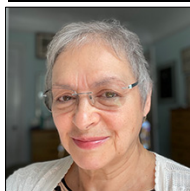


Four person-ideas in a soul-searching internally persuasive discourse



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Abstract

The monologues presented in this article represent a particular Bakhtinian analysis of a transcript of a passionate, dramatic, and conflictual General Assembly meeting held in the first democratic school in Norway, the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO), only two months after the school was opened, on November 2nd, 1967. In the meeting, they confronted each other with deep disagreements in their vision of the school and ways to govern it.

The Bakhtinian assumption is that a dialogic analysis of any dialogue takes entering into dialogic relationships with the original participants in the analyzed dialogue (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Curtis, 2019). By taking the floor in the Soul-Searching Assembly, the students confronted each other fully from the bottom of their hearts and minds. Their ideas were embodied intentions, motives, reasons, and desires – what Bakhtin called the person-ideas (Bakhtin, 1999). I constructed four person-ideas based on the transcript of the Soul-searching assembly. In that process of dialogic abstraction, I attempted to distill specific points of view without depersonalizing them into abstract ideas thorn out of the living moment of their lives.

The analysis through the construction of the four person-ideas complements a vignette I wrote based on the same transcript (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b). It is both a distinctive kind of dialogic analysis, and it also helps me prepare the data regarding the students' ideas for a further conceptual analysis, where I explore the students' ideological positions, beliefs, and worldviews. That conceptual analysis is published in a separate article of this special issue (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a).

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Introduction

This article is a part of a quartet of articles exploring democratic education and dialogic pedagogy in the first democratic school founded in Oslo, Norway – the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO). In the first article, my colleagues, Tina Kullenberg from Sweden and Mikhail Gradovski from Norway, and I explore the interplay between democratic governance and the educational ecology designed by the students (in collaboration with their teachers and educational researchers) of the first two democratic schools in Scandinavia, The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO), Norway and the Experimental Gymnasium of Gothenburg (EGG), Sweden. We looked for the aspects of the students' educational approaches in governing their own schools that could support and promote or hinder and suppress the learners' authorial agency in education. While conducting our research, we found out that there exists a full transcript of the EGO students' assembly held on November 2nd, 1967, only two months after the school was opened. In this explosive meeting, the students confronted each other with deep disagreements regarding the visions of the school and visions and approaches to education. As luck would have it, the meeting was audio-recorded. The almost verbatim transcript of this fateful meeting that the students referred to as the "Soul-Searching Assembly" or the "Helluva Assembly"¹ was published (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 22). The existence of the recording and its verbatim transcript created a unique opportunity to look closer and deeper into the students' actual, unique, and ontologically significant personal positions, opinions, beliefs, and desires regarding the very concepts of education, its purposes, democracy, freedom, responsibility, etc., as this dramatic meeting revealed them.²

I created three different analyses of the explosive conflicts and passionate dialogues of the Soul-Searching Assembly. First, I approached the Soul-Searching assembly through a *dialogic analysis* (cf. Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, et al., 2019). As a result, I created a vignette, using the transcript as raw data. I constructed a story where these raw data take shape through my dialogic lens (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b). Namely, I looked at the Soul-Searching Assembly as a relational drama of disagreements among "the friendly enemies" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015) in the course of the four and half hour meeting. What did they want *for* themselves, *for* each other, *from* each other? What were their urgencies as they clashed with each other, striving to make their points meaningful and persuasive to the others and to clarify, formulate, test, and potentially transcend their own deeply held cherished ideas? The dialogic analysis in the vignette helped me understand the dynamics of the relationships among the students by letting me better hear their authorial voices emerge and take shape. This process and the resulting vignette were both an analysis in itself and a particular preparation of the evidence for my dialogic engagement with the students' distinctly voiced worldviews out of the raw ethnographic data of the transcript.

My goal has been to develop a conceptual analysis of the students' ideological positions, the premises of their theories of education, and their worldviews. I started deconstructing the students'

¹ In Norwegian "Sjeleallmannamøtet" and "Kjempeallmannamøtet." I use here an English slang word "Helluva" that stands for an ellipsis of a phrase "hell of a." See more in Marjanovic-Shane (2023b).

² *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal* was given gracious permission to publish extensive parts of this transcript, which is a part of the book by Hem & Remlov, "Forsøks-gymnas i praksis" [Experimental Gymnasium in Praxis], by the current owner of the estate of Pax Publishing house.

conceptualizations of democracy in their school governance, especially their views on what and how they should change the meaning of their education. I wanted to better understand how the students espoused the purposes of education and their guiding values as they struggled to persuade each other. The resulting final conceptual analysis is published in the last article in this series of studies, “A paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis of a soul-searching assembly meeting” (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a).

However, before creating an extensive conceptual analysis, I decided to create another analytic pass, aiming to make the emerging ideological positions even clearer and more nuanced. This second pass of the dialogic analysis resides in this article. I constructed four “person-ideas,” partially based on the transcript but also on the cultural-historical events taking place at the time that might have been important for the young students in 1967. The historical context helped me imagine the era in which they lived and the reality of their lives (see more details about this process below).

What is a person-idea?

According to Bakhtin, events like the Soul-Searching Assembly are the true birthplace of ideas. But ideas are not abstract constellations of individual thoughts. For Bakhtin,

The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. [...] The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 87-88).

The Soul-Searching assembly meeting was such an event in which the ideas emerged and started to live. The students confronted each other from the bottom of their hearts and minds, testing each other not only as people but also as each other's ideas. The ideas they tested were their embodied intentions, motives, reasons, and desires – exactly what Bakhtin called the *person-ideas* (Bakhtin, 1999).

Bakhtin constructed the notion of a person-idea in his analysis of Dostoevsky's novels. He described the ideas expressed by the characters of the novels as inseparable from the characters themselves,

[the characters'] discourse about the world merges with confessional discourse about oneself. The truth about the world, according to Dostoevsky, is inseparable from the truth of the personality. The categories of self-consciousness [...] now become the basic categories for thinking about the world. Thus the loftiest principles of a worldview are the same principles that govern the most concrete personal experiences. And the result is an artistic fusion, [...] of personal life with worldview, of the most intimate experiences with the idea. Personal life becomes uniquely unselfish and principled, and lofty ideological thinking becomes passionate and intimately linked with personality. (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 78-79).

