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Norwegian Ecophilosophy and Ecopolitics and Their Influence from Buddhism

BY SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

My point of departure is Norwegian ecophilosophy and ecopolitics, with reference mainly to the work of the Ecophilosophy Group, which I have worked with since its start in 1969. I can here give only a few glimpses of what we have been doing during those years, and I will partly focus on my own contribution, since that materialized gradually, as an attempt to combine Western ideas with Buddhism and Gandhian action philosophy—which I also interpret in a Buddhist direction (that is easily done, since the Buddhist influence on Gandhi was strong).

The themes I am going to focus on are mainly two: time (or process) and what I call "radical human/environmental complexity." These two themes are interrelated. They were not only developed philosophically, but evolved as centrally related to ecopolitical activity. We have had a tendency here to combine theory and practice—in keeping with both the Buddha and Gandhi—that is, to be interested in theory only in so far as it is useful for practice. We were quite conscious in letting this South Asian attitude influence us, but it came easily, since there is also a Norwegian precedent for it—one going counter to Western-learned neutral-

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ity and detachment. It has been an attempt to weave thought and action into a single multi-colored fabric. Furthermore, ecophilosophy in our mode presupposes no definite beginning nor any climactic conclusion, as it is supposed to reflect life more than logic. My glimpses are of an ongoing spiritual-material activity.

Several of the group members had a university background, but we learned quickly that going into ecophilosophy required of us that we spend much time talking and listening to people with no academic training. But to have fruitful exchanges in this direction it proved necessary for us, the "academically prepared" group members, to spend several years de-learning our "off-the-ground" language. As part of that, I gradually came to use a lot of visual illustrations, like cartoons telling stories, and as symbols, also under inspiration from Buddhist culture. If we are looking for a new, universal paradigm, a new basic pattern for understanding, new glasses to reveal a new "reality," something that will replace the mechanistic, analytical approach—still the vehicle in which the West travels—it is essential to speak a language so that the effort, step by step, is shared by the world community at large.

Along that way, visual elements are useful in engaging people's imagination and recollection of personally experienced situations. I will, however, hasten to say that there is one danger in using pictures—at least when your location is the academic milieu. This is that pictures tend to arrest in time the onlooker more than words do, to fix him in space, while I mentioned before that time or flow or process is one central message of ecophilosophy—process in our conception is something eminently available as the generator of a new paradigm. My thinking here may have a counterpart in very early Buddhism, as expressed through its total avoidance of any visualization of the figure of the *Tathāgata*.[1] Later paintings and statues may be a Western influence, e.g. through Gandhāra, the north-western province in old India where Greek influence was strong.

As a starting point, I will go back sixteen years when we were more academic than we are now, and I will just state the definition of "ecophilosopher" that we made at that time. It runs as follows:

> An ecophilosopher is one who occupies himself or herself with the following four kinds of pursuit, never forgetting their inter-relatedness:
>
> 1. Studies of the global eco-social system and local subsystems and of man and human groups as dynamic entities at various depths of complex integration with that system; 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 it is attempted to use all human faculties—of intellect, sensitivity, feeling, intuition and practical experience—to grasp and integrate consciously as much as possible of the total network of interdependencies and the dynamisms of the life process, so that these insights and sensibilities are, among other things, directed towards:
>
> 3. A critical evaluation of 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 towards:
>
> 4. The formulation of values, norms and strategies pertinent to human activities aiming at the strengthening of the dynamic steady state or

1. "The One who, like the many previous Enlightened Ones, has come to direct us and then passed away." Several of the various translations of this old designation of the Buddha seem to me to underline the process perspective.

> "homeorhesis"[2] of the life process as well as the continuing growth of the "organic complexity" of that process and the formulation of criticism of values, norms and procedures that tend to weaken homeorhesis and to stunt that growth.

