SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

# Complexity and Time

## *Breaking the Pyramid's Reign*

BY SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

Modern ecophilosophy started some twenty-five years ago. For a brief spell, some bright ideas were launched in various countries. Since then, there has been a lot of action, but very little philosophical movement. But we have reaped a good deal of experience through ecopolitical activity. We need now, after all that experience, to sit down and do ecophilosophy again, to philosophize under direct influence of the reaped experience. Otherwise, we'll keep on making unnecessary, sometimes very serious mistakes—even moving in the wrong direction.

Of course green philosophers have been at work during this period, but they have generally not been the people of concrete political action; that is why—in my view—so few viable ideas have appeared. The socio-ecological crisis of our time is throwing us through something completely unprecedented: it is global, and it is deeper and more uprooting than most people—even among the greens—have imagination to grasp. A few generalist studies give us hints to that effect (specialists, of whom there is an overabundance in the world, are misleading instead of enlightening here). We need very much to develop a viable new paradigm, a new world picture, or rather a new mode of perceiving, thinking, and living, maybe a new myth. The need is for something we can base our action on, something that will give us a collective strength at least equal to the security with which our opponent, an Industrial Growth Society, operates.

In relation to the kind of crisis we face, most of the ideas I have seen during the last decade are too con-

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PHOTO ABOVE: OLOF HENKE

ventional, meek, and conservative, more suited to hide than to expose and therefore sometimes dangerous. I don't know if I have made any beginnings toward a new breakthrough, but it is up to all of us to make a try and to have faith in the attempt. In any case, I have seen how some of the thoughts I and several others expressed in the sixties have been invalidated by what we have run up against ecopolitically in the intervening years.

Through all of our political actions in Norway we worked on a new philosophy of society and man-in-nature. Actually, the organization we developed (which I describe later) required that the participants do both. From 1969 we called our way of thinking *ecophilosophy:* "Love for the Wisdom of the World House." We produced many definitions of ecophilosophy. But since the stress in ecophilosophy is on activity and the persons involved in ecophilosophy, I will here reproduce the version that is in keeping with that, which means that rather than defining ecophilosophy, we define "ecophilosopher."

An ecophilosopher is one who occupies her- or himself with the following kinds of pursuits, never forgetting their interrelatedness:

1. Studies of the global eco-social system and local subsystems and of humans and human groups as dynamic entities at various depths of complex integration with that system, with the latter conceived of as a self-regulating macro-organism in interplay with matter and energy; awareness focused particularly upon relationships of process, communication, and structural shifts.
2. In this study, trying to use all human faculties—intellect, sensitivity, feeling, intuition, and practical experience—to grasp and integrate consciously as much as possible the total network of interdependencies and the dynamisms of the life process, so that these insights and sensibilities may be, among other things, directed toward
3. a critical evaluation of the relevant scientific, technological, and economic/political views and regimes, their basic assumptions and their impact on human attitudes and activities, as well as on their relation to nature and to human society, and toward
4. the formulation of values, norms, and strategies pertinent to the strengthening of the dynamic steady state or "homeorhesis" (I prefer the latter concept, which is the British geneticist C.H. Waddington's, since it is more in keeping with our process perspective; more on that later) and the continuing growth of the "organic complexity" of the total eco-social system, and the formulation of criticism of values, norms, and procedures that tend to weaken homeorhesis and to stunt that growth.

*The One and the Many* ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

Ecophilosophy is here conceived of as something more than an academic discipline in the traditional

sense. It is thought of as a total engagement. It should strive to be as wide in scope as the attack on the life strength of the ecosystem and human society is today. Ecophilosophy is a form of activity and a direction of thought that appears as something not freely chosen but as a necessity—a response required by the total system crisis we are experiencing in the world, challenging us to attempt a deep-level revision of the basic notions of our Euro-American civilization. In such an extraordinary situation, the limits of the academic tradition—value-neutral and strictly intellectual—must, at least for the present, be broken out of.

The definition was more or less thought of as a program, something that we subsequently tried to follow as a gradually expanding string of groups. On the Norwegian scene we later got another concept, Arne Naess's "ecosophy," and the two terms tend to get mixed up in the media. The ecophilosophy group, which began while Naess was occupied elsewhere, has wanted to keep the term it started with, for several reasons: We wanted at an early stage to "occupy" the term that would most likely later on be chosen by academic institutions as a designation for a value-neutral, purely descriptive concept—like "the philosophy of ecology." We didn't want that to happen. It should not be possible to walk into a university and take up a philosophical discipline related to the ecocrisis that leaves one inactive. Any combination of "ecology" and "philosophy" should signal the necessity of involvement. In the United States the term "deep ecology" has been used to describe what we were driving at. But I am not ready to lose the "philo" part of the term. We wanted to keep a clear signal of involvement with *love.* We would seek understanding and work politically continuously inspired by love of nature and love of the human partaker in nature. We associate "ecosophy" more with a purely intellectual pursuit.

Naess, on the other hand, wanted an academically neutral, descriptive field as well, and thought that "ecophilosophy" should be reserved for that. And before we got around to discussing this somewhat awkward situation with him, he had published the first edition of his *Økologi, samfunn, og livsstil* (now in English as *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle)* and several widely read articles. Since then we have been stuck with two terms.

This may serve some purpose, since the concepts covered by the terms are actually different, and there is also a difference of approach. One of Naess's definitions of "ecosophy" runs as follows: a "philosophical system (synthesis) that treats nature as diversity-in-unity, views human beings as parts of nature, and enlarges the field of validity of the norms of natural rights to encompass all of nature." In keeping with this, Naess has put a lot of effort into proposing and discussing theories of animal rights and "humanity as a part," while the ecophilosophy group might be said to be more anthropocentric, spending most of their time on the organization of human societies and how human cultures develop and change.

Perhaps this reflects two different ontologies—one of systems and system relationships (in Naess's case with Spinoza as a source of inspiration); the other of *process* as basic to everything. In any case I feel that the two projects complement each other nicely. Both engage people in work that badly needs to be done, probably people with different backgrounds and temperaments that would not find inspiration in both approaches. The differences and similarities between these two approaches could certainly be discussed at length.

## PART I: TWO KINDS OF SOCIETY IN BASIC ANTAGONISM

I want to begin by outlining some general ideas about and ways of analyzing our eco-social crisis, and then move on to a discussion of how they have played a role in the Norwegian environmental movement. But I must make it clear that these ideas were not fully formed before we began to act; they were also formed in "midstream," so to speak, and even if they come first in this paper, that doesn't mean they came first in ac-

tual fact. This is an important idea, and one that will become clearer as my discussion proceeds.

I will contrast here two basically different sorts of social organization; much of the thinking of the Norwegian ecophilosophy group has been formed through posing these two against each other. We have called them *Industrial Growth Society* (IGS) and *Life Necessities Society* (LNS). The first one is based on steady or accelerating growth in the production of industrial articles and the use of industrial methods. The second one is based on producing life necessities and always tending to give priority to that.