Inspired by this idea and knowing only the transcription of a discourse I did not hear or witness, I tried to envision the people and place the ideas emerging in the transcript into possible imagined lives of characters I constructed. I tried to summon the living urgency, the very pulse of these ideas, to make them vividly true by (re-) creating them as four Bakhtinian person-ideas. I added the imagined internal monologues to the actual (transcribed) passionate speeches and comments, hints, and innuendos that were loudly expressed in the passionate, internally persuasive discourse of the Soul-Searching Assembly. That partially fictional analysis-synthesis helped me, and hopefully, it could help you, dear reader, step into each person-idea and look at the world and at the others from the inside, as if through their souls. I believe

that these “living” person-ideas can deepen our understanding of the internal logic of abstracted ideological positions that I analyzed in the article on their paradigmatic differences (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a).

A brief historical note on the Soul-searching assembly at the EGO

The problems and tensions among the EGO students started from the very beginning of the school year. They steadily grew during the first two months of the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo’s (EGO) existence. In the day-to-day clashes about almost everything, from the practical chores to the school’s rules and norms, the students started using derogatory labels for two of the several fast-forming groups. The first group of about 15-20 founding students had worked hard the whole year before the opening of the school. They were the ones who conceptualized and planned the school, its rules and norms, and the ways it would operate. They were the ones who obtained permission from the authorities to open the EGO. They passionately wanted to make the school run in the way they had envisioned it. In an interview with me in the early winter of 2019, one of these founding students, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, described this group of students, to which he belonged, as follows,

[We were from] more progressive and leftist kind of parents, intellectuals, for example. And people with often intellectual backgrounds, arts maybe? Yeah! Different kinds of people, but mainly, ... roughly [saying], a kind of cultural capital, [the cultural] upper class...³

The students from this group were insistently urging, even nagging everyone else to abide by their vision and already planned school organization.⁴ They were soon labeled by the dissatisfied others, “*Tantene*” - “The [Nagging] Nannies,” which they resented. On the other hand, they called another group of students who strongly resisted their impositions – “*Avvikere*” - “The Deviants.”⁵ The *Deviants* defied the *Nannies’* original educational vision in many ways – through non-attendance, class disturbance, and avoidance of myriad chores, tasks, and duties, including the democratic governance necessary for running the school (Jørgensen, 1977, p. 47; See more in Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b).

A third, probably the largest group, were “the silent ones” – students who were too disoriented, too “numb,” or too shy, or too frightened to have much to say, and who generally followed the school plans in the old, unenthusiastic, disinterested and tired ways they had become accustomed to, over the years of their alienated traditional education (Jørgensen, 1971)

The internal conflicts among these groups were amplified by additional external pressures of the educationally conservative Department of Church and Education of Norway⁶. Although the school was granted many liberties when it got its permit, the state still attached some strings, making it not entirely sovereign. For instance, the school could not ignore the Norwegian Department of Education’s curricular guidelines, although they could modify them to a certain extent. Without this compliance, the EGO students

³ I interviewed Øystein Gullvåg Holter in December 2019. He was one of the founding students and also a son of one of the University of Oslo’s principal researchers of the school, prof. Harriet Holter.

⁴ This included a preplanned curriculum, partially based on the Norwegian Department of Education requirements for the National high school graduation exam (*artium* in Norwegian) and delivered through teacher organized classes (Jørgensen, 1977). See more about this vision in (Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Gradovski, 2023).

⁵ “*Avvikere*,” is a harsh word, meaning literally the “rule/law breakers” or “deviant people.” Øystein Gullvåg Holter was actually slightly taken a-back when I reminded him of this name-calling. When I quoted it from the published transcript of the General Assembly meeting on November 2, 1967, he said, “Was it *that hard word* [we] used?”

⁶ The Norwegian Department of Education was administratively combined with the Department of Church and literally called “Kirke og Undervisningsdepartementet (KUD)” in the 1960. Today “the name of the Department of Education in Norwegian is “Kunnskapsdepartementet”. In English, it is Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The ministry reports to the parliament (Stortinget). The ministry was responsible for church affairs till 2002. Since 2002 the ministry of education and Research is responsible for education and research.” – from the personal correspondence with Dr. Sultana Ali Norozi of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

could not officially graduate, i.e., they could not apply to take the national graduation exam (*artium* in Norwegian). In addition, the Department of Education closely monitored the EGO's work in these early days, scrutinizing every aspect of the school practice. It used traditional criteria of educational assessment and threatened with a looming possibility of immediate school closure. Jørgensen reports that after an unannounced visit, two representatives of the Department of education's advisory board for high school education wrote:

... 'No daily record is kept regarding students' truancy; the words on one blackboard were misspelled; there was a student who functioned as an assistant teacher, but the [visiting] representatives had to help him; the school leader was not present; a roll call of the students yielded disastrous results' (cited in Jørgensen, 1977, p. 49).

The conflicts among the students mushroomed in a dramatic and explosive debate at the General Assembly meeting of November 2nd, 1967, dubbed by the students the "Soul-Searching Assembly" or a "Helluva Assembly."⁷ A few Nannies, the founding students, decided to spark this debate in their weekly general meeting to discuss the growing conflicts, struggles, agonies, and emergent bitter antagonisms. The Soul-searching assembly steadily became more and more dramatic. The clashes and meltdowns seemed to ebb and flow. But at one point, it appeared that a transformation occurred. The students somehow transcended their most bitter conflicts. Their fights, accusations, resentments, and insults seemed to give way. The fierce *antagonisms* seemed to transform into an *agonistic dialogue of disagreement* (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015; Mouffe, 2000). In the "agonistic dialogue" of disagreement, "the politically (and/or paradigmatically) disagreeable other is appreciated as a potential source for one's own unknown self-limitation of truths and values" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015, p. 211). They started to test their and their opponents' positions and beliefs openly. They could problematize and re-examine their dear ideas, searching their consciences through stormy confrontations, verbal fights, and breakdowns. And although they did not end up resolving their conflicting views right there and then (and possibly never)⁸, their ideas could emerge and get their shapes in the juxtapositions with the opposing alternatives. We know from other sources that the students succeeded in keeping these dialogues open long after this fateful Assembly meeting, returning to the debated issues with more trust, potentially with the newly gained interest in each other's points of view (Jørgensen, 1971).

