

Ecology Manifesto

The four changes

anon.

1969

1. POPULATION

The Condition

Position: Man is but a part of the fabric of life—dependent on the whole fabric for his very existence. As the most highly developed tool-using animal, he must recognize that the unknown evolutionary destinies of other life forms are to be respected, and act as gentle steward of the earth's community of being.

Situation: There are now too many human beings, and the problem is growing rapidly worse. It is potentially disastrous not only for the human race but for most other life forms.

Goal: The goal would be half of the present world population, or less.

Action

Social/political: First, a massive effort to convince the governments and leaders of the world that the problem is severe, and that all talk about raising food-production—well intentioned as it is—simply puts off the only real solution: reduce population. Demand immediate participation by all countries in programs to legalize abortion, encourage vasectomy and sterilization (provided by free clinics)—free insertion of intrauterine loops—try to correct traditional cultural attitudes that tend to force women into child-bearing—remove income tax deductions for more than two children above a specified income level, and scale it so that lower income families are forced to be careful too—or pay families to limit their number.

Take a vigorous stand against the policy of the right-wing in the Catholic hierarchy and any other institutions that exercise an irresponsible social force in regard to this question. Oppose and correct: simple-minded boosterism that equates population growth with continuing prosperity. Work ceaselessly to have all political questions be seen in the light of this prime problem.

The community: Explore other social structures and marriage forms, such as group marriage and polyandrous marriage, which provide family life but may produce less children. Share the pleasure of raising children widely, so that all need not directly reproduce to enter into this basic human experience. We must hope that no one woman would give birth to more than one child, during this period of crisis. Adopt children. Let reverence for life and reverence for the feminine mean also a reverence for other species, and future human lives, most of which are threatened.

Our own heads: "I am a child of all life, and all living beings are my brothers and sisters, my children and grandchildren. And there is a child within me waiting to be brought to birth, the baby of a new and wiser self." Love, love-making, a man and woman together, seen as the vehicle of mutual realization, where the creation of new selves and a new world of being is as important as reproducing our kind.

2. POLLUTION

The Condition

Position: Pollution is of two types. One sort results from an excess of some fairly ordinary substance—smoke, or solid waste—which cannot be absorbed or transmuted rapidly enough to offset its introduction into the environment, thus causing changes the great cycle is not prepared for. (All organisms have wastes and by-products, and these are indeed part of the total biosphere; Energy is passed along the line and refracted in various ways, “the rainbow body.” This is cycling, not pollution.

The other sort is powerful modern chemicals and poisons, products of recent technology, which the biosphere is totally unprepared for. Such is DDT and similar chlorinated hydrocarbons—nuclear testing fallout and nuclear waste—poison gas, germ and virus storage and leakage by the military; and chemicals which are put into food, whose long-range effects on human beings have not been properly tested.

Situation: The human race in the last century has allowed its production and scattering of wastes, by-products, and various chemicals to become excessive. Pollution is directly harming life of the planet: which is to say, ruining the environment for humanity itself. We are fouling our air and water, and living in noise and filth that no “animal” would tolerate, while advertising and politicians try and tell us we’ve never had it so good. The dependence of the modern governments on this kind of untruth leads to shameful mind-pollution: mass media and most school education.

Goal: Clean air, clean clear-running rivers, the presence of Pelican and Osprey and Gray Whale in our lives; salmon and trout in our streams; un-muddled language and good dreams.

Action

Social/political: Effective international legislation banning DDT and related poisons—with no fooling around. The collusion of certain scientists with the pesticide industry and agribusiness in trying to block this legislation must be brought out in the open. Strong penalties for water and air pollution by industries—“Pollution is somebody’s profit.” Phase out the internal combustion engine and fossil fuel use in general—more research into non-polluting energy sources; solar energy; the tides.

No more kidding the public about atomic waste disposal: it’s impossible to do it safely, and nuclear-power generated electricity cannot be seriously planned for as it stands now. Stop all germ and chemical warfare research and experimentation; work toward a hopefully safe disposal of the present staggering and stupid stockpiles of H-bombs, cobalt gunk, germ and poison tanks and cans.

Laws and sanctions against wasteful use of paper etc. which adds to the solid waste of cities—develop methods of re-cycling solid urban waste. Recycling should be the basic principle behind all waste-disposal thinking. Thus, all bottles should be re-usable; old cans should make more cans; old newspapers back into newsprint again.

Stronger controls and research on chemicals in foods. A shift toward a more varied and sensitive type of agriculture (more small-scale and subsistence farming) would eliminate much of the call for blanket use of pesticides.

The community: DDT and such: don’t use them. Air pollution: use less cars. Cars pollute the air, and one or two people riding lonely in a huge car is an insult to intelligence and the Earth. Share rides, legalize hitch-hiking, and build hitch-hiker waiting stations along the highways. Also—a step toward the new world—walk more; look for the best routes through beautiful countryside for long-distance walking trips: San Francisco to Los Angeles down the Coast Range, for example. Learn how to use your own manure as fertilizer if you’re in the country—as the Far East has done for centuries. There’s a way, and it’s safe.