IGS is a subclass of what I will call pyramidal societies. As it progresses historically, its administrative and political networks tend toward perfecting the pyramidal shape. This development is propelled through four dynamic agents:

1. It is aiming for—and its success is measured against—*linear or accelerating expansion of the production of industrial commodities and services and the use of industrial method*—standardized mass production, concentration in a few, urbanized centers, carried out by specialists on all levels.
2. The main propellant is *individual competition,* not only in the economic sphere, but in every field of human endeavor, including leisure activities and art.
3. The main resource for expansion and for out-competing competitors is not the control of minerals, energy, and the like, but *applied science.*
4. The main method of governing everything and seeing what's wrong and what should be done is *quantification,* presupposing a world of spatial-mechanical constitution. These four characteristics should be regarded as one dynamic block, all of them effective in conjunction at any time.

There is only one historical example of this kind of society, our own, which is tending to become global. Most other human societies have been of the LNS type. Many of the latter have not been good societies to live in for the majority, but among them a few have belonged to a sub-variety that we have named *Life Growth Societies*—societies that are furthering continued complex ecological and cultural growth and human creativity for all. The society we are aiming for is of this kind. In our thinking, such a society can only come about on the basis of prioritized life necessities production, that is, it will keep its place as a subspecies of the LNSes. An IGS will never afford that basis. So any attempt to rewire that sociopolitical organization is futile.

IGS is an abnormal kind of society that exists for only a brief historical second. Judging from various indications spanning twelve million years, the LNS is the human kind of society, and we think it will remain so.

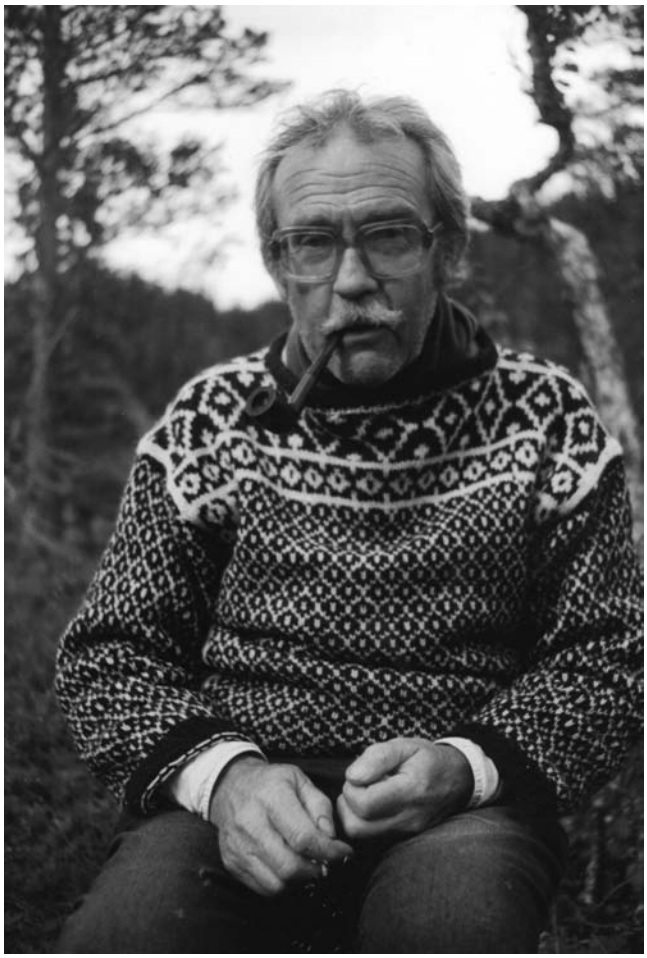
That means among other things that we have no faith in the saving capacity of the computer. Rather the opposite: the computer and its data collecting networks, its educational systems, and so on, will have as its most conspicuous function a treatment of symptoms and a hiding of real causes, and so will permit a buildup of crisis tendencies longer than they otherwise could.

I will go into more depth on these themes later, but just now I will assert that the computerized society model furthers isolated individualism (the talk of an electronic "global village" is a completely non-empirical fancy), mechanical schemes to replace organic processes, and alienation to nature. It offers an abstract world in replacement of a concrete, a complicated for a complex, employment instead of work. It represents the last stage of a civilization that for centuries regarded work purely as a means to an end—survival, and, if possible, affluence.

The end result of that will be a more devastating crash than a computer-free development would have led to—that is, if the green movement, together with fresh Third and Fourth World activity, does not manage to build a global, radical break with IGS in parallel with the IGS's running itself down. And our hope is that the latter does happen as a soft crash and not as a sudden, violent one accelerated by positive feedback.

## COMPLEXITY, PSEUDOCOMPLEXITY, AND COMPLICATION

I want now to describe three other concepts that have been useful in our analysis of modern Western society. I label these concepts complexity, complication, and pseudocomplexity—in the latter case I also use the expressions "Amusement Park Diversity" or "Disneyland Effect." This handful of concepts has also been useful in clarifying how computers and living entities differ, nay, belong to two different worlds. By "complexity" (CX) I mean the dynamic, irreversible, self-steering, goal-directed, conflict-fertilized manifoldness of nature and—as a particularly refined and intricate version of that—the human body/mind. By "complication" (CC) I mean the static, reversible, externally steered, standardizing structure-intricacy of the machine. The computer is a particularly refined and intricate version of that.



Sigmund Kvaløy Setreng. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

"Pseudocomplexity" (PCX) *mimics* CX; it is the human invention of various arrangements and activities designed to keep people occupied in a diverse manner, through mass media, hobbies, tourism, schools, and so on, but on the kind of shallow level that is exemplified by the amusement park—without offering training or development that equips them better for creative interaction with nature or with human society. Environmental PCX gives a "safety-valve" outlet for the inner urge toward complex development that any human is born with; it offers, however, only the sort of interaction that leaves the personality unchanged after the event.

CX can be described only by references to *qualities* (where, however, quantitative perception and assessment is included as *one* segment of the spectrum of the mediations between man and environment)—kinds and sorts and differentiations and crossings, shades and hues without definite boundaries, as well as dialectical leaps.

CC can, in any situation, be completely described by reference to the five mechanical parameters: height, breadth, depth, mass, and velocity, modeled through spatial diagrams, mathematics and logic, and quantified according to fixed numerical scales.

The propaganda of IGS tells us that LNS is a simple, primitive, and even standardized sort of society, while IGS is complex. One of my main points here is to show that it is actually the other way around. And there are many examples that most people will recognize that clarify the opposite view: that the complexity of IGS is just an appearance. A closer look reveals something else beneath the surface, if you are looking for what has really happened, psychologically and socially, to the lives of the majority of individuals when their society passed from LNS to IGS.