Constructing person-ideas

To deeply understand the students' positions emerging in the Soul-Searching assembly, I created four person-ideas, as four distinct ideological orientations to education and life, embodied in the voices of "living" people in their hot dialogue of disagreement. Three specific ideological orientations were held by more than one student in the meeting, while one person mainly authored the fourth orientation. However, for this analysis, I embodied each ideological orientation into a single person-idea composed of all like-minded voices. I used the words from the actual transcript, but not only. I also sometimes used metaphors from contemporary popular music, the lyrics of the songs that I imagine the young people in this meeting had sung and played on their guitars in the hallways (Hem & Remlov, 1969; Jørgensen, 1971; Melheim, 2019).

⁷ In Norwegian "Sjeleallmannmøtet" and "Kjempeallmannmøtet." I use here an English slang word "Helluva" that stands for an ellipsis of a phrase "hell of an."

⁸ According to Mouffe "the aim of democratic politics is to transform *antagonism* [i.e., involving hostile adversaries who try to annihilate each other] into *agonism* [i.e., involving friendly adversaries, whose right of the existence is recognized by each side, if not even appreciated] ... Modern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 103).

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In some cases, I relied on the stories and metaphors of the very new, influential ideological liberation movements, like feminism, pacifism, and anti-war protests of the time. I sometimes used ideas and wordings based on similar ideological positions held by educational scholars and philosophers.⁹ In addition, I also tried to give particular, personal sounds, rhythms, and speech idiosyncrasies to their imagined voices and, from time to time, to imagine what they had thought but not vocalized while they were speaking, i.e., their inner dialogues.

The person-ideas I created are artistically composed characters designed to personalize and deeply understand the living spirits of the people of that time. In other words, I approach the historical moment of these people by “entering into” or “descending to” their minds – what Giambattista Vico, according to Berlin (1990), called having a kind of *fantasia*,

... an imaginative insight that he [Vico] demands [that was] ... indispensable to his conception of historical knowledge; it is unlike the knowledge that Julius Caesar is dead, or that Rome was not built in a day, or that thirteen is a prime number, or that a week has seven days; nor yet is it like knowledge of how to ride a bicycle or engage in statistical research or win a battle. It is more like knowing what it is to be poor, to belong to a nation, to be a revolutionary, to be converted to a religion, to fall in love, to be seized by nameless terror, to be delighted by a work of art. [...] It is this kind of [...] self-awareness - what men thought, imagined, felt, wanted, strove for in the face of physical nature at a particular stage of social development, expressed by institutions, monuments, symbols, ways of writing and speech, generated by their efforts to represent and explain their condition to themselves... (Berlin, 1990, p. 62).

I was also inspired by two more authors, a Yugoslav writer, Ana Šomlo, and an American scholar, Douglas Hofstadter. Ana Šomlo wrote a book, “Milena’s letters to Kafka” (Šomlo, 1988), in which she imagined what Milena, Franz Kafka’s greatest love, could have written in her letters to Kafka. Šomlo based her imagined letters drawing from F. Kafka’s published letters to Milena. Also, Šomlo researched not only the historical records of Milena’s life. She also studied the cultural “*Zeitgeist*,” the spirit of the times of their lives, looking into the various cultural events (e.g., theater performances, public lectures, political events, etc.) happening in the times between the matching dates of Kafka’s letters that may have been known to Milena. In constructing these person-ideas, I tried a similar approach, looking into the artifacts of the youth culture at the time.

The second inspiration to construct the person-ideas comes from Douglas Hofstadter’s book, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an eternal golden braid* (Hofstadter, 1980). In the book, Hofstadter interlaced his abstract analytic Chapters with the imaginary Dialogues between Achilles, the Tortoise, and some other characters of the famous Ancient Greek philosopher Zeno’s paradox. Describing the structure of his book Hofstadter writes why he weaved the text in this way,

The book is structured in an unusual way: as a counterpoint between Dialogues and Chapters. The purpose of this structure is to allow me to present new concepts twice: almost every new concept is first presented metaphorically in a Dialogue, yielding a set of concrete, visual images; then these serve, during the reading of the following Chapter, as an intuitive background for a more serious and abstract presentation of the same concept (Hofstadter, 1980, pp. 27-28)

I created person-ideas in this chapter for a similar reason – to allow me (and hopefully you, dear reader) to first present certain abstract concepts “metaphorically in a dialogue.” In contrast to Hofstadter’s

⁹ For instance, K. Lewin, J. Dewey, P. Gray, E. Matusov, A.S. Neill, I. Berlin, etc.

entirely imaginary characters, like Achilles and the Tortoise, my person-ideas are grounded in the actual people and their real recorded words. But I did not know the people. I was not in the meeting. I could not witness their voices. However, almost as much as Hofstadter needed to create his characters, I needed to make a living “intuitive background,” a beating heart of each of these person-ideas.

I named each person-idea I created by the name (or rather a pseudonym) of its most prominent champion in the meeting transcript.¹⁰ What follows are the four person-ideas clashing against each other in the Soul-Searching Assembly.

- a) Åge – “*Our school is a serious educational endeavor, not a playroom!*”
- b) Thorleif – “*Love is all you need.*”
- c) Inge – “*Our school should respect and support every student in searching for their personal goals and purposes, even the conflicting ones.*”
- d) Tom – “*Becoming a responsible human being and a community citizen.*”

Four emerging person-ideas in the internally persuasive discourse of the Soul-Searching Assembly

Åge – “Our school is a serious educational endeavor, not a playroom!”

- If you ask me... No! Let me tell you! I mean it: education is a serious business. This is it. We are not kids playing school! [Many students chuckle.]
- No! For real! Yes, everyone laughs, but not everyone here agrees with me...
- Look, what is not understood here, what you don't understand, is the essential point... – Listen, this is a *student democracy!* Not a *student anarchy!*

There is a long applause, and Åge feels emboldened.

