DIALOGUE

An introduction by Anthony Blake, 2009

People get together and talk. They have been doing this for tens of thousands of years. It is perhaps the major component in human evolution and the reason why we have come to dominate over all other animal life forms. We mostly take it for granted but it is possible to engage in the process more consciously than usual, by the practice of dialogue.

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UNPREMEDITATED TALKING

The word 'dialogue' like many other words can mean different things to different people. It is used for the words spoken in a film script. It is sometimes thought of as *any* exchange between people. Sometimes, it is used for an exchange of views. Most of these usages presume a reciprocal action between two people or two sides of an argument. The sense in which it is going to be used here is: *The talking together of any number of people within practical reason with no prior determination.*

This description might seem to apply to what we do all the time, so why single out dialogue as something special? The reason is that whereas, yes, we do this all the time when we get together but we *also* pile on top of it many things that distract us from the basic process. In many ways, we predetermine what will be voiced.

First of all there are our multifarious *purposes* we bring with us or in us such as negotiating an agreement, arguing an issue, demonstrating our wit or knowledge, cementing social ties, gossiping, or simply for the sake of it while we are doing other

things such as eating or working. Some of these are obviously goal-oriented, wanting a result to take away or aimed at doing something. Others are to do with maintenance of the social fabric, enabling participants to feel they belong to some group or community. In dialogue we are going to meet the idea that we can be more intelligent when we are without purpose in the senses just described.

Secondly, people take on different *roles.* There are official meetings with roles clearly defined. In many situations, people divide into dominant and marginal roles the former speaking far more than the latter as a matter of course. Then there are gatherings in which 'experts' or authority figures play a stronger part than the rest. We call these sorts of roles 'divisive' because they introduce hierarchies or differentiations of value of people. In dialogue there not such divisions.

It is fairly easy to anticipate that if we take away overt purposes or agendas and also suspend the exercise of divisive roles there will emerge a very unusual kind of talking together. The two work hand in glove to release potentials that are rarely manifested. Nevertheless, some sense of purpose remains because people remain human; also each one of us will strive for some role for ourselves, some sense of identity, even if we do not easily find it. In dialogue purpose can *emerge in the present moment* rather than being pre-set beforehand or by habit and custom. And the roles we seek can be of a kind that offers us *equality* in a way that is rare in common conversation. This means, in effect, that we *do not know what we are doing* and also that we can never fix ourselves into any single definite role.

The ground state of dialogue is *creative* and this is why many people experience it as disturbing.

Having an overt purpose and utilising set roles (whether arrived at formally or informally) is close to having a 'script'. The people involved may not know precisely what they will say or when they might say it but the outline is already there and they may have rehearsed their lines many times before. In what we are calling dialogue there is no such script. It is a step into the unknown. At the same time, people devoid of a script are not vacuous but can draw on content that may lie deeper beneath the surface than what usually appears; in a way, they are 'forced' to do so, just because they will hardly remain perfectly silent so must say something.

By suspending agendas and neutralising divisive roles (some dominant, others marginal) a deeper or more subtle process is made accessible. This is similar to scientific practice in which scientists isolate a process they are interested in from extraneous phenomena, or cut out the 'noise'. The dialogue process has been there all the time but covered over and distorted by the exercise of external controls. With the suspension of such things a freer, less predictable kind of talking can emerge. Once we have become aware of this more subtle mode of exchange (have 'tasted' it) we can recognise it working 'behind the scenes' in more common situations and align ourselves more with it in real life situations.

CONDITIONS FOR DIALOGUE

Now we look at how we can set up conditions for dialogue to emerge. The crucial one is that everyone who takes part is regarded as and acts as 'equal' to everyone else. This simple requirement is actually very radical. What 'equal' means is worked out during the course of the dialogue as an integral part of the process. We call this a condition but it can also be regarded as a final goal: beginning and end are as one The late Patrick de Mare, who did so much to pioneer dialogue in the UK, spoke of the ultimate aim of dialogue as *koinonia*, a Greek word that translates as 'impersonal fellowship'. It is symbolised from the very beginning of any session by having people sit in a circle so that they are able to see and hear each other with no one person in a special place.

No distractions or added ingredients are allowed (usually – there are sometimes exceptions) such as eating and drinking, playing music or engaging in any other activity than speaking and listening.

They first of all agree to talk together for a specified time and the dialogue is not allowed to be cut short or extended according to the moods or interests of the participants. It is usually advised not to continue with the topics that came up in the dialogue after it has finished in order to make the event a closed 'hermetic' one. If people know that they can carry on outside the specified time it weakens their concentration in the dialogue session itself.