The main reason for the common misunderstanding—on which the propaganda thrives—is that in IGS *division of labor* is confused with spiritual, social, and cultural complexity. These are, of course, entirely differ-

ent parameters. The different jobs that had to be done in the older society could, in principle, be taken care of by any individual. Each person came near to complete self-sufficiency and self-reliance, given a minimum of natural resources. To be so fit required of her or him the development of a broad spectrum of talents both intellectual, intuitional, emotional, and practical.

Modern women and men have been robbed of the kind of work that brought this out, of work as the everyday catalyst to the unfolding of human complexity. The potential of each individual's complexity has instead been administratively cut up and handed out to a thousand different career specialists. Life becomes complicated instead of complex.

## MEANINGFUL WORK

This complication-encouraging pattern of work is a topic E.F. Schumacher stresses and treats lucidly in the chapter "Buddhist Economics" in *Small is Beautiful.* In Buddhist thinking, *man needs work as much as he needs food.* Again, we have an idea that sounds crazy in Western ears, since for us, work is a pure means, never an end in itself. This is very much so because in the IGS economy the ideal worker is an appendage to the machine, be it the physical or the organizational one. In other words, in IGS work loses its human meaning by necessity.

I want to go into the concept "meaningful (or human) work" as it has been developed in Norwegian ecopolitics. We define the concept through five characteristics:

1. It is an activity necessary for the human being's material life, giving it a direction and practical seriousness not shared by any other human activity.
2. Its fruits or products (material objects and services) do not damage but rather enhance life (dynamic complexity both in the ecosystem and in human culture), with no time limits.
3. It poses such challenges that the potential complexity of talents and capabilities in the human individual and her/his group are brought to bloom.
4. It demands of its partakers the building of loyalty, as well as practical techniques for cooperation.
5. In general it engages children (and any other social group), not as play only, but in a way needed by our society.

What is really remarkable about IGS is that it—unlike most types of societies we humans have tried out so far—deprives us of work in the defined sense. That might be its most damaging aspect. And what has appeared to us as a wonderful aspect of work in the stated sense is that a society built upon that foundation will thrive on meager energy resources, and that energy affluence blocks its path. And not only that: a society with an economy structured through work in this sense is one where all the green movement's other concerns are taken care of. Meaningful work presupposes a specific kind of social economy, which again requires the enhancement of sensitivity toward fellow human beings and nature. This is our contention, having compared information on a wide range of different cultures and societies, historically and throughout the world.

One example of what I mean here, though, can be fetched from Norwegian sagas. Snorri Sturluson wrote of the building of the largest and most beautiful Viking ship for the famous king Olaf Tryggvesson, around the end of the first millennium A.D. One of the foremen of the boat builders was a man called Torberg Skavhogg, who, like most of his contemporaries, was a farmer, hunter, fisherman, blacksmith, carpenter, local parliamentarian, and cattle man—a super amateur.

One day Torberg asked to get leave from his job because of pressing matters at his farm. King Olaf realized that the farms of the day were a kind of holistic production unit on which all of society—and consequently the king's power—was based. So Torberg, despite his importance to the crew, was allowed to go home. He was gone quite a while, and when he got back, the great ship was nearly finished, even to the rim planks forming the gunwales. But Torberg, in contrast to everyone else, did not seem pleased. And when

the next day the king came to inspect the ship, there was great consternation among the builders; someone had hacked great gashes along one of the rims. In a rage, the king declared that he would give a bag of gold to whoever could deliver the vandal for execution. Torberg stepped forward and admitted his guilt.

King Olaf gave the renowned shipwright one last chance to redeem himself. Torberg sprang to the ship, and with smooth strokes of his axe, leveled both rim planks down, eliminating the notches he had cut into the one. The difference wasn't more than a few inches, but the saga reports that "everyone saw that the ship was even more beautiful." Torberg was honored for his modification.

Two points are worth emphasizing: First, Torberg, in contrast to our modern society, was willing to stake his life on his aesthetic sense, something that IGS has made hardly likely in our time. Second, it shows the close integration of value and work of Torberg's day, an association built on the sort of economy where everyday challenges are complex and where tasks call for the adaptability, ingenuity, and participation of every member of society.

## TIME

What can make it especially difficult for us to develop this manifoldness in our own society is that we in the West are particularly handicapped because our minds have such a weak sense of time. I mean "human" or "natural" time, as distinguished from clock time, the time of physics, which is time reduced to space, to projections on paper or to the computer screen. Our perception and our personalities are static.

We need to regain time, we need training in the sense of progress. We ask the question, What does the future hold?—but that's a meaningful question only if the future is a storehouse, a spatial affair. But it is not. *We* are building the future, on the basis of—or often in spite of—what's buried in our history. Right now some of us are trying to build a society that even in its roots is qualitatively different from the past and present one, a complex instead of a complicated society.

But, of course, we *have to* take our ideas from earlier experience, and in doing that, our best bet is to compare the widest possible range of different societies that together constitute humankind's experiments up to now. And in attempting that, we seem to discern a few very general elements that are probably indispensable strands for weaving a future that will avoid the kind of self-propelling dynamism that leads to IGSes.

One bundle of such elements is what I have defined as meaningful work. That's my main reason for claiming that we have a useful and even vital working guideline, even in a period when the future seems so uncertain.

A thinker who has been an inspiration both to me and to all eco-activists in Norway is Gandhi, who says that man's most important source of insight and wisdom is located in social conflict where central human values are at stake. And that is exactly where Gandhi devises for us a training course for the *regaining* of time! Gandhi says, "The way is the goal," and the way is one of swimming in the stream, nonviolently, but gaining ability through action and conflict.

## THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF REVOLUTIONIZING YOURSELF SEPARATELY

It's something typically Western when some of the greens say that we can and should start by changing *ourselves* first, and through *that* get ready to change the sociopolitical system. That's still building on the view of man as a soul separated from his body and from his environment. In our world of passivity that's the worst kind of recommendation, and ensures that nothing will happen.

Instead of that, we should learn the karma-yoga message of Gandhi: You have to step into the stream to be grabbed by something outside your private soul, *something you do not control.* It's then that you have a chance of being shaken so that you're changed, and through that already contributing to changing the system. Instead of observing the river "scientifically," from a safe distance, you step into the river, are—surprisingly—grabbed by the current, and are *forced* to learn how to swim. That's

when you learn to accept that nothing is permanent, that everything is time and that time is creativity. Only then will you have the initiative and ability to escape control by the powers above you in the pyramid.

## SPATIAL WEST VERSUS TEMPORAL EAST

I began by contrasting two kinds of societies, one dominated by Western, spatial thinking, and an alternative, characterized by Eastern, temporal thinking. Let me here illustrate this difference by referring to a contrast between house-building traditions in the two cultures.

In the "Plow Furrow" valley in the Himalaya, tourists and mountaineers often pass through and say: "Look at these poor people. They try to build houses with regular right angles, striving for geometrical perfection, but they cannot! These primitives lack the simplest knowledge of mechanics, and the necessary technology besides! They are always short of time, and never manage to build a proper house!"