- Yes! We are here... creating a school – for serious, responsible people! People who are interested in their own personal academic development. Hey, we are here to become learned, learned people in our culture! To learn important things in our society. To learn and to build upon the knowledge, the lore, the values of our elders! We are here to learn about the important achievements of our times.

Åge thinks to himself: “This is it! This is so important! Tell them why! They must understand that!”

- Last year, I worked hard! We were planning every detail of this school. And, let me tell you, I learned a lot! I learned what I know from the University professors! They are educators who study education... they are people who know. And I learned a lot from *them!* [Åge points to a number of other students, EGO founders.]

- So, indeed, I learned a lot about what makes a school – a good school. And let me tell you: A school, a good school, definitely, definitely, definitely is NOT a playroom! A school is... – a school. A place to learn. Important things!

- Here... [he makes a large circle with his hand and then stabs with his index finger in an imaginary center of this circle]. Here is where we will learn the most important stuff in our life! *This* is what we are making here! A place where everyone can find the keys to their own mind and heart! Not any keys! But exactly the keys, the most important tools to unlock everything that matters in our society, the keys to our culture! The keys that open the door to becoming an adult! This is what our school is about!

¹⁰ The published transcript contained pseudonyms given to the participants in the Soul-searching assembly by the authors of the book “The Experimental Gymnasium in practice” (Hem & Remlov, 1969). I kept these pseudonyms in my analyses of this meeting.

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– But a school – our school included – is not a place where everyone can do whatever they want! Oh, no, no, no!! There are some things that must guide us all together. I mean it! Especially because we are free! Especially because we have been allowed, most graciously, to run a school the way we want.

– Yes, I think we must be grateful to the Department of Education! Everyone here should be grateful! ... for the freedoms we got. And the trust!

To himself: “This is what they don’t understand. I must make them see that! And appreciate the freedom we are given already!

– Look! We have many extra-curricular activities! Many more than ever before! You can be free with so many choices! No other school has so many choices! For God’s sake, we have music! We have jazz ballet! We have drama classes! We have swimming! Bodybuilding! We have so many other activities!! And... we can even decide to organize more!

People nod! One can hear voices of approval echoing Åge. “Yes! Yes...,” “Jazz, ballet!!” “Bodybuilding!” etc.

– And...! [He pauses and raises his hands.] You are free to choose what classes you want to attend! Hey, you can organize the class schedules! You can even tell the professors what topics you want to study!! They will listen to you!

– Right?

Åge waits until some people start enthusiastically nodding again. Some tentatively listen. Some others remain visibly tense. He concentrates on the last group, addressing the skeptics and disbelievers.

– Nothing like that exists in other schools. Nothing! We have freedom! We do! No question...

Some people start to applaud. Åge stands up and waves his hands to silence the applause and get their full attention. He keeps eye contact with disbelievers.

– But what is happening here? I see total chaos! People think that freedom means they can do... whatever... Right now, the situation here is, indeed, becoming more and more chaotic... and tense by the hour.

Voices directed to Åge from the audience: “Not to mention that it is a pig stay!” “We’re proud pigs! Oink! Oink!” [laughter]

– People sit in the hallways when they should be in classes... – as if they should not have classes!

To himself: “Mmm, no... I should not make the Deviants angry right now. I need to make them agree first. Stop this open critique, Åge. Don’t antagonize the Deviants. Point out what is important. They must first understand what a good school is.” He changes his tone back to being upbeat and continues.

– What I want to say is: Yes, we have freedom! But freedom is not just to sit on our asses! Pardon my French. Freedom is... not just hanging out in the hallways and doing nothing at all. Seriously, guys!

He raises his right index finger and slows down his speech.

– Freedom does not mean having no responsibility! Freedom does not mean having no obligations! On the contrary, freedom comes with responsibility! It is freedom under responsibility!

Some people nod and start to applaud, but many others still seem to feel uneasy or openly resistant. Hands shoot up! In protest, Åge suspects. In a flash, Åge decides to appeal to their sense of pride. He must give them a reason to agree with him. As in a lucid dream, it suddenly occurs to him that you pull people

over to your side by showing them trust or even just a willingness to trust in them. You make them your comrades. You let them know that you trust them. And you show that you understand that living up to your best is not something trivial but a noble thing, indeed. This is what it means to be in control of yourself! – All of these thoughts appeared in Åge's mind with startling clarity as he continued to speak.

– Hey! We have to behave like responsible people. Like adults. After all, we were adult enough to create this school in the first place. We've been adult enough to form our own rules! We've been adult enough to hire teachers, to plan our own schedules, to plan our own curriculum. We should now also show ourselves that we are adults who can bring this school forward to success!

Someone yells: "Down with Nannies! Stop moralists!" Åge gets angry. He thinks to himself: "But look at these Deviants! They are ruining everything! They don't care about anything! Should we even have them in school? I can't really say that. Maybe just a hint."

– But the Deviants don't understand! This school leads up to the *artium!*¹¹ – I will strongly oppose that we should just tolerate Deviants. [Cynically] Of course, we should tolerate the... Deviants! [Laughter and applause] Of course, we should do it. But, my God, you have to start wondering... One should tolerate that *some people*... – Yes, call them "Deviants" or call them whatever you want! – ... that they only go here because... I don't know! Certainly not to pass the *artium*.

Many students seem to feel very upset now. They look at each other and yell at each other in angry tones with disapproval at Åge. Åge thinks to himself: "No, this was wrong. Calm down. I shouldn't have dissed them so strongly." He takes a deep breath and squats back down, almost to the level of all the others sitting on the floor. He lowers his voice.

– Look! The goal of freedom is to master yourself and become a responsible person. We must learn how to control our own impulses. The impulse you have... OK, no. The impulse *I have!* ... to go to the hall and play the guitar! Don't you think I don't want to? But, by Jove! We have to renounce such an impulse! I mean it! We have to have a strong will... And we have to sacrifice... to get this idea, this school, worked out...

Big applause from his supporters. A Deviant yells in sarcasm: "Look at this Joan of Arc!"

– We can't have people that just don't care! If everyone does whatever *they* want, that will destroy the school. It will kill the spirit of this school! And yes! – it will spiritually kill those people here who are less self-conscious and noisy. People who *really* have good motivation to go here to learn. They are here to get an education. They *want* to pass the *artium*. And we are responsible for helping them. We must support them, not sabotage them!

