

Constructing new life styles

Our evolution is now cultural not biological. It is what is in our heads and how we use this information, not our genetic information, that will be the determining factor of our survival. Cultural evolution requires an informed, literate, and peaceful people. This requires much more than clinics and pamphlets. Huge injections of many kinds of supplies will be required. This is only possible if the world recognizes the state of emergency that exists now.

Economic thinking has come to focus on monetary growth which has pushed all other factors to the periphery of our management decisions. Many are blaming technology and science for today's environmental problems and alienation; but science would not have been "misapplied" if our economic institution were knowledgeable and holistic. To promote the general welfare, economics (household management) must derive from ecology. Such a major reorganization of our affairs will require an unprecedented period of rapid cultural transformation. This requires a general consensus as to the nature of our present situation and a willingness to recognize our dependence on a life support system that is finite.

Some groups still perceive environmental concern as a means to an end such as overthrowing or scoring revenge on all or part of the "establishment". Others simply see it as a movement to force a long overdue cleanup of smoke, smells, and spills. Such positions are not only naive, but are making an adequately clear understanding of the ecological perspective difficult to grasp. The advocate system of settling a dispute in court or justifying a revolt in the streets is an archaic mechanism in the face of the task before us. Everyone is adversely effected and threatened by the inequities generated by a culture that does not understand what it is dependent upon. Only by massive education and through defining new values by which to make decisions and transform our institutions may we assure ourselves of a future.

We now use more energy every day than is available to us from the sun. Not only have we become dependent on finite fossil fuels and are becoming dependent on finite nuclear fuels. There is no way that we can survive such an inequity. We have also restricted our usage of solar energy. We have contaminated the upper atmosphere resulting in the increased reflectance of the earth's atmosphere. This loss has been amplified by increased water vapor at lower levels from irrigation and reservoirs. In addition we have increased the non-utilization of the sunshine that reaches the earth's surface. We have cleared away oxygen producers, green plants, to make room for oxygen consumers, people and their attendant cars, factories, roads, etc. We have also lost agricultural lands to urban sprawl, highways, and airports.

Every animal requires a certain type of dwelling place to protect himself from predators or to moderate the conditions of the environment in which he lives. Man's household is becoming increasingly hostile to him. A continuum exists from a rural house in a non-industrialized country to an apartment in a large industrialized city. It is ironic that western cities are choking and befouling themselves on materials gathered from impoverished regions of the planet.