Through my long personal association with the people of this valley, I have come to think these Westerners are wrong. These Himalayan semi-nomads and farmers do not share this Western aim of geometrico-Platonic perfection, which has to do with perceiving the world as pure, immobile space overlaid with illusionary movement—even with detesting movement and time. In my perspective it is misleading to even use the word "architecture" to talk about Himalayan houses.

We should instead talk about "life with one's house." The house is a part of one's personality, something that is always accepted to be changing. The Sherpa and Tibetan houses are living beings that the builders take responsibility for on a day-to-day, never-let-up basis. If the roof blows off, you put it back on. It's no greater a tragedy than having your hat blow off; it doesn't threaten your life.

This is the strategy—formed by necessity in a non-affluent society—of humoring nature, which is actually yourself, instead of forcing nature to remain unchanged. Forcing nature easily gets you into trouble. That's where we in the West are.

Western architecture, on the other hand, is an example of "stop-time aesthetics." If one day a crack appears in the wall of a house—that smooth, pure face—the owners can't bear it. The house is supposed to be a structure where the cracks of time are not supposed to have any relevance. And if the truth of its nature—a being in time—is revealed, it shows up something terribly wrong with this society and its economy. Western architecture, like Western society, is built to make you believe time is finally stopped, that withering and death are no more.

To keep that illusion going, however, requires a global robber economy, a systematic plundering of the earth's last resources at an exponential rate, trying desperately to preserve structures that are contradicting time, the process of life. Man here is living on a self-contradiction of his essential roots.

In contrast to this I propose what I call the philosophy of positive decay, a paradigm accepting decay because that means accepting life. It's another word for ecophilosophy. And this is where I find realism in the East, especially in the Buddhist tradition.

## BUDDHISM PLUS ORGANIC SYSTEMS THEORY

The key element in the Buddhist tradition is that when the Buddhists say the world is suffering they mean *we are time but we think we are space.* It is the element that unlocks Buddhist philosophy, especially in light of what I have said earlier. We think we are space and act accordingly, which means we are continuously colliding with ourselves and everybody else.

Buddhism—mainly classical Buddhism, but also Mahayana, Northern, and Far Eastern Buddhism—says instead that we are part of a time flow, of a stream, of chains of events with no beginning and no ending. In this stream our individuality disappears, although it is almost impossible for us to accept this. By natural inclination enormously fortified by pyramidal societies we seek individual permanency. We are inclined to do that, but we are also born with a freedom to rid ourselves of that inclination.

Buddhism is in this way basically at variance with IGS, with a socio-economic system that demands that people fight each other. And if that demand suddenly found no effect anymore, it would mean economic chaos and social catastrophe. Not only the individuals of the West, but also society itself, is forced to try to stop time. Half consciously we sense that we are living with an impossible project and sense how vulnerable we are. Deep down we are scared, and that leads to the opposite of Buddhism. We build protective walls around ourselves, we seek economic security, or social status, honor, a pyramid on top of our grave. But everything has to come down, because we are but eddies in the time stream.

There is no substance that things happen to, not even a substance of form. Everything is just movement, events that are linked together causally and ordered rhythmically. Even our language is a screen hiding reality. It uses words like "that," "everything"; it's a language of spaces and permanent substances, it's a screen that's hiding reality. IGS has inherited the Greek tradition of a geometric world, and mechano-spatial industrialism evolved from that.

There are, however, ideas that have been spawned in the context of IGS which—after millennia—might fruitfully come together. One is Western organic systems thinking. Gautama Buddha's theory of the individual being an eddy in the stream of time posits only the individual and the great system (Samsara and Nirvana); there is nothing in between those two levels. In organic systems theory the in-between is full: there are many intermediate and mediating layers, hierarchical in function. All entities of life tend very strongly to form and be part of organic systems, where smaller are parts of larger. Semipermeable membranes constitute the boundaries, keeping the larger and the smaller entities as part-systems, but interdependent and contributing symbiotically to each other. Gautama, of course, could have none of this hierarchical idea. But in a somewhat analogous way he dismembers the individual, leaving us only with *skandas*—loosely connected "existence groups" whose unity in the form of a permanent, self-centered being is illusory.

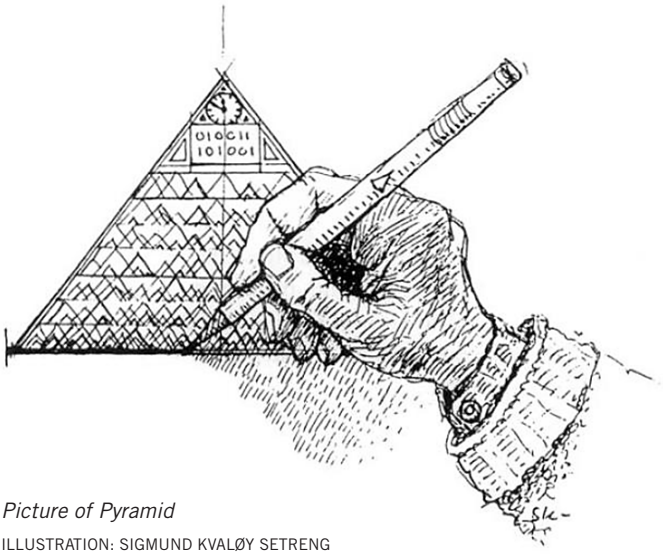
With this in mind, I think our psychologists, psychiatrists, social psychologists, and the like, have been wrong in one of their basic presuppositions. When these thinkers and researchers talk about a human being whose mental life is chaos, they always stress the importance of getting back into the self; their aim is to build an individual identity where one was previously lacking. And success here is based on the possibility of defining one and only one personality structure as a skeleton for the healthy and sane individual.

Instead of this notion, we can conceive of a human being as a being who at birth is like a very complex root system that is trying not to fix a permanent personality structure, but to grow in a multiplicity of personalities and never to fix any of these either. I have in mind a dynamic and multidirectional but organically ordered pattern. Contrasting this, we "civilized" peoples live today as we did five thousand years ago under pyramidal systems that demand from us that when we are born we must be one, single, rigidly identifiable person. That's the only way we can function as controllable "elementary particles" in a pyramidally ordered universe.

Oddly enough, the novelist H.G. Wells wrote toward the end of his life a doctoral dissertation with the same theme and the fantastic title of *A Thesis on the Quality of Illusion in the Continuity of the Individual Life in the Higher Metazoa, with Particular Reference to the Species Homo Sapiens.* He has this idea that maybe we've had it all wrong, this one individual center that we turn back to all the time. Maybe the human personality structure is like a stage instead of a center, a stage where a series of actors are performing. We recognize only one of them at a time, and the rest are suppressed. The Finnish psychiatrist Reimo Kampman has related ideas in the book *You Are Not Alone* (*Du är inte ensam* [Stockholm, 1975]). He describes how, using hypnosis, he was able to call forth "side personalities" in a surprisingly high number of tested individuals.

