SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

The Universe Within

BY SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

Modern Ecophilosophy started some 15 years ago. For a brief spell, bright ideas were launched in various countries. Since then, there has been a lot of action, but very little philosophy. We have gained a good deal of experience. Now we need to sit down and philosophize. Otherwise we'll keep on doing 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 people of concrete action—so few viable ideas have appeared. The socio-ecological crisis of our time is throwing us into something completely unprecedented. It's global, and it is deeper and more uprooting than most people—even among the Greens—have the imagination to grasp.

TWO KINDS OF SOCIETY

Much of the thinking of the Norwegian Ecophilosophy group has been formed through posing two basically different sorts of social organization against each other. We have called them *Industrial Growth Society* (IGS) and *Life Necessities Society* (LNS), the first one being based on steady or accelerated growth in the production of industrial articles and the use of industrial methods. The second one is based on producing life necessities and always giving priority to that. There is only one historical example of the first kind of society, our own, which is tending to become global. Most other human societies have been of the second kind. IGS is an abnormal kind of society, which can exist only for a historical second. Judging from various in-

Reference to original publication: Kvaløy, S. (1984). The universe within. *Resurgence, 106*, 12-15. Permission for publication on OpenAirPhilosophy generously granted by Resurgence, http://www.resurgence.org.

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dications spanning 1-2 million years, the LNS is the human kind of society, and it will remain so. We have no faith in the saving capacity of the computer. Rather the opposite: the computer and its data-collecting networks and its educational systems will have as its most conspicuous function a treatment of symptoms and a hiding of real causes, and so will permit a buildup of the crisis. The result will be a more devastating crash.

HYDRO-POWER AND ECOPOLITICS

A green movement started very early in my country. Its beginnings were in the 1930s, giving the Norwegian labor movement a special flavor. Half of its popular basis was small farmers and fishermen, not industrial workers. Norway was industrialized very late compared to the rest of Europe.

Norwegians have always been very curious people, they have travelled 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 top of our mountains, and looking southwards towards Europe, watching the new order of things approach, with fear and excitement. I grew up with that double sentiment. In my own lifetime, I experienced the complete transition from an almost medieval agricultural, self-reliant society to modern super-industrialism, replete with computers, relaxation in Mallorca, and complete dependence on world market forces.

One reason for our very late industrialization, was the lack of resources. The only thing we had in any abundance was the combination of steep mountains and a lot of rain. In other words: hydroelectricity. Today Norway has, per capita, more electricity than any other nation in the world, almost twice as much as Canada which is number two in the world statistics. But this has meant a direct collision with the Norwegian folk-soul. The people of Norway once settled along the rivers. They utilized the rivers in many different ways and became dependent on them for their material existence. Their organization as a nation consisted of many small, almost independent sub nations along our extremely long and rocky territory. Their soul was a soul of rivers and waterfalls and deep fjords.

ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

NECESSARY CONFLICT

Throughout the first half of this century people went along with hydroelectric projects, feeling that electricity and industry would compensate for river losses. But after the war all that changed. The scheme grew out of all proportion and far beyond the needs of the people. That's when Norwegian electricity became the bridge for international industry, and for Western Jet-Set civ-

ilization. The North Sea oil came along and worked neatly as the second stage of this two stage rocket now threatening to fire Norwegian society off into empty black space.

This is the period when the culture collision became apparent. That conflict has hardened tremendously during the last few years and I have come to see it as my duty to intensify but also to clarify that conflict. It's not possible to reach a future that is creative without social, economic and political conflict.

We need to develop a new paradigm, a new world picture; a new mode of perceiving, thinking and living, some people would call it a new myth. We need something that will give us a collective strength equal to the security with which our opponents operate, and which the self-verifying IGS system gives them every day. Without this, we are at their mercy, and we are easily split asunder and brought to confusion.

COMPLEXITY VERSUS COMPLICATION

The propaganda of IGS tells us that LNS is a simple, primitive and even standardized sort of society, while IGS is complex. Actually it is the other way around. The complexity of IGS is just an appearance. A closer look reveals something else. The main reason for the common misunderstanding—on which the propaganda thrives—is that in IGS a multifarious division of labor is confused with spiritual, social and cultural complexity. These are, of course, entirely different 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 self-sufficiency and self-reliance, given a minimum of natural resources. To be so fit, this required of her or him the development of a broad spectrum of talents—intellectual, institutional, 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 enfoldment 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. IGS makes life *complicated* instead of complex.

I'll use my childhood to illustrate this. I lived on a Norwegian mountain valley farm. Contrast this with a glimpse into a present-day situation: it's my son who has gone to bed in an apartment in modern Oslo. When a child goes to bed all the impressions of the day are digested. The only time when there is peace for that, is in bed, before sleep comes. When I look back I have a lot of fabulous memories of the room in the old log house where every single piece of timber had been individually shaped and I knew whom among my own relatives had done it. I knew where in the forest they had cut the timber, spots I could visit myself and still see the stumps. 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 play and work were new every day. Every night there would be something new with me to give life to all those fantastic visual patterns that surrounded me on the walls and ceiling, the natural patterns in the wood, always impressing upon the mind the rhythms of living growth. They inspired adventure stories that grew incessantly in my mind, bridging waking existence and dreams.

The situation today is different. Look at my son's room, which is a "bed-and-media chamber." On the surface it looks colorful; closer scrutiny reveals it as an expression of the mass production of IGS. We have a Buddha here, pointing to "spiritual values" and a "cosmopolitan attitude," a Buddha printed in 4 million copies on washable, glossy plastic, made in Tokyo. Every item in the room is expressive of the standardization and commercialization of the world of this growing child. There is nothing here that challenges him to be self-creative, to use his own hands and senses in direct interplay with the naturally complex material and spiritual world.

