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A Landscape for Humans

by: Peter van Dresser

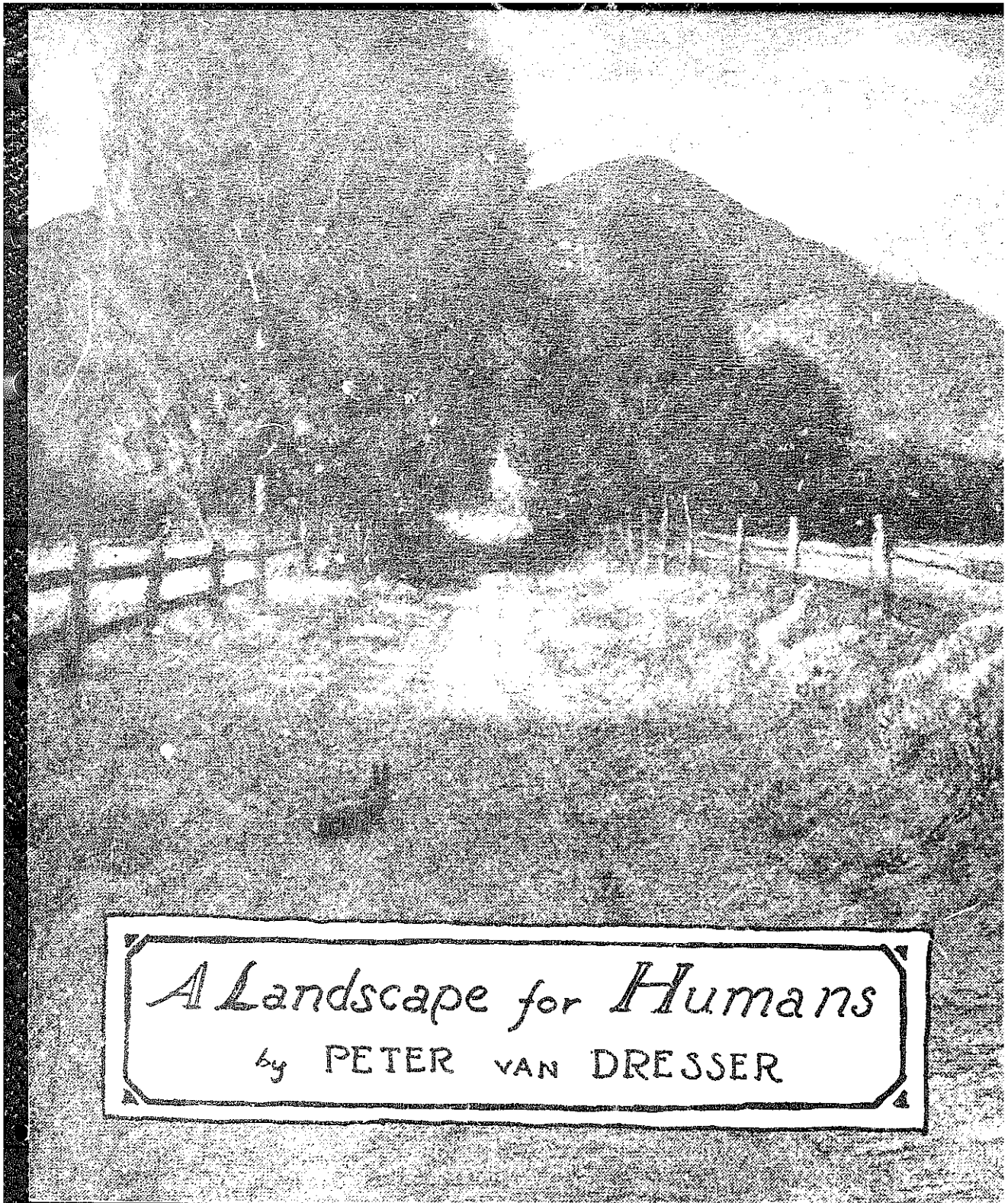
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A Landscape for Humans
by PETER VAN DRESSER

A LANDSCAPE FOR HUMANS

A Case Study of the Potentials
for Ecologically Guided
Development in an Uplands Region