To this definition we added a commentary from which I will just quote a part:

> 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 upon the life-strength of the ecosystem and of human society as 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 limitations of the academic tradition—values-neutral and strictly intellectual—must, at least for the present, be broken out of…

This was our starting point, and it was not just a definition, but a program that we subsequently tried to follow as a gradually expanding string of groups. But of course we did not start in an historical vacuum. It has been said that the movement got off the ground earlier in Norway than elsewhere in Europe. In some respect I think that observation is correct, and one hypothesis to explain that is the very late industrialization of Norway, coupled with the fact that Norwegians were always travelling around the world like mad, eagerly gaping at what people elsewhere were doing; and that again coupled with a strange labor movement, where half its members were small farmers. Then, when industrialization finally came, it happened as an explosion, but was met with quite a bit of awareness and suspicion. It actually all occurred during my lifetime. I grew up on a mountain farm, with practices still but little removed from the Middle Ages, and at twenty-two I was an electric systems specialist on jet fighters in the Norwegian air force!

That collision between the old and the new cultures and its endless range of interdependent effects has gradually occupied more and more of my attention since the founding of the ecophilosophy group. It has structured a lot of projects. Right now, for instance, I have a Buddhist Sherpa friend—Tashi Tsangbo, from a remote Himalayan village—visiting at my farm in Norway. Together we are comparing the Sherpa tradition of semi-nomadic farming and cattle-herding and the similar tradition in Norway, and we are finding that these traditions are so close in vital human and social aspects that the difference is greater between my little Norwegian mountain community and Oslo, than between that community and Tashi's village!

This situation underlines the fact that industrialization and commercialization have not, so far, led to a homogeneous, uniform transition in my society. Instead, a high and hard barrier has been thrown up right through it as a whole, and due to ecopolitical activity, "green activism" and the like, that barrier has grown and is quite a bit more pronounced today than, say, fifteen years ago. And the comparison we are doing between Norway and the Buddhist Himalayas illustrates a further discovery: that this barrier is a global one and that it *divides both the Third World and our own.* Norwegian mountain farmers are part of a struggle

2. We prefer the latter term, which denotes a concept invented by the British geneticist C. H. Waddington, as being more in keeping with our process philosophy. A *homeorhetic system* does not swing around a fixed time trajectory. It never returns to a previous state; instead, even its "center of balance" is on the move, changing. *Homeorhesis* is "inventive," but orderly. *Homeostasis*, in contradistinction, is the balancing of a system around a fixed time trajectory.