LIVING WITHOUT SPLITTING

Well, the child of the log house grew up, and was one day sitting on top of a Norwegian mountain looking southwards. As mentioned, it was not solely frightening; like so many growing boys I was excited at the technical miracles and the promise of mastering enormous forces; it was a new version of what we had been told the old Norwegians could do in their time of magic and giants. Like so many of my own age, I was split down my mental middle: one part wanted to take over the farm that had been in the family since before the Viking era; the other part thought the greatest adventure of all must be to leave not only the farm but

Above: Fathers: Life Necessities Society
Below: Sons: Industrial Growth Society
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the earth and to fly on a rocket ship to Mars or Alpha Centauri. But my eyes were not good enough to navigate an airplane that was later to become a starship, so I settled for a career as a designer of rocket engines. My best friend was the son of the village blacksmith. In the smithy, we produced three rockets. Design No. 3 went straight through the roof of our barn and landed across the river—that was like crossing the Atlantic, later, at the Technical College of the Royal Norwegian Air Force, I learned that rocket careers today require you to be part of a "Technical Order System." So the adventure was wiped off the pages of the latest science fiction book, the one I was writing myself. In the nick of time—before the social investment became too heavy for withdrawal, I left the air force and entered the philosophy department at the University of Oslo. Actually I went there to find out about double personalities, but to my disappointment no such idea was on the curriculum.

I was in the hands of Western academic philosophy.

Well, this double prospect was very much the situation for a lot of Norwegians of my age and many of us tried to accept both at the same time. For a long while I felt that this was terrible to live with. One had to choose, but could not. Finally, I chose to work for the complex society, where the great adventure is spiritual and cultural, not technical. One has to find a way to live and act within the social structure, which is IGS. Otherwise we have no chance to change things. This state of affairs is not wholly a hopeless one, even though it is painful.

A LABORATORY FOR ECO-POLITICS

To make a long story short, after some years in New York, India and Nepal, I joined the Norwegian eco-political tradition on an all-day, all-night basis. 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 presupposing the

world to stand still, So, in 1969 on the 24th of June, a group of friends met and founded what we later called The Ecopolitical Ring of Cooperative Action—the RING, for short. All activists are welcome, but none other. It still exists, and nowadays there are members in many countries, in America and India, and in Norway we represent ECOROPA and Friends of the Earth and The Ecologist. We put out our own journal devoted to ecopolitical philosophy, called *The Ring*.

That first autumn we lacked practice and training, so we called on top experts of the Norwegian IGS to come every week to our meetings and be informative, but what they did not know was that their primary function was to act as our training objects. That was our laboratory. I am stressing it, I 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, knowing next to nothing outside that field. The world is full of such people. We are governed by persons who don't know where we are heading. So we built our own training program to become *super amateurs,* meaning people who both know a little within all relevant social and ecological fields, who love their work and who put all their effort and talent into learning that work. The *main* trick of "super-amateurship" is the training to combine logically and understandably across the specialists' fields and to tie all that to the main theme that interests people.

During this period we invited the head of the Landscape Protection Office of the Norwegian Hydro-Electric Administration and he came out with a surprising argument. He had been around Norway in his car and had taken lots of photos of farms, houses, courtyards and fences, and he tried to prove through this series of pictures that the common people of Norway completely lack aesthetic sensibility. If our group's main argument against dams and hydropower was aesthetic, our case was doomed. You are just a tiny, exclusive elite, so 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. To prove this he showed an old, well-built log house where the walls had been broken through and enormous panorama windows put in, even at the corners.

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. But of course few people today are creative, they are passive consumers of the mass media. One cannot speak much of an artistic folk culture. If you go back half a generation you find an artistic folk culture. The deterioration in taste coincides with industrialization. His documentation of a national low ebb in aesthetic sensibility testified to a deterioration that he himself, the designer of "nicer" power stations, had contributed to. His contribution had been one of making a quick super industrialization of Norway more acceptable. He was an IGS cosmetologist.

COMPLEX WORK

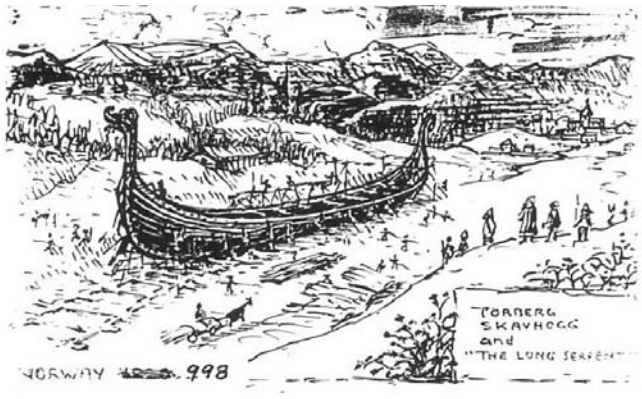
Let's go back to a time when aesthetics were part of daily life. I will relate a story found in Snorri Sturlason's *The Sagas of the Norwegian Kings*. Its theme is the building of the most famous of the Viking ships, The Long Serpent. It was built for the equally famous king, Olav Tryggvason, a few years before the end of the first millennium A.D. The ship was the largest known at the time, around 180 feet long, and it was meant to be the most beautiful. One of the foremen of the building crew was a man named Torberg. During the construction of the ship Torberg was called home, something serious had happened there and his help was needed. The king let him go.

That tells us something important about that society which is strikingly different from our own. The difference is twofold. This man Torberg was actually one of the main designers and construction engineers of the ship, but he was not a specialist in ship-building. He was a farmer, but we learn from other sources that people along the coast were never just farmers, they were fishermen, hunters in the mountains, traders, blacksmiths, iron ore miners and refiners, carpenters, semi-nomads herding cows and sheep and goats among mountain pastures, local parliamentarians, and they built boats, large and small. They were persons that could in principle do anything. Torberg was a generalist or "super amateur."

Point two: Torberg was permitted to go to his farm, in spite of his role as a key man on the most prestigious ship. In that society the farm was regarded as the foundation. The king knew that disregarding this order of things, he would risk losing the support of the farmers of Trøndelag.

Well. Torberg had to stay away for quite a while.

When he came back, it was evening but he eagerly went to the ship. By then, the sides had been boarded up the rim, including the rim plank. The king and a crowd of people were expressing pleasure and excitement. But Torberg did not share their happy mood. The following morning the king and Torberg arrived to find everybody standing around. What's up, asks King Olav, why aren't you working? And the men say: something terrible has happened; someone has ruined one of the top rim planks. Hearing this, the king flies into a rage and promises death to the one who is of such an atrocity and gold to the one who tells who the guilty one is. Torberg, standing next to the king, says quietly: well, you don't have to go far to find the one who is now first to be given gold and thereafter lose his life, it was I who did it. Everybody was as if struck by lightning.



The Long Serpent
ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

And the king says, I have to keep my promise, if you can't make the damage good right now. Whereupon Torberg runs over to the ship and he uses his axe and starts slicing off wood to level out all the cuts he had made during the night, and since the ship is really the *Long* Serpent I guess they let him keep at it for a couple of hours.