A person yells, "Education is not about passing damned exams!"

– I agree that we need to clarify what we think this school should be! Then, we should all agree what to do. We have so much freedom. You can choose what to do and how to do it! But we can't have everyone doing something entirely different. It can't be 150 different opinions. This is ridiculous! It would not be a school! I repeat, if you think that you came here to heal your soul, I must tell you: this is not a psychiatric clinic! And if you think you can study *ONLY what you want* to study, I repeat, this is not a youth club! And again, this is not a playroom!

A supporter: "It's not a cocoo house." Laughter.

¹¹ Norwegian National Graduation Exam.

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– We already have... We already made good plans for the school. Some of us happen to like them! And they were accepted by the Department of Education! But now, it turned out that there is quite extensive dissatisfaction with us! [Someone yells: "The Nannies!"] You call us the "Nannies" because we became a little too fond of our school! But I think that those who are dissatisfied with us, they can stand up and tell us why they are disappointed! So, tell us, what is it that does not work? Seriously! Stand up and say what bothers you! Otherwise, we can never get clarification... at all.

Uncomfortable silence. Åge doesn't wait, however. He quickly continues, trying to keep the momentum.

– Now, I mean it! Seriously! Don't tell me those lame stories about love and understanding! This is just whinnying! First of all, no one is against love. But this is not a Hippie school! That's not what we're arguing about.

– This is a serious school! We must take it seriously! We must be responsible for education in this school. It is us now! We owe it to our city and its taxpayers. They are paying US to run the school. After all, they work hard and expect us to work hard, too.

– Also, don't forget that we are here to improve Norwegian education! This is a great experiment! Others will learn from us. We are here to figure out how to run a school better! We must learn what works and what does not. We must carefully plan. We must closely monitor everything and understand what works.

– OK, we don't have mandatory attendance! But then, we should be accountable for some kind of a "duty to learn." Something! Indeed!¹²

There is some laughter in the audience.

– We are a serious enterprise! We must agree that learning important academic stuff is our priority. That is what school is about! What else are you here for, indeed? Why would you go to school if not to acquire knowledge and culture, to become a dependable and respected adult?

– You can't come here only for bodybuilding! C'mon! You can't be coming here just for guitar lessons! *This is not why we go here. We go here first and foremost to go to school, indeed.* We must agree on what is important and what is not. What classes are important? What counts here? Math, science, literature, sociology, current affairs? I think so. Those are the things that count. You need those to pass the *artium*! We must work hard to learn these things! A responsible person understands that, for God's sake! And you are still free! *We are free!* There are so many choices!

Someone with sarcasm: "Yeah, yeah."

– Don't get me wrong!! I am not against love and humanness! But it must not come at the expense of *artium*... Obviously, I know that this school must, of course, be a humanistic school. A school that conveys love, to put it that way. *But we can't just live on love.* It is regrettable - but you can't do this in this world...

Åge stands up again with new inspiration.

– We are responsible people! We were given this responsibility! And we must show it! To the whole world! To the Department of Education! To the taxpayers! To our parents! To our friends in regular schools! It now depends on us! It is we who are responsible for making all decisions! See? But that is not enough! We also must agree *to obey these decisions!* No one should be indifferent to them! We

¹² For instance, they were recording attendance, calculating its percentages. And according to teacher Arne, if class attendance is voluntary, then what needs to be accounted for and placed under "production control." There should be some kind of "a duty to learn" (Arne, p. 33).

can't have people who are indifferent and only care about themselves. Democracy means – organizing oneself under the rules! Democracy is about the rules! Of course, we should promote understanding and tolerance and be a school full of love! But first and foremost, we are responsible for making a school where everyone is fully and sincerely engaged in serious study. No one can be indifferent! This is what we are responsible for. This is who we are! And this is what we must agree about!

Thorleif – “Love is all you need”

– I started here at school because I thought this was going to be a school where people love each other. Where people are a bit neighborly with each other... and can feel glad to be together in school! I thought this was a school where you don't trash people. Even if they are different from you. I thought this would be a school where people are more important than “serious academic work.” Where Love is more important than anything.

– But you snap at those who don't agree with you [looks at Åge and the Nannies]! You can't expect people to be able to say something if you just bite them. It has so disappointed me...

– If this school is only about “academic work,”... You constantly bite anyone who is not in this rat race, who doesn't do that ... You just snap! Everyone here bites. It's so creepy. We snap, bite, and crush everyone. We constantly fight. But we must imagine that there is something else.

– There are people here who were trampled on... who were thrown away... Then they come here... looking for something..., looking for love! but then they are trampled on here, too...

– But we shouldn't! We need to accept them with love.

– You ask them to say what they want and what they don't want and to feel free to come up with criticism! You say, “It's antisocial not to be honest, not to say what you think.” But then! Oh, then! When they do say something! What hypocrisy! I can't avoid hearing you snapping back at them: “You are a fucking stupid idiot!”

– We, kind of, stand up here and talk now. Maybe it applies to me, too! I might be... – we who are strong here at school – we hardly think of those not so strong, those who dare not rise up and say anything. Those who dare to say what they really believe only in the hallways! But not here. How many are these? 100? 150?

Thorleif looks around from one face to another. Most of the people stare back in some confusion. Their faces are apprehensive... What is he aiming at?

– How many people here dare to get up and say something really serious? [He points his index finger to the floor] Here, ah?

– He turns back to Åge and some other Nannies.

– See? They are afraid of being thrashed. [Åge yells back at Torleif, “No, they're not!”] If they say something that they really need to say - then they will be swept away... You tell them... I tell them, “What you say has nothing to do with anything!” or “Nonsense! This it is absolutely *immaterial*” –

– It... it..., – Nothing draws us together! There is no Love left here. I really hoped for this, for Love at this school. That we should be able to love each other. [A Nanny smirks, “We aren't a kindergarten.” Others shush her.] But we are not able to love. It's so awful... We... It's just fighting all the time.

– But it should be easy! Don't you know? Can't you hear? [He slightly chants, more talking than singing a Beatles' song¹³] “There's nothing you can do that can't be done! Nothing you can make that can't be made... No one you can save that can't be saved... Nothing you can do... you can learn how to be you, in time... It's easy...”

