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Looking out one day over the Hudson River from a lecture room at the Riverdale Center for Religious Research, Thomas Berry said to a group, "We won't clean up that river until we have an emotional attachment of it. The river is not loved, otherwise we would be so angry about someone pouring chemicals into it that we would almost literally tear them to pieces." (GE has put over a million pounds of PCBs into the Hudson over the years and has put up a fierce struggle over being stopped from continuing to dump its wastes into the river. That's the same GE now building a plant in North Carolina. The same GE that closes up plants, as in Riverside California, when the bottom line says the work can be done cheaper somewhere else.)

In the same way that it is said of the people of New York that they do not sufficiently love the Hudson, it may be said that North Carolinians do not love the natural world here enough to become angry at the routine everyday violations of the soil, the water and the air, the trees and the animals. Development is accepted as the normal, the desirable. The indictment of the leaders of the State is that they do not love, they do not protect our State. They accept and condone exploitation. Anything that interferes with the money makers is bad. Cooperation with the money makers is the rule of life.

One expects to accuse politicians thus, for their constant concern is to find out which side the butter is spread on. But, there are many many perceptive people among us who wield influence and about them it may be said, "They do not love. If they did they would be angry enough to protect the natural world from at least the meanest and the most venal of the developers." That is probably true all over the country. We all move around so much that we cannot get emotionally involved with the soil, the rivers and the woods. We come to accept as routine the bulldozers clearing new tracts day by day for a staggering, mind stunning total each year.

The Second Law group has been examining the problem of what is possible to do to achieve a sustainable and healthy harmony of life in North Carolina for the purpose of submitting recommendations to the NC 2000 Commission. Peter Batchelor talked to us in February about a program he has under way to define and to build a community which takes into consideration four fundamental questions: what is the function of the City?; what are the trends shaping communities?; what are the emerging forms of sub-communities, the neighborhood, the block?; what new forms of housing are relevant to today's population? Batchelor has a five year project just getting under way to find the answer to these questions and to plan and actually to build a community.

Chuck Korte, an associate of Batchelors at NCSU, and an urban psychologist makes it his particular interest to study neighborhoods and communities; what makes them good, and what makes them bad. He looks in Raleigh "to find 'urban villages' where there is a mix of social and environmental ingredients, small scale design, intimate face to face relations, caring, support, all that kind of business". This interest made him a natural to review the book Resettling America, which he talked about at our last meeting. This large, thick, expensive book tells about experimental communities trying to cope with the problems of local self-reliance and ecological balance. The following quote will give you the flavor of the editor's thinking about what the problem we all face is:

It is the thesis of this book that what we are experiencing at this moment in history is not just another series of crises within industrial civilization, but rather, the final crisis of that civilization.

The "limits to growth" debate is no longer about whether it is possible (or desirable) for infinite material growth to continue in a finite world. Rather, it is about when, and how a transition can be made to a sustainable and, it is hoped, a just society.

The fundamental premise of the present volume is that the accelerating depletion of non-renewable energy and natural resources, and escalating levels of environmental degradation have already set in motion changes that will force a transition to an entirely new form of human culture. Whether these changes represent an improvement in the human condition depends largely on this generation's ability to accept the inevitability of this great transformation and to work creatively to guide the direction of change. In the next quarter century, through conscious choice and default, we will decide what kind of people we want to be, what our relationship should be to the environmental systems that sustain us, and what kind of technological systems, social structures, and patterns of settlement we shall live within. Whatever we decide, we shall bear the consequences for the foreseeable future on this planet.

These decisions, if left to the momentum of present conditions or the discretion of existing institutions and cultural managers, are likely to result in a frantic effort to sustain our environmentally destructive way of life until it collapses through the sheer weight of its life-denying tendencies. Consequently, this book is addressed to those who feel that it is time to take responsibility for reshaping their own lives, neighborhoods, and cities. It is addressed to those who feel that our built environment, if still a mirror of who we are, is no longer a reflection of who we want to be. It is a call, therefore, for a grass-roots movement for personal, social, and environmental change - a call for resettling of America.

The purpose of this introduction is two fold: (1) to summarize the factual basis for the thesis that the inevitable end of industrial civilization is clearly in sight, and (2) to outline the implications of that thesis and describe how the contents of this book delineate the emerging alternative to industrialism, an alternative that is not a regression to the preindustrial past but an historically unique synthesis of the past and present in an emergent future.

That is a mouthful of doomsaying and the ultimatum it carries shakes the soul. Korte calls this the "Hazel Henderson approach" and says that it accepts without question forecasts of disaster that are by no means as certain as they are portrayed to be. We ought to start right there it seems to me and have a debate on just how well justified is the alarm that Amory Lovins and Gary Coates (the editor who is quoted above) express. Is the sky really about to fall on us or will some sort of appropriate correction sufficiently accommodate to the natural world so that the system we know can continue to function? I will aim a June session at this question.

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May 27, 1982 - Wes Hare of the Twin Streams Adult Education Center. Twin Streams is modeled on Myle Horton's philosophy, "Poor working-class people can take charge of their lives and conditions." What happens to poor people is important to everyone and important to the future of the State.

June 29, 1982 - A Second Session on Resettling America (Is the sky falling?)