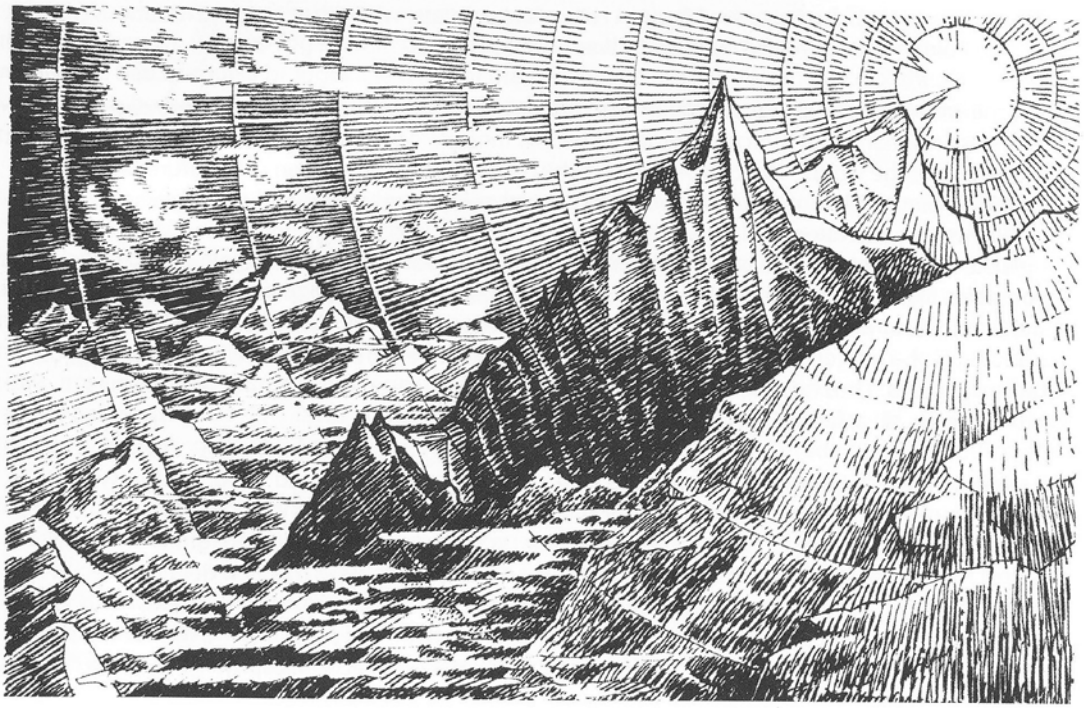
Now, to understand the story we have to keep a few things in mind, like for instance: the top rim board is always made out of very hard wood. In addition, Torberg must have worked very fast during the night when he made the incisions, in order to finish the whole rim before being discovered, so I think he'd just cut straight down on the plank, he hadn't stopped to chop sideways. And he had been cutting into the wood at right angles to its growth lines and that way you never get very deep. Adding it all up I doubt if he had gone deeper than half an inch, at the most. So that's the thickness of what he was slicing off, and I am sure that we today would not have noticed the difference when he was finished—not on a 180 foot ship! But the saga reports differently: "Then everybody saw that the ship was even more beautiful," it says. And not only that, the crowd immediately noticed the difference between the two sides of the ship, and the king made him polish down the other rim plank as well. *Now*, finally, the ship was perfect, and Torberg was made Honorary Chief Builder of The Long Serpent, and he was given a name by which he could be remembered: Torberg *Skavhogg*—"the one who shapes wood by axe." We get the full significance of the story if we keep in mind one more thing: the saga of the life of Olav Tryggvason

is a long and detailed one, and it tells us vividly that Torberg was taking a grave risk. He knew quite plainly that his life was at stake.

But Torberg could not bear living the rest of his life knowing that he had taken part in building the Long Serpent and that the ship was less than perfect. Playing against death, he *had* to show everybody what a perfect form is, but he knew what kind of audience he was performing for, so when it was cut out for them, *all of them* were immediately convinced. He knew they would be, if he was given the chance. What *we* would single out as a purely aesthetic value, had at least as much force in Torberg's society as economic necessities in ours. The enormous difference between those two societies becomes even clearer when we remember that ours is an extremely rich society in the material sense, while Torberg's was full of physical toil with very little economic reward. And Torberg's contemporaries didn't regard his act as strange or unreasonable. Rather the opposite. He was made an historical figure because he was one of those who set a norm of excellence for everybody to be guided by.

Now, the story of Torberg Skavhogg is just one of many of the same nature in Norwegian history. Many other nations and cultures have similar stories. In the economy of those cultures everyday challenges are complex and children are included in work, parents or adults are careful in selecting work for the children so that their experience *is often one of success*.

This is the situation I have seen on many occasions in Sherpa culture in The Himalayas. There is a social seriousness in the challenges that a child has to cope with. Every child knows that she or he is a highly regarded member of society. The child is given responsibility and is even relied upon for initiative when unprecedented situations arise, and the jobs are so varied that the whole range of talents of this human being are in principle developed, the intellectual, intuitional and emotional. So when this person grows up a high level of self-reliance and resourcefulness is achieved, and on top of that the ability to discern between ugly and beautiful.



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EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH

Briefly, I will mention a few campaigns and direct actions we went into and which taught us a lot. Our first action came in 1970 in *Eikesdal*. Local cooperation came easily and naturally, because there had already been two hydropower schemes implemented in the valley, and the emptiness of promises had become clear to everybody. The action had been under preparation one year. Our aim was to stop the hydro-electrocution of the Mardøla waterfall—the third highest in the world when the springtime thawing of snow in the mountains makes it plunge 2,000 feet in one leap into an extremely lush forested valley by the Eikesdal lake. The picture of that waterfall later became the symbol of the whole ecopolitical movement of Norway, and is the emblem of the Ring.