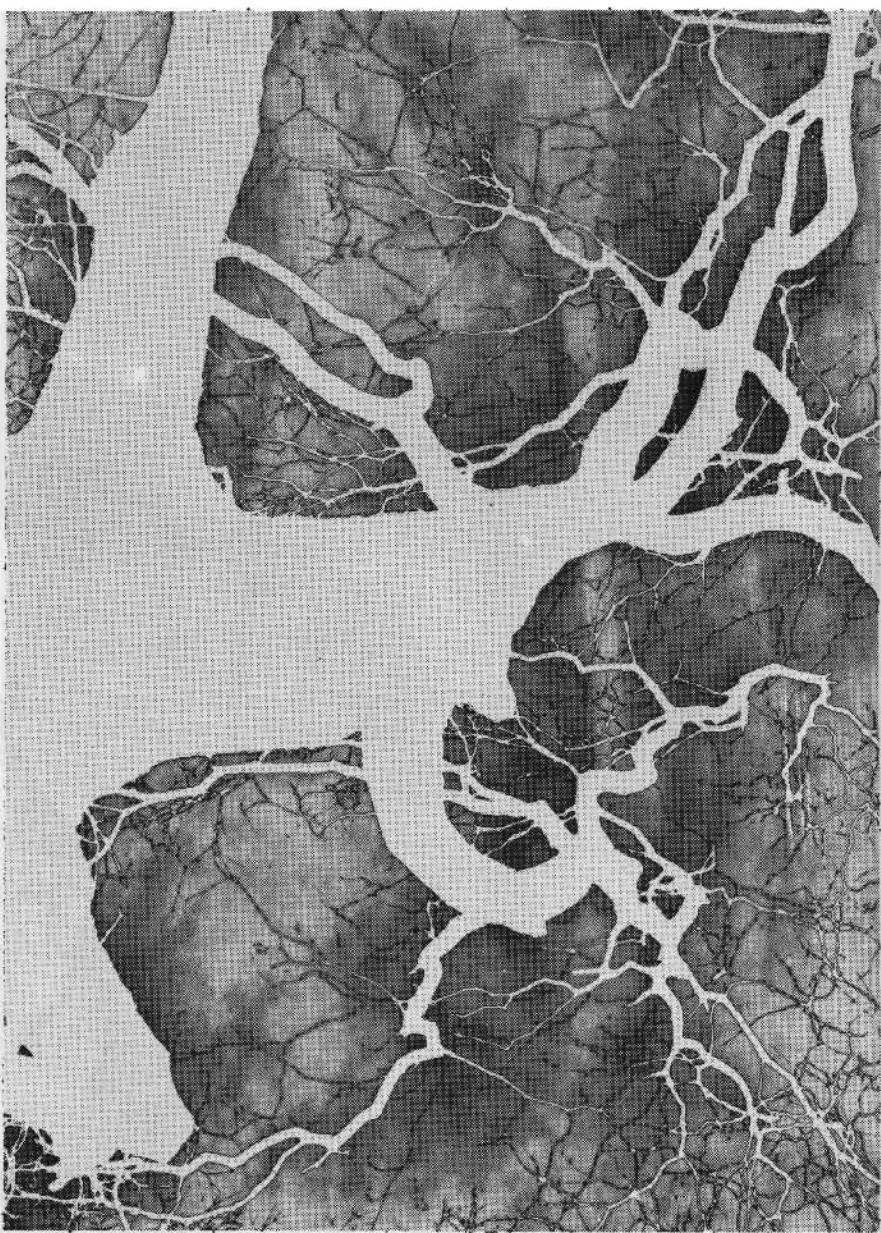
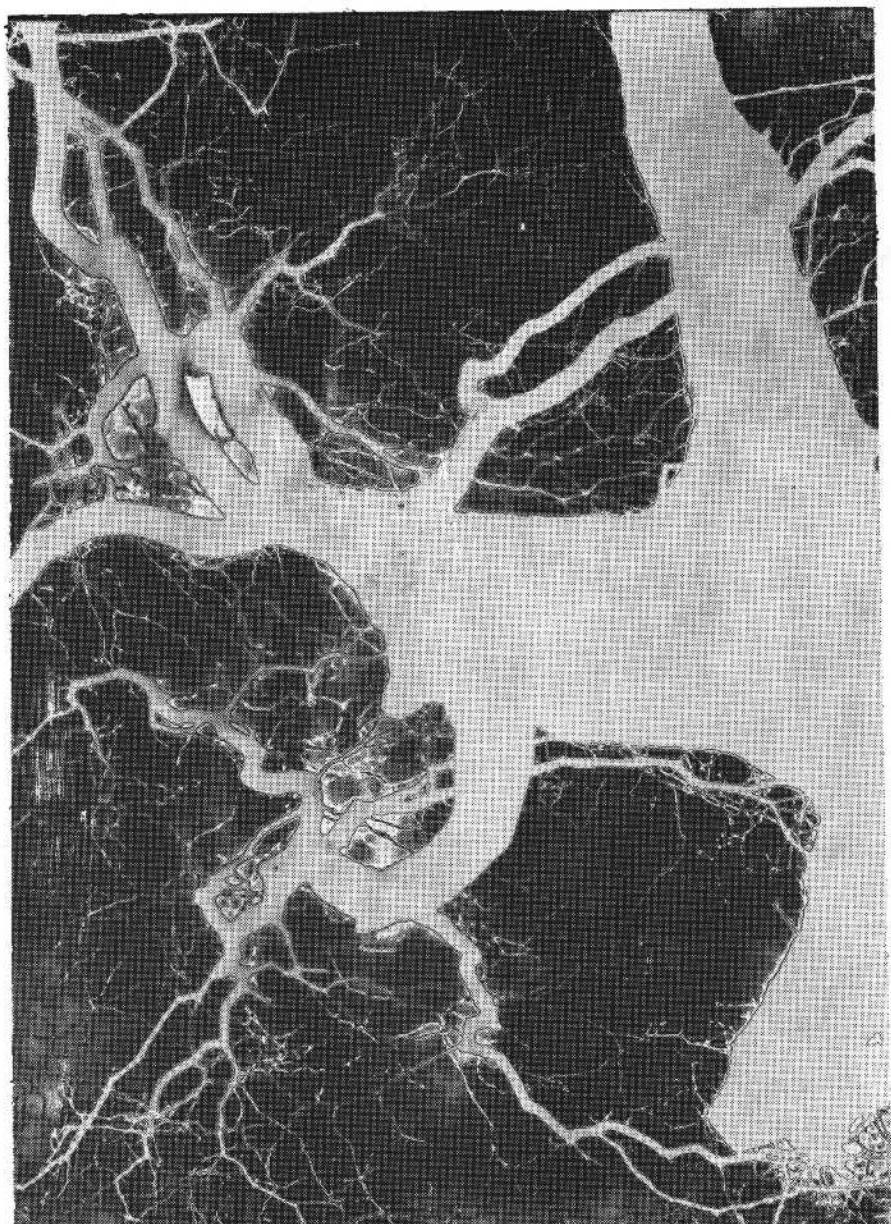


