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Living in Denial

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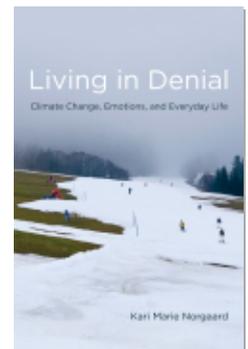
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“Experiencing” Global Warming: Troubling Events and Public Silence

We often assume that political activism requires an explanation, while inactivity is the normal state of affairs. But it can be as difficult to ignore a problem as to try to solve it, to curtail feelings of empathy as to extend them. . . . If there is no exit from the political world then political silence must be as active and colorful as a bright summer shadow.

—Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*

Passivity and silence may *look* the same as obliviousness, apathy and indifference, but may not be the same at all. We can feel and care intensely, yet remain silent.

—Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial*

Ulrich Beck (1992) argues that we now live in a “risk society,” or a society preoccupied with risk. If so, in what sense are people preoccupied? In their daily lives? **If people are so preoccupied, why is this concern not visible? If community members consider global warming a significant problem, why does it receive so little serious attention? Are community members simply too busy to do more?** In our allegedly rational modern society, we tend to imagine that serious threats or at least potentially serious threats will generate a social response. But this is not the case.

If chapter 1 described the “where” of the story, this chapter describes the “what”—the widespread public silence in the face of the most serious environmental problem we have ever faced. My aim here is to take the reader on a journey in which, to borrow a phrase from Dorothy Smith (1987), “the everyday world [becomes] problematic.” Nonresponse to the possibility of climate change may seem “natural” or “self-evident”; from a social movement or social problem perspective, not every potential issue translates into political action. Yet with a closer ethnographic view, we can understand **nonresponse as a social process**. People *might*

behave differently. In order to clarify the meaning of nonresponse, this chapter concentrates on the events, issues, and the extent of public silence regarding climate change in Bygdaby. First, I spend some time exploring in depth the contours of public silence in one particular dry and warm winter.

The Events of an Unusual Winter

The way I remember winters, or winters before, you know there was always lots of snow, and it was cold the entire winter.

—Anne, a farmer in her midforties

You know that we have had seasonal changes, but now it has been nearly ten years that we have had a different climate. Less snow and—yes, yes, precipitation hasn't decreased, but it hasn't been cold enough so that it snows in the lower areas.

—Ketil, Culture Center employee in his midfifties

It is, well, milder. There has been less change between the seasons. There is less snow and more like halfway winter, and the summers have been colder. I think that it comes from climate change. Because it didn't used to be this way. And it's, like, known.

—Vigdis, 17-year-old student

Among the unusual local weather events that took place in the fall and winter of my year in Bygdaby, 2000–2001, the most significant and tangible were the very late snowfall and warmer winter temperatures. Record temperatures for the community as reported by the local newspaper in January 2001 showed that the average temperature in the Bygdaby region on the whole was 1.5°C warmer than the 30-year average: October 2000 had an average temperature of 9.8°C (49.6°F), versus the past 30-year average of 5.8°C (42.4°F); the average November temperature was 5.0°C (41°F), versus the past 30-year average of 0.3°C (32.5°F); and December averaged -1.3°C (29.6°F), versus a 30-year average of -3.0°C (26.67.4°F). As of January 2001, the winter of 2000 for Norway on the whole was recorded as the second warmest in the past 130 years. In addition, snowfalls arrived some two months late (mid- to late January as opposed to November). The late opening of the ski area had recreational and economic effects on the community, and the ice on the lake failed to freeze sufficiently to allow ice fishing, once a frequent activity. Ketil described the lack of ice on the lake to me this way:

Ketil Like the lake here, now there is ice on it this year, but until fifteen years ago people came to Bygdaby from eastern Norway, from Hallingdal and other places by train. They stayed overnight at the hotel in order to use the ice. It was completely black out on the ice every single winter.

Kari Because there were so many people, no . . .

Ketil Yes. They went out there and fished. It was very good fishing. But you know it hasn't been like that for the last ten years, now it is completely gone. Nobody comes here any more. Now there is ice of course, but you can't tell if it is safe enough yet, but it will be. Still, you don't see people out there.

Kari I see. So it's less than before . . .

Ketil Oh yes, absolutely. It hasn't been safe ice for nearly ten years now. After a day or two it will rain.

Lene, another community member, also told me about the past ice fishing activity on the lake and how in the previous weekend the local school had to cancel an ice fishing trip for kids because officials weren't sure if the ice would be safe:

When it opened there, they just had two kilometers [of ski run], and not . . . they had artificial snow. And it is a bit [disappointing], with artificial snow. . . . So they tried to do ice fishing, and they tried to have a skating track, but as soon as they were going to have the ice fishing, the weather turned warm. And this weekend they were going to have ice fishing for the kids. It was the trip for the kids. And they had to cancel it because they weren't sure if the ice would hold with many on it, and if they had a lot of kids, it would be dangerous.

The lack of snow in the community was clearly an unusual event, albeit one that people had come to notice over a period of several years.

Community Impacts

The “unusual weather patterns” of the winter of 2000–2001 were, again, visibly identifiable and had tangible effects and measurable economic consequences in Bygdaby. The economic impact on the community from the weather that winter is telling. Late snows delayed the opening of the ski area. The shorter ski season meant that some three dozen employees of the resort (including my husband) began their winter work season in late December or January rather than in November. When the resort did open on December 26, 2000, it was with a single long run of 100 percent artificial snow. No snow had fallen naturally, and aside from the artificial snow on the slope itself, the mountain was bare. Skiers found themselves on a tiny corridor of “snow” between exposed rocky slopes and trees.

The resort owner had to invest 17 million Norwegian kroner (approximately 1.8 million U.S. dollars) in snow-making equipment and another 1.5 million kroner (approximately U.S.\$170,000) on electricity and labor to create the artificial snow for that season. The process required the installation of 7 kilometers of water lines earlier that fall, which were used to pump water some 500 meters up the mountainside. In mid-December, it was finally cold enough to start making snow. Thousands of gallons of water were pumped up the hill, and employees worked all night long keeping the snow cannons going. It took a crew of people working around the clock for 14 days to produce snow for the 1,200-meter-long ski run.

This effort testifies to the importance of skiing to the local community, both economically and culturally, and to the fact that unusual weather patterns, whether they were the effects of climate change or not, were very tangible events for community members, including those who owned the ski area, those who worked there, and all those who owned or worked in ski shops, hotels, and in any way with winter tourism. With the ski season shortened, hotels, restaurants, shops—especially ski shops—and taxi drivers were affected.