One element in the Mardøla action is an abridgement on Gandhi, I don't know if he would have approved. We used steel chains to anchor ourselves to the rocks so that the police could not move us. A 70-year-old Eikesdal farmer, Olav Utigård, made the chains from old cow anchors. Some of us were mountain climbers so we used drill pitons. We drilled into the rock and sat on the pitons so the police could not get at them. We fastened ourselves so that no one could cut the chains without hurting our bodies. Norwegian policemen hesitate to hurt anyone, so that was successful. The chains represented our vital ties to Mother Earth. They couldn't be severed without lethal damage. Olav Utigård himself and several of the other farmers sat with us in the chains. The action and the larger campaign around it became very involved and we learned more from it about Norwegian society than we would have in seven years at a university seminar. We came out as different people. The Mardøla action was sensational. It was reported in the *New York Times* and *Der Spiegel* and on television. About 500 persons joined it, some from France, America and Holland. We lost the waterfall but we started a movement. Right after that, and inspired by it, we 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 kindergarten and another through a suburban settlement, to stop several new military target ranges, etc.

Through these practical actions we worked on a new philosophy of society and man-in-nature. From 1969 we called our way of thinking *ecophilosophy*. We held ecophilosophical seminars in the mountains—in and out of the chains. Our experiment had proved to ourselves that Gandhi is right when he says "the goal is the way and the way is the goal." It's detrimental to your effort to concentrate on some pre-conceived achievement. Living here and now makes you strong.

My great source of inspiration has been *The Gita According to Gandhi*. Gandhi makes the Gita relevant to the 20th century. But in any century its bright guiding star is the *Norm of Selfless Action*. The source of knowledge is to be found, not at some university, but at the center of social and political conflict, in the *selfless* search for Truth. But what is this "life-truth"? You may find guidance in Gandhi, in Martin Luther King, in the Vietnamese Buddhist monks who burned themselves to death, in Torberg Skavhogg. But you have to help yourself through your own action. It's not laid out beforehand. That's why *you should not hanker for the fruit of your action*. This is very strange to Europeans. We always act as if the world is a map, a piece of space where definite goals are plotted. To us it is crazy that we should be striving without the aim of the fruit of our action. What else could inspire activity?

It is impossible for us to say that an aim will materialize as we define it. If, for instance, in the Mardøla river project you get very close to reaping the fruit, but in the end you lose the river, commonly, you are shocked into inactivity because "everything is lost." That's where Parliament and Big Industry may sit back and let out a sigh of relief and say; finally we have peace, those demonstrators have been robbed of their wind, so, let's get on with the next electrocution!

Pre-figuring a future point of win-or-lose was what

we started to get out of through the Mardøla action. We liberated ourselves from the chessboard. In life obstacles are just inspirations to experimentation.

In 1970 the parliamentarians, as usual, let out their sigh of relief, happy to be rid of the demonstrators. But to their consternation there wasn't any good riddance this time. The next day we were there again campaigning for the next river, plus putting brakes on North Sea oil drilling, and to keep Norway out of the European Common (growth) Market, which we won. The movement reached the less activist-oriented parts of the population, creating the *Future in Our Hands* organization four years later; that one has since grown very large and spread to the other Scandinavian countries, and to England as well.

ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

INNERDALEN AND ALTA

"Mardøla" was only the first in a series of nonviolent direct actions and unconventional campaigns. All the big ones were river actions, the most notable of which were at *Innerdalen* and *Alta*.

Innerdalen, "The Inner-most Valley," is (was, I now regret to say) a beautiful, extremely fertile mountain valley in Mid-Norway, that was to be completely inundated as a hydroelectric dam. In this valley we were finally able to stage a pure Gandhian action, plowing and harvesting crops, keeping cattle, producing milk, butter and cheese. We organized a "Green University" and a "green factory workers occupation," proclaiming the dam workers as "strike breakers." The latter was to provoke discussion with the labor movement. It was at meetings in Innerdalen that we conceived the idea of a *Green Workers International*.

The Alta campaign comprised a lengthy series of direct actions, repeated arrests and a morass of court cases, aimed at protecting the river Alta and the last unspoiled territory of the *Same* (Laplanders) reindeer herders. That campaign reached its culmination in the winter of 1980-81, with large-scale direct action under arctic conditions. The temperatures went down to minus 40°C, and the actionists chained to the rocks as in Mardøla—housed in heated tents. The international participation was this time much larger, besides Scandinavians, people from West Germany, France, Holland and Belgium took part. The resistance, named "nonviolent winter guerrillas," was broken when the authorities sent a ship with 600 policemen to Alta. Specially trained technicians used flywheel cutters to break the extremely heavy chains, and asbestos and steel sheets to protect the demonstrators from the terrible wounds that this technique might otherwise inflict. The campaign included a one month hunger strike, staged in Oslo by five young *Same* men, a *Same* women's occupation of the Government Building, and a *Same* Women's delegation to New York and Ottawa to seek support from American Indian and Eskimo organizations, a support that was whole-

heartedly given. One of the very positive results of the Alta campaign has been a contribution to the international cooperation between the various aboriginal organizations. One of the young *Same* fighters, *Nils Somby*, who lost his left arm in trying to blow up a hydropower construction site bridge in Alta, fled the Norwegian police and was adopted by a Canadian Indian tribe. He lives in Canada now with his family.

One result of a decade of Alta campaigning has been a substantial reduction of that hydropower scheme. Another result has been the positive transformation of the lives and outlook of a lot of the participants. Many of them have told me that "for the first time I experienced meaning in my life." That is noteworthy. For the first time they were part of a process where it became natural to forget their egos, to identify completely with other human beings.

MEANINGFUL WORK

Moving from one river to the next, the horizon was widened step by step. Above all we learned the meaning of work. This is a topic that E.F. Schumacher stresses and treats lucidly in his chapter "Buddhist Economics" in his book *Small is Beautiful.* In Buddhist thinking *man needs work as much as he needs food*. In Western thinking work is a means, not an end in itself. Because in the IGS economy the ideal worker is an appendix to the machine. In IGS work loses its meaning.

Search for *meaningful work* is the basis for our initiative to form the Green Workers' International. We define the concept through five characteristics:

1. It is an activity *necessary* for a human being's material survival.
2. Its *fruits* (material objects and services) do not damage, but, rather *enhance life.*
3. It poses such challenges that the potential *complexity of talents and capabilities* in the individual are brought to bloom.
4. It demands *loyalty* as well as cooperation.
5. It engages *children* and other social groups.

IGS deprives us of meaningful work. That might be its most damaging aspect. A wonderful aspect of meaningful work is that a society built upon that foundation will thrive on meagre energy resources. Energy affluence actually destroys meaningful work. Meaningful work presupposes a specific kind of economy, which requires the enhancement of sensitivity towards fellow human beings and nature.

