other Place: The Sandhills of Nebraska* or *Small Town South*. Long-winded and obscure or cute titles and subtitles often point to a lack of focus and understanding of a topic or place.

Reading and reacting to a title resembles reading and reacting to any form of advertisement, whether a billboard, sign, banner, space ad, e-blast, you name it. Does your title immediately convey the main idea, thought, argument, and goal of your project? That is, within the proverbial two or three seconds in which most people cast an immediate and often lasting impression? Or is it mired in the murky muck of highfalutin, impenetrable academic verbiage?

Visual literacy can also convey and enhance a book's message, especially in the selection of an illustration that conveys visually what the title intends. For example, when an author came up with the engaging and thematically accurate book title *Soft Time in a Hard Place*, the accompanying color photograph on the book jacket of men in orange garb in a prison pod carried the thesis to an unmistakable place with its associated meanings. These kinds of connections between the visual and the written are much appreciated by all, from readers and reviewers to publishers and bookstore owners.

Given the opportunity to make connections between vernacular buildings and landscapes and the larger socio-economic world in which they have emerged, and given the advancement of time and the proverbial fifty-year window for historic preservation and retrospection, scholars might soon follow the lead of photographers who, especially since the *New Topographics*

exhibition of 1975, have visually investigated, observed, and interpreted a wide range of vernacular subjects.<sup>2</sup> These include the changing nature and globalization of suburbs; the relationship between edge cities, commercial strips, and inner-city decline and growth; the changing workplace; the ongoing evolution of the road; the impact of sports and recreation and of religion and the delivery of medical services on the built environment; the expansion of government enclaves and edifices, from the county courthouse and public library to national park facilities; the interface of transportation nodes and hubs on immigration and urban morphology; the revolutionary interface of old and new ethnic neighborhoods; the commemoration of land and life through memorialization; ad infinitum. I long for the day when I receive a manuscript entitled *Lowe's Landscape*.

Also, as a senior professor and well-known author at a Big Ten university shared, more studies emerging out of the VAF "are cognizant of the landscape, which is reflected in the name of the VAF journal, *Buildings and Landscapes*. Nonetheless," he continued, "most research in the field is still heavily directed toward structures, with the landscape often considered little more than 'the spaces between buildings'," as geographer Larry Ford (1943–2009) portrayed in his path-breaking book with the same title.<sup>3</sup>

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2. The "New Topographics: Photographers of a Man-altered Landscape" exhibition was organized and curated by William Jenkins (b. 1944) for the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. It opened in January 1975, traveled to the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles and the Princeton Art Museum the following year, and was accompanied by a forty-eight-page catalog. The ten photographers who were selected for the landmark show are famous today: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal (1947–2010), Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel, Jr. Three of them—Deal, Gohlke, and Shore—later published books with me.

3. See Larry R. Ford, *The Spaces between Buildings* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins

University Press, in association with the Center for American Places, 2000).

As historical and cultural geographers stray farther away from their historical roots, relying less on fieldwork and more on GIS (Geographic Information Systems) in order to be "more theoretical and scientific," opportunities abound for members of VAF to fill the intellectual space that human geographers are leaving behind in the publishing world.<sup>4</sup> For example, only a handful of university presses now attend the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, even as attendance has more than doubled during the past decade. Ideally, the vernacular landscape will become an equal partner to the vernacular building in this enterprise, and hopefully members of VAF will also re-establish old connections to the various academic fields and professions that have traditionally embraced the vernacular.

#### *Methodology and Connectedness*

In some place-based fields, nomothetic and quantitative approaches can periodically dominate research strategies and agendas in the guise of a technique masquerading as theory (aka theology). During the 1960s, for example, geography began to feel like Cinderella when it compared itself to other "more traditional" and "hard" behavioral and physical sciences, and so it rediscovered the trinity of math, statistics, and the search for numerical data as a holy grail. Not every scholar or department understood what they were doing, but the quantitative approach to geographical analysis began to take over almost every aspect of geographical research without full consideration of the side effects, notably an incursion into the importance of traditional field study of the physical and cultural landscape and an

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4. As defined on [www.esri.com/what-is-gis/overview](http://www.esri.com/what-is-gis/overview), a "geographic information system (GIS) integrates hardware, software, and data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information." Accessed 2 October 2012.

increasing reliance on federal funding for research that tilted heavily against traditional "historical and cultural geography" toward the data-driven "scientific" work. It took decades before some semblance of balance and mutual respect emerged within the various sub-disciplines and journals, but human geography never recovered fully. More recently, the human infatuation for technique has found a very useful but nonetheless golden calf in GIS with additional repercussions regarding how to conduct field research and field analysis within a Digital Age. The impact on the humanities has once again been especially heartfelt.

