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Advisory Board
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Circular No.25

The future, the future, the future — everybody is talking about the future. "There is a growing sense that something has gone wrong in the world, that the road toward a future of unlimited wealth and happiness through science and technology, and the American Way of Life may, in fact, be a dead end." (Gary Coates). "There is no longer any doubt that our age of affluence, based upon depletion of our planet's non-renewable energy and material resources, is at an end and that major changes must be made in every aspect of our lives." (Tom Bender). Both quotes are from Resettling America, a new book out of Brickhouse Publishing Co. That opening is kind of like Circular No. 1, two years ago, where Joseph Campbell was quoted, "The sense of apocalypse is very widespread."

This sense of unease and bewilderment may be what is stimulating all kinds of people to alertness, to sharpen observations of the surroundings. The Governor has set up a study commission to think about what North Carolina of the year 2000 might be like. I guess he is uneasy. The chief project officer of that study is going to talk to the Second Law study group on the 30th of this month. It seems possible that some of the orientation of the Second Law group might be injected into the state study. We shall see. For certain, the members of the group have a sense of unease. They continually ask, "What can I do? How do we find a path leading to healthy cooperation between people and with the natural world. We are dismayed by the wreckage of nature entailed in the American Way."

How widespread is the unease is further revealed by the following. The Sunday before last 60 Minutes (CBS TV) described a new approach to city government in Santa Monica. A political movement practising what it called "economic democracy" was elected to office and imposed restraints on rents and development. The outrage in some quarters was McCarthyesque. I telephoned the mayor's office a couple of days after the program to ask for whatever they could send on philosophy of organization and practise. I learned that they have been swamped with calls from all over the country asking the same thing. There is awe and rejoicing that somewhere the money-makers have been restrained.

The city itself was the subject at the last Second Law study group session, led by urbanist Peter Batchelor, architect, planner, professor, philosopher, and student of the city. Batchelor has assembled a team of graduate students and begun work on a project which will culminate in the building of an urban community of the future. Batchelor is in love with the city and is convinced that the solution to the problem of the city will be found or that there will be no solution to any of civilization's problems. He has been involved with city planning for three decades, and has seen the colossal failures and partial successes of the past on the part of federally planned, state planned, and corporate planned cities. He states that planners have not recognized that complexity is the principal character of the city. The incredible variety of value systems, life styles, educational needs, cultural needs and expressions, social services, recreational needs, family structures, etc., etc., are what makes the city the delightful place it ought to be and sometimes is.

The beginning problem is to conceptualize and that takes input from philosophers, economists, sociologists, political scientists, financiers, theologians, and artists,

as well as architects. Basic, is to conceptualize the neighborhood where the individual finds a link to society. From there one goes to the concept of the larger community of neighborhoods to the conglomeration that comprises the whole city. Batchelor's group will take some five years of work on concepts and designs before anyone picks up tools. The seriousness with which he goes at this is evidenced by the fact that he intends to devote the rest of his life to a realization of the project.

Following shortly on Batchelor's talk, Clay Stalnaker sent a copy of an essay called The Metaphysics of Paolo Soleri by Henry Skolimowski. Soleri is the crazy arcologist building a micro city out in Arizona near Scottsdale. (Arcology is architecture combined with ecology). Soleri, an ardent student of Teilhard, may be crazy, but he also is a philosopher of considerable stature that a lot of people listen to with respect. Batchelor knows him and has appeared on the platform with him. Soleri also emphasizes complexity along with hierarchy and miniaturization as controlling principles in architecture and in life. So Batchelor and Soleri agree there. I know also that Batchelor has the profoundest respect for nature and fully intends his own project to take into account the technology of renewal and recycling so important to Soleri.

Here we go!! From Skolimowski's essay:

The three basic concepts that govern the ascent of life, also conscious life on the human level, according to Soleri, are: complexity, miniaturization, and hierarchy. Life is complex, for life occurs in the thick of complexity. Health and radiance of life forms are in proportion to the diversity of the environment in which they reside. Now the attribute of complexity, which is an essential characteristic of life, evolving into ever more mature and capable forms, should be sharply separated from mere complication which is an attribute of ever expanding bureaucracies and of high-power technology, and which is life-suppressing.

Complexity must go hand in hand with the process of miniaturization, for otherwise it would become unmanageable for organisms. The process of imploding, another way of describing miniaturization, is making things internally so exquisitely related that little space is required by an organ or an organism to perform exquisitely and sometimes almost miraculously. Miniaturization must be governed by hierarchies, those supreme orders that make other orders fall into their respective places. For Teilhard, morphology recapitulates spirit, spirit being the supreme hierarchy that governs all other hierarchies.

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March 30th - Noel Dunavent: North Carolina 2000
5:30 p.m. for Commission on the Future of North Carolina