TIME AND SPACE

We in the West are handicapped at predictive activity because our minds have such a weak sense of *time.* I mean "human" or "natural" time, as distinguished from clock time or the time of physics, which is time reduced to space, or to projections on paper and on the computer. Our perception and personalities are static. We need to regain time, and train our sense of process. With no training of that kind we are unable to predict the future. Being equipped with computers makes us worse, because it makes us think we're coming to grips with time, while actually a static piece of apparatus, a machine, has been interposed between us and the creative process of life.

We often ask the question "what does the future hold?" That is a meaningful question only if the future is a storehouse. A computer can piece together a million indications of, say, what's buried in a cave; it can help us become better archaeologists, but archaeology doesn't help us in uncovering the future.

We are building the future, on the basis of or *often in spite of*—what's buried in our history. Some of us are trying to build a society that is qualitatively different from past and present society: a complex instead of a complicated society. But, of course, we *have to* take our ideas from earlier experience.

Some of the greens say that we can and should

start by *changing ourselves first*, and through *that* get ready to change the system. That's still building on the view of man as a soul separated from his body and from his environment. Instead of observing the river, from a safe river-bank, you step into the river, and are grabbed by the current, and are *forced* to learn how to swim. It's *then* that you have a chance of being shaken so that you're changed and through that you change the system. That's when you learn to accept that nothing is permanent, that everything is time, and time is creativity. Only then will initiative and responsibility replace passivity.

The West is space fixed. The East has temporalized space.

Let me illustrate the separation by referring to the house-building cultures of the two traditions. In the Himalayas, there is a valley called "The Plow Furrow." I have visited the place six times, and I and my family are adopted members of three local clans. I have seen tourists and mountaineers from the West come through this valley, and stop briefly, take one look at the village and say, "Well look at these poor people. They strive to build houses with right angles, perpendicular walls, conforming to geometrical perfection, and look how these ideals are always beyond their reach! They are toiling, but frustration is always their lot.—And of course! Because these primitives don't have the simplest knowledge of mechanics, they lack the proper instruments and tools, and they are always short of time." "We have to help them," said Sir Edmund Hillary, and brought in an aluminum school, *shining* with Greco-American principles.

But these tourists and helpers haven't a clue. The Himalayan farmers are not aiming for geometric-Platonic perfection which has to do with perceiving the world as immobile space overlaid with illusionary movement, even with detesting movement and time. It is misleading to use the word "architecture" about Himalayan houses. We should talk about "life with one's house": The house is part one's personality. It is always changing; change is its nature. The house, together with everything near and relevant to it, human beings, animals, plants, all this is behaving like one organic rhythmically changing form.

The Sherpa and Tibetan houses are living beings of which the builders take responsibility on an everyday basis. The house is meant to be repaired every day. It is built light so that the forces of nature, like wind, are permitted to show their force, but in such a way that it's always the parts that are quickly, almost effortlessly rebuilt. The roof blows off in strong winds, the way it's meant to, but that means that the much more important skeleton of the house remains untouched, and the family puts the roof back. I've watched it happen on several occasions. Putting the roof back is like putting your hat back. You don't feel terrible having to do that. This is the strategy formed by necessity in a non-affluent society.

Western architecture is an expression of a "stop-time aesthetics." The modern house is a member of a class, I label "paper constructions," because when that kind of house is built it shares an important characteristic with the clean drawing on paper done by the architect. If you smoke a pipe, like I do, and as an architect you have a bad day and happen to put your sooty thumb on the just finished drawing, leaving a black stain, that's intolerable, and you just have to throw it in the dust bin. The same is the case with a modern house. If one day the passers-by observe a crack in the wall—a scar on that pure, smooth face—they can't bear it because it's part of a structure where the cracks of time are supposed not to have relevance. Western architecture is built to make you believe that time is stopped and that withering or death is no more. To keep that illusion going, however, presupposes a global robber economy, a systematic plundering that is now finally emptying the earth's last resources at an exponential pace, scooping up energy and materials and people around the globe to desperately preserve structures that are contradicting time, the process of life. Man is here living by contradicting himself at his existential roots. On the personal micro-level something like this would be called insanity, probably labelled as schizophrenia.

In contrast to this, to regain sanity, I propose *the philosophy of positive decay*. Accepting decay means accepting life. It's another word for ecophilosophy.

THE PROCESS PARADIGM OF BUDDHISM

The key element of Buddhism, is that the world is suffering (*Dukkha*: "revolving on a crooked axle"), they mean *we are time but think we are space*. It's the element that unlocks Buddhist philosophy. We think we are space and act accordingly, which means we are continuously colliding with ourselves and everybody else. We are part of a time flow, of a stream, of chains of events with no beginning and no ending and in this stream our individuality disappears. By natural inclination we seek individual permanency. We are *inclined* to do that, but as human beings we are born with a freedom to rid ourselves of that inclination. Even the name we are given at birth fortifies the inclination. Holding on to our name from one minute to the next is pulling us into the trenches of the war against time. When we are born as human beings we start by discovering our body, as often as not by getting hurt, we don't get milk when we need it, we burn our fingers or cut ourselves on a knife. Having a human perception and self-consciousness we react self-protectively, and step by step an individuality bound to a body becomes the most vital thing in the world to care for. But we can't protect our body, nor even our mind! To exist individually means to be a loser. This kind of thinking is at variance with IGS, with a socio-economic system demanding that individuals fight each other. We build protective walls around our person, we seek economic security, 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. The worst of our "reductionisms" is that of reducing time reality, to space an illusory world. And the more we do it, the greater the crash when time breaks through.

EYE VERSUS EAR

Let us once more look at two basically different cultures, contrasting them. We'll first focus on IGS which is based on mechanical mobility instead of time. IGS is a pyramidal society. As is progresses its administrative and political networks tend toward perfecting the pyramidal shape. This development is fourfold.

1. It is aiming for *linear expansion of the production of industrial commodities and services and the use of industrial methods*,—standardized mass production, concentrated in a few, urbanized centers, 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 method of governing is quantification.

I want you to look at this drawing of the pyramid.