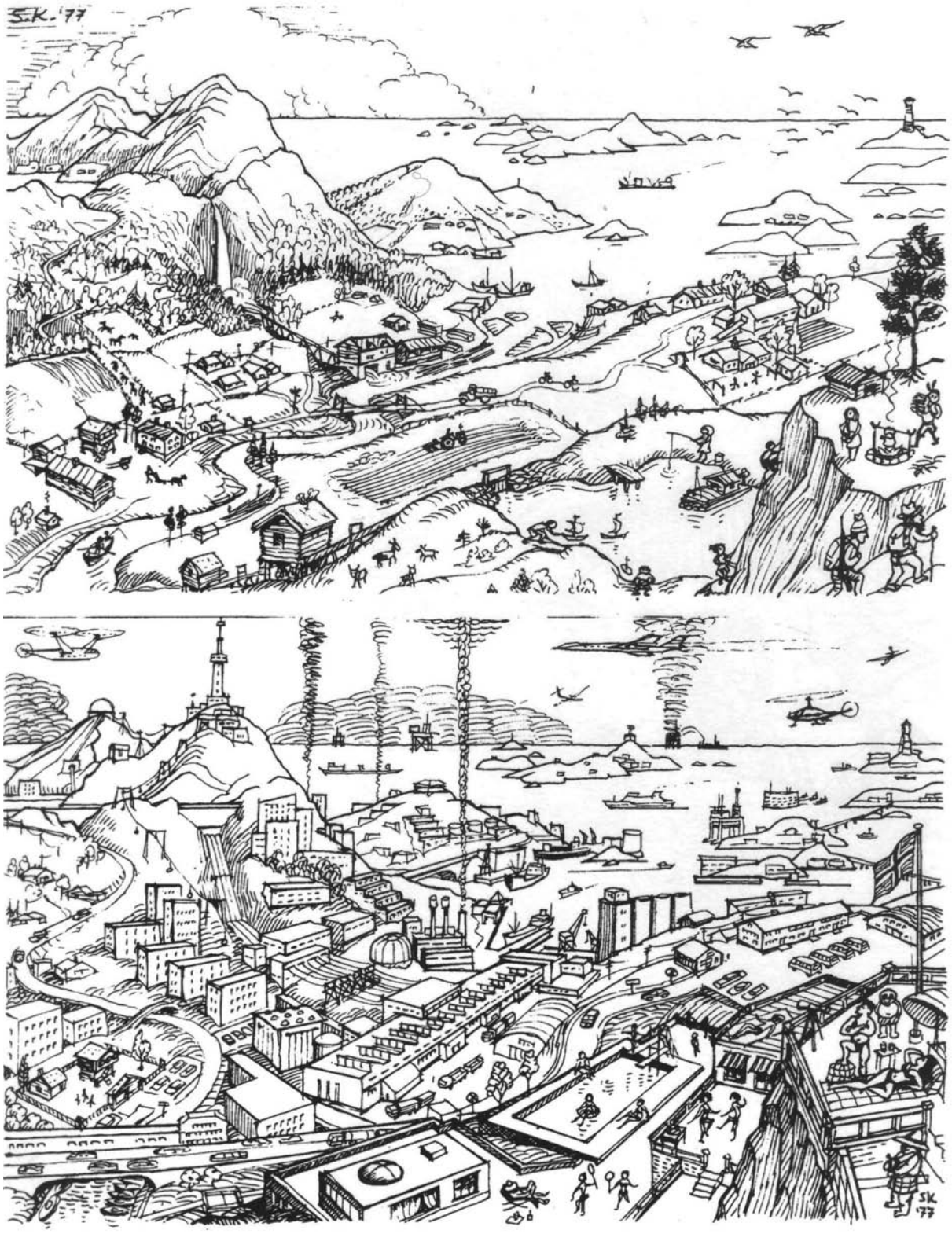

Figure 1: *Norwegian Landscape: Two Views* ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

that today engages "green Indians" all over the world in confrontation with industrio-competitive "pale-face" forces.[3] In our modern European predicament, we have actually been looking to South Asia and her "experiments with Truth" for help. That illustrates not only the industrialization of the world, but the parallel globalization of the green movement as a common and unifying response.

So many of my people learn at school and through the mass media that "natural," pre-industrialized Norway offers a standardized environment, where children are bored, forced to engage in daily dreary work routines, given no room for play, etc., while our modern industrial society is the complex one. It has become a part of the Norwegian ecophilosophical/ecopolitical project to show that a closer look reveals the opposite.

I have often used one specific pair of drawings to illustrate the transition, both of them referring to one typical Norwegian *fjord* landscape (figure 1).

The first, depicting a situation with industrialization still under control (in its mild 1930–1950 version), I call "Life Necessities Society" (LNS); it represents a somewhat modernized subclass under that category, while the other one represents "Industrial Growth Society" (IGS). Among various items in the IGS picture, the new large centralized school is an important seminal object, with its attached phalanx of school buses. The portrayed institution immediately signals to you, since it is a contemporary worldwide phenomenon, that the pictured IGS town has created a large periphery of communities that are being emptied of human activity, and finally, of people too. In this typical Norwegian case, what we observe is an effect of the transformation of the natural river system into an industrio-centralized resource, serving some power-consuming world market production. It indicates the creation of a world dependency, a consequent vulnerability, and a loss of economic democracy. Jobs are specialized and standardized; the loss of self-reliance is directly reflected in a loss of existential meaning. Disneylandish weekend diversions do not compensate for that.

This kind of reflection got us started in 1969, after a couple of years of loose discussions. That summer, just after the founding of the organization, we made the decision that all the members of the ecophilosophy group also should be members of one of the ecopolitical groups, and we took this very seriously. We read Gandhi, who says that the most important source of vital knowledge for a human being is to be had not at a seminar room, nor at some political convention, *but right in the center of social conflict, in non–violent struggle for Truth* through Satyagraha. I do not want to go into a discussion about "Truth" here, but most—maybe all—of my readers should be acquainted with Gandhi and his use of the word "Truth." Particularly important to us became his (and the *Bhagavad Gita's*) "norm of selfless action" and its Buddhist counterparts, given in many versions throughout Buddhist literature. I would say striving to understand and to follow that norm gradually gave us a strength that we otherwise would have lacked.

We also read about and were inspired by Buddhist "non-attachment" and the "homeless life." Being fond of aimless wandering in the mountains, we were of course happy to find a 2500 years-old support, when the Buddha says: "I thought that life was oppressive in a house full of dust. Living in a house it is not easy to lead a full, pure and polished spiritual life, but the open air is better" (Majjhima Nikāya). So we thought: "Let us use our love for the open air and for wild nature, and go up into the mountains and do politics there!"