Technique too often seems to drive the research question, rather than the reverse. The result is often gaping holes in the way a manuscript, of any kind and type, is conceived and created. It is hard to differentiate the sizzle from the steak in too many manuscripts, a task better suited to marketing departments.

The study of vernacular landscapes and vernacular buildings, of course, has long been the foundation for what J. B. Jackson (1909–1996) pioneered when he established the field of "landscape studies" with his editorial wizardry at *Landscape* magazine (1951–1969), his creative and inspirational teaching at Harvard and Cal-Berkeley, and his wide-ranging writings (essays, articles, and books) and accomplished artistry (drawings, watercolors, and slides). He impacted and even revolutionized fields as diverse as architecture, historic preservation, human geography, landscape architecture, photography, planning, transportation, and urban studies in how they came to appreciate the importance of the everyday landscape and its assemblage of cultural and economic expressions. Fieldwork and field observation were at the heart and soul of such discovery.

Thankfully, most books and articles written by members of VAF combine a clear topic as displayed in the title/subtitle, original research and

engaging fieldwork as set forth in the organization of an article or a book's table of contents, and good writing and visual literacy as presented in a manuscript. But the pressure to become more theoretical (as opposed to contextual) within the VAF world runs the same risk afforded other kindred spirit worlds, such as geography. To repeat an earlier statement, complicating the simple does not lead to theory; theory is derived by simplifying the complicated and discovering the linkages to emerging but ever-changing truths.

### *Writing and Time Management*

Well-written and smartly illustrated manuscripts surely have an advantage over books that do not so shine. Senior editors usually know, within five to ten minutes, whether an author is properly conveying her or his ideas. That little window may be all the time you ever have to convince an editor that "you have the chops" as a writer (or an artist). A good title helps set the table, but the writing and the visual application of an argument represent the meal. Most scholars need to spend more time becoming better writers (and photographers).

One question that is asked at nearly every publishing seminar and during many one-on-one sessions with authors is, "How do I write for a general audience?" To which I believe there is only one response, "There is but one kind of writing: good writing, in which an author writes clear, clean sentences (preferably in the active voice) that convey equally clear, clean ideas about a topic or a place." And then we discuss the obvious: that one becomes a writer only with practice. If one wants to run a 5K, 10K, or marathon, one trains. The parallel to writing is direct.

To be a writer requires constant attention, at least four or five days a week, no excuses. Most training for a running event includes timed

workouts: twenty, forty, sixty minutes, occasionally more, four or five times a week. The same holds true for writing. Most of us can only find or carve out those small increments of time to devote to writing, but the better authors seem to be so disciplined. They also juggle more than one research and publishing project at a time, making time management an essential ingredient for professional success and personal health.

Writing also involves the telling of a story, a narrative of some form that offers a beginning and a sequence and an end. Even in a report and an article, one can convey a chronology of events that allows for the contextualization and visualization of materials, no matter how numerical the research may be. Good exercises for learning how to craft sound and interesting abstracts, paragraphs, *précies*, reviews, and even pages of text include: read great authors and summarize their article, essay, or book in 250 words or less; compose and submit a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, which forces you to be succinct and allows you to share with the larger community how your teaching and/or research has informed you about an issue; and read your work aloud to identify the jagged edges, long and obtuse sentences, uneven and poor transitions.

At the 2012 GDFA workshop, a first-year, tenure-track assistant professor from China, now at Kentucky, shared news of his discovery as to why the white ash in the Upper South has bloomed later than normal when every comparable species of tree, plant, or flower has bloomed three to six weeks earlier than normal, due to warmer-than-average temperatures during the winter. He asked for advice, "How do I convey this information?" The response seemed clear: people beyond the academy are interested in learning about such events and how phenology (which Aldo Leopold pioneered) can serve as a connector between local conditions and global influences. And so, in addition to writing a scholarly article for publication in

a ranked, peer-reviewed journal, he will also take the opportunity to share this information with those who reside in Lexington, by writing a feature article in the local paper, thereby contributing to public service and reaching a general audience. At the same time, he sees this as a chance to enhance his ability to write cleanly and more succinctly in English, his second language.