¹³ “All you need is love,” a song by the Beatles,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0_hzeqeoc&list=RDGMEMJQXQAmqrnmK1SEjY_rKBGA&index=1
More about the song and its significance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwfzqgYaAvC>

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- There is nothing WE can't do that we want to do. It's only without Love that we can't.
- To Åge, I say "Hippie school?" – if Hippies are the ones who love, if Hippies are the ones who love each other, then we should have a *Hippie* school. [...] It is really one of the things fundamental for this school – [that] you only act with Love... [Åge smiles.]
- I don't want to be... In fact, I can't be a puppet on a string that someone else is pulling¹⁴. This is not about *being allowed* to sit in the hallway... I am not talking about that! It's about simply *being able to be yourself* without constantly having to be in a rat race, on a treadmill.
- You talk about compromise... There is no compromise on Love. Either it is Love, or it is not Love. If you can... if you can simply live or be yourself without always playing someone else... without having to knock yourself down to be great...
- There is no compromise!
- If you have to say, Hippie, say Hippie... or whatever, or... [A Nanny: "So pathetic!"]
- What the fuck are you if you do not have Love? - Then you are damned.
- If this is just about "serious academic work..." I am out of here!

Thorleif can hear protests from some other students. Inge tells him that she thought she understood him, but "then you outdid yourself by saying you could quit school itself. You fail to show a slight tolerance. Do I understand you right that, deep down, you want to tear down the school today?" Others just stare silently in disbelief and shock.

- Maybe you guys are not saying anything ... I don't know... Do you know how much I admire these people who started...? I don't want to be scolded that I don't like you...
- His voice cracks as the taste of tears chokes his throat.
- ... that's about the cruelest thing you can do... I... [long pause] ... I don't want to be perceived anymore just as "someone who is sitting in the hallway." Love – is not about being allowed to sit in the hallway... It's about simply *being able to be yourself*...
- I don't know... [Turning to Inge] I just want to tell them one thing now: End of school! Because those who are sitting in the hallway are going to destroy our school. End of school!

He jumps up and stands there, both hands on his head, in desperation. His chin shaking. Then he stops still addressing Inge.

- I'll try to control my emotions... I'll try to speak their [Nannies'] language...

Thorleif takes a deep breath and says:

- If we agree that this school here should be a school that will make human beings ... If so, this ... does not fit with what the Press and the Department of Education are expecting from us. What do we do then? If we all agree *with* the Department of Education, then we get to pull, jerk, and tug ourselves. Tug - tug - and tug! And eventually, we'll become a regular high school! The more we try to pull, the more we get entangled in their strings. Because... You, see? If we want to dance their dance, then "we probably have to shake and bounce to the same rhythm as every other puppet in line..."¹⁵ [Someone, probably a Nanny, exclaims, "Be a realist. They helped us."]
- Or!... We oppose the Department of Education! If we oppose the Department, then the school can be closed! Well, it *will* be closed. [Sarcastically] "We did a good job!" And if we then repent, it will not be closed. But then it will not be the school of Love! The school of Humanity we had been praying for.

¹⁴ Potentially a reference to the Eurovision hit song by Snady Shaw, "Puppet on a string" - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xnzPnyyWbY&ab_channel=TheEuroSongContest

¹⁵ Thorleif recites the lyrics of a popular song "Dukkeman" (Puppet man) by Kirsti Sparboe, about a puppet that thought to be better than everyone, only to find out that he is just another puppet on a string as every other puppet. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Njl-6xalcb4>

- That is the dilemma! Should we hold on to Love as long as we can until the school is closed? Or should we collude with the Department and keep it open? I think that is the most important dilemma for us to resolve!
- As for me: I don't want to compromise with myself - I'd rather have the school shut down than have it be a regular high school! Surrender to... the same machine that drains life from the whole world.

Inge – “Our school should respect and support every student in searching for their own personal goals and purposes, even the conflicting ones”

- You know, I think there are many people here who do entirely different things... and conflicting things, too. And...
- An idea occurs to me now that this is really what the school is about: everyone should be free to follow their own path. Free even when they don't know... Free because we don't know. And most of us... most of us don't know! Honestly! And this is good – this is called “education” ... We should be able to throw away all the pretenses. Like, drop all the usual camouflage of feigning some high interests, some visions, when we don't have them... We should no longer have to fight that war. We should be able to say openly that we, at least some... many of us, don't have some big goal ahead of us. We're not visionary ... We're kids, not pretend-to-be-adults. We should be able to stand naked without shame about it.

Inge sees that she sounds strange to Åge and many others. And she freezes for a moment. “Not again! Again, he'll try to freeze me out,” she thinks.

But among many disapproving faces, resenting faces, she also sees a few flickers of recognition, approving eyes, maybe half smiles... almost joyous disbelief that something like that can be said aloud so casually. And that gives her a little ping and an extra beat of the heart.

- It occurs to me that people should be *welcome* to try to understand what they really want... And... they might not even know that yet! Perhaps not immediately... perhaps not for a while. And that should be fine... you know... Some people already know what they want, and some don't, and some may be wrong in their current choice. There're many false choices that we need to figure out. You can't compare them to each other.
- Here... in our school [she spreads her hands and fingers with a motion forward, rounding the motion at the ends as if outlining a big field], we should be able to hold..., to help each person not to feel embarrassed. Each one of us should have a basic, human, comforting experience. We should support each other to feel relaxed just searching... Just trying out different things. Not hurrying. Just being patient with someone who is trying to find...
- I don't think we should be forcing ourselves and forcing others... to accept any first thing that happens to come our way..., right... at... this moment. Nor should we grab and hold on to something just because we are told to do that, because we should be..., you know... [she makes the quotation marks in air with her fingers] “seriously studying.” Indeed, isn't every journey serious... when people embrace it for real?
- I think that we should allow ourselves to be unselfconscious... What we need... is to constantly try to see different..., many different realities... ways each one of us is unique... unrepeatable... just here...