So that is part of the background for the decision both to philosophize and be politically active simultaneously and to fight for nature *in* nature. Actually, quite a bit of our ecophilosophy was conceptualized during direct, non-violent actions in the mountains,

3. I mean here: *American* Indians, who have become an important inspiration to the North American and European green movement. "Pale-face" was the North American Indian name for "white" European intruders.

the forests, the fields, along the coast, in the villages, and on the streets of the cities. Throughout, we were trying to protect rivers, fertile soil, fishing grounds, open-air kindergartens, etc. against heedless onslaughts by single-minded industrialism. And, as it turned out, our most successful campaigns were those in which we were able to go beyond just protesting and to build positive, constructive actions in the classical Gandhian sense, i.e. actions by which we were able to demonstrate our alternative, the kind of society we wanted instead of the disintegrated state resulting from competitive industrial growth.

First and foremost, the *Bhagavad Gita's* "norm of selfless action" was our guiding star. The norm says: "Act, but do not strive for the fruit of the action!" This sounds crazy to the West, attached as it is to results that enhance individual permanency, but our step-by-step discovery was that this is the central key to everything. The norm says that the *road* is important, not your personal reaping of the harvest of your toil. And it is an illusion that the road has an end. At the deepest level, Buddhism teaches us that even our own toiling selves are illusory. Accepting this means a complete turn-about of lifestyle compared to the normal "means-to-end" practices of the West. And following the norm, we experienced something unexpected—invulnerability! Even if we lost a kindergarten to a four-lane road or a fishing ground to oil drilling, we didn't feel beaten down and we didn't stop acting. Having acted—with all our care and strength—was our success! And slowly the politicians and the broader public began seeing the light.

Through this, we have been able at least to begin to show the strength of Buddhism, that the individual's "reaping of fruit" is an expression of egotistical desire (*tanhā*), which is not only something morally negative, but represents a *misconception of reality.* Reality is process, and that turns out to be the full logical consequence of the ecological perspective. A lifestyle based on this is invulnerable—because your antagonist finds nothing to hit! And the final outcome of our campaigns has actually been a substantial change of attitudes and practices towards the environment in Norway—even new laws passed recently by our Parliament. Compared to that, the loss of some individual objects is not all-important.

In this way, we were testing the East in practice in the modern West, Gandhi was a child of two worlds. That is why, with him as a bridge, we may—in a non-romantic way—gain access to Buddhism and other resources of the East, a priceless asset in an epoch when our Western resources have run dry.

A central part of our ecophilosophical activity—actually the starting point that we have kept coming back to all along—is the analysis of Industrial Growth Society. Our model has generally been a pyramidal structure (figure 2) tapered towards four governing principles:

1. IGS is tending automatically towards an *accelerating expansion of the production of industrial commodities and services* (and this is its recurring measure of success) and *the use of industrial methods*: standardized mass-production, concentrated in a few, urbanized centers and carried out by specialists on all levels.
2. It is based on *individual competition*, in every human field of endeavor.
3. Its main resource for expansion is *applied science*.
4. Its main device for registering, analyzing and responding to troubles is *quantification.*

These four principles should be seen as always interdependent, the way they have developed historically. Each one of them is in operation fortifying the others. Our Western society, is not, as yet, *perfectly* governed by this foursome (it could never reach that stage and survive), but it is tending towards that and it is doing it through various sorts of positive feedback. (It is mending its cracks by adding new ones deeper down.) The development in question is one that presupposes two specific conditions to be fulfilled: (a) that the earth's resources are unlimited, and (b) that human society and nature are machinelike in form. Both are untenable

assumptions—I should think we are all agreed on that. So, what I am describing is a self-destructive social organism. What we today talk about as "the global socio-ecological crisis" is—that has been our contention—a direct and inevitable outcome of IGS in operation, i.e. a social system tending, characteristically, to fulfil the described model. IGS-managers—top to bottom—try to run society as if it were a machine, as if it were *complicated*, a structure reducible to elementary logical and mathematical entities and operations. Quality and novelty do not enter this picture and any development is in principle treated as reversible, the way it is in a machine.