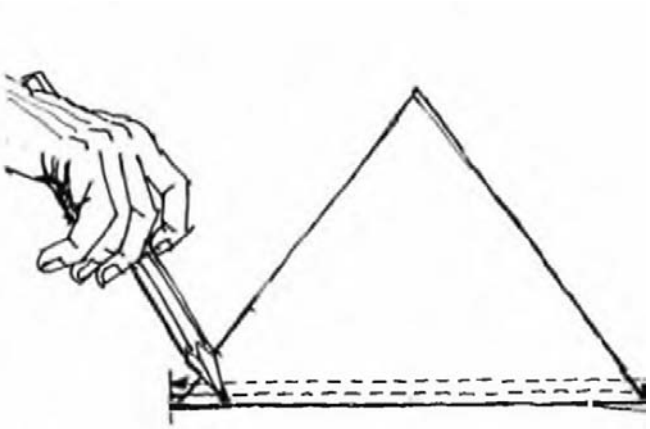

ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

I'll use the human eye as a symbol of the Western approach. Now fix your eyes on the tip of my pen as I move it from the left to the right side of the drawing. You manage to do that easily, I'm sure, and you're equally successful in reversing the process, following the pen as I move it back to the starting point. This

ability to reverse and repeat, to control a movement in space, is a specific ability of our organ of visualization. It is our primary organic-perceptive instrument for fixing us to space and thereby controlling our world. It is in this way different from the other sense organs, that are predominantly sensing time flows. Take hearing. You cannot for instance stop my flow of words and reverse them, you cannot go back and hear once more what I said a while ago. You cannot reverse that kind of process. And because of that *you have to raise your awareness to a higher level*—to *be really present*, in conscious and active synchronization with what's happening. Otherwise you'll slide out of participation, you'll be individualized. The eyes, in contrast, are conducive to the private study of books etc. You may be attentive or not, as you choose. You have control because of isolation. You're abstracted from the world, from the life stream.

Because of its seeming security, we think that eyesight is the most important. In keeping with Buddhism, controlled space is illusory—but that illusory world is fortified through material and competitive success, especially if you are part of IGS and have at your disposal the science and technology of that socio-economic system. But our sense of hearing may help us to regain awareness of what time is. Time makes the space usable and discernible to a living being. All our activity has its roots in time. Time makes us active, so that we can act in space, with our senses and with our hands. But we are taught to reduce time to space.

THE COSMIC JAZZ BAND

Our technology and our commercial power centers have launched a massive attack on hearing and on sound to reduce them to space phenomena. They do it with tape recorders and record players. The most crazy thing I know is when jazz fans are listening to the same improvisation by Charlie Parker one thousand times over, trying to copy his improvised solo in detail. It's so crazy, because improvised jazz is actually one of the very few outlets for time awareness in our culture. Jazz offers us real creativity and organic existence, the opportunity of genuine personal creativity. We may use as the contrast here classical orchestra music, and this is not a contest between two types of music but between two types of society.

The cello player in the picture is governed from the outside. You look at sheet music, you follow the metronome, you count and subdivide bars, you listen to recordings, you try to copy and you are alone. Alone, but secure, in a controlled environment, where everything unfolding is according to plan. Maybe you have a conductor in front of you, giving orders that you have to comply with. You know that if you don't comply, there is no security any more. Chaos threatens, which means time would take over.
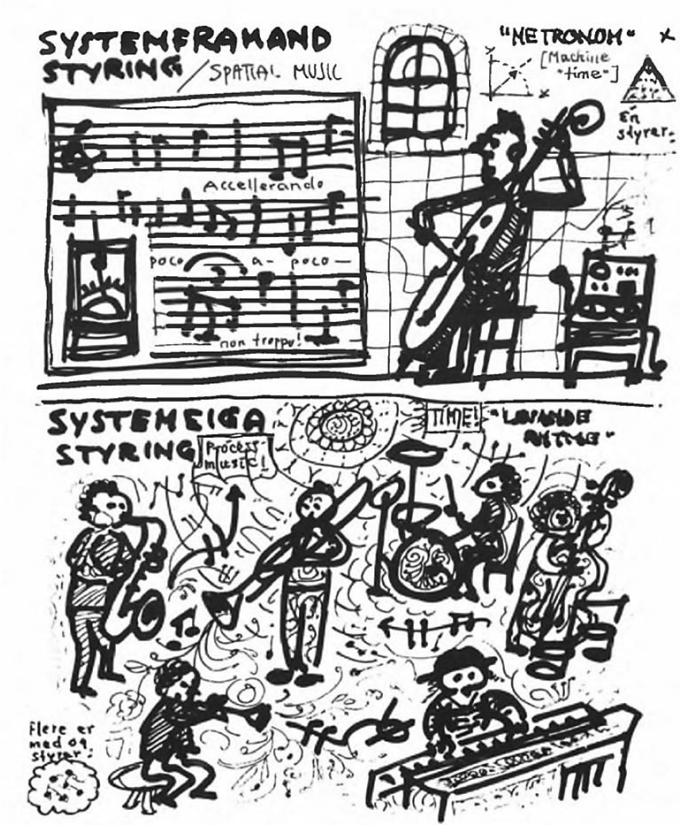
ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

The small, well-integrated jazz band is a different world, a flow where every member has the same importance, where there's no conductor, and where creativity happens all the time.

Why are there so few individuals that are good at playing both kinds of music, that can function in both kinds of society? Because going from one to the other is so radical a shift that it is like changing personality. Coordination in "Jazz band society" is done through an internal sharing of the rhythm of a total creative flow. If you try to keep time by counting, keeping track of bar lines in jazz, you are lost. To achieve that undefinable quality called "swing" the part-takers have to share the ability to swim in a river of rhythm. It's more like being in your breathing and stomach—like meditation—than your head. This is, partly, the basis on which jazz functions so well as an international language. Because it employs directly the natural rhythm that we all share as children of nature. Jazz musicians all over the world know some 150-200 standard, rhythmically ordered chord sequences, but they don't know them as mathematics or grammar, they have internalized them in their "body and soul." These internalized sequences have become like a refined interpretation of their own breathing-life.

You may go to New York or Bristol or Tokyo or Addis Ababa or Moscow, and without any practice beforehand you may join a jazz band and somebody just gives a short signal and riff away all of you, Japanese, English, Norwegian, Russian or African are off swimming in the same river.

WE ARE MORE THAN ONE

Our psychologists have been wrong on one of their basic pre-suppositions. When they talk about a human being whose mental life is chaotic, they always stress the importance of him or her getting back into his or her self. Their aim is to build one individual identity. And all success is based on the possibility of defining one and only one personality structure as a skeleton for the healthy and sane individual.