Inge looks at Åge, Tom and Thorleif. She sees their faces and their suspicious, cold eyes. What will they think if she is completely sincere? Specially Åge and Tom. They are so serious, so dedicated, so proud of what they have already created. Maybe this will completely shock them... And she continues,

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– I have an excruciating fear of standing in large congregations and talking - so I don't know if I can express myself clearly and say what I mean, but I hope you can try to hear what I mean. When I started here, I hoped to find a very creative environment... where I would not be ridiculed, where no one would laugh at the opinions I had. Where I should be tolerated as another human being... I have been frozen out in several schools before because of my opinions. And I have a feeling that I'm being frozen out here, too. People say to me, "You can't really believe that!" only because they think what I say is weird... They think it's weird. And again, I have the feeling that I'm not being tolerated. And I wonder: are we not fond of each other as human beings anymore?

– We need to let ourselves give up, even renounce... this... made-up, pretend plastic–stereotypical–perfect image that we've each been taught to strive for. We need to step out of those identical girdles, chokers, body-shapers..., molds into which maybe no one can really fit. Maybe we should openly renounce that everyone should agree to be "just what we are told that we ought to be." You know! That Cinderella's glass-shoe-mold has already worn a deep groove in our brains.¹⁶ But we should stop trying to put it on. We should step out of it and let ourselves be shamelessly barefoot... Or put on someone else's shoes on... Indeed.

– And, sometimes, that takes time. And it takes trust... I think there should exist a right to have time to think, as long as it takes... even if it looks like doing nothing! Let each person experience that joy when they suddenly find out exactly what they want to do, all by themselves. And even if they don't...

– This is it! ... I think a school, this school, should give each of us opportunities to ask ourselves: What do I want to learn? Is it time for me? See? "What do you want to study?" This could be asked not only one time... And nobody should have to stick to the first thing they try. We could ask, "what do you want to learn?" and "what do you think?" all the time! We should respect the "dunno" answer.

– We here... [She points to all in the room, with a quick encompassing gesture] – I think we don't always know what... what *may* become important... I think no one really knows. I think that... maybe we should help each other find out what we want to do, even if it maybe takes more time...

– And some people may need to recover... to start to live again. Someone just needs a healing place at this moment. That is what they need. Why not be a psychiatric clinic for those who need that? Why should we call them "Deviant" and not tolerate them? Why say, "This should not be a youth psychiatrist clinic"?

– But I have a feeling that here, humanness is being put out!! Humanness is to try to understand each other... tolerate each other. Hear each other... Without laughing, without ridicule. This is humanness. No one should be frozen out if they sound strange. It should be up to them. As long as they are not anti-social...

– Didn't we all come here to make a school where people can be respected for who they are? We cannot lose our humanness! And what for? What is the use of passing the *artium*, when everyone becomes a machine, as you do in many other schools? ...What can we do for this country if we are all computers? Operating without emotions, not owning emotions... or if we have emotions, we can't show them to each other.

Inge looks around. She now sees puzzled faces... She sees Åge nervously fidgeting and squirming and continues hurriedly to make her point,

– I am not against people who want to pass the *artium*. Not at all! I think there are 150 different sides to this case! And we need to at least tolerate them. I think we have to be clear that not only those sitting in the hallways feel depressed. Also, those who advocate for rigor and such – they also feel equally depressed... No?

¹⁶ These words echo Gloria Steinem, a world renowned American feminist, who made a sensation with her undercover reporting from the New York Playboy club in a two piece article in the Show Magazine, "A Bunny's Tale," in May and June 1963 <https://undercover.hosting.nyu.edu/s/undercover-reporting/item-set/61>, and later described in a book "Outrageous acts and everyday rebellions" (Steinem, 1983).

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- I think that *everyone* should have the right to do what is important to *them*!
- But what is most upsetting and wrong... is that some people try to coerce and control others! This is not right! In our school, there should be a right... everyone should *be welcome* to find their own vision. That's just it! In our school here, we should be able to tolerate all people, from the most hopeless neurotics and introverts to the most hopeless fighters for freedom and love, Maoists, and such. ... In *our* school... that we run, we cannot exert control over each other in the old way, by force. Coercing each other. We must find new ways... We need to agree to disagree, too!
- This debate is about... not about whether we should have a school of Love instead of a school of Work, but a place where we can expand the concept of the school... where we can have Love included. And Hard Work included. And Bodybuilding included... And Playing-guitars included... And just Staring-at-the-ceiling, not knowing immediately what to do... included... And... For those who want it. But those who don't – leave them alone.
- Because, in my view, good schoolwork cannot exist, at least not for me, except when I get satisfying human fulfillment. In our school, people should have an opportunity to experience their own satisfying human fulfillment! Whatever that means to them.

Tom – “*Becoming a responsible human being and a community citizen*”

- This school is almost for real – the reality. I can feel it – palpably. I can feel it like a beacon of light. But! Basically, we have a problem. A storm that may throw us off our course, maybe smash us on the rocks!
- Let me put it this way. When you [looks at Åge] call some people “Deviant,” I am upset! I am upset if you imply that this school is... not for students to become responsible community citizens who are aiming for... not to study for the *artium* (graduation exam). No. No, no, no. But to DO something in the community they live in. *To try to change their society, to become socially conscious!* To have freedom and free will! And to be radical! Love without compassion is empty love [looks at Thorleif]. Compassion leads to action, to radical social activism, to the betterment of society. This is what taxpayers are paying school tax for, Åge. Not just for endless searching for yourself [looks at Inge].
- It certainly is not some comfy sleeping pillow to be radical! No indeed! It is one of the hardest things to do! Of course, working with society and oneself, it's as tough as nails. Nothing is as easy as being conservative and just hanging under some authority.

Bull's-eye! Tom knew he poked the same sore that had irked the EGO founders from the beginning and throughout the yearlong planning of the school. He saw Åge stiffen with alert as he, too, suspected where Tom was going. But it was not just a discord between the two of them – which it was, no doubt. But he also saw the dismay on the faces of those students whom Åge called “Deviant.” For Tom, it was not just a clash between the “Nannies” and the “Deviant.” It was deeper. It was his own nagging doubt – it was that place he knew he would have to ultimately face, yet he still desperately avoided... A place where he had no solution... Where the Gordian knot of an unsolvable controversy was lurking, waiting for him. The abyss of the unknown... The sinking hole in his gut. The clash between two visions! Not just TWO visions! The clash between all the visions: Åge's vision, Inge's vision, Thorleif's vision, his own, Tom's vision, if he even knew what it was at that moment! Maybe some other, still unknown visions! And the clash was true! It so convincingly existed! *That*, he could not deny! A clash that he could not resolve. And again, that clash was dangerously gaining momentum right before his eyes. He had to patch it quickly.