In the Norwegian ecophilosophy group we reserved the word "complex" for natural and social processes, generally conceived of as contrasting with machine operations in being irreversible, qualitative and dialectical, tending to produce novelty—gradually or in unpredictable leaps, developments that are surprising even if *rhythmical* (an important notion when dealing with homeorhetic living processes), sometimes chaotic. So this became a pair of contrasting concepts to us: "complicated" versus "complex." It is a characteristic feature of IGS that it thrives (the organizational system, not its human members) as long as complication is spreading throughout society, replacing complexity.

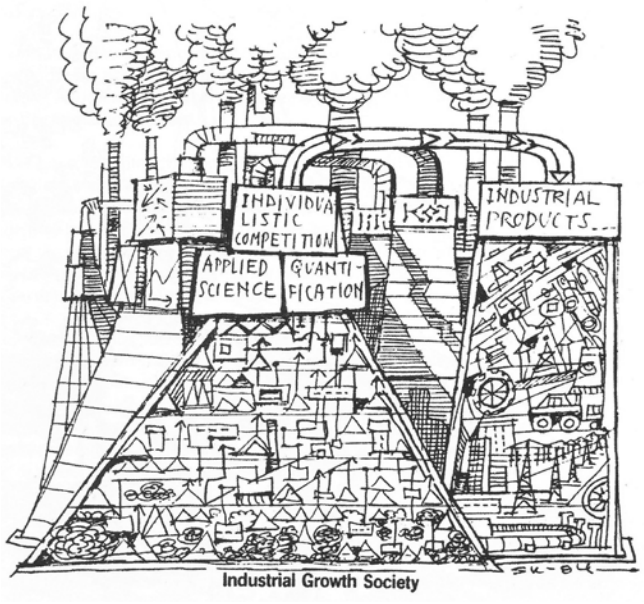

Figure 2: *Industrial Growth Society*
ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

The top of the IGS pyramid, seen as a centralized social organization, may also be compared to the governing station of a machine—the single position from which you start and stop it and control all its functions. It is a basic characteristic of a machine to have just one such control center, while a *living, organic* process has many, or you might say, none: the whole is governing itself. But if you are *looking* for governing centers to explain various functions, you will see several (never one that dominates all) and these may even be in conflict with each other. While in a machine—even in an advanced computer—if there were independent governing centers, you would have to scrap it. It would be unreliable, even self-destructive, because a machine is strictly and uni-directionally dichotomous in all its operations; it lacks completely the qualitative process-character of organic entities. The latter *thrive* on certain varieties of uncertainty and conflict, even *need* them for their continuous existence.

The all-quantifying, complicated control scheme characteristic of IGS is a *spatializing* system—it tends to reduce all time processes to space parameters—and I will just in passing refer to Henri Bergson here and recommend his contribution, a unique one on the European stage. As regards the Norwegian ecophilosophy group, however, we received our main ideas in this direction from Buddhism and Gandhi. Bergson has been so effectively repressed by European space-bound philosophy that his relevance was revealed to us only recently. Since that has happened, I am ready to name him as Europe's first ecophilosopher.

Buddhism, however, as it is interpreted in some of the branches of its gigantic historical-cultural tree, constitutes the most radical process philosophy the world has seen. Since it goes back two and a half millennia, that is remarkable indeed, considering the modernity of process thinking as brought about by ecology and the new physics. Whitehead should also be mentioned here (William James and James Joyce are

also relevant). In view of what's happening, I predict an imminent widespread recognition of both Bergson and Whitehead, and that their contributions this time will be discussed in conjunction with Buddhism. That did not happen before, since Western philosophers were largely ignorant of the East (and even to the Buddhologists the process character of Buddhism was not clear until the works of Stcherbatsky and Rosenberg in the twenties). The time has now come.