I want to illustrate the idea that we are eddies in the stream of time, a decentralized, diverse group of personalities, with a few examples from Western cultures. Suppose, for example, I were to draw a pyramid. You could fix your eyes on my pen as I move it back and forth; you're able to reverse the locomotion of the pen. This ability to reverse and repeat, to control a movement in space, is a specific ability of our organ of visualization. Because of its offering of this control, of seeming security, we think that eyesight is the most important. According to Buddhism, controlled space is illusory, but the illusion is fortified if you are a part of IGS and have at your disposal the science and technology of that socio-economic system. The eyes are suited to private study of books and things, you can be attentive or not, as you choose, because you have "control." In this way, you become abstracted from the world, from the life stream.

Hearing, in contrast, senses a time flow, irreversible novelty, creations in time. If I were talking to you, you could not stop my flow of words and reverse that to hear once more what I had said a while ago. And, because of that, with hearing you have to raise your awareness to a higher level, to be really present, in conscious and active synchronization with what is happening. Otherwise, you'll slide out of participation, you'll be individualized.



*Picture of Pyramid*
ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

A comparison parallel with that between sight and sound can be made between a symphony orchestra and a jazz band. You can play orchestra music by yourself, look at the scores, follow the metronome alone, but secure in a controlled environment. If you play in an orchestra, you are governed from without, there is one and only one control center—the conductor—that you must follow as best you can. If you don't, chaos threatens.

In contrast, jazz offers us real creativity or organic existence. Jazz means the opportunity of genuine personal creativity, but through a tightly woven *collectivity:* the jazz band is something greater than the individual, nevertheless it is nothing without him. The small, well-integrated jazz band is a flow where every member has the same importance, where there's no conductor, and where creativity happens all the time as a common effort.

Their communicative network happens through semipermeable membranes surrounding each individual, but at the same time including her or him in the total organism. Organic life teaches us this principle. But even the membrane is changing. This is in contrast with the method of the machine, and it is my symbol of the process structure of the kind of society that we are deprived of today but that should be our aim as an alternative.

Another example, this one from my own country, can help make these ideas clearer. Up until about seventy years ago, Norwegian communities along the western and northern coasts were seminomadic. Part of the year they were stationary in one place with their farms and families. But every winter for three or four months they left home on a sailing vessel, normally owned collectively by five or six neighbors, to go fishing at the Lofoten Islands far away in the north.

They often had very rough weather, and handling these little open, square-rigged boats was not easy. But they were masters at it. The only way they managed this was through total, mutual cooperation—the six of them, and the boat and its rigging, became like one organism. The theory of semipermeable membranes is very helpful in understanding how this happened.

These men had to be members of two extremely

different societies with two different ways of social integration. They were also meeting nature in two different ways. In my view they did it because they developed *two different personalities.* The theory of permanent ego centering does not cover this phenomena. These two personalities go deeper than mere role playing, because in role playing, you keep the same center and merely *act* differently. At the same time, the varied personalities of these boatmen were dynamic, always shifting, adjusting, and growing. These men in their tiny nutshell of a boat had actually lost their egos. Not, however, into the disintegration into the *skandas* of Buddhism. *One* of the personalities of each man, his "Lofoten personality," combined with the similar personalities in each of the others, producing—with the boat, the waves, and the wind—an over-individual. The over-individual was an organically functioning form, one that was flexible in time. The personalities at work here were constituents of a world other than the one these men had put to sea from, the "geometrical" farm community of "secure separateness."

The behavior of seminomadic people of the central Himalaya can also be explained by assuming they have three different, annually operative personalities, repeated sequentially. This utilization of their complexity potential is brought forth by the very diverse demands posed by their environment and resources. Their existences are the following three: (1) as village-based farmers part of the year, (2) as high-altitude cattle herders another part, and finally (3) as caravan traders across the Himalaya once or twice annually.

A reincarnate lama head of a monastery in the valley I am most familiar with has five personalities, a product of his training to be deeply knowledgeable in all fields of human interest. That makes him an unusually stable and courageous person: he includes a little *society* within his mental and physical range. His community expects him to be many, and feels safer knowing that he spans that range.

What I am talking about is different from "split personality." I am speaking about a really radical utilization of an enormous potential for complex, deep "permeation" or interpenetration—an urge we all have from our childhood but which we are not permitted to follow in our society. I am using a *social* model for the psychic world of the human individual, starting with that internal society and then explaining the individual, rather than the usual method of beginning with the human individual and then going out to society. In the perspective I'm outlining, any person has a lot of different personality tendencies that are always budding, or trying to bloom or actually evolving, and some of these are supporting or complementing each other, and some are in conflict.

That conflict may not be damaging; it can be very fruitful. And if a person develops this complexity potential, he or she can with extraordinary courage and confidence meet challenges from new social or natural process structures. We in the West have come some distance in building democratic institutions in society; I think now we could entertain the possibility of developing a democracy in the individual's inner world.

IGS is a society demanding that we close up our membranes, so that we may be used as bricks in the pyramid. But the ecopolitical struggle needs people with soft, semipermeable membranes. Not only that, it needs people who are trained to be two, who are utilizing that potential. People who can't make that transition are victimized by the established powers—bulldozed into the ground by academic formality and legalistic pyramidisms!

If you are aware of this ability you have of utilizing your personality complex and building bridges to the right part of resources to use in the right place, your courage to act will be up to the challenge. You will discover that you are psychologically invulnerable because you no longer have just one single personality with its specific vulnerability.

If we could cultivate our inner complexity, the hard shell between us and the world would be broken, and we could become true cooperative partners with any human being in the endlessly creative life stream.

And you'll accept all kinds of people because you find them all in your inner society. Recognizing that and permitting your inner democratic revolution furthers the democracy of your environment.

## PART II: HYDROPOWER AND ECOPOLITICS

I want to turn now to the Norwegian experience in green thinking and acting, and try to illustrate some of the ways we developed and used the ideas I have outlined above.

After having traveled very much during the last thirty years to various corners of the world, I feel it is safe to say that the ecopolitical debate and some sort of a green movement started very early in my country. Its first beginnings were actually in the 1930s. One reason for the early start is the fact that Norway was industrialized very late compared with the rest of Europe. Iceland is in the same situation, I guess, and we have seen a comparable green awakening there.

At the same time, Norwegians have always been very curious, they have traveled a lot, and our authors started very early to describe and analyze the effects of industrialization in different countries. It was as if we were sitting there on our mountains, looking southward toward Europe (we didn't think of Scandinavia as part of Europe), watching the new order of things both with fear and expectant excitement.

I myself grew up with that double sentiment. Like so many of my own generation in Norway, I have experienced a complete transformation of society in one lifetime—from an almost medieval, agricultural self-reliant society to a modern super industrialism, replete with computers, holidays at Mallorca, and complete dependency on world market forces.

One reason for our very late industrialization was our lack of tempting resources for industry. The only thing we had in any abundance was a combination of steep mountains and a lot of rain—in other words, hydroelectricity. The whole industrialization of Norway has been based on using our rivers this way.