Well, instead of this notion we can conceive of a human being as a being who at birth is like a very complex root system which is trying not to fix a permanent personality structure, but to grow a multiplicity of personalities. I have in mind a *dynamic* and *multi-directional* but *organically ordered* pattern. Contrasting this, we, "the civilized" peoples, live under pyramidal systems that demand of us that we must be one single, rigidly identifiable person. That's the only way we can function as controllable "elementary particles."

The only author I have found in Western literature who has taken a first step toward questioning this basic assumption is *H.G. Wells*. It's a deviation from everything else that he wrote. Towards the end of his life he had the idea that he ought to be a member of the Royal Society, and for that purpose he wrote a doctoral dissertation. It was published in 1944 as an appendix to an essay collection, and it got the fantastic title "A Thesis of the Quality of Illusion in the Continuity of the Individual Life in the Higher Metazoa, with Particular Reference to the Species Homo Sapiens." I've never heard of anyone who is aware of it. I guess those who read it at the time thought the idea was untenable or just plain crazy. (He got the doctor's degree but not the Royal Society.) He has this idea that this one individual center that we turn back to all the time is wrong. 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, the others are suppressed. But sometimes we go to bed at night having very interesting plans for the next day, in the morning they all seem totally irrelevant to us. We feel like being part of an entirely different universe, where other things matter. The sleep has mixed up our various identities.

Well, I think a lot of interesting ideas and observations would come out of looking at the world from this angle. The most rewarding places to look for healthy multiple person structures are semi-nomadic societies,

because they are made up of people who live two or more parallel lives, in integration with more than one environment. I'll mention a couple of examples. One is from my own country, from communities on the Western and Northern coast up until about 70 years ago. The men of these communities were stationary in one place with their farms and neighbors and then every winter for three months they left home on a sailing vessel, to go fishing at the *Lofoten* islands far away to the North. One of my grandfathers lived like that in his youth. They often had very rough weather, and this little, open, square-rigged Viking type boat wasn't easy to handle. But they were masters at it, and the only way they could manage, was through total mutual integration. The six of them, together with the boat and its rigging, became like one organism.

These men had to be members of two extremely different sorts of society with two different ways of social integration. They were also meeting nature in two different ways. They could do it so well because they developed two personalities. The theory of permanent ego-centeredness does not cover that phenomenon. And, mind you, these two personalities go deeper than role playing; they were dynamic; always shifting, adjusting and growing, sometimes by the situation brought to border on each other, and there might be conflict between the two personalities.

These men in the tiny nutshell of a boat—40-50 feet long, riding the storm, had actually lost their egos in that situation. *One* of the part-personalities of each man combined with the similar one in each of the others, producing—with the boat, the waves and the wind—an over-individual, organically functioning form, one that was flexible in time, or rather: creating these men's time. A storm would be the final catalyst to complete this fusion. And this situation—if nothing else—should convince us that the personalities here at work were constituents of a world other than the one from which these men had put to sea, the "geometrical" farm community of "secure separateness."

What I am talking about is of course different from "split personality." I *am* speaking about really radical utilization of an enormous potential for complex, deep "permeation" or interpenetration, an urge we all have from childhood, but which we are not permitted to follow in our society. And the clinging to isolated individuality, a hardening of the membrane, is the root of suffering. 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, semi-permeable membranes! And not only that; right now it needs people who are trained to be two, who are *utilizing* that potential. I am here getting back to my starting perspective. Let's look at what ordinarily happens if we re-enter nature and start living on a farm as I have done and which by now a number of Norwegian ecopoliticians and ecophilosophers have done. They did it, saying we have to do ourselves what we teach. And we can still manage to be eco-activists. But what happens? We don't hear a word from them after that, from most of them. They are out of that political fight. I think I understand why.

I know through my own experience. For instance working in the forest, often alone and in winter, even when there's a blizzard blowing the cap off my head, I find my work so rewarding it seems to me almost like a terrible thing to go back to the house at night and sit down to read parliamentary acts and talk on the telephone to some bureaucrats in Oslo and bang on the typewriter in order to try and protect our own river.

To be able to do it I have to build a bridge to my other, urban personality. I have hit on some tricks to facilitate that shift, like turning on the radio and listening to Berlin or Moscow or London, or I put on a record with Western urban music. Instead of eating oatmeal porridge, I put a pizza in the oven, and instead of local beer I pour myself a drop of bourbon. I light a cigar instead of my homemade pipe. These are pleasant things, so that moves me softly onto the bridge. Doing it directly, without this sort of mediation, is too painful to be bearable. I happen to have a double background, so

I can do it. Most farmers can't and *that inability* is used as a weapon against them by the established powers. My neighbor farmers are bulldozed into the ground by academic formality and legalistic pyramidism!

What I try to do, right now, is to devise training courses for many personalities. Our chance lies in something along these lines. We must work directly with soil and forest and sea, not all of us, but as many as possible. We have to contribute directly to the green texture which must be our overriding concern, *but if we only do that, we are lost*. The next you know, your river is dry and you're buried under concrete. Even though it is painful, we have to develop an urban busybody too. And we do have the capacity to do it, without losing the other, the "green" stem of our dual-world tree. That's what I have been trying to argue. The many personality existence is

ILLUSTRATION: SIGMUND KVALØY SETRENG

demanded of us living in this age of mankind's most pervasive and deep-going transition.

Let's look momentarily at another illustration of man's capacity for radical complexity: I have done altogether seven expeditions to a valley in the central Himalayas where I am acquainted with people whose behavior is best explained by assuming they have *three* different, annually operative person-structures, repeated sequentially. That's a utilization of their complexity potential brought forth by the very diverse demands posed by *their* environment and *their* resources, meagre and widely spaced. These are of course again the kind of people who thrive in houses with no right angles, people living by creating time. Their existences are: (1) as village-based farmers part of the year, (2) as high-altitude cattle herders another part, and (3) as caravan traders across the Himalayas visiting Lhasa or other important trading centers once or twice annually.

A reincarnate lama, head of a monastery, ritually regarded as god-son of mine, has five personalities, a product of *his* training to be deeply knowledgeable in all human interest fields. That actually makes him an unusually stable *and* courageous person. He consists of a little *society*, prepared for anything, within his own mental-physical range. And his community expects him to be many, and feels safer through knowing that he spans that range.

DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

A pyramidal society can exist only so long as its members accept an existence as that pyramid's elementary particles or indivisible building blocks, accepting that they themselves are small pyramids, micro-copies of the big one. It can exist only if it may rely on identifying each member in a standardized way. Today computers are facilitating that sort of control. As soon as a member deviates from his pyramidal identity the psychiatrists are there at hand, and because they are his own accepted authorities, he is easily convinced of where

he belongs, often putting his own effort into getting back into his one and only self. And that self keeps him insecure, frightened and in need of Big Brother, suffering and contributing to others' suffering. It's a self-perpetuating affair, keeping the great pyramid going, through Egypt, Babylonia, Rome, the British Empire, and The Third Reich. But modern technology and globalization are now finally winding up that story. Our task is to cushion the great crash, to build a green basis for the complex, time-creative society.

We *have* covered some distance in the Western world in building democratic institutions in society; but we have not begun to even conceive of the possibility of democracy in the individual's inner world. For this inner world we have the capacity and even urge to create a whole society of personalities. I'm not speaking of some fixed set of entities, but something like a group of personality trends, given us by nature to cope creatively with a vast variety of situations.

So 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 supposing or complementing each other, some are in conflict. And all this means that such a person, if he is *aware* of his inner, radical complexity range, can with extraordinary courage and confidence meet challenges from new social or natural process. Let's say, you meet a situation and a person deviating from your normal social setting; you would be able to relate, because even this extraordinary human character conforms to one of the actors on your inner stage, one you already know.

LIBERATION GENERATES COURAGE

Normally we go around ridden with hesitancy, anxiety, lack of trust, even sheer fright. We shrink from getting involved in unprecedented ways, our hearts cry for a mother or a father who is not with us any longer.

An immediate illustration that comes to my mind is how I was a wee bit scared today because it's the first time I meet a large English audience and I never gave a talk in England before. So I said to myself—or rather "one of me" spoke to "the other me"—this is another river, so, it's a grand opportunity to extend your knowledge of swimming. The Thames or the Severn or the Avon I'm sure have other rhythms than the Mardøla, but something like those rhythms are already in me. One Englishman I know quite well is Teddy Goldsmith, creator and editor of *The Ecologist*, at the other end of the green-blue scale I have met and quarreled with Sir Edmund Hillary who is a New Zealander but a very British mountaineer (he wanted to climb a sacred mountain!). As a super-active ecopolitician I find Gerard Morgan-Grenville in Wales, I've been reading *The New Scientist* every week for 10 years. So, there are here some personality trends that I have begun to relate to, all of them being different from Norwegian, German, French and Russian ones, but they conform to various rhythms that easily grow from roots in my own soil. And I have learned how it helps to have a bridge over onto a new situation so I walk in here, I talk to Satish our concert master this evening and a dear fellow Gandhian from our common spiritual fountainhead India, and I pour myself a cup of coffee from a thermos bottle that a kind Englishman just provided for me—all this is the bridge, and after having passed through these various steps I already find myself in the new situation. Being where I am now, everything is totally different from the situation just a little while ago, when I was sitting outside in the hall and it was almost inconceivable that I could go in here and function in front of these 600 strangers. I have already talked for a while, and that's the last part of the bridge, and right now it seems I am getting across to you. Some English-oriented person on my inner stage might be growing and even taking the lead.

Anyway, this is what I mean: if you are aware of this ability you have of utilizing your personality complex and building bridges to put the right part of your resources to use in the right place, your courage to act

will be up to the challenge. Going into it deeply you should discover that you are psychically invulnerable because you no longer have just one single personality with its specific vulnerability. We know that our life is movement. But we also have personality resources to cope with a much wider range of environments and challenges than most people are conscious of. We have in us the potential to integrate deeply with situations extremely far from our normal ones.

We have this because we have "inner members" that embryonically have the various resources. We should just let them come forward and take responsibility, to unfold their own person-structures. Through that, the hard shell between us and the world would be broken and we could become true, cooperative partners with all fellow human beings in the endlessly creative life stream. And you'll *accept* all kinds of people, because you find them all in your inner society. Recognizing and then permitting your inner democratic revolution to happen furthers the democracy in your environment. And finding all the elements of nature within, your feeling for the earth's ecosphere will be lifted to a new level. "Accepting your own bunch means accepting the bunch of humanity as well as accepting nature." You lose your anxiety and gain security through liberation from a self as a sitting duck in its private fortress or up in its own very beautiful big tree, by letting go of control, entering the stream of life and accepting it with all the conflicts without which life would be nothing.

"I" exists in several geographical places at the same time because personality is defined through participation which is not confined to one spot. Right now, one of my part-personalities is speaking here at Bristol University, another is working the Saetereng farm in Trøndelag in Middle Norway. The activity that defines one member of my personality group goes on there, where it is partly carried on through the activity of my son Øystein and Tashi, a Sherpa from the Himalayas who is staying at the farm, and by some of our neighbors as well. Another of my part-personalities is at work in Oslo in the Ecopolitical Cooperative Ring. One part is still active in The Plow Furrow, the remote Himalayan valley. That's because I've spent so much time there, taken an active part in village life, been adopted with my family into three Sherpa clans. I as *Tsering Dorjee*, my local name, is still a somewhat dynamic element in Plow Furrow affairs, and the villagers know I am concerned and have responsibility as a clan member and that my body again will be seen among them. That keeps Tsering Dorjee's presence alive. Tashi's active presence at Sætereng right now has brought several Himalayan part-personalities into part-integration with that Norwegian socio-ecologically locality. But the most intensely active member of "my bunch" is now here at Bristol, I guess. In any case, that one draws on experiences of all the other part-personalities through variously open channels: the Sigmund Kvaløy/Tsering Dorjee complex is not a split personality!

If this sort of person-structure, this kind of complex human activity-presence, was cultivated as the dominant paradigm, there would not be any suffering in the Buddhist sense, because there would not be any individual to inflict suffering upon. Activity does not suffer and there would, for instance, not be any "I" being afraid of dying. Activity does not die, as long as there's someone to carry it on. Person-death would cease. Nirvana in Buddhism is not Heaven or a state to be achieved after physical death: instead, Nirvana is our situation, our way of life from that moment when we are liberated completely from the prison of the individual struggling to hold on to his individuality. And Nirvana means releasing the brakes on time—to be free to swing as partaker in the cosmic jazz band.