In addition to economic impacts of the unusual weather, there were also cultural consequences that were not always immediately obvious. On our first night in Bygdaby, my husband and I joined our neighbors Anne and Torstein in their *stabbur*, a traditional storage building for meat and other goods, as they cut up one of their freshly slaughtered sheep. The gathering was a work event, but also a social one. It was the first of several such community events we would attend in which people from the neighboring farms came together to work over a bottle of homemade beer or wine. The six of us crowded around the table in the *stabbur*'s low light and small quarters. Anne worked quickly and skillfully with the knife, instructing her son Lars. A retired butcher, Hans Olav, had come over to help with the project, as had the nearest neighbor, Bjarte, a man in his late sixties. Bjarte brought with him a jug of homemade elderberry wine, which everyone drank with enthusiasm. Sam and I watched this community work event with interest and awe as the slicing and salting of the meat unfolded in very much the same way as it probably had for decades, if not generations. The conversation drifted from sheep preparation and old farm equipment in the building to other topics. Bjarte and his son, it turned out, had recently invented a machine for making artificial snow. The two of them had used it for the first time the previous year in Bygdaby to make artificial snow for the local cross-

country ski track. This year their invention would be put to use in several other communities across Norway. “We have had less snow, you know,” he said, and after a pause he leaned toward me with a knowing look and a twinkle in his eye, “You know the farmers have to have something to do in the winter.”

Bjarte’s comment, that we need snow because “farmers need something to do in the winter,” alludes to the central cultural significance of skiing for Norwegians in general and for Bygdabyingar in particular. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to overemphasize the symbolic and recreational significance of skiing for community members. Norwegians are proverbially said to be born “with skis on their feet.” Skiing in this community is the source of a great deal of local pride and identity, and it is a very common pastime during winter months. It is a form of exercise, recreation, and sport. It is not uncommon for children, especially those who grow up on farms, to begin skiing the first winter after they learn to walk.

Symbolic and cultural consequences of the late snow and warm weather are of course harder to measure than economic effects, but they are equally real. Skiing is a very old, traditional activity. It is “what farmers do in the winter.” Cold snowy winters, required for skiing, are expected in Norway. The arrival of cold temperatures and snow marks the changing of the season, part of the sense of the ordering of time and place that forms the sense of moral order and ontological security (see chapter 1). Norwegians desire, as the phrase goes, a “sikkelig Norsk vinter”—a “real (or proper) Norwegian winter,” one that gets really cold and forces people to wax skis with *blå smøring*, blue wax, for cold temperatures. The phrase “sikkelig Norsk vinter” suggests the deep cultural significance of mountains, skiing, and snow to the Bygdabyingar’s identity, to their concept of “the good life” and what is normal and right. The winter season is marked by the ritual of skiing. Participating in this activity assures community members of where they are in space (at home, in the mountains, in Bygdaby) and time (you know that it is winter when you put your skis on). Skiing as a ritual connects community members to the place where they live.

National and International Events and Media Coverage

The local weather wasn’t the only thing that prompted thoughts about climate change that winter season of 2000–2001. On the national and international level, October and November brought extensive flooding across western Norway. During the same time period, communities



Figure 2.1
Climate change in the news: Headline reads “Bad weather will give you higher insurance.”

across England received record storms that led to their own dramatic flooding. The topic of climate change was clearly salient in the media, and information was widely available.

In addition to local weather events that provided the possibility of direct experience of climate change that year, **there were a number of national and international political events that brought the issue to Bygdabyingar’s minds.** Just three months before my observations began, the Labor Party had replaced a coalition government that was described as “the first government to fall due to global warming.” The former prime minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, had opposed the construction of natural gas facilities on the grounds that they would generate too much carbon dioxide (the primary gas associated with global warming). Bondevik had taken a stand against the plants, called for a vote of confidence, which he lost, and then resigned. In November, several hundred miles to the south, the nations of the world held climate meetings at The Hague. And from January to March 2001, three events focusing on climate change received significant attention in the national Norwegian press, making the front page of the national newspapers that were delivered on doorsteps and for sale on racks across Bygdaby.

First, the New Year’s Day speech by then prime minister Jens Stoltenberg raised the issue of climate change, connected it with a reference to the unusual weather of the previous fall months, acknowledged the failed climate talks, and urged people to take individual and collective responsibility:

We have had strange weather recently. In the south and east parts of the country, we have scarcely seen the sun, and we have had flooding and precipitation records. Farther west and north things have been dry. In Sunndalsøra, it was 18°C in December, and people could pick roses in the middle of advent time. **An unusual winter isn’t proof of climate change. But change over time tells us that we must take this seriously.** It was a defeat that the climate meetings at The Hague fell apart. But it tells us also how difficult it is for the nations of the world to come to agreement on sharing the burdens. I am convinced that it is possible to come to agreement, and we are doing all we can to contribute. To meet the climate challenge will require contributions from all of us, as a society, businesses and individuals, but this is the way forward. (Nationally televised speech, January 1, 2001, my translation)

Another New Year’s Day speech, given by King Harald, also mentioned climate change, although this time more briefly and in conjunction with an emphasis on Norway’s relationship with the United Nations: “We stand together to protect the peace, to forbid weapons that kill arbitrarily and bring war criminals to court. We work together to fight

AIDS and other epidemics, to watch over climate change, and to make clean air and water available for all” (nationally televised speech, January 1, 2001, my translation).

The fact that both the king and prime minister chose to address the issue of climate change in their New Year’s Day speeches highlights the salience of this issue on the national level. By mentioning global warming in this context, both leaders called on the nation’s citizens to keep this issue in their minds as significant and relevant. Yet although these events were visible and public, they portrayed climate change as an abstract concept. These speeches were about large, significant issues. They served to call attention to global warming, but doing so did not automatically make the issue “real” or integrated in daily life.

Second, three weeks after these speeches, on January 22, 2001, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its third assessment report on climate change. This report disclosed that climate change appeared to be occurring faster than before (average temperatures may rise 10.5°F in the coming century as compared with previous estimates of 2.5 to 5.5°F) and gave strong evidence of human causes of climate change. The findings of this report were unanimously approved by some 150 scientists and 80 members of industry and environmental groups. The next day, on January 23, the front page of the *Bergens Tidende* (*Bergen Times*) featured a large picture of a walrus sitting on a melting iceberg with the headline “Varmere, varmere, varmere” (Warmer, Warmer, Warmer).

And third, in March climate change made headlines again as President George W. Bush announced that he was pulling the United States out of the Kyoto Protocol because it was “not in our economic interests.” I first learned this news not because I read the *New York Times* on the Internet or even because I watched the evening news. I learned of it because Bygdabyingar were eager to tell me and discuss it. Conversations that condemned the United States were easy to come by in Bygdaby (see chapter 5).