Our analysis of IGS led us to the conclusion that it is a socio-political and socio-mental system that cannot survive beyond a few decades; you cannot mend its ways for the better, since it is a characteristic of the system that it thrives on or exists through an accelerated depletion of resources and an expanding simplification and standardization of global process complexity. For that reason, after a few years, we stopped having as our aim the diversion of IGS onto a socio-ecologically sound track. Instead, we started investing our activist energy into inspiring as many people as possible to experiment with a basis for a viable society to replace the one that is now step by step cracking up at its base. I will also say this, however, that the Industrial Growth Civilization may be utilized as mankind's most effective teacher so far. In that way we have started to look upon it not as something purely negative. It demonstrates to us, by extreme contrasts, what man is, what his potentialities are, as well as his limitations. It offers us many perspectives, mutually superimposed, because it attacks all cultures globally with one and the same standardized set of methods. At a level that perhaps is the deepest of all, it presents to us the ultimate experiment to see how far society may be pushed in spatializing time before all ends in chaos.

I will, presently, try to elucidate somewhat our notion of time. Due to my ecopolitical context, my concern here lies, of course, not so much in the infra or ultra domains—although I share with others the inspiration from the "new physics" and contemporary cosmology—as in the middle domain, in the range of human life. Let us go a little further into how one culture may be mainly time-based in the sense mentioned earlier, while another—our own—has this strong spatial bias. Let us look at a Sherpa village in Nepalese Himalaya. Westerners passing by tend to say "How primitive!" and "We cannot possibly have anything to learn here!"

Let us take a look at a traditional Sherpa house (figure 3). There is not one perfectly straight line in it, not one perfect right angle, the walls lack any semblance of standardized smoothness. No two buildings are the same, however each one expresses the safety of shared requirements. After having pondered over these structures and how they are somehow never completed, contrasting them with European architecture today, I have come to the conclusion that even the word

Figure 3: *The invading Army of "Spatialists"*
ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

"architecture" is inappropriate as applied to this building culture. It just leads us to judge it within a frame of concepts that is foreign to the builders themselves, and we miss their intentions, their aims. We might instead talk of their way of "living with a building," or how buildings are part of a household.

A Western method that might help in giving us a local frame of reference is the following: Place a movie camera in front of the Sherpa building and let one single frame of the film be exposed each day and keep doing that for fifty years. Then develop the film and let it run at normal speed. What would then be revealed to us is a house that is never a fixed structure; it is a process having a flowing "amoebic" pattern, shifting functions around—we might even be tempted to drop the very word "structure." Stones are moved in the walls, the roof planking is constantly being shifted about, new parts are being added to the house, old parts removed, lichens grow on the walls, maybe a little tree on the roof, a different species of plant is coming up alongside the wall to the southwest, animals—domestic during the day, wild during the night—are flowing in and out and around, children and adults likewise (*yetis* at night!), etc. What we see is something rhythmic, something organic, a living, pulsating duration-time being created. Mind you, not something happening in time: thinking that way we would be back in a spatializing frame of ideas. Living with this "house" as the Sherpa does, *we are part of time.*

As for aesthetics: whether the building is beautiful or not has to be discovered through watching—or better, by being part of—the movement that was just revealed to us. You have to stop and stay and even work with the Sherpas. Here, you cannot isolate aesthetics from any other area of human concern, as little as you may isolate the Sherpa building from its many functional aspects that characterize the wholeness of Sherpa life and Himalayan nature. The house is an extension—temporary like everything else—of the human beings who built it and *keep building* it every day. The Buddhist process paradigm works perfectly as a reference pattern for this society, and any aid to the Sherpas today should spring out of a strengthening of that tradition. A "modernization" within that framework would strengthen their own identity, instead of undermining it, as is happening now.

So this is an illustration of two different world paradigms, as represented by two different cultures through their building traditions, and in the old Norwegian mountain farms I now see reflected the same process-character as the one I have found with the Sherpas. The "Greek" tradition with *its* technological successes reached the cities of Norway some time ago, but the remote rural areas only superficially. So there are unexpected allies to be found around the globe for an international "green" process movement. Of course, I am not here just talking about buildings and technology, but about a whole outlook on life. Neither am I talking about a reversal of *history*; a process cannot be reversed anyway.

One word I have used for this time-oriented ontology, ethics and aesthetics is "the philosophy of positive decay." In order to have continuous growth, where continuous withering is the daily reminder, unbroken human creativity is needed. In this perspective—again using the building as a symbol—you cannot just leave the design of your house to an architect, then stay in it for a brief spell leaving the repairs to others, then go off to some other place. That would be tantamount to leaving your own body.