photo: Russell Dian

from an ecological perspective

The task before us, bringing our activities into tune with our needs and the earth's limitations, in itself requires energy. Remaining fuels should be mostly used for these tasks. As fuels are consumed in ignorance of this perspective, options are surrendered. Another consideration is how much fuel should we keep in reserve to meet unknown contingencies of unknown magnitude? Fossil fuels will perhaps offer alternatives under such conditions that future energy sources might not be capable of offering.



Our resource base must switch from new materials to the reuse of spent materials wherever possible. It must be understood that man hours are a renewable resource that should be utilized to the fullest in order to conserve the non-renewable resources. Unless we return organics to the soils, we will have no crops in the future. Obviously the economics of supply and demand in the market place have not reflected all the costs of production, use, and disposal.

The stability of the life process and the moderation or consistency of physical conditions on the planet is achieved through two avenues, homostatic mechanisms and organic diversity. Homostatic mechanisms control temperature, rainfall and other conditions. Stability of the life process within any of the planet's communities is provided by organic diversity. That is, a wide variety of characteristics in a community assures that nothing will get out of control or that one disaster will not destroy the entire community.

*Excerpts from an article by Clifford Humphrey,
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"In the new society, the existence of technology means that man's great goal must be consciousness . . . and consciousness is a very different thing than material goods of their equivalents, honor and status. These by their nature are in short supply. But consciousness, or to use an old expression, wisdom, is not a substance that is subject to upward limit. In seeking wisdom, men's interests are not antagonistic. No person's gain in wisdom is diminished by anyone else's gain. Wisdom is the commodity that is unlimited in supply. Indeed, each man, his experiences, his personality, his uniqueness, becomes an asset to other men when their object is to gain in wisdom. The more unique a person is, the more he contributes to the wisdom of others. Such a community makes possible and fosters that ultimate quest for wisdom—the search for self. Each person is respected for his own absolute human worth. No such luxury was possible during most of man's history. It is wealth and technology that have now make community and self possible."

In a community devoted to the search for wisdom, the true relationship between people is that all are students and all are teachers. Teaching in this sense consists of helping each person with his own personal search for experience and his own goals. Although the goals are individual, it is apparent that the search for self cannot take place in isolation, that self must be realized in a community, and therefore the community enhances each person no matter what his particular endeavor."

The Greening of America by Charles A. Reich
Bantam Books