Thus, the national news media *did* discuss climate change in connection with coverage of the weather and described future weather scenarios and impacts—in contrast to the local news, which I discuss later. In the same time period that unusual weather patterns were observable in Bygdaby (November 1, 2000, through January 31, 2001), there were 34 stories on climate change in the largest papers in Norway (*VG*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten*, and *Bergens Tidene*). Issues associated with climate change made the front page of these papers multiple times during that

period. In some cases, these stories were accompanied with dramatic photos (see, for example, figure 2.2). Newspaper coverage generally portrayed climate change in a political way. National press provided information about climate change and made connections to weather events. So what happened to this information once it entered the community?

The Contours of Public Silence

I know that environmental protection is very important, but in the everyday I don't think so much about it.

—Lisbet, early forties

As a sociologist, I was as puzzled by the behavior of the people I met as I was concerned about the lack of snow. It is relatively difficult to imagine and describe behavior that is missing, something that might have occurred but did not. This approach is related to the study of everyday life, of how, as Dorothy Smith (1987) has explained, the everyday world that we see as normal is in fact “problematic.” **To see the production of “normal reality” as a social process requires one to pay careful attention to moments when topics appear briefly, under the surface of an interaction, only to disappear again, as the topic of climate change did in Bygdaby.** I look more closely now at the spaces where we might expect to find some response from local community members: formal politics, volunteer associations, street protest, local media coverage, and daily conversation.

Political Organizing

The most obvious way of responding to global warming's significant threat to society, culture, and the economy, especially because it is such a large problem, is through some sort of **collective political action.** Political response may manifest in a number of ways. Official actors may enact and carry out policies through the formal political system, and citizens propose ballot measures, vote, and testify at public forums. Political response also occurs as volunteer groups organize, raise money, put pressure on official channels, and write letters to the editor. And political response happens as people take to the streets in direct protest. Each of these avenues of political action is animated when people get together and talk about issues in their lives. Political philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas describe the central importance of public

dialog to the generation of power and the project of democracy. It matters, these philosophers tell us, whether people get together and talk about their lives. If, as Arendt famously tells us, “powerlessness comes from being inattentively caught in the web of human relationships” (1958, 183), then political talk is a key antidote. Political talk is a form of meaning-making power; it engages the “sociological imagination,” that “quality of mind necessary to grasp the constant interplay between our private lives and the political world” extolled by sociologist C. W. Mills (1959, 13). We turn first to the more visible, obvious dimensions of political activity in a community.

Formal Politics: Climate Change Is Not a Local Issue The level of direct participation in the political process is quite high in Norway, and Bygdaby certainly follows this pattern. At the time I lived in Bygdaby, at least eight political parties were visibly active in the community. Community politics are structured in such a way that some two dozen members sit on the town council, the *kommunestyre*. In addition, each party maintains a “list” of potential council members. When election time comes around, the number of people on the list who take seats on the *kommunestyre* depends on the number of votes the party receives from the community in that election. Thus, in addition to the several dozen community members who sit on the council itself, another half-dozen or more might be on the list (i.e., reserve duty). And behind those people are party members who participate in the regular party meetings at which the party’s agenda and local politics are discussed. Thus, for a town of 10,000 residents, there is a great deal of direct citizen involvement in the local political system, especially in comparison to the low political participation in the United States.

So what went on in these meetings in 2000–2001? Was climate change discussed? Meetings focused on a wide variety of topics from zoning laws regarding downtown to new area for huts and, of course, the budget. To my surprise, climate change was never discussed in any of the city council or specific Labor Party strategy meetings I attended or even in the meetings of the municipal subgroup on culture and environment. If people actually cared about the issue, how could this be? It seemed that from the perspective of both the newspapers and the local politicians, climate change was not a local issue at the time. When I asked Øystein, a member of the Labor Party who sat on the city council and was the father of several preteen children, about climate change, he responded: “Yes, it is of course a theme that everyone is interested in, but locally it

isn't discussed much because, well climate change, you know there isn't so much you can do with it on a local level. But of course everyone sees that something must be done in order for, in order to stop the development of climate."

Øystein referred to the sense that climate change is more of a national issue. From an organizational standpoint, climate change is clearly a global problem, and nations must work together. Nonetheless, it is on the local level that people in Bygdaby experience changes, that people's lives are affected by cultural or economic impacts. Labeling climate change as a national or international issue and "not a local one," although understandable, also works as a justification for the public silence. Susan Opatow and Leah Weiss, in their review of denial with respect to environmental problems, describe the displacement of responsibility onto "higher authorities or legitimate decision makers" as a form of denial of self-involvement (2000, 481).

Volunteer Organizing Volunteer organizations are widespread across both Norway and the United States. As people come together in organizations from parent-teacher associations to church groups, the Red Cross, and local chapters of larger nonprofits, they form the basis of a public sphere. Participants in these groups not only achieve the organization's manifest goals, but also come to see themselves as part of a larger whole and develop collective interpretations of the world. For Hannah Arendt (1958, 1972), both a sense of collective vision and identity are key elements for citizenship, which is in turn key for democracy. Jürgen Habermas (1984) has also been highly concerned with democracy. His theory of communicative action describes the importance for the lived experiences of people (their "life world") to inform social institutions and the society as a whole. For Habermas, the fact that volunteer organizations are controlled by neither the state nor the market makes them potentially important sites where people can get together, share their experiences, and from this sharing develop their own narratives about the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to problems in their lives. These narratives can then form the basis of social movements. Furthermore, through such interactions in voluntary organizations, people may develop appropriate ethics for citizenship.

Thus, a second area of local political influence to consider is that of volunteer organizations. If political participation was high in this Norwegian town at the beginning of the new millennium, volunteering was off the charts. Community members were actively volunteering in

everything from Amnesty International and international children’s hunger relief groups to organizations set up in opposition to the European Union. They also participated in community discussion groups such as the Saturday Academy, a community group that met roughly once a month to discuss local issues of interest such as a proposed shopping center to be located just outside the downtown. Yet there was no active environmental organization, and in none of the dozens of local meetings I attended the year I lived in Bygdaby did climate change come up, not even once.