Members of VAF, I think, miss many valuable opportunities to reach beyond the narrow and insular world of the academy. They should participate more fully in the public's awareness and knowledge of our vernacular foundations and traditions by engaging in such outreach. Getting the word out through various media benefits us all: it usually improves one's standing in the larger world through community outreach; it hones one's writing skills in the process; and the university's brand and standing amongst the general public, state legislators, regional businesses, and foundations is enhanced. Juggling classroom preparation and teaching, research and publishing, e-mail and administrative chores, and a healthy personal life is a challenge, as all in academe admit. Time management and maintaining priorities are paramount to success. Perfection is, at times, an impediment to staying on task, but paying attention to details is an asset.

Writing a book (or a series of articles) is a long, steady process. Even when research is completed, it is a very good year if one can complete one polished chapter (or article) per semester. If one includes the summer, then reaching a goal of two to three chapters per year is a real accomplishment.

That most books contain, on average, eight to ten chapters means it takes three or more years to write and complete a manuscript before it is deemed ready for peer review. A publisher then needs, on average, two or more years to conduct one or more rounds of external peer reviews, seek a faculty board's approval with unconditionally positive reviews in hand, and



proceed to copy-edit, design, and produce a book. This means that authors must avoid binge writing, waiting for large blocks of time that always seem to evaporate before one even gets started. To avoid being constantly behind, create a log, monitor a check list, and meet all deadlines for your writing and research agendas. By the way, publishers expect authors to honor contractual obligations—especially delivery dates and book specifications (number of words and number and type of illustrations). Doing so is critical, for publishers are finding more ways than ever to say "no" to projects, even those that may be signed to contracts but arrive late or exceed the allowed word length and number of illustrations.

### *The Regional Emphasis and New Areas of Interest*

The financial lifeblood of most, if not all, university presses is the regional book. And the reason is obvious: people want to read, know more about, and experience those areas in which they live. Books of regional architecture, art, biography, botany, ecology, ethnicity, folkways, foodways, geography, history, literature, music, photography, recreation, transportation, and so on contribute to the financial bottom line and welfare of the home state press, and the press has an educational obligation as well to so inform its state and regional citizenry in this regard.

Chris Wilson, a long-time member of VAF and the J. B. Jackson Professor of Cultural Landscape Studies at the University of New Mexico, has begun to contemplate and write about how the essential ingredients that underpin the study of vernacular architecture and landscapes can now be applied to contemporary issues involving sustainability in its myriad forms, offering new opportunities for articles and books. Climatic changes and the need for more energy-efficient buildings, he says, suggest a renewed link to regional thinking about traditional forms of architecture and building

materials; historic preservation seems poised to embrace new forms of vernacular expression both in terms of what is recognized as worth saving for the historical record and worth pioneering in the form of new economic zones; and New Urbanism and Smart Growth initiatives lean toward and often embrace the notion of community space and the common good, often turning a designer's and planner's eye to regional and vernacular forms of expression for inspiration, precedent, and counsel.

The currency of the past is self-evident in the present. Writers and artists of the vernacular scene have a real chance to expand the horizons of their respective scholarly and/or artistic objectives by paying attention to such applications. Publishers are thirsty for relevancy in their list, especially as this relates to the expansion of regional topics. Too often, scholarly books read like obituaries; here is a chance to provide an afterlife to the past as it relates to the present and future direction of the places we wish to build and either cherish or cast aside.

The growing awareness of the importance of place in all artistic and scholarly fields and professions continues to offer opportunities for new research and writing projects of interest to publishers of all kinds. One way for professors in the VAF world to ensure the welfare, growth, and relevancy of the field of landscape studies is to cultivate talent, research and writing skills, and visual literacy at the *master's* level. Ph.D. candidates, first- and second-year tenure-track assistant professors, and even contract teachers/scholars should not be wrestling (as all but a few do) with inadequate CVs, how to construct research questions and an appropriate methodology, how to communicate and write better, how to become visually literate, how and where to publish, and the like.

Universities must start this process earlier. Everything must be pushed down to the master's level. Every master's degree should result in one or

more peer-reviewed publications, whether an article, a book chapter, or even a book, as was the case for me. Starting early improves the chances that the new holder of the Ph.D. will have a competitive advantage over other newly minted Ph.Ds in the job market and the world of publishing. The curriculum vitae of prospective tenure-track candidates rarely has a publishing record, other than the book review and/or conference proceeding. This is insufficient in publishing circles and limits one's chances in employment. To list one or more peer-reviewed publications in a CV provides opportunities not only in securing a job after the Ph.D., but also one's standing as a scholar and writer when a publisher reviews your material.