Tom was a person who could not stand uncertainty, having no answer, no clue... He wanted to wish away this feeling that made his head run in circles *ad nauseum*. And yet, he had to be honest! Yes, honest, but probably on borrowed time until he could find a resolution, find his own opinion... All of these thoughts appeared to him instantaneously, in a flash. Without skipping a beat, he continued,

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– Having one's own opinion! ... That!... is exactly what one should try to find! One's own opinion, basically! In all matters! Each one of us, as responsible students and responsible citizens, must be free to develop, to create our own education! Our own entering into the world, if you will...

Tom slows down again. He pauses. He starts talking slower, as if thinking aloud, fishing for his own thoughts.

– I realize that this may be unpredictable. It may be opaque and unfathomable... You know...

Tom pauses. He looks around, staring deliberately into each person's eyes, looking both stricken and curious, with slight disbelief.

– I suddenly realize! *We cannot know how someone really thinks...*

Tom raises both eyebrows and lifts his hands like holding something in front of him, staring into the space between his palms. He seems to be astonished about what he just said and even more astonished with a new thought he is about to utter,

– People cannot be judged by the same measures based on what makes sense only to me. People cannot be judged like that, ... and then if they don't fit these measures, simply be discarded! We've got to know one another... At least... try to find out about one another... It may never be fully possible... We should be committed to trying...

Tom suddenly snaps back from his dreamlike state. His voice is now fully flowing as he addresses Åge and a small group of Nannies in a practical and matter-of-fact tone.

– We should not talk about expelling the Deviants. 'Cause, of course, then the Conservatives got it right: 'Some people are not mature enough for freedom.' You see? As soon as we make the students fail here at school, as soon as *we* think people should not be allowed to learn something *else* than what is required for the *artium*... We will, basically... fail! The Radicals should embrace that as a challenge.

– Should we consider irrelevant anything that does not lead to the *artium*? Just a waste of time? Definitely not! On the contrary! It is learning *to become a responsible person!* *That* should be the most important. *That* motivation for learning! Not for passing the *artium*! You see? If you can't make a change to *that* motivation - then the school has failed.

– If one is to be educated *for* responsibility - then one *must be given* this responsibility! – *This* must not be violated. One has to have responsibility for oneself. One has to act – in their mind – in the manner of an *auteur!*

Tom sees many question-marks in people's eyes! Eyes that he sensed were now already fixed on him, but eyes that were not all approving. Some people again became suspicious. He realizes that his words may be a trap. For they might even scare some people away. Especially those whom Åge calls Deviants. Asking them to take responsibility might sound like a teacher talk...? A disingenuous way to put them into the yolk of obligations they did not ask for. But Tom did not mean that. So, he quickly ads,

– *One has to have the freedom* to find responsibility for oneself! Only this would help us become engaged to do something in the community. *To try to change society, to become socially conscious...* It takes work, it takes toil. You don't solve the world's problems by saying: 'let the shit hit the fan'...

Some students loudly laugh and applaud. Others are still holding off. Tom continues.

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– I strongly believe that the school needs to develop *that other* sense of responsibility, the sense that *you are a world citizen*. The sense of having the will to try to fix the world! We will fail as a school if we do not manage to convey this sense of *higher morality*! If we don't develop this inner sense of justice!

More students loudly applaud. Tom waves his hand as if to say, "wait, I am not finished yet!" He continues, again looking back and forth from Åge and other Nannies to Thorleif, Inge, and the Deviants.

– I basically don't see a contradiction between wanting to pass the *artium* and wanting to develop as a free person who strives to make society better. They go together, of course! In this school, we can and we *should* support both. You could say that both goals are equally important in life. [He counts on his fingers.] A) a personal development into a responsible human being, and B) learning skills to succeed in life and work to support oneself. So, I do not think we need to make any prioritization between these two goals of education. There is plenty of room for everyone to define what they want to do within these two goals.

– We should not deny anyone! Not for what they think. Not merely because they may be different from us. No! In fact, we can start embracing them, indeed! Look, we can *bring them in* instead of casting them *off*. What is most important, basically, is that everyone... Everyone should figure out what they want and then do it! Each one of us, no matter how different! No matter how strange! Everyone must be given an opportunity to do that! This school can be both a psychiatric clinic and a school. I have... At least, it changed me tremendously...

He points around to some other founders, the Nannies, addressing them. Inge whispers something to Thorleif.

– We should restrain ourselves from trying to have dictatorial power! [Many in the audience: "Yeah!"] We should acknowledge that others have a right to be different and to have their own goals! We should recognize them and help them become socially accepted, better people if you will! But...

He gets applause, and for a while, he struggles to get his voice above the noise. When the applause subsides, he continues.

– I want to say one more thing. What I mean: the school has a huge responsibility to the world and society and knowledge. It is not that one should have freedom at all costs to do whatever... freedom to relax and hang out in the hallway. I mean, my God! – then you have no sense of responsibility at all! - Because our society nowadays... it would then hang on the brink of chaos and horrible conditions... But we can help turn it away from the brink... We can... help change the world! To become a place where people can live life in peace, and everyone can be humanly fulfilled. Imagine!¹⁷ This is what we are doing here!

Anti-conclusion

How would YOU, dear reader, reply to Åge, Thorleif, Inge and Tom?

¹⁷ This reference to John Lennon's "Imagine" is my own impression of Tom's person-idea. The hopefulness of the turbulent 60s was strong. The youth movements of the time, with all of their violent protests were deeply grounded in the faith that a world peace and liberation of human dignity from the perils of wars, destruction and dehumanization can be achieved. Lennon's "Imagine" came in 1971, four years after the Soul-searching Assembly at EGO, but it sublimated this hope of the 1960s, and it is a song that still resonates today. In my view, while Thorleif exuded anger, helplessness, and despair, Tom projected calm self-confidence that it would be possible to achieve this humanization of the world.

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