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# *Ian McHarg, Landscape Architecture, and Environmentalism: Ideas and Methods in Context*

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In 1959, Ian McHarg introduced prominent scientists, humanists, and poets to landscape architecture by inviting them to speak in his course *Man and Environment* at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1969, he published *Design with Nature*, a finalist for the National Book Award and a book that led to fundamental changes in the teaching and practice of landscape architecture (Fig. 1). For the next decade, he promoted landscape architecture as the instrument of environmentalism and helped shape national policy on the environment. McHarg is among the very few landscape architects since Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. who have commanded widespread notice, respect, and influence outside the design and planning fields.<sup>1</sup> But what, exactly, are his contributions to landscape architecture within the context of environmentalism? While there is consensus on the importance of his influence, there is disagreement over the nature of his legacy. A perplexing figure, he has always generated controversy within the profession, at least among North Americans. The conflicts and inconsistencies embodied in McHarg's words and actions are those of the profession itself—the tensions between preservation and management, nature and culture, tradition and invention, theory and practice.

This essay draws mainly from primary sources—Ian McHarg's own writings, departmental archives, professional reports, interviews, and my own firsthand experience. I was a graduate student in landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1970s and worked with McHarg in his office from 1973 to 1977. Some of the projects I discuss are ones I worked on myself, including the Woodlands New Community and Pardisan. Others are projects with which I had less direct experience. As a faculty member at Harvard from 1979 to 1986, I achieved some critical distance before returning to Penn as a professor (and chairman of the department from 1986 to 1993). I am grateful to Ian McHarg, Meto Vroom, Michael Hough, Carol Franklin, Narendra Juneja, and Richard Westmacott for their insights and information and to Michel Conan for his wise advice and encouragement.

<sup>1</sup> Books by Loren Eiseley and René Dubos were considered for the National Book Award in the same year but were not selected as finalists. While the profession seems to have a sense of entitlement about outside commendation, no one other than McHarg has attained the same degree of recognition and influence outside the field.