### *Practical Matters*

All publishers, even university presses which share the nonprofit status of their home institution, are businesses that must balance budgets. That is, the income from the sale of books, journals, and/or subsidiary and translation rights must meet or exceed the costs of development, production, promotion, fulfillment, and sale.

The current market for books is steadily dwindling, industry-wide, despite the promise of electronic books and other technologies that are assuming more of the financial share once provided by the selling of printed and audio books. Authors need to be smart about how a book's topic, specifications (length, number and type of illustrations, trim size, edition size, pricing, and discount), and projected audience will impact a publisher's enthusiasm for a project and its ability to afford to publish it.

There is no such thing as a "typical" book. Each is unique, like a person, and has its own requirements. But it may be worthwhile to offer a comparison. When I began my career at the Johns Hopkins University Press in 1984 and founded a number of innovative book series such as "Creating

the North American Landscape," it was fairly common for a "typical" monograph in this series to result in a book of 320–356 pages, priced at \$39.95 (U.S.) and containing some 80,000–85,000 words of text, 10,000–15,000 words of notes, and between sixty and ninety illustrations of varying kinds. Today, those specifications are tough to sell to a publisher without financial support (subvention) being provided. Publishers are much more secure economically with a book length of between 60,000–80,000 words, inclusive of notes, and twenty-four to thirty-six illustrations, resulting in a book of around 256–288 pages that sells for anywhere between \$40 and \$100 (U.S.). Same topic, different specifications. In reduced form, would Bill Wilson's *The City Beautiful Movement* be as well received and win so many awards? Or Bob Ensminger's *The Pennsylvania Barn* sell as many copies? Or Jay Vance's *The North American Railroad* reach as many readers?

Authors need to write their book as they see fit, but the practical matters and the current marketplace are affecting publishing decisions right and left. Be cognizant of such practical matters as you create the architectural blueprint for your book-length manuscript.

### *Keeping Things Simple*

I return to the matter of writing and the presentation of clear, clean ideas. They are key to laying the foundation for any successful publication.

Universally, I believe it is true that most academic authors are inclined to complicate the simple in order to sound knowledgeable or to present a new idea or to posit a revised theory. Unfortunately, most of these attempts fall flat or fail, resulting in the outright rejection of a manuscript or the all-too-common response, "Revise and resubmit." And few authors or publishers have the time to engage in that kind of merry-go-round.

Simplifying the complicated, however, is another matter. And no

matter how complicated or layered the details and interconnections of a work may be, a simple narrative flow of exposition and organization should nonetheless prevail. Those are the kind of books and articles that matter, that make a difference, that are cited, that alter the way we view and understand a topic or a place, that influence the way we think of the world, that are gifts to one's profession and to civilization.

By beginning early at the master's level in the research and writing process with an eye toward publication, scholars improve their chances of not getting bogged down at the Ph.D., post-doc, and tenure-track levels. By practicing the skills of writing and visual literacy on a regular, even daily, basis, excuses such as "writer's block" and "not enough time" fall away like wisps of smoke. By making the necessary connections within academic fields and professions and by interconnecting the vernacular expressions of the local or regional with the larger world and contemporary concerns such as sustainability, climate change, energy efficiency, and societal needs, scholarly and trade publishers will have no choice but to take notice. After all, they are in the business of selling books, and their task is made so much easier when authors provide manuscripts that are original, well written, smartly illustrated, and of topical interest.

### *The Bottom Line*

During the external peer review of any article, portfolio, report, or book-length manuscript, reviewers are asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What is the author's argument, thesis, or goal? Is it clearly stated?
2. How original and significant is the manuscript? How does the manuscript

compare to other important books or articles already published?

3. Is the manuscript organized logically and effectively? Is it the right length? Are the illustrations appropriate, sequenced, captioned, and integrated in the best way?

4. Is the text well written? Are the primary and secondary sources in the notes appropriate and essential, current or dated, excessive or incomplete?

5. Do you have confidence in the author's ability to create and/or revise a manuscript so that it is of lasting value?

6. Who will want to read, review, use, cite, and buy the manuscript?

You, as an aspiring author, no matter what your experience may be, need to answer these questions affirmatively and without hesitation or conditions, beginning with your topic, research question, and article or book title. If you can, then you should be confident in the publishing prospects for your respective work.