Peter van Dresser

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To Florence and Lucile

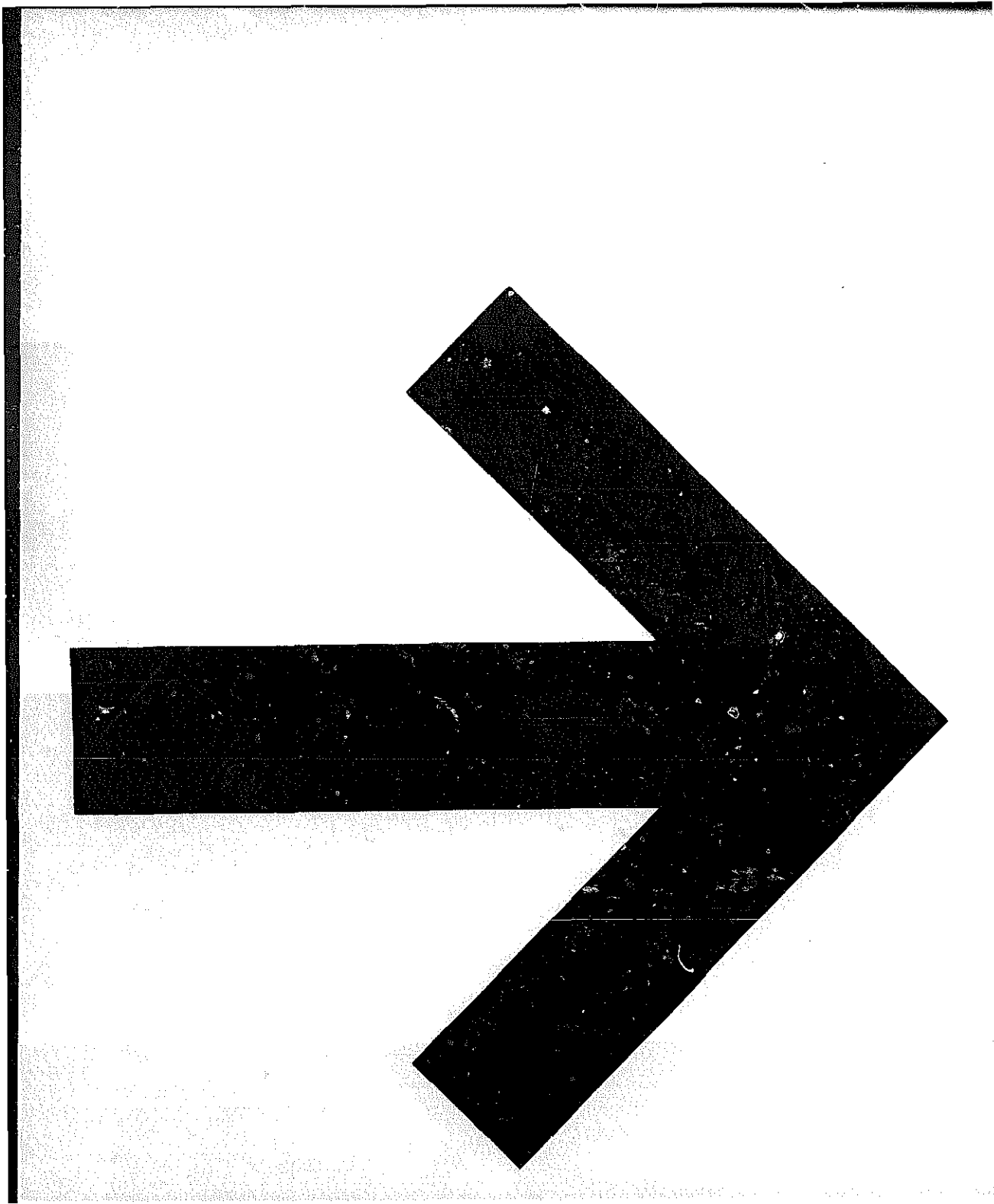


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FOREWORD

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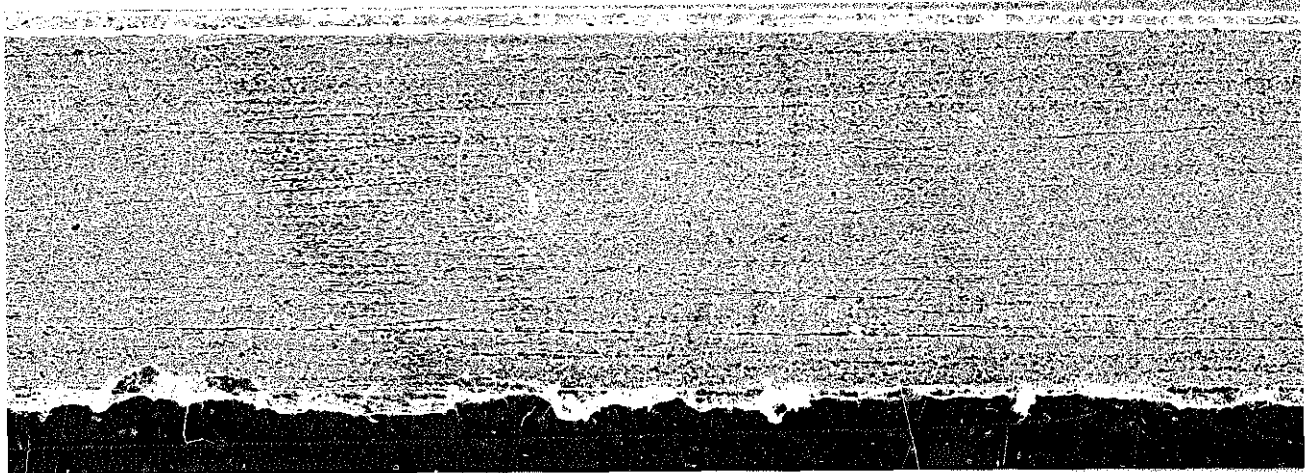
“There is much evidence,” said zoologist Charles R. Goldman at the First Congress on Optimum Population and Environment, “that planning for a smaller future is in the best overall interest of mankind.” A hard truth, perhaps, for a society that invented the skyscraper, the assembly line, bumper-to-bumper traffic, Superman, and consumership, but a truth all the same.