I was a research fellow in human ecology and environmental philosophy for five years at the Oslo School of Architecture, and during that time I had fruitful exchanges with architects on these matters, and I brought four of them with me to Nepal. We started to call the contemporary Western house (in the double sense) a "paper structure," referring back to its inception on the designer's perfectly white paper sheet with its thin, ruler-drawn lines. Let's say we have a less-than-perfect architect smoking a pipe as I do, one day by mishap leaving a sooty fingerprint on the just completed drawing. All of a sudden it has lost all value, except for the

trash collector. But not only the drawing, but also the finished building is treated this way! A little crack in its smooth wall, and it looks terrible. It is a kind of structure that cannot bear the "tooth of time." If the crack is not patched up in a week or two, passers-by will start thinking something is wrong with the economy of the company or the city or whatever owns the building (still using the double sense).

But the Sherpa house is made to be cracked! It is not a paper structure. Of course I am not here speaking about the virtue of having a house that cracks. I am trying to elucidate, in contemporary terms, the contrast between a Buddhist world conception and lifestyle and the West, where clinging to individuality and permanence is the very basis for society. And I am saying that the might of our modern West is built on illusion in Buddhist terms, and it must therefore be self-destructive. And the Buddhist attitude is well

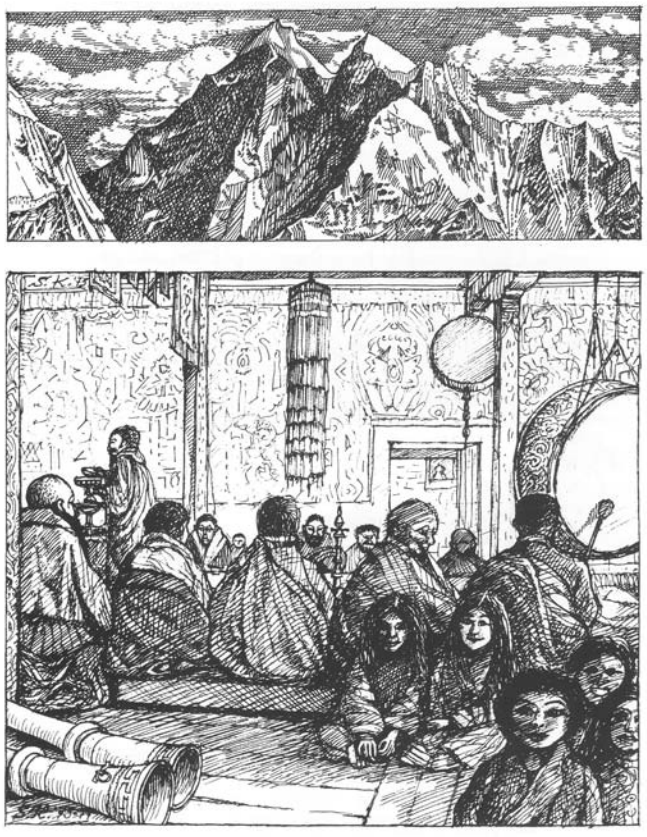

ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

represented in other, non-Western cultures, in relation to which Buddhist philosophy may well serve as a tool for clarification and as a key to a united effort against Western destructiveness.

All pyramidal societies have been short-lived and all grand-scale efforts at fortified permanency have led to grand-scale devastations. Our Western society is imbued with internal psychic and social contradictions, expressive of how we are forced to live as atomized individuals, on a map, while by nature we are eddies in the stream! There never was a better illustration of the Buddhist *dukkha*—and how it propagates—than the West today!

I have a tendency to think that the West and the East have been moving away from each other, starting with those Greek philosophers who based their philosophy on permanency and perfection as the marks of reality itself. Heraclitus, with his "everything flows" (*panta rhei*), represented a potential in the opposite direction, but it came to nothing. It had no impact to speak of on later European philosophy and religion, since it offered no basis for technological and economic growth!

Mathematizing, spatializing and individualizing the world were fortified through material success, and finally today we are in this position from which I think it is nearly impossible for a Westerner to bridge over into, say, the Hindu identification with Brahman, or—even more radical—the Buddhist way of dissolving everything into emptiness, *shunyatā*.