But this has meant a direct collision with the Norwegian folk-soul, so to speak. The people of Norway once settled along the rivers; they utilized them in many ways and became dependent on them for their material existence. The rivers also decided their organization as a nation consisting of small, almost independent sub-nations along our long and rocky land. Finally, the rivers of Norway contributed to Norwegians' mental constitution. Their soul was a soul of rivers, waterfalls, and deep fjords.

### NECESSARY CONFLICT

The industrial transformation was slow at first, and throughout the first half of this century people largely went along with the hydroprojects, feeling that electricity and industrialization would compensate for the river losses. But after World War II all that changed: the schemes grew out of all reasonable proportions and far beyond the needs of the people. That's when Norwegian electricity finally became the bridgehead for modern international big industry. This is the period when cultural collision became apparent.

That conflict has hardened tremendously during the last few years, and I as a member of a growing group have come to see it as my duty to highlight that conflict. I feel that it is impossible to reach a future that is creative and not destructive without social, economic, and political conflict. And I would even say that it's not possible to keep appealing to everybody, for instance the whole of the Norwegian population, because by now a number of people are so drawn into the industrial growth way of life that it has become a part of their personality. It is a waste of energy to try to pull them back to the green side of the new cultural dividing line.

We are reaching a future through conflict—and this is not coincidental, but rather what has always happened at major shifts in the various events building futures in history. So we have to accept that, and

that's one spot where we feel we were too naive fifteen years ago, and the industrial powers caught us up on it. Our philosophizing was done too much in a harmony model. Our actions taught us a lot, and we now need to think in a model of conflict, to be prepared at every turn for strife. And what I have been saying here is, all of it, a product of conflict thinking.

Memories of bedtime in my childhood farmhouse can illustrate how some of these ideas I've been talking about developed, and how they led to ecopolitical engagement. We didn't have electricity, and we were not to use candles or oil lamps unnecessarily, so in my room I just had natural twilight, which was different every night, and my experiences and impressions of the day of play and work were also continually new. Every night there would always be something new with me to give life to all those fantastic visual patterns that surrounded me on the walls and ceiling, the natural pattern in the wood, always impressing on the mind the patterns of living growth. They inspired adventure stories that grew incessantly in my mind, bridging waking existence and dreams, shaping and giving momentum to my daily self-becoming.

The situation today is different. I look at my son's "bed and media chamber," where every item in the room is expressive of the total standardization and commercialization of the world of this growing child. Through its brightness and impressive crispness it functions as propaganda for the mass production of IGS.

What became clear to me here was that it is a blockage of our understanding of a human being's personality to draw limits around it as something trapped within the skin of one body. It is more fruitful to look upon the person's full environment—all the things and events that are near to him—as elements that are being *integrated into his personality* as it matures and unfolds. "Humanity and the Environment," a designation we see often these days, is misleading, too analytical and too static. As he lies there in bed, the child's person structure is being integrated with the people of the society that shaped his surroundings.

This realization, and a number of other unpleasant encounters with IGS's world of complication and competition, led me to join the Norwegian ecopolitical tradition on an all-day/all-night basis. It was a sort of therapeutic business, primarily: if you vividly feel that the roof may cave in any moment, it's just not possible to sit still at an Institute of Philosophy, analyzing some Greek concepts that presuppose that the world stands still.

So in 1969 a group of us met at that philosophy institute and founded what we later called the Ecopolitical Ring of Cooperation (snm). That first autumn we lacked practice and training, so we spent the first half year calling on top experts in the Norwegian IGS to come every week to our meetings and be informative. What they did not know was that their primary function was to act as our training objects. That autumn was our laboratory.

This deserves emphasis, because it proved very successful. At each "laboratory session" they were one and we were many, which meant that we dared to confront them and make mistakes without losing our nerve. Not only did we pick up courage this way, we discovered their one vulnerable spot: they were specialists, meaning they could be beaten by generalists. They were extremely good within their own narrow field, but they knew next to nothing outside that field. The present world is full of such people; that is why we are governed by people who don't know where we are headed. So we built our own training program to become *super amateurs,* like Torberg the shipwright and his contemporaries—meaning people who both know a little within all relevant social fields and love their work and put all their efforts and talents into training for that. The main trick of super amateurship is the training to combine specialized fields with the main theme that interests people: the future for their community.

This is the sort of program that one can hardly live up to, but we have seen through the years that it is possible to go part of the way and that it makes a great difference. It was later to become our main weapon in the fight to stop atomic energy in Norway, a fight that we won.

Then, during our first training term, we happened on a case that at first stopped us in our tracks: our laboratory object was the head of the Landscape Protection Division of the Norwegian Electricity Directorate, and he came out with the argument that the people of Norway lacked any aesthetic taste! He had been around Norway in his car and had taken a lot of photos of farms and houses and courtyards and fences, and he tried to draw from them his surprising conclusion. And if Norwegians lacked any aesthetic sense, then our arguments against dams and hydropower generally—which were mainly aesthetic—were politically doomed.

"You are just a tiny, exclusive elite," his argument ran. "And most people, in any society, are primarily concerned with material security and growth. If they are economically compensated for ugliness, then ugliness is OK." And to prove this he trotted out pictures of old, well-built log houses where the walls had been broken through and enormous panorama windows put in, even around the corners. The entrance to one courtyard looked like a gas station, only the gas pumps were actually old, monumental stone posts that had recently been painted red, yellow, and blue in stripes.

Right then we were at a loss to counter his allegations. The next week's meeting we had to be alone to discuss his argument. Our conclusion was twofold: For one, his selection of pictures was clearly biased. The situation wasn't that bad. Second, there are an abundance of such illustrations to be found in traditional Norwegian society, going back just half a generation. Even so, recently we find a high-level artistic folk culture in our land. And at our following meeting we were able to defend the view that the deterioration of taste in half a generation coincides strikingly with the industrialization of the country. The state of aesthetic taste must somehow be the fruit of the transition to an IGS society. His documentation of a low ebb in aesthetic sensibility testified to a deterioration that he himself, as a designer of nicer power stations, had contributed to. He was making the quick super-industrialization of Norway more acceptable. He was an IGS cosmetologist.

In short, we decided that if in a certain society you find very few people who have an urge to fight for aesthetic values, that is a society with an economy and a social structure that *stops* people from developing a concern for such values. Most directly, it is the outcome of the kind of work available to most people for their living. And as an example of this, we thought of the difference between our own society and that of the Viking shipwright Torberg Skavhogg. Who in our society would risk his life to move a window in the city hall an inch to the right?

Anyway, the experience of the expert and his aesthetic slide show contributed decisively to our analysis of IGS, and as time passed and our work progressed we found ourselves aiming for a certain kind of alternative society with increasing clarity.

But actually realizing that society is formidably difficult from our present starting point, because it means *replacing* the basic economic and social structure of today with something different and molding our mental life according to a new world paradigm. And this we cannot do through available political means such as are easily acceptable to the establishment.