Solid waste: boycott bulky wasteful Sunday papers which use up trees. It’s all just advertising anyway, which is artificially inducing more mindless consumption. Refuse paper bags at the store. Organize Park and Street clean-up festivals. Don’t work in any way for or with an industry which pollutes, and don’t be drafted into the military. Don’t waste. (A monk and an old master were once walking in the mountains. They noticed a little hut upstream. The monk said, “A wise hermit must live there”—the master said, “That’s no wise hermit, you see that lettuce leaf

floating down the stream, he's a Waster." Just then an old man—came running down the hill with his beard flying and caught the floating lettuce leaf.) Carry your own jug to the winery and have it filled from the barrel.

Our own heads: Part of the trouble with talking about DDT is that the use of it is not just a practical device, it's almost an establishment religion. There is something in Western culture that wants to totally wipe out creepy-crawlies, and feels repugnance for toadstools and snakes. This is fear of one's own deepest natural inner-self wilderness areas, and the answer is, relax. Relax around bugs, snakes, and your own hairy dreams. Again, farmers can and should share their crops with a certain percentage of buglife as "paying their dues."

Thoreau says: "How then can the harvest fail? Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of the weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds? It matters little comparatively whether the fields fill the farmer's barns. The true husbandman will cease from anxiety, as the squirrels manifest no concern whether the woods will bear chestnuts this year or not, and finish his labor with every day, relinquish all claim to the produce of his fields, and sacrificing in his mind not only his first but his last fruits also." In the realm of thought, inner experience, consciousness, as in the outward realm of interconnection, there is a difference between balanced cycle, and the excess which cannot be handled. When the balance is right, the mind recycles from highest illuminations to the stillness of dreamless sleep; the alchemical "transmutation."

3. CONSUMPTION

The Condition

Position: Everything that lives eats food, and is food in turn. This complicated animal, man, rests on a vast and delicate pyramid of energy-transformations. To grossly use more than you need, to destroy, is biologically unsound. Most of the production and consumption of modern societies is not necessary or conducive to spiritual and cultural growth, let alone survival; and is behind much greed and envy, age-old causes of social and international discord.

Situation: Man's careless use of "resources" and his total dependence on certain substances such as fossil fuels (which are being exhausted, slowly but certainly) are having harmful effects on all the other members of the life-network. The complexity of modern technology renders whole populations vulnerable to the deadly consequences of the loss of any one key resource.

Instead of independence we have over-dependence on life-giving substances such as water, which we squander. Many species of animals and birds have become extinct in the service of fashion fads—or fertilizer—or industrial oil—the soil is being used up; in fact mankind has become a locust-like blight on the planet that will leave a bare cupboard for its own children—all the while in a kind of Addict's Dream of affluence, comfort, eternal progress—using the great achievements of science to produce software and swill.

Goal: Balance, harmony, humility, growth which is a mutual growth with Redwood and Quail (would you want your child to grow up without ever hearing a wild bird?)—to be a good member of the great community of living creatures. True affluence is not needing anything.

Action

Social/political: It must be demonstrated ceaselessly that a continually "growing economy" is no longer healthy, but a Cancer. And that the criminal waste which is allowed in the name of competition—especially that ultimate in wasteful needless competition, hot wars and cold wars with "communism" (or "capitalism")—must be halted totally with ferocious energy and decision. Economics must be seen as a small sub-branch of Ecology, and production/distribution/consumption handled by companies or unions with the same elegance and sparseness one sees in nature.

Soil banks; open space; phase out logging in most areas. "Lightweight dome and honeycomb structures in line with the architectural principles of nature." "We shouldn't use wood for housing because trees are too important." Protection for all predators and varmints: "Support your right to arm bears."

Damn the International Whaling Commission which is selling out the last of our precious, wise whales.

Absolutely no further development of roads and concessions in National Parks and Wilderness Areas; build auto campgrounds in the least desirable areas. Plan consumer boycotts in response to dishonest and unnecessary products. Radical Co-ops. Politically, blast both “Communist” and “Capitalist” myths of progress, and all crude notions of conquering or controlling nature.

The Community: Sharing and creating. The inherent aptness of communal life—where large tools are owned jointly and used efficiently. The power of renunciation: If enough Americans refused to buy a new car for one given year it would permanently alter the American economy.

Recycling clothes and equipment. Support handicrafts, gardening, home skills, midwifery, herbs—all the things that can make us independent, beautiful and whole. Learn to break the habit of unnecessary possessions—a monkey on everybody’s back—but avoid a self-abnegating anti-joyous self-righteousness. Simplicity is light, carefree, neat and loving—not a self-punishing ascetic trip. (The great Chinese poet Tu Fu said “The ideas of a poet should be noble and simple.”)

Don’t shoot a deer if you don’t know how to use all the meat and preserve that which you can’t eat, to tan the hide and use the leather—to use it all, with gratitude, right down to the sinew and hooves. Simplicity and mindfulness in diet is a starting point for many people.