Buddhism developed, in certain aspects, in the opposite direction from the West. The various branches of the gigantic religio-cultural tree of Buddhism that grew and matured through the centuries present to us a multitude of philosophical viewpoints in spirited but tolerant discussion with each other. What strikes me, looking at this tree from the West, is that throughout this differentiation, a basic unity is preserved, revealed as a unanimous negation of the spatializing and individualizing tendency that characterizes Western philosophy. All of it may be seen as attempts at a puri-

fication and radicalization of process thinking. One illustration of the width of this gap between Eastern and Western thought is given by the Bodhisattva ideal as it evolved in certain branches of Mahayana, where finalizing the time stream in Nirvana has almost been pushed out of view, and where even conflict and pain is something one returns to, because escaping complex time as an individual is seen as an illusion. Whether this is a deviation from the Buddha's basic intuitions is a matter of controversy, but it serves well as an example of a manner of thinking that is as far away from the Western Christian and scientific approach as it is possible to get. It represents one way of taking the ultimate logical step towards a complete eradication of permanence and clinging.

The Buddha's disintegration of the self left us with the five aggregates (*skandhas*): groups of functionally united "existence factors," namely, body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Between the composite individual and the Whole, modern organic systems theory today teaches us to find layer upon layer of hierarchically ordered, system-seeking organ-entities. On top of that, Hegel and Marx have given us the idea of dialectical breakthroughs. Attempting to combine these various ideas, I have ventured the thought that the human being, when born, potentially has an extra level of complexity beyond what has been conceived by Western anthropology and psychology. That extra level is one where capacity is given to grow more than one person-stream, or "personality." Let me just use this latter term without defining it, since I am short of space. I am not talking about playing different roles. If you have the opportunity during your lifetime to become immersed in or integrated with more than one distinct environment, you have the endowment to develop one personality for each, as distinctive as its corresponding environment. In each case "your" (meaning "your person-manifold's") system-seeking tendency should be in operation.

This capacity that a human being has is not allowed to flourish in a *pyramidal* society, such as Industrial Growth Society, because that is a structure which needs a base of small human "pyramids," organizational copies of the large one. You have once again the old mechanistic model of the universe; you need a definite governing station (the pyramid's top) from which the structure of this system is controlled, and you need ultimate, hard building blocks, or atoms, to be able to monitor and operate the complete structure efficiently, e.g. to reverse processes if they go wrong. But natural processes can never be reversed, since they are in fact not pyramidal. Breaking with this kind of rationality is a necessity that Industrial Growth Society teaches us when it reveals its oppressive character, and this is where my "middle domain" ties in with the "infra" and "ultra" domains of the new physics and cosmology, and where Buddhist concepts and modern variations on them are becoming vitally relevant. There are common conceptual forms here, inspirational takeoff points to be shared.

Well, if you have understood me correctly so far in these few pages, you are also ready to understand—if not to accept—that the individual human person process can be active in several different places simultaneously. For instance, mentioning "myself," "I" have another personality that right now is active at home on the farm because personality is not bounded by the skin of a body; in my paradigm or ontology it defines itself through activity and through intimate interaction with people, nature and landscape. Reasoning along the same line, it is not limited by death either—and here is again one point where these ideas tie in with Buddhism.

Let me round this off by just mentioning the reactions of some young people after one of our recent nature-protective campaigns—a constructive campaign in the sense mentioned, where the campaign's meaningful function completely depended upon the participants' identification with nature and humankind's future generations. These youngsters came to me and said that for the first time in their life they had experienced meaningful existence. My first thought was that this is certainly a revealing comment on the normal existence

that modern Western society offers young people. Further inquiry convinced me that their feeling of having lived through something deeply meaningful sprang from a *positive loss of their ego's significance*. Later on, it dawned on me that this campaign, the way it finally found its relaxed, resilient but insistent "middle way" form, had functioned to many as a modern Western version of Buddhist insight meditation. After all, meditation in this sense may employ any method that leads the seeker onward to enlightenment, i.e. *Nibbāna.*

Here, as at several of our earlier campaigns, we were decisively influenced by what in our situation are the two most relevant well-springs of the East, Buddhism's way of liberation from the ego and the *Bhagavad Gita's* action gospel, easily combined! And we are today just one little member of a rapidly growing global community of practical activist groups that draw inspiration from these same sources in their struggle for a green world. My experience during the last fifteen years tells me that it is this practical struggle that will gradually give birth to the much sought-for "New Paradigm," the paradigm of resilient, creative, limitless life.