Bigness for bigness’s sake lies close to the heart of American dogma. But where has bigness got us? The question is largely rhetorical, of course, because the answer can be *felt* by anyone who lets his senses and sensitivities register the impact of his everyday environment upon his consciousness. Bigness hurts. In legal parlance, bigness delivers torts — to the individual, to the community, to the political organism, and most grievously, to the human perspective. Bigness has produced the “crispies” culture.

We all know this, though we are loathe to probe very deeply into the substance of “the richest, most powerful nation on the face of the earth.” We are afraid of what we might find. And yet, paradoxically, we might very well find the forgotten essence of what made the United States such a singular success in the first place.

I think we might find *ourselves* again. We might rediscover, for example, such blunted attributes as competence and personal gratification in work. We might realize the precariousness of the handhold on life itself maintained by an extractive technology and an extruded culture. Indeed, the American people, presented with an alternative, might begin to perceive the promise of a new — or shall we say old? — way of seeking the highest of all goals: self-fulfillment.

They might even swap their bowl of crispies for a nourishing sense of personal re-engagement in the shaping of their lives and their environment.



Toward this end, few students of the American experience have given more thought to the wisdom of Dr. Goldman's "smaller future" than Peter van Dresser. For more than twenty years, Mr. van Dresser has lived in the kind of micro-environment that might very well be transformed, carefully and unsensationally, into a model of social and ecological regeneration. Within the bioeconomic scope, and the immediate and intimate environs of the villages of the southern Rockies where he has made his home, there exists an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate the virtue of smallness.

This book will help us take the necessary first step towards activating this opportunity. This step must be, as the argument makes clear, the widespread recognition that many of the rural and provincial communities of the United States do, in fact, possess the resources to revitalize themselves; that revitalized micro-environments based, in Mr. van Dresser's words, on "skilled, scientific, and conservative use and management of local biotic and other flow resources, rather than on large-scale machine- and energy-intensive industries," can go a long way toward redressing the balance between industrial excesses and provincial impotence.

This is exciting stuff. From the standpoint of people needs and ecological responsibilities, Mr. van Dresser conceives of a biotechnic society in which both man and nature are well served.

William Houseman
Editor, "The Environment Monthly"
June 24, 1970

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago speculative economists began discussing the approach of the "post-industrial age" — a coming era of affluence in which the chief business of man would be the distribution of automatically produced abundance, the elaboration of public amenities, and the enjoyment of leisure. Urbanists and city planners began projecting vertical, radial, domed, underground, floating, and ribbon cities to house the teeming millions to come. Engineers dreamed of agrochemurgic complexes, nuclear-generated energy fields, and automated transportation networks to serve the coming ecumenopolis.

In this vision, the growth or extraction of raw materials and their fashioning into commodities through mechanization and automation, was about to be raised to such a level of efficiency that only a small minority of men need henceforth devote their efforts to such activities. Correlatively, the distribution of commodities and services, the perfection of public amenities, and the creative use of leisure, would become the principal preoccupation of a society provisioned, housed, and serviced by an unfailing commissariat of "iron goblins" (to use Ruskin's anticipatory epithet for automated machinery).

Such a vision of post-industrial society supposed, of course, an indefinite extension and elaboration of the tremendous logistic apparatus which now ministers to our needs. It supposed a continued proliferation of the transportation, transit, and communications networks which serve an ever-expanding population either clustered in metropolitan areas or distributed in "non-place urban communities." It supposed ever more intricate factory complexes, deeper oil wells, huger wheat fields, vaster