Our own heads: It is hard to even begin to gauge how much a complication of ‘possessions, the notions of “my and mine,” stand between us and a true, clear, liberated way of seeing the world. To live lightly on the earth, to be aware and alive, to be free of egotism, to be in contact with plants and animals, starts with simple concrete acts.

The inner principle is the insight that we are inter-dependent energy-fields of great potential wisdom and compassion—expressed in each person as a superb mind, a handsome and complex body, and the almost magical capacity of language. To these potentials and capacities, “owning things” can add nothing of authenticity. “Clad in the sky, with the earth for a pillow.”

4. TRANSFORMATION

The Condition

Position: Everyone is the result of our forces: the conditions of this known-universe (matter/energy forms and ceaseless change); the biology of his species; his individual genetic heritage and the culture he’s born into. Within this web of forces there are certain spaces and loops which allow total freedom and illumination. The gradual exploration of some of these spaces is “evolution” and, for human cultures, what “history” could be.

We have it within our deepest powers not only to change our “selves” but to change our culture. If man is to remain on earth he must transform the five-millennia-long urbanizing civilization tradition into a new ecologically-sensitive harmony-oriented wild-minded scientific/spiritual culture. “Wildness is the state of complete awareness. That’s why we need it.”

Situation: Civilization, which has made us so successful a species, has overshoot itself and now threatens us with its inertia. There is some evidence that civilized life isn’t good for the human gene pool. To achieve the Changes we must change the very foundations of our society and our minds.

Goal: Nothing short of total transformation will do much good. What we envision is a planet on which the human population lives harmoniously and dynamically by employing a sophisticated and unobtrusive technology in a world environment which is “left natural.” Specific points in this vision:

A healthy and spare population of all races, much less in number than today.

Cultural and individual pluralism, unified by a type of world tribal council. Division by natural and cultural boundaries rather than arbitrary political boundaries.

A technology of communication, education, and quiet transportation, land-use being sensitive to the properties of each region. Allowing, thus, the Bison to return to much of the high plains. Careful but intensive agriculture in the great alluvial valleys; deserts left wild for those who would trot in them. Computer technicians who run the plant part of the year and walk along with the Elk in the migrations during the rest.

A basic cultural outlook and social organization that inhibits power and property-seeking while encouraging exploration and challenge in things like music, meditation, mathematics, mountaineering, magic, and all other ways of authentic being-in-the-world. Women totally free and equal. A new kind of family—responsible, but more festive and relaxed—is implicit.

Action

Social/political: It seems evident that there are throughout the world certain social and religious forces which have worked through history toward an ecologically and culturally enlightened state of affairs. Let these be encouraged: Gnostics, hip Marxists, Teilhard de Chardin Catholics, Druids, Taoists, Biologists, Witches, Yogins, Bhikkus; Quakers, Sufis, Tibetans, Zens, Shamans, Bushmen, American Indians, Polynesians, Anarchists, Alchemists...the list is long.

All primitive cultures, all communal and ashram movements. Since it doesn't seem practical or even desirable to think that direct bloody force will achieve much, it would be best to consider this a continuing "revolution of consciousness" which will be won not by guns but by seizing the key images, myths, archetypes, eschatologies, and ecstasies so that life won't seem worth living unless one's on the transforming energy's side. By taking over "science and technology" and releasing its real possibilities and powers in the service of this planet—which, after all, produced us and it.

The community: New schools, new classes, walking in the woods and cleaning up the streets. Find psychological techniques for creating an awareness of "self" which includes the social and natural environment. "Consideration of what specific language forms—symbolic systems—and social institutions constitute obstacles to ecological awareness." Without falling into a facile interpretation of McLuhan, we can hope to use the media. Let no one be ignorant of the facts of biology and related disciplines; bring up our children as part of the wild-life.

Some communities can establish themselves in backwater rural areas and flourish—others maintain themselves in urban centers, and the two types work together—a two-way flow of experience, people, money and home-grown vegetables. Ultimately cities will only exist as joyous tribal gatherings and fairs, to dissolve after a few weeks.

Investigating new life-styles is our work, as is the exploration of ways to explore our inner realms—with the known dangers of crashing that go with such. We would work with political-minded people where it helps, hoping to enlarge their vision, and with people of all varieties of politics or thought at whatever point they become aware of environmental urgencies. Master the archaic and the primitive as models of basic nature-related cultures—as well as the most imaginative extensions of science—and build a community where these two vectors cross.

Our own heads: Is where it starts. Knowing that we are the first human beings in history to have all of man's culture and previous experience available to our study, and being free enough of the weight of traditional cultures to seek out a larger identity. The first members of a civilized society since the early Neolithic to wish to look clearly into the eyes of the wild and see our self-hood, our family, there.

We have these advantages to set off the obvious disadvantages of being as screwed up as we are—which gives us a fair chance to penetrate some of the riddles of ourselves and the universe, and to go beyond the idea of "man's survival" or "the survival of the biosphere" and to draw our strength from the realization that at the heart of things is some kind of serene and ecstatic process which is actually beyond qualities and certainly beyond birth-and-death. "No need to survive!" "In the fires that destroy the universe at the end of the kalpa, what survives?!!" "The iron tree blooms in the void!"

Knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from.



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