And at this point growing numbers of the Norwegian ecopolitical activists have ceased training for that harmonious kind of transition where IGS leadership is steered into the sort of economy that supports life and creativity, because that would be tantamount to going against natural law.

Instead of that, we are following the more modest program of contributing to a new social, economic, and mental basis that will come into function gradually as the IGS system breaks—and it must, since its self-destruction is a characteristic of its mode of behavior. Quite briefly, I will mention a few of the campaigns and direct actions we went into, which taught us a lot.

## DIRECT CONFRONTATIONS AS "EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH"

The start was actually made around 1967–68 when we planned to chain ourselves to the rocks while the wa-

ter was rising in a hydropower dam in Trøndelag (mid-Norway); we wanted to show that we were willing to risk our lives, to show that we experienced the onslaught on our rivers as a lethal threat even to our personal human existence. (Torberg's spirit was with us here, too!) That plan was never realized because that hydropower scheme had gone too far, and it was actually speeded up due to popular pressure to stop it, something that we've seen many times since. And besides, our kind of action cannot be done as a rush project.

Our second plan progressed much further toward realization. The idea was to build on a small scale the kind of alternative society we were aiming for—I mean the kind of society where people of all ages are cooperating in meaningful work in exactly the spot where a power station was to be built. That was in the middle of the well-known Aurland Valley in southwest Norway. Our aim was to create a "positive, constructive action" in the Gandhian sense.

Some of us in the late 1950s, inspired by Arne Naess, had started reading Gandhi, trying to learn from his various nonviolent direct actions in South Africa and India. So *that* had been brewing for a considerable period already, and all the later actions were actually "Experiments with Truth" in the Gandhian mode. A positive action does not only protest, but first and foremost it is a demonstration of what we want as an alternative to what is happening by living out that society as if the future were already here.

But again, we couldn't go through with it. This time not because we were short of time, but because we found out that the Aurland farmers had been talked into believing that it would be to their benefit to have the river taken, since their compensation in money would be so great. Today, over twenty years later, they know that those were empty promises, but they didn't at the time, and you can't do such an action without being a part of the struggle of the local people.

Our first realized action came in 1970 in Eikesdal, further to the north. Here local cooperation came easily and naturally, because there had already been two hydropower schemes implemented in the valley. The emptiness of the economic promises had become clear to everyone. The action had been under preparation for one year. Our aim was to stop the "electrocution" of the Mardøla waterfall, the third highest in the world. In the springtime, when the snow thaws in the mountains, this fall makes its plunge two thousand feet in one leap into an extremely lush, forested valley, the Eikesdal. The picture of that waterfall later became the symbol of the whole ecopolitical movement of Norway.

One element of the Mardøla action may have been an abridgment of Gandhi: we used steel chains, forged by a local farmer, to anchor ourselves to the rocks so that the police could not move us. No one could cut the chains without hurting our bodies. Norwegian policemen are very hesitant to hurt anyone, so that tactic was successful.

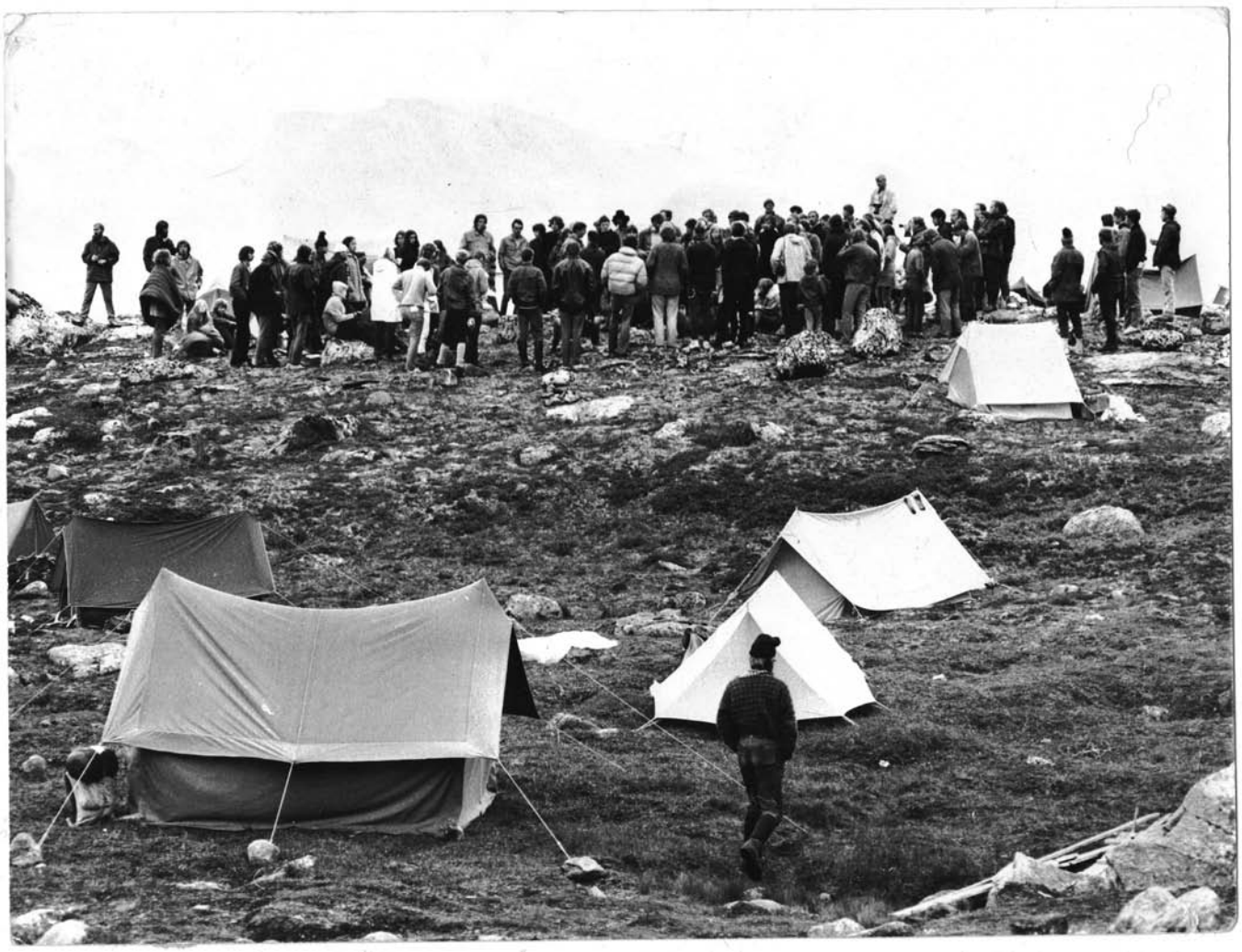
The action and the larger campaign around it became very involved—more than we'd been able to envision beforehand—and we learned from it more about Norwegian society than we would have through ten years at a university seminar. Equally important, we learned vital things about ourselves and our potential for change. We came out as different people, and that's what the future demands of us.