All who come to a dialogue must do so voluntarily and individually. If people come because they are told to or persuaded to, or for any other reason than choosing to talk together, this will interfere with the process. Also, if some of the people have pre-established relationships with each other this will restrict what is possible because it reduces their autonomy.

The agreement is to talk together as autonomous individuals within the confines of the session – and nothing else. Sometimes, the 'primary task' of dialogue is stated as 'learning how to talk together', which challenges the participants because they implicitly believe they do not need to.

The dialogue is *convened* by someone who, at least metaphorically, 'calls' people together and acts as keeper of the boundaries (conditions). He or she is not in the role of a facilitator that is, as someone who intervenes to direct and guide the process. The convenor is somewhat self-effacing and seeks to become just another participant. Whatever he or she says must be regarded as on the same level as what anyone else says. The convenor cannot tell someone that they are not doing dialogue properly or criticise the group in any way that suggests he or she is an expert in control of the process. But this does not mean that the convenor cannot take initiative. The direction and guidance of the process is in everyone's hands and each person will fulfil this common role in his or her own way. Every participant can be called 'the *conscience* of the dialogue' because it is not a matter of controlling the process as an 'expert' might but of *experiencing* the process as a totally involved participant. An expert would separate him or herself from what is going on, make judgments about it, and intervene according to what he or she sees as desirable with mantle of an authority. The convenor only expresses what is 'there' already.

DIALOGUE IS NOT TO BE ACHIEVED

If we acquire the idea that dialogue is a 'good thing' we might then be led to suppose that we can learn about it and train to do it better and better. But, in fact, we cannot know how it works in advance of doing it. It is something that we relate to only by participation. We have outlined some of the conditions for dialogue but said nothing about *how to do it* simply because we *cannot*. Though general patterns can be seen in many dialogues, each one remains unique. There are no 'stages' in dialogue such as people are found of outlining for various group processes. Even the idea of there being stages can interfere with the process itself because it raises expectations. When, as is often the case, someone asks 'are we doing dialogue yet?' there can be no answer. Whatever is happening is the best we can do at that moment.

Dialogue is going on anyway but obscured and distorted by impositions of agendas, leaders, social mores, and personalities and so on. It is not something to be achieved as a state in the future but something to be uncovered and appreciated or realised in the present moment.

Dialogue can be called both 'natural' and 'unnatural'. The word 'natural' has a double meaning, signifying both what is intrinsic to our species and also what most people are accustomed to. We need to suspend the unnatural artifices of our

complex societies to allow the deeper, intrinsically human, process to show itself. This is done by the participation of our awareness rather than by any piece of knowledge. It is by becoming aware of what is going on in talking that dialogue appears, quite 'naturally'.

Patrick de Mare outlined a basic progression of Talking – Awareness of talking – Dialogue. We start off talking, somehow, but gradually listen or become aware of the talking in such a way that what is said begins to change or, at least, the way in which it is said. For instance, something can be said/heard in the mode of an argument, as assertion or denial, but the 'same thing' can be said *simply as a statement, a meaning.*

People who tune into dialogue come to understand that something can be said but it does not have to be agreed with, or denied, or modified, or added to in any way. This is an unusual experience for most people, the reason being that in most circumstances we are arguing, trying to get ourselves heard, making a point, justifying ourselves, imposing ourselves on others, reacting to what others have said, requiring feedback, etc. Though not all common situations of talking together are adversarial, conflict of some kind plays a major role in many. By withdrawing energy from conflict it is made available for understanding, which means amongst other things, new thinking. Most conflict situations are inherently static and do not generate anything new. If we have to struggle to maintain our position we have little energy available to think differently. Awareness does not come out of thin air. It arises from the liberation of attention, when it is not taken up with trying to control the situation.

Awareness acts as a neutralising power that decreases the noise or friction in the system and enables us to realise there is a common human process of dialogue underlying our exchanges. This need not necessarily arise when we are in friendly conversations in which we seem to agree with each other, situations which can be as constricting as those of conflict. In dialogue, there is no need to agree.

BEYOND SURVIVAL

We might consider the more usual experiences of talking together in Darwinian terms as a struggle for survival. 'Persons' and 'ideas' are attached to each other and we use words to *assert and defend ourselves*; if our ideas are defeated we ourselves feel we lose out. An important thing that dialogue can do is loosen the attachments or 'dissolve the glue' between persons and ideas so that the ideas can stand more on their own feet and not only be used as the expression of a personality. We might regard ideas as having an intelligence of their own and with the capacity to 'talk' with each other. It is broadly accepted that translating our existential situations into words allows us to work with symbols rather than resorting to physical action (or suffering inwardly), for example in psychotherapy but also in political affairs (as Churchill said, 'Better jaw, jaw than war, war'). In dialogue this symbolic activity is greatly enhanced.

The move towards seeing ideas presented by different persons side-by-side instead of in competition with each other is profound. Quite opposite views can turn up in a dialogue but there is no drive to choose between them or to resolve them. There are no choices because there is no voting or majority rule. There are no resolutions because dialogue does not aim at finding answers. Beyond the sphere of contention lies an extraordinary sphere of new understanding; but this not just in some idealistic heaven of agreement and love but a container strong enough to contain all the pain, anger and frustration we might engender between us. Conflict is no longer the master of the process but just one of its many servants. To speak of ideas as standing side-by-side beyond contention is not to say that they are 'neutered' and do not matter to us as much. Quite the contrary – they can matter much more. We are able to see into them, to follow more deeply what they mean.

David Bohm, who was much influenced by de Mare and did more than anyone to spread the idea of dialogue, interpreted the word 'dialogue' as compounded of *dia*, through and *logos*, meaning – hence 'going through meaning'.

MIND EXPANSION

Bohm draws attention to the prospect of willingly taking part in a *shared meaning* that is evolving almost 'of itself' out of our contributions. When we are not so much occupied with making a point, defending ourselves or finding something 'important' to say, we are more relaxed and open and able to participate in shared meaning. The number of people involved and the openness of procedure means that no one person is on the spot at any time. People speak when they chose to according to their own sense of the flow of meaning.

As we have implied before, most conversations condense down into sets of exchanges between pairs of people. This means that the talk goes 'back and forth'. In dialogue, there is the prospect that threads emerge that eventually 'flow through all' or many of the people involved. In other words, there is a much larger 'circuit' of thinking in dialogue than in most other conversations, which is reflected in the Native American traditional practice of 'talking in circles'.

The back and forth of typical conversations is sometimes called *discussion*, a word that Bohm links to 'percussion' and other words signifying clash or impact. Discussions (particularly in the mass media such as television) are frequently valued in terms of the friction or 'heat' that they produce. Dialogue converts the same energies into new thinking.

It is a significant step – in becoming more human one might say – to open up to another person's mind as *playing the same role as one's own* and to open up to several others minds even more so. To open up to all the members of a dialogue equally and without reservation is probably a distant ideal but it holds the promise of a greatly expanded mind. The verb 'to open up' is often a vacuous idea in that we cannot *do* such a thing. What we can do is suspend judgments that separate us from others to the extent we are able. There is no success or failure here. We can imagine the expanded mind as a subtle attractor to which we can respond to the degree that our awareness and attention are free of struggle.

Instead of being engaged in filtering out what others say, we glimpse a mental space in which *everything* said can be accommodated. What is to be sacrificed for its sake is any immediate gratification, and any immediate feedback from others. The meaning of what one person says will pass through what everyone else will say before it returns again to its source.

We do not know in advance what can take place in this expanded mental space. We can suspect that it will not look like any answer we might expect. It is also probable that it will not be any 'higher' synthesis. It may not consist of anything we can recognise as an 'idea' at all. This space enfolds our separate minds. We can only come to know what arises in us and what we hear and say.

Some people understand this higher mental space through the idea or metaphor of 'silence' This can lead them into practices of meditation and the exclusion of talking and the belief that people can be 'closer together' if they are silent. In dialogue, the belief is that this same 'silence' can be present together with talking. The larger mental space does not have to consist of words or any known kind of concept or object. Its content can be registered by participants in various ways including feelings and physical sensations, *just as they might register their own presence.* Some people are inclined to register the larger mental space as if it were an entity and want to give it a name while others will prefer not to. There will be as many versions of it as there are participants.

OPTIMISATION

We outlined some of the conditions that help make dialogue possible. We suggested that the role of the convenor should be restrained and circumspect, but one of his or her primary functions is to encourage participants to suspend expectations of any kind of pre-determined result, or even any result at all. Starting the ball rolling or giving nudge to the process is not for the convenor exclusively to control.

Dialogue is supported by diversity, where this 'diversity' is of diverse kinds. We can borrow the concept of 'adequate diversity' from cybernetics, a term used for systems that have multifarious possibilities of response enabling it to adapt to a wide range of situations. We have repeatedly remarked that most public discourse is polarised or adversarial as, for example, in the current (2009) USA 'town meetings' on medical care, which seem specifically designed to sabotage any possibilities of sharing meaning and common deliberation. When we go beyond two 'sides' we see that there might be any number of 'sides' and the very idea dissolves away into just diversity. However, is there a limit on this diversity? It seems there is.

In a very large group – of a hundred or more for instance – people find it next to impossible to operate as autonomous individuals and, instead, factions emerge similar to political parties. As far as designating an optimal number of participants goes, our pioneering guide Patrick de Mare opts for seventeen, a number that is the median value of a range that can stretch between twelve and twenty two or even wider. The number is arrived at in terms of the two variables of (a) number of voices and (b) opportunities to speak.

To give some concrete idea of what this means: fifteen people meeting for an hour and a half have on average six minutes of theoretical speaking time; thirty people would have three minutes on average and sixty would have ninety seconds. There are averages of course and often some people are silent and others more vocal.

A further consideration is that, as the size of the group increases, it becomes more and more difficult to hear everyone. That is why special buildings such as Chapter Houses and amphitheatres were used.

We have mentioned the typical duration of a dialogue session as one and a half hours. By and large this is recognised as the longest period over which most people can sustain attention. But, how frequently should a dialogue meet? Typically, it is once a month because this tends to be what most people are willing to undertake; it contrasts with what they can be willing to give to their individual therapy or coaching.

A more important factor is the membership of the group. If the membership is static, relationships and habits build up and the optimal diversity of the group diminishes; the level of dialogue plateaus or even declines. Ideally, people would circulate between various dialogue groups and the role of convenor rotate amongst participants. Willy-nilly the particular temperament and style of a particular convenor will tend to influence what happens. A serious issue is what to do if one member of the group is obsessive and so dominates the proceedings that dialogue is stifled. Some convenors would exclude such people while others would hope for their overbearing influence to be reduced in time.

INTELLIGENCE

Talking together is an important part of our intelligence. We can share information and increase the amount available to us; but it is not simply the amount of information that counts. Some kinds of information can organise other kinds and we call these 'ideas'. It is not just the quantity of information that helps us be intelligent but how well we combine different bits or kinds of information.

In meeting and talking together we are subject to political and social patterns. One of the main types of such influence is called *hierarchy*, which is based on the premise that some people are more important than others in terms of decision-making, expertise or status. Hierarchy reduces complexity, which makes it attractive when we do not want to spend time on generating new thinking. In the long run, however, it tends to obfuscate issues that then build and spill over into crises. It certainly leads to many voices being stifled and a very limited vision of reality, but strivings away from hierarchy are often rejected as 'anarchic' since the familiar rules of order are not followed.

'Democracy' is a loaded term and often abused but it reflects the sense that *everyone* who has a stake in a situation should *have a say* in how it is dealt with. The problem is, how is this to be managed?

A premise of dialogue is that people are by and large much the same in being human and ordinary discriminations of intelligence have lesser importance. Most people want to be heard while many feel afraid of speaking their minds, but each has something unique to contribute. It is probably true that we discover ourselves primarily through what we say.

The way we combine information in talking together reciprocates with how we relate to each other. Hierarchical patterns fix relationships into dominant kinds, whereas in the 'democratic' mode of dialogue we are free to evolve and dissolve a multitude of relationships. The belief in dialogue is that we can adapt and change according to what is emerging at the moment. It is unlikely that there can be any set pattern that 'works' for all occasions.

It must be added here that hierarchical patterns are not the sole provenance of business or professional organisations and they are very much in force in family groups. Hierarchical control over talking together is easier in small groups than in larger ones because there are fewer possibilities of individuals 'breaking the rules' and 'getting away with it'. In family groups parameters of power and emotion (as in love and hate) prevail even if their members believe they have transcended, for example, old 'patriarchal' ways. In dialogue, by way of contrast, the parameters of meaning and culture are the most important and relationships develop from the flow of meaning rather than being the driving force of it.

Hierarchy produces restrictions on the flow of information and also its accessibility. Historically, science has been fostered by increases in these parameters. People are more able to act intelligently if they have access to more information and increase its flow. This is one of the reasons for the growth of cities because they amplify flow and accessibility. Centres of innovation such as Vienna in the first years of the twentieth century flourished because they acted as 'hubs' in information networks and also concentrated numerous articulate individuals together. In the same vein, the Gulags of Soviet Russia became effective 'universities' for new ideas.

People largely prove themselves responsive to 'free' information just as life is responsive to 'free' energy; but it should not be overwhelming. This is what the optimal number for dialogue takes into account. Such a number engenders intelligence but this will, of course, be used by individuals in their various ways and not conform to any pre-established programme. There is no way in which any authority can impose itself on the workings of dialogue without curtailing it. At the same time, dialogue is self-regulating in naturally constraining the amount of new thinking that is generated within manageable proportions. It has been noted e.g. by Arie de Guess that companies flourish if they practice 3-10% innovation in their work.

We have to ask, 'What is dialogue for?' The essential answer is that it serves as a *recreation of our primordial state of intelligence.* Instead of striving to 'improve' on the mechanisms we have built up for governing our talking together we eschew such things altogether and, as it were, start afresh. This is, of course, quite contrary to the

attitude of seeking improvement. It implies that we should not start from where we are but, instead, reverse our steps.

Dialogue then serves as a new starting point, but it does not determine what we make of it. It opens a door but does not spell out what lies beyond it. Sooner or later we have to return to the 'market place' and make our way. We may, however, have gained an understanding that can help us be more human in our dealings with each other or, most importantly, as Patrick de Mare emphasised at the end of his life, more *mindful.*

WORKING APPROXIMATIONS

In 'pure' dialogue overt purpose is excluded but this need not be an absolute rule. Dialogue is possible if participants agree to seek *unanimity* instead of majority rule. A common example in the UK legal system is afforded by the *jury.* A group of twelve people from all walks of life and also possibly of different ages, sex and cultures come together to agree a verdict. A jury holds the promise of a way of talking together that transcends the vested interests of adversarial lawyers and often delivers on that promise.

The Councils of the Native Americans meet to deliberate issues in circles allowing all points of view to be heard. Their tradition recognises archetypal roles metaphorically linked to the several directions in space we can register and discriminate and hence provides a model of the larger mental space we have spoken of.

> You have noticed that everything as Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round..... The Sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nest in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours....
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> Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. [Black Elk]

The Mexican method pioneered by the revolutionary Zapatista continues to be applied, as in the recent (2009) workings of the Climate Camps dedicated to increasing awareness of climate change and allied issues. The criterion of unanimity serves much the same function as the 'levelling' of dialogue and can be equally frustrating!

> By and large, it is run on a system inspired by the Zapatista revolutionary force in Mexico, and their principle that everyone in a village must agree on any decision. This technique for organising grass-roots groups was developed and honed over here in the 90s by the anti-roads movement, and is specifically designed to avoid any activists assuming an overt leadership role in Climate Camp.
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> As you might expect, this entails a lot of meetings, some of them long. Instead of a chairman, you have a facilitator – a role that is regularly rotated to make sure that everyone develops the skill of running a meeting. The facilitator's job is to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak if they want to, and that agreement has been reached by the end of the meeting. Everyone has to agree, and although this has its disadvantages (meetings have gone on for days), at least once the decision is reached it belongs to everyone, and – in theory – you get less backtracking and squabbling later. [*Guardian*, 26th August 2009]

An important possibility of dialogue is that people who have 'tasted' of the process and seen behind the veil as it were can influence the conduct of ordinary meetings in which they are engaged though in subtle ways that may not be obvious to the others

taking part. It is never desirable to seek to *impose* dialogue on people – which is antithetical to its nature – but experienced people may help to 'humanise' discourse that is, render it more mindful.

In the last section 'Stories of Dialogue' we provide three case studies that show how varied they can be according to people and circumstances. There is always a degree of 'impurity' in any actual dialogue but that helps render them unique. The case studies might also serve to explain why the question 'Are we doing dialogue yet?' cannot and should not be answered. The participants can only truly ask this question of themselves.

There are many examples of diverse approaches that echo the principles of dialogue though allied with an overt purpose or agenda. Here are some of them:

Talking in Circles

The talking circle is a traditional way for Native American people to solve problems. It is a very effective way to remove barriers and to allow people to express themselves with complete freedom. For this reason, it is becoming more and more popular in mainstream society. The talking circle is making its appearance in schools, corporate board rooms and team dressing rooms around the world, for the simple reason that the technique works very well. The symbolism of the circle, with no beginning and with nobody in a position of prominence, serves to encourage people to speak freely and honestly about things that are on their minds.

How a Talking Circle Works

Everyone sits in a circle, generally with men to the North and women to the South. The conductor of the circle will generally sit in the East. A token, such as a feather or a special talking stick, is passed clockwise around the circle. As each person receives the token, they may speak for as long as they wish, including addressing a topic brought up by another in the circle. When they have finished, they pass the token along. If someone does not wish to speak, they simply pass the token. The token may go around several times; when everyone has had the opportunity to speak as many times as they wish, the conductor ends the circle.

Types of Talking in Circles

The most common type of circle is a simple sharing circle, where people just share whatever they have to say. There is no particular purpose or theme, and many fascinating side-trips often happen. The sharing circle is also an excellent introduction to ceremonies, and is a great learning tool for those who are just discovering traditional Aboriginal ways. We frequently incorporate such circles in our gatherings, and find that the circles generate a feeling of harmony and kinship in those who participate.

Another common circle, and perhaps the most powerful, is the healing circle. This is generally guided by the conductor, and will be convened to deal with issues that are bothering people. These issues may be specific, or the circle may be called to simply allow everyone to get any problems off their chests. Very often, a simple chance to have a voice, and to have a problem heard in a sympathetic and supportive environment, is all that a person requires for healing. In addition, sharing amongst a group allows everyone to take a piece of the burden from the person with the problem, who then leaves the circle with a lighter load. However, since the problem does not belong to the other participants, they are able to lay down the piece of the burden they accepted and walk away without having increased their own loads.

Another type of circle is used to mediate problems between people, either individuals or groups. Again, very often all that is required for a solution to such

problems is the opportunity to hear and speak in complete honesty, so that both sides of the problem become aware of the impact of the problem on the other party. In these circles, the conductor guides the participants toward finding their own equitable solution to their problem, since a solution that is created by the participants is the most likely to work over the long term.

Guidelines

There are a few very simple guidelines that allow a talking circle to function:

1) Only one person speaks at a time - only the person holding the feather or talking stick may speak. Dialogues are not part of the circle, as they can become confrontational.

2) Introduce yourself - it is polite to introduce yourself in the first round. Use your spirit name, if you have one; otherwise, use your given name.

3) Speak from the heart - the speaker should address the circle from the heart, and may speak for as long as they need to, with respect for the time of others.

4) Listen with respect - all people except the speaker listen attentively and give support to the speaker. Listening with the heart allows you to hear the true intent beneath what the speaker is saying. Listen in the way you expect others to hear you.

5) What is said in the circle stays in the circle - never repeat anything that is said within the circle, unless you have the permission of the speaker.

When convening a circle, smudging the participants with sage will help dispel any negativity they may be carrying with them. In a way, it's like 'wiping' your spiritual 'feet' before entering the circle. As well, keeping a sage smudge burning during the circle, particularly when emotions are intense, will help keep negativity from entering.

Mi'kmaw Spirituality – Talking Circles http://www.muiniskw.org/pgCulture2c.htm

Quaker Meetings

The Quakers are a Christian group, more formally known as the "Society of Friends". The group was founded in 17th Century England, when many were challenging established beliefs and the institutionalisation of the Church. Friends emphasise the personal relationship with God and believe that if they wait silently, there will be times when God speaks to them directly in the heart. They hold regular "business meetings", quite unlike any other business meetings you might have experienced, and their model has inspired many secular groups as well.

The meeting is an exercise in attentiveness, and in listening to the promptings of the Spirit. Whatever the topic, the overriding intention is to discern the will of God, and the entire meeting is seen as worship. The Quakers prepare to come to the meeting in an open state of mind and willingness to listen attentively. They strive to open themselves to what others are saying, suspend their prejudices, and always consider the possibility that they their own strong convictions may be wrong.

People who attend their first Quaker meeting are always struck by the silences. The meeting begins and ends with silence. They observe silence in between individual contributions. The silence allows for reflection, and act as a brake to avoid any one individual seizing control or dominating. Each person normally only speaks once on a subject unless responding to questions with factual information. Having spoken once to the issue, they trust that if further valid points occur to them, someone else will raise them.

They speak honestly and frankly, but do not have arguments or debates. When there are differences they are resolved through conversation. The facilitator continually identifies areas of agreement and disagreement to push the dialogue further.

Quakers also work by consensus rather than majority decisions. Their perspective is that a prophetic voice is often lonely, and so if a deeply felt concern or dissenting perspective continues to come back, they will listen to