In the Streets Political activity happens not only in the formal political system, but also in the streets. Political activity in the streets is activity of protest. Like volunteer organizations, the public protest in the streets can form a vital piece of the public sphere. Residents have the opportunity to share their views and to hear what others have to say under circumstances that, although often still scripted, are generally more free form than within the meetings of volunteer organizations or political parties. Here, too, is an important space for collective meaning-making on the issues a community finds most pressing. During my eight-month stay in Bygdaby, residents took to the streets with signs and songs on several occasions. The first event occurred shortly after I arrived, on November 9, the so-called Crystal Night on which the Nazis seized many Jews and took them to concentration camps.¹ A group of 30 or more young people met at the bridge. After several short speeches describing the importance of the date and the continuing presence of racism in Norway, the group walked through the downtown carrying signs and candles and singing. Most of the participants were in their early twenties, although there were also a few people in their thirties, forties, and fifties.

All in all during that year, climate change was mentioned, as far as I’m aware, **only once in a public forum, as part of a highly motivational speech given by a woman in her late twenties in a downtown public event on May 1:**

And I am seriously concerned and afraid of the greenhouse effect; we can see that flooding and deserts are coming. So I wonder what it will mean for life on Earth and for the humans who live here. A Swedish friend of mine said that we have to cut our CO₂ emissions by 60 to 80 percent. The Kyoto Agreement is about cutting them by 5 percent. And even that ridiculous pace was too much for the climate hooligan George W. Bush in the United States. The head of the USA’s Environmental Protection Agency said that “we have no interest in meeting the conditions of the agreement.” Well, that may be so. But it is other countries that will be hit the hardest from climate change. . . . But now it isn’t that it’s

just Bush and his cronies who sin against the environment. The government of the Labor Party has said that so long as the United States doesn't do anything with the climate agreement, so in a way it is just fine for the rest of us to shirk our duties. At the same time, they are putting on the pressure to build pollution power plants. As a result, Norwegian emissions are going to increase even more. And that is of course the opposite of environmental protection! It should really be that if the USA begins to break environmental promises that were agreed upon in Kyoto, it is just natural that Norway should take the climate treaty seriously and follow up on it. (my transcription and translation)

The references to the United States construe Bush policy as a bad example that Norway should not follow (I discuss the use of criticism of the United States as a rhetorical strategy in chapter 5).

All in all, *Bygdabyingar* were remarkably active politically in this period, through the formal political system, volunteer organizations, and street protests. They actively engaged with issues ranging from opposition to the European Union and racism to land zoning and the local labor market. But in each of these spaces climate change was virtually invisible.

Local Media Coverage

Newspaper stories are considered not only a key source of information, but a central element in how the public “frames” information. In Bygdaby, the local newspaper, the *Bygdaby Posten*, is an especially key source of information about the tangible, everyday situations that William Gamson (1992) describes as a necessary complement to abstract information so that people can generate collective action frames. Especially for a community that is very self-conscious, events reported in the local paper—i.e., the things that happen down the road or that affect one's neighbor or cousin—are more likely to seem real.

On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays the local paper comes out in Bygdaby. The 10- to 12-page paper enjoys close to 100 percent readership in the community. It covers local events, with occasional mention of related regional and national events, and features color on the front and back pages. It also has a sports section (dominated in the winter by skiing events), an editorial page, and a lengthy classifieds section that contains remarkably detailed information on local events, from upcoming organization meetings to special events. A reader can even learn if her dentist will be taking a holiday soon by reading this section of the paper. Also included in the paper are television and radio programming schedules for the three-day period. Each issue has two to four letters to the editor. The Saturday edition features a local resident and an historic

photo of some detail of life in Bygdaby from the past century. The front page normally has a large photo for the feature story and seven or eight smaller stories. The three-day weather forecast also appears on the front page, along with a highlighted quotation from someone in the community linking to an inside story. The back page generally features a photo essay in the “human interest” genre.

So how did the problem of climate change play out in the local paper in 2000–2001? Did the newspaper help people to make sense of their troubling concerns? Did it help them to develop a sociological imagination—that ability to connect local experiences to wider events? During the three-month period from November 2000 to January 2001 when the weather was most unusual in Bygdaby, I found 11 articles that made references to the lack of snow or to unusual weather. Most mentions of the winter’s weather patterns in the local paper were made in connection to skiing and the ski area’s efforts to create artificial snow. **So there was coverage of the unusual weather.** However, as we shall see, these stories talked about the weather in ways that were subtly reassuring. In mid-November 2000, a large spread of photos and text described the new snow cannons and efforts that would go into the making of snow. This story had a reassuring quality; snows were late, but with the wonder of technology the ski season would be saved, and all would be well. Perhaps this tone implied an effort to avoid scaring off tourists. The manager of the ski area was certainly carefully positive in his statements about the good quality of the snow. A story at the end of November described how one local ski club had to travel several hours by train to practice at another location for the first time (“Ski Talent Got to Test the Snow”). This article did not mention why the team had to travel, nor did it raise the issue of climate change or speculate on what might happen in future years. Nor was there any mention of the impacts on the local economy, when local ski groups traveled elsewhere for training. Rather, the writing framed such happenings **as unique events.** Instead of drawing attention to the possibility of climate change or raising questions about local weather in light of scientific predictions, these news stories worked to reassure readers that “all is well.” Other stories in the sports section referred to the condition and quality of the artificial snow at the cross-country track in connection with races. A later article (January 4, 2001) with the headline “Disappointingly Few Take Advantage of the Artificial Snow at Bavallen” described the manager’s frustration with the lack of business at the ski area. On January 9, a large story in the sports section (page 6) recounted that more than 200 individuals raced in the local

cross-country race and that the race took place on 100 percent artificial snow. The last paragraph of the story reported that none of the racers complained about the track. One racer was quoted as saying, "We took the conditions as they were, and all went fine." On January 11, the headline of a column on ski conditions on page 3 included more encouragement in the face of the snow-free slopes: "The Ski Slopes Are Waiting," and a subhead stated, "It may be that the chances for a weekend ski trip are improving."

Because the weather report appeared only in a small box on the front page of each issue, the paper did not contain a "weather section" per se, in which the issue of climate change might have been taken up. The closest the weather came to making headlines was the front-page story on the day it became cold enough to begin using the snow cannons at the resort. The paper for December 19, 2000, featured an extra large front-page spread with two photos of the snow cannons in operation. The headline read: "Historisk Snø i Skianlegg" (Historic Snow in Ski Area). Subheadings read: "Finally it is snowing in Bavallen. Sunday it was cold enough for the new snow cannons to do their work, and since then the production of artificial snow has been more or less continual." The remainder of the story gave a hopeful description of the number of snow cannons in operation, the expected opening date of the ski area, and what turned out to be an overly optimistic description of the expected ski conditions.

Two stories covered the warmer weather specifically. On November 4, 2000, page 2 featured a story with the headline "Mildest October in 40 Years." This short article reported average temperatures as recorded at the local weather station and compared them with past years. There was no mention of climate change or analysis of what might be happening. A second and much longer story appeared on January 6, 2001, on page 3 with the headline "The Year 2000 Was Warm and Wet." This story gave a number of statistics for the months of October, November, and December from the local weather station and compared them with national-level data. Again, no reference to or discussion of climate change appeared.

A third story related to unusual weather was accompanied by a large color photo on the back page on December 5, 2000. The photo featured a giant orange chanterelle mushroom in full color. The headline read: "Advent's Chanterelle" with a large subheading: "Completely impossible, thought Stig Dalgard as he, on a trip to his mountain farm this weekend, came across something that could only be a chanterelle." The

article continued: “Stig Dalgard has found mushrooms by his farm for many years but never so large as this. And for certain not so late in the year. When the Christmas month comes, it isn’t usually mushroom picking that one is up to when one goes to the mountains. But for Sunday dinner on the first Advent day Stig will be able to serve freshly picked mushrooms.” The article continued with discussion of how he came across the mushrooms and concluded with the statement that “it is usually a skiing trip, not mushroom picking, that brings people to the mountains at this time of year. But many things seem to be against the norm this fall and winter.”

The color photo of the bright orange mushroom and the apprehensive tone of the reporting made this story different from the others. This news story was one of the few that did not provide a sense of reassurance. Although comments about the mushroom and serving mushrooms for dinner may seem to trivialize this event, in fact the mention of Advent, mushroom walks, and ski trips connected this event to deeply significant social categories for community members. The impact of this short story resulted from the way that it drew on Bygdabyngar’s knowledge of the local nature and their sense of time and place. Unless people are aware of the natural world and thus attuned to the “normal” patterns of natural phenomenon—when mushrooms fruit, the seasonal timing of snowfall—environmental change will go unnoticed. The native people in the polar regions, who have reported “on the ground” effects of climate change, have done so because they are aware of “normal” patterns and cycles. Bygdabyngar also have this kind of perception of their region—it is brought into collective awareness through ritual practices of autumn mushroom hikes and winter ski trips. To find a large chanterelle in December during Advent interrupts the sense of time and place, going against the flow of order and tradition, which for Bygdabyngar are connected to the land and its seasonal cycles. This chanterelle story was different from other news coverage of weather-related events in that, rather than reassuring readers that all was well, it was one of the only stories that explicitly opened the door for questions such as “What is going on? What does this mean? What will happen next?”

Finally, the lack of snow that year was the subject of a playful advertisement in which a local member of the ski community stood holding a pair of skis on top of the local newspaper on a grassy slope with Bygdaby in the background. The ad was for advertising in the local paper. The text of the ad read: “Without the *Bygdaby Post* I’m just standing on

bare ground.” As I described in chapter 1, the use of clever jokes is a kind of traditional practice for Bygdabyingar. Jokes and humor play many social functions, and making light of serious issues can be a way of releasing the pressure associated with the uncomfortable emotions raised by taboo topics.

In the most political space of the paper, the editorial page, I found no editorials or letters to the editor commenting on the weather or making political links between the poor weather and the economy. There was no reporting on economic impacts of the shorter winter season for the ski area or the community, nor on the economic success or failure of the winter season for the community that year in general. There was also no reporting about potential future consequences that climate change might bring should trends from that year continue. In fact, the term *climate change* did not appear in the newspaper at all that season—but, interestingly, not because the chief editor, Lene, did not herself believe climate change was happening. In an interview held in late December 2000, we discussed the issue at length:

Kari One thing I have wondered about since I arrived, that is that the snow came late and that there isn’t as much as there has been.

Lene For tourism and that kind of thing, is that what you are thinking of? Or that the snow is away?

Kari Yeah, and do you think—that it is less than before?

Lene Oh yes. Yes! Both snow and cold temperatures.

Kari And cold temperatures?

Lene Yes, both. And of course it’s climate change that is doing it. There isn’t anything to be done about it. And we are on our side of the mountain—ten years ago the weather came from the west, so the snow came down here. Now it comes from the east, and the snow falls on the east side of the mountain.

Lene’s perception regarding links between observable weather and the possibility of climate change was not translated into the reporting in her paper, however, even though the dry and warm weather was clearly troublesome to her. When, with skis in hand, I ran into Lene outside the train station a month after we met, it was snowing hard. After we greeted one another, she noted with satisfaction, “Now you have yourself a real Norwegian winter.”

On the whole, the local newspaper in Bygdaby conveyed information about unusual weather events, yet with the exception of the story on the chanterelle, it did so in a normalizing way that created a sense that “all

is well.” Stories alluded to the problem only to show that things were in fact going fine, emphasized the wonder of technology, and later complained that there were so few skiers “taking advantage” of the artificial snow—as though the problem was with the skiers, not with the lack of snow! Local stories about these weather events could have made links to similar events across Norway or the world. Columnists could have asked questions about the long-term consequences of the situation or reported on the poor quality of artificial snow for skiing. Yet they did not. **Only by reading between the lines would one get a sense that something big may have been taking place that year.** News stories covered the installation of new snow cannons, the annual winter ski races, and the local ski organizations’ latest activities. These stories were pitched to answer the questions that everyone was asking: “What will happen now?” “How are things going for the community this year?” The stories addressed these questions repeatedly and with full-page photo spreads. Yet at the same time that they conveyed specific information about atypical events, they smoothed over troublesome questions with references to technology, appeals to Norwegian toughness and self-sufficiency, and the use of humor. The story on snow cannons emphasized the wonder of technology; the ski racers “took the snow conditions as they were, and all went well.” And the newspaper used humor about the lack of snow as a clever means of advertising.

Conveying troubling information yet doing so in a reassuring way is achieved not only by emphasizing the power of technology or spreading the “take it as it comes” variant of Norwegian “toughness,” but also by **following local norms about a sense of place and time** (chapter 1). **Indeed, one might say that the newspaper is a key site for reproducing such norms.**

Among the important threads of scholarship upon which I have drawn is sociologist Nina Eliasoph’s very provocative work on apathy in the United States. **In her study, Eliasoph found that local news presentation contributed to the lack of sociological imagination for the people she met by providing local stories without explanations of causes beyond local circumstances: “the local news made it seem that politics happens elsewhere.”** Eliasoph concluded that “reading the local newspapers did not help citizens make connections between politics and everyday life” (1998, 226, 210). The same can be said of the local paper in Bygdaby. The tendency to focus one’s attention on the local in 2000–2001 made it **less likely that residents might make links between their weather and information they learned about polar ice melting** and other effects of

climate change. Information connected to climate change might be “known,” but residents easily kept it in separate mental categories from what was happening around them in daily life. The mental orientation toward the past, reflected in the frequent historical photographs in the newspaper and in long-time residents’ experience of weather changes, increased community members’ sense that something unusual was going on, giving them ready access to a mental “data set” of past winters. I believe that this awareness of the past contributed to so many people’s suspicions in Bygdaby that the unusual weather *might* reflect climate change. Their consciousness of the past gave them a frame of reference that made the problem visible. Yet without a corresponding focus of attention toward the future or across spaces so that other unusual weather taking place that season came into view, the implications of present events were hard to understand. Information was known in an abstract sense but not integrated into the sense of immediate reality.²

No Place to Talk about It: Conversations about Global Warming

In early January, it had finally snowed enough in the high country to ski in the Bygdaby area. I was on my first *Sondagstur* or “Sunday Trip” out on skis with the local hiking and skiing club, Bygdaby *Utferdslag*. The sky was clear, a beautiful very pale light blue unique to the low-angled winter sunlight. We spent the morning climbing up a steep road to a small saddle where we stopped for lunch. On the way back, a man in his fifties skied alongside me. He wanted to know where in the United States I was from and asked some questions about Washington and Seattle. After a bit, I asked him about the ski route into one of the nearby huts that I had seen on the map. He told me where the route was but said that there wasn’t enough snow yet and that the route was still pretty rocky. “You know, there is less snow this year than usual.” I nodded but said nothing and waited to see what he would say next. He added, “You know that they have been talking about climate change and that it is the fault of humans.” I asked him what he thought about that. He gave a funny laugh and then said, “The United States has been reluctant to decrease their emissions.” “Yes,” I agreed, “That is terrible.” At this point, there was a long pause as we skied side by side. The topic was a grim one. What more was there to say? We continued skiing in silence.

—Field notes, January 6, 2001

Before an issue can make it into a council meeting, onto picket signs, into the framing of a local news story, or into a newspaper editorial, somebody has to start talking about it. When people get together and talk, a number of important things can happen. Conversation is the site for exchange of information and ideas, for human contact, and for the

building of community. Conversation can help people understand their relationships to the larger world or obscure them. It can engage the sociological imagination, that “quality of mind necessary to grasp the constant interplay between our private lives and the political world” (Mills 1959, 13). Conversation can also do the complete opposite. Specifically political talk is important because, as Eliasoph tells us, “it helps cultivate a sense of community so that people care more, and think more, about the wider world” (1998, 11). By “political talk,” Eliasoph means the kind of conversations through which people might come to see local phenomenon within a larger context, to see “personal” events as “political.” She draws upon the work of Hannah Arendt, who describes political talk as an end in itself because it is a means of creating one’s own interpretations of reality, a necessary form of political power. For Arendt, “power springs up between men when they act together,” and powerlessness comes from being “inattentively caught in the web of human relationships” (1972, 151). Through engaging in political talk, people can figure out what they think, cultivate concern for the wider world, develop a sociological imagination, and participate in the form of political power that comes from having their own interpretation of the world.

Building on Arendt’s observations about the power of citizens’ political talk in the shaping of their point of view and of their awareness of what issues are on the political agenda, Eliasoph writes, “Power works in part by robbing the powerless of the inclination or ability to develop their own interpretations of political issues. With active, mindful political participation, we weave reality and a place for ourselves within it. A crucial dimension of power is the power to create the contexts of public life itself. This is the power to create the public itself.” She goes on to note that “this power can also be a means to more instrumental kinds of power because it opens up some aspects of life for public questioning and closes off others, allowing some aspects to seem humanly created and changeable and others to seem natural and unmovable” (1998, 17).

Eliasoph further notes that it is not just the topics that people must be able to control in order to be powerful, but the ways of engaging: “Without this power to create the etiquette for political participation, citizens are powerless. Without the power to determine what sorts of questions are worth discussing in public, citizens are deprived of an important power, the power to define what is worthy of public debate, what is important” (1998, 17–18). Yet it was precisely this kind of talk that was in limited supply in Bygdaby at the beginning of this century. In the words of Mette, an 18-year-old student: “Well, yes, we talk about

it, especially *this* year, if you are sitting with someone you know, you talk about the weather. But we don't talk about it in a *serious* way."

Throughout the year I lived in Norway, climate change was frequently present in casual conversations. For example, in late December 2000, an elderly woman getting onto the bus commented to the driver that "this climate change seems to be a good thing." She presumably felt this because it was easier for her to walk around without so much ice. Yet I noticed that people talked about climate change in a particular way. Discussions of climate change were associated with a significant degree of concern and with feelings of **helplessness and powerlessness**. The issue was raised with a shaking of heads, a sense of trouble and discomfort, with no notion of what could be done, as when the skier in my section-opening story mentioned climate change to me in relation to the lack of snow, but then the conversation stopped. I also noticed that there were places where people did not talk about climate change. Local political leaders mentioned climate change more as an inspirational topic to try to motivate action, but not as a day-to-day concern.

From my observations, climate change was most likely to be discussed as a serious topic when it came up on the news and there were several people in the room. I did not have access to many of the places where such conversations might occur, such as at home between friends or with the family around the television. Because I could not be present for all these conversations, I could learn only indirectly about what might have been said by asking residents during interviews. I made a point of asking people whether they were talking about these things privately. Here is the reaction of a group of young female students:

Kari Do you tend to talk about climate change or the future with your friends, or . . .

Siri No, but it has been a bit . . . like, this year that plant there shouldn't be flowering, like (pointing out the window). . . . In fact, there should be snow here, so you know this is totally crazy.

Trudi You know when it has come as far as the first of December and there isn't snow . . .

Kari So you do talk about it?

Siri Well, not seriously, though.

Trudi Not seriously, but it is usual in a way. You know, when you watch the news, you might talk about it.

These young women were particularly politicized, actively following the news and even working in their school to educate their peers about

AIDS. The fact that even they discussed climate change only “a little” further suggests that such conversations were not widespread. When I asked Øystein about whether he talked about climate change with his children, he told me that he didn’t and referred to the fact that the kids get it in school.

Kari Is it something that people, well, do you talk about it with your children?

Øystein Not so much, more sporadically. It isn’t often, but we have of course; of course they have this theme at school, the kids. They have it at school, of course, so they hear it, of course, they are aware of it. They have it at school so that the kids will have a good relationship with the environment and so forth, but I don’t talk so very much with my kids about it. Not so very much.

Kari No?

Øystein No, I don’t, very little really. We don’t talk about it much.

Yet the educators I spoke with in Bygdaby expressed significant difficulty speaking about environmental problems and climate change with students. They had a hard time connecting the issue to students’ lives and struggled with the sense that this information was somehow “too much.”

Most telling was the fact that when I brought up the issue of climate change in interviews, I noticed that it often killed the conversation. People gave an initial reaction of concern, and then we hit a dead zone where there was suddenly not much to be said, “nothing to talk about.” From the things they said (e.g., “it’s depressing,” “not sure what to do”), I had the distinct sense that it was an issue that people were uncomfortable discussing. It was not, for example, a topic on which the conversation flowed, or when the topic was raised, people gave “stock” replies, easy answers, or even easy reflections. These reactions were similar to those that John Immerwahr observed in focus groups on climate change in the United States: “As they thought about the problem, they seemed to run into brick walls, characterized by lack of clear knowledge, seemingly irreversible causes, and a problem with no real solution. As a result they were frustrated and eager for a solution but unsure of which way to go. The symptoms of this frustration are clear. The first is that people literally don’t like to think or talk about the subject. Our respondents always seemed to want to move the topic from global warming itself to more familiar topics, such as moral deterioration, where at least they felt on firmer ground” (Immerwahr 1999).

For example, in a joint interview with Åse and Lisbet, two women in Bygdaby who worked on human rights issues, the conversation did not stay focused on the problem of climate change. Instead, the women turned the conversation to the **more manageable topic of electricity prices and the fact that the power companies were earning so much money.** Neither of them answered my question of whether they ever spoke about climate change with their friends:

Kari I wonder if this [climate change] is something that you think about or worry about or talk about with your friends?

Åse I don't know, but I try to influence the government, you can say. Because they are the ones that are going against all the agreements, so they are the ones that are trying to lift the brakes.

Lisbet It's like I think that everybody knows about it, but just what they will do, concretely, that's not so easy to figure out.

Kari What they will do, or what you will do?

Åse What they will do isn't so easy to figure out. But people know about it, I think so. And some people feel that's just the way it is.

Kari Yeah.

Åse It's just a joke to get involved with that.

Lisbet Of course, we are used to it . . . just look at the gas prices or electric prices. It's like people are trying to lose by building power plants.

Åse But the ones who are making money on it are the power plants.

Kari Because prices are going up.

Åse Yes, we pay nearly twice as much in electricity. . . . Yes, Norway has of course a lot of energy, and that is, you know, a great way to keep the prices high, and then we accept the construction of new plants—they're making new ones here and there. . . .

Lisbet In the everyday, I don't think about it so much, but I know that environmental protection is very important.

Åse Yeah, you say in the everyday, what . . . well . . .

Lisbet Yes, climate change, you know we have had that since the ice age, so there has been climate change all the time.

Åse Yes, it happens all the time.

Lisbet So I don't know how much more the atmosphere can take. But I don't think so much about it. I'm worried enough, but . . .

Åse No, I don't think about it myself. But when the government does something, they do it completely. I think that most people individually do what they can, when it comes to saving electricity and all that here. But what I think is so bad when they increase electricity prices is that it is the power companies that are making money off of it.

When I asked people if they talked about climate change with their friends, the answer was generally an awkward and almost apologetic “no.” Lisbet, like others, said that she was worried but didn’t think much about it in her everyday life.

People in Bygdaby did not describe economic losses that might be tied to climate change—neither present nor potential future impacts—in terms that would lead to political analysis (e.g., blaming industry, the Norwegian government, or the United States for disproportionate emissions). What did happen when I raised the issue of climate change was that people indicated that they believed it was happening, that it was a serious problem, and they often gave quite explicit information about the history of local weather events in their community. Although I did not ask specific knowledge questions (such as whether people knew the causes of climate change or knew how much Norway was contributing to overall global emissions or knew the largest sources of emissions in their community), rarely did I get the sense that people were ill informed on this topic. Rather, the topic was one in which knowledge existed in “raw form.” It had not been processed by political analysis. People knew basic information, but they hadn’t done much with the knowledge. They had not developed the nuanced understanding or the free and easy speech patterns that result from active participation in political discussion of a topic. In fact, I always felt that raising the issue in interviews was considered a bit “off topic.” It made people uncomfortable; it was somehow not as polite as the questions I asked about local traditions or what people liked best about their community. Instead, as I discuss in chapters 3 and 4, the issue of global warming was one that had to be carefully managed. It brought up potential feelings of helplessness and despair. As all the educators in Bygdaby stressed, there was always a need to be positive when discussing these issues.

Bygdaby community members did respond directly to changes caused by global warming in some ways. Bjarte and his son had invented a snow-making machine for the cross-country track, and the owner of the ski area spent a great deal of money to purchase snow cannons and to make artificial snow. As discussed earlier, casual comments about the unusual weather were commonplace and in general contained references to climate change. And there were economic responses in the community. Yet there was a general failure in the community to respond in any political way, either through social movement activity or through the kinds of conversations that might generate such activity. There was no local political organizing; few, if any, conversations took place in which

community members talked about what could be done, what might happen next, and how to plan for it; and no one wrote letters about the topic to the local paper.

Instead, information about global warming remained outside the sphere of normal life, normal thought, and the sense of what was normal reality. People were aware that there was the potential for climate change to alter life radically within the next decades, and when they thought about it, they felt worried, yet they did not go about their days wondering what things would be like for their children, how farming might change in Bygdaby, or whether their grandchildren would be able to ski on real snow. They spent their days thinking about more local, manageable topics. Ingrid described how “you have the knowledge, but you live in a completely different world.” In the words of one environmentally active man in his midforties,

I don't think we can get around feeling problems by pushing it out and pretending it isn't there. Everyone says that everything is so sad and sorry that they don't want to hear about environmental problems. But they know. They know that there are serious problems. . . . And I must say that I don't know anyone who goes around and is bothered in their daily life due to environmental problems. I don't do it, and I don't know anyone else who is. But that in between it is discouraging and an emotional weight I don't think that can be avoided.

Although present in small talk, climate change was not a topic of the more serious political talk that took place within the community's many volunteer and political organizations. It was not, for example, discussed at any of the multiple meetings I attended of the local Labor Party branch. These meetings were centered on very “local” issues, such as land zoning, a new shopping center, and the allocation of municipal resources. For community members, these divisions of topics into local and national issues were perhaps self-evident. From a sociological perspective, it remains to be understood why and how some issues came to be understood as locally relevant, whereas others did not.

The terms *nonresponse* and *apathy* are used in sociological literature to refer to social movement nonparticipation. The term *nonresponse* seems more neutral, but the label *apathy* carries a connotation of deficient moral qualities such as laziness or greed that prevent people from engagement. If we look to the root of the term *apathy*, however, we might apply it differently.

Buddhist environmental philosophers Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown write that “to be conscious in the world today is to be aware of vast suffering and unprecedented peril.” Because of the degree of destruc-

tion of life and potential for destruction of life, “pain is the price of consciousness in a threatened and suffering world,” and “apathy is the mask of suffering” (1998, 26, 27, 191). Macy and Brown then describe apathy in the United States with respect to environmental problems not as lack of caring, but as being more like its Greek root, *apatheia*, which means the refusal or inability to experience pain. Thus, apathy is closely allied to denial at its root. Philosopher and practicing psychotherapist Shierry Nicholsen describes apathy as “a way of adapting, of defending oneself in a situation that is utterly overwhelming and where there is no end in sight.” Furthermore, she adds that “we all need this kind of protection in our current environmental situation, certainly, in which there is so much destruction of so many kinds, in so many places, affecting so many people and so many other creatures, and with no end in sight. No wonder environmental activists complain about the widespread apathy that meets their efforts to arouse concern” (2002, 147).

Social movement theory has usually assumed apathy or nonaction to be the norm and focused attention on why people participate in movements rather than on why they do not (Klandermas 1997). In contrast, Eliasoph examines the production of apathy in everyday conversation. Unlike the dominant social movement perspective that nonparticipation is the norm, Eliasoph asserts that apathy takes work to produce: “Simple apathy never explained the political silence I heard. Instead of ‘apathy’ was a whole underwater world of denials, omissions, evasions, things forgotten, skirted, avoided and suppressed—a world as varied and colorful as a tropical sea bed” (1998, 255). People do care; they just aren’t able to express their caring in all social contexts. And as Cohen reminds us in his work on denial, “Passivity and silence may look the same as obliviousness, apathy and indifference, but may not be the same at all. We can feel and care intensely, yet remain silent” (2001, 9). This observation is supported by studies of empathy and prosocial behavior that find that both people who experience very low levels of empathy and people who experience very high levels of empathy are less willing to help victims in a variety of situations (e.g., Stotland et al. 1978). People with high levels of empathy for victims found encounters so painful that they avoided involvement rather than assisting someone in need.

In fact, the association of apathy with greed or lack of concern reflects the widespread social (and often sociological) assumption regarding why people are not responding, which I seek to problematize. As illustrated by the examples in this chapter, I use the terms *apathy* and *nonresponse* to describe the absence of the issue of global warming in conversations

or politics. I use the term *apathy* synonymously with *nonaction* and *nonresponse*. Rather than seeing nonresponse as an issue of lack of information or concern, we can approach it as being a result of socially organized *denial*—that is, the active (albeit rarely conscious) organization of information about global warming in such a way that it remains outside the sphere of everyday reality, a “distant” problem rather than a local political issue. Cohen reminds us in his work on denial that “the most familiar usage of the term ‘denial’ refers to the maintenance of social worlds in which an undesirable situation (event, condition, phenomenon) is unrecognized, ignored or made to seem normal.” Cohen highlights the importance of ambiguity. Denial operates in the slippage zone between knowing and not knowing: “we are vaguely aware of choosing not to look at the facts, but not quite conscious of just what it is that we are evading. We know, but at the same time we don’t know.” He contends that “denial is always partial; some information is always registered. This paradox or doubleness—knowing and not knowing—is the heart of the concept” (2001, 51, 5, 22).

Denial, this condition of “knowing and not knowing,” works precisely *because* it becomes natural, like everyday life, and thus invisible. The very real fact that Bygdabyingar (like everybody else) lead busy lives and find themselves pulled in multiple directions by the needs of family, work, home, community, and rest, works to support the necessary ambiguity. In 2000–2001, the fact that there were no (or very few) particular identifiable moments in which one ought to have taken action served well to cover up and explain the fact that individuals weren’t doing anything about the issue of global warming.³ Here, as Eirik struggled with how to understand why others in the community were not doing more on the issue of climate change, he referred to the fact that people do lead busy lives and “have to choose what to be engaged with”:

Kari I asked you earlier if you felt that you had a sense of personal responsibility for climate change, and you said that you did. I wonder if you have a sense of whether other people have a personal relationship to this?

Eirik I am not really so sure. Because it can be, we hear a fair amount about it in the newspapers and so forth, it is a topic of discussion—such that people have the sense that they are collectively responsible. It is possible, but then at the same time I think that there are many who, we don’t care, we’ll close our eyes to it. I think that there are many who do this.

Kari And why do you think that is?

Eirik They have to choose what to become engaged with, and these unpleasant things they decide not to become involved with, I can imagine.

As we continued our conversation about why more people were not involved, it is the fact that he knew that people *are* busy that made Eirik unsure of exactly what was going on:

Eirik I don’t know. There are certainly many reasons. I can’t really answer it, but I can imagine many people are a bit active in different things. It can be their work or their family or caring for their children or their grandchildren that they really prioritize at that time or that they have a hobby, some people work on their cars, others cut wood in the forest, and some are active with sports. We often have lots of things that we are involved with.

Kari That one has to split the time between.

Eirik Yes, that you have to divide your time between. And if you have family, then you have to take into account what your children want to do and what your partner wants to do, and then there are the responsibilities that you have.

Kari And you have to sleep a bit and eat . . .

Eirik (Laughs.) Yes, yes, yes . . . so it can be that we have already filled up our time with lots of things, that can also be an important reason. Many people spend a lot of time with their families. Watching the kids, taking them on a hike.

Like the term *apathy*, the notion of being “in denial” has a negative connotation—being incapable of comprehending something or behaving out of stupidity or ineptitude. I wish to clarify that a key point in labeling the phenomenon of no direct activity in response to climate change as *denial* is to highlight the fact that nonresponse is not a question of greed, inhumanity, or lack of intelligence. Indeed, if we see information on climate change as being *too disturbing* to be fully absorbed or integrated into daily life—as is explored with interview data in chapter 3—this interpretation is the very opposite of the view that nonresponse stems from inhumanity or greed. Instead, denial can—and I believe should—be understood as testament to our human capacity for empathy, compassion, and an underlying sense of moral imperative to respond, even as we fail to do so.

And thus, it is when we take this latter view of denial that we see how apathy is the *mask of suffering*. The perspective of denial draws attention to an increasingly relevant psychological predicament for privileged

people in this globalized “information age” when capitalism creates both a wider divide between the material conditions of the lives of haves and have-nots and reorganizes space and time in ways that bring privileged people ever closer to the worlds of those people they exploit through cheap airfares and quality digital Internet images. As Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens tell us, these new conditions of modern life have profound implications for our understanding of self and place, and for social action. For the well-educated and “nice” people who live in relative security, these circumstances make for disturbing contradictions. Under the surface of the rosy, serene picture of their lives are dark concerns. We move next to hear their voices.