The Mardøla action became a sensation. It was reported in the *New York Times* and *Der Spiegel,* there was a film made of it, and it came out on television. It lasted for about five weeks in late summer 1970. About five hundred people joined it, including some from France, Holland, and America. It is now regarded as the start of the modern ecopolitical movement in Norway.

We lost the waterfall in the end, but we had started a movement. Right after that, and inspired by it, we and others went into a series of actions—to save a beautiful forest near Oslo, to stop a new international airport on good farming land, to stop a road through a day care center and another through a suburban settlement, to stop several new military target ranges, and so on. But the large rivers had priority all along.

In connection with the action, we held ecophilosophical seminars in the mountains when it wasn't raining or blowing too hard. And when Mardøla was taken away from us, we still knew that we had progressed (not "achieved"), as well; the movement was much broader, and all of Norway was to some extent aware of the new thinking that was coming in. As things developed in Norway, Mardøla was only the first of a series of nonviolent and unconventional campaigns to save these rivers. Two of the most notable later actions were at Innerdalen and Alta. Both of them lasted several years, and were on a much greater scale than Mardøla.

Innerdalen, "the innermost valley," is (was, I now regret to say) a beautiful, extremely fertile mountain valley in mid-Norway that was to be completely inundated by a hydropower reservoir. In this valley we were finally able to stage a pure, positive, constructive Gandhian action. We plowed and harvested crops from large fields, we kept cattle, produced milk, butter, and cheese. We organized a "Green University" there, and finally a "Green Factory Workers Occupation," proclaiming the dam workers as "strike breakers." The latter was partly done to provoke a discussion with the labor movement. It was at a meeting at Innerdalen that we first conceived of a Green Workers Interna-



Tent camp, as part of the Mardøla campaign. PHOTO: ODDVAR EINARSON

tional, an organization that was finally founded in cooperation with the European Ecological Action group (ECOROPA) in 1979. That was right after we'd finally been arrested, with participants from Sweden and Finland, and forcibly transported out of the valley.

The Alta campaign—a lengthy series of direct actions, repeated arrests, and a morass of court cases—aimed at protecting the river Alta and the last unspoiled large territory of the Same (Lapp) reindeer herders of northern Scandinavia. That campaign culminated during the winter of 1980-81, with the world's first large-scale direct action under purely arctic conditions. The temperatures outside went down to forty degrees below zero, and the activists chained to the rocks had to be housed in large, permanently heated tents. The international participation this time was much larger; about a thousand demonstrators—Scandinavians, West Germans, French, Dutch, and Belgians—all took part. The resistance, sometimes called the "nonviolent guerrillas," was finally broken when the authorities sent a ship with six hundred policemen to Alta. Specially trained technicians used flywheel cutters to break the extremely heavy chains, and asbestos sheets and riot shields to protect the demonstrators.

The campaign included a one-month hunger strike by five young Same men, a Same women's occupation of the Norwegian capitol building, and a Same women's delegation to seek support from American Indian and Eskimo organizations, the Canadian labor unions, and other organizations as well—a support that was wholeheartedly given. One of the very positive results of the Alta campaign was that it contributed to cooperation among various aboriginal groups—a strengthening of the Fourth World.

I was part of that action, and it was amazing to see how easy it was to find organizations and even radio and TV networks in America that were willing to help. That was another sign that an international green movement is underway. You find people everywhere who are hurt by the same forces, which gives us a global potential for mutual identification. In spite of cultural differences, IGS unites us!

One direct, local result of the decade-long campaign at Alta has been a substantial reduction of that hydropower scheme. Another, nonlocalized result has been the transformation of the lives or outlooks on life of many of the participants. I have talked to many young participants afterward who have told me that "for the first time I experienced meaning in my life." For the first time they were part of a process where it came naturally to forget their egos, to identify completely with other human beings, even those of generations unborn.

Through experiments like these we proved to ourselves that Gandhi is right when he says, "The goal is the way and the way is the goal." It doesn't help to concentrate your effort on some preconceived future achievement. That's why Gandhi says that you *should not hanker after the fruits of your action.* We in the West are always pitched on some concrete goal in the future. That means we think we always know what the future is before it's part of our own life. Instead, living the future right here and now makes you invulnerable—what happens tomorrow can't hurt what you are doing right now.

For us, the guiding star of Gandhi was the *norm of selfless action.* Gandhi tells us that the most important source of human knowledge is not to be found at some university or in meditation, but at the center of social and political conflict, the fight for Life and for Truth.

But this "Life-Truth"—what is that? Above all, these are experiments; you yourself have to help the definition along, through your own fight. It's not laid out beforehand, on a map, not in the real world, which is a creative stream. We in the Norwegian environmental movement had to learn that we are not chess pieces on a board, but part of a complex process. This means, in fact, that as we go on, the aim of our action is bound to be transitory. If you get very close to the fruit, say, saving the Mardøla cascade, and then lose the river, your co-activists are likely to be shocked into inactivity because "everything is lost." And that's where the

Government and Big Industry will sit back and let out a sigh of relief and say, "That takes care of those demonstrators! Now we can continue as always!"

After Mardøla we were liberated from the chessboard prison of win or lose. In the lifestream, obstacles are just inspirations to experimentation. So we continued experimenting, campaigning even more fiercely for the next river, doing our best to put the brakes on North Sea drilling, and the like. We saw the creation of the activist-oriented movement The Future in Our Hands, and parallel movements sprang up in the other Scandinavian countries and in England as well.

### IN CONTEXT: LIBERATION OF THE SELF THROUGH ECOACTIVISM

Basing my judgment on the Norwegian experience I would venture the claim that an effective modern Buddhism is realized through ecopolitical action, with ecology, Marx, and Gandhi as important catalysts. In addition I could mention Thoreau, Bergson, Black Elk, the Laxa river protectors in Iceland, the Japanese Narita airport fighters, the Greenpeace "Rainbow Warriors," the women of Greenham Common, some of the Greens' actions in Germany, the Indian Chipko Andolan forest defenders, and many more as well.

The main thrust of the theory of radical human process complexity is its value as a pointer to a new way of liberation from the pyramid, from oppression by a sociopolitical and economic system that not only deprives us of meaningful work, but hustles us all into a global holocaust. If, however, the members of IGS should refuse to act any longer as part-pyramids, then the large pyramid would crumble.

If you want to contribute, "the way is the goal"—selfless, nonviolent action, found at centers of social and political conflict, and meaningful work. Those are the ways of getting started on the path to liberation, to breaking the walls of the pyramid.

It's not an easy process to rid oneself of an all-pervasive world paradigm. It is always easier to start training, to pick up the original courage to get started, if we join hands with people in the same situation, for example with the peace movement. But there are countless opportunities to get involved in "training programs" everywhere in our societies, right here in the West. This is another reason why I have stressed the hydropower actions so much. In Norwegian ecopolitics, those functioned as training courses for recapturing the human process-sense, and that, in my view, is a requirement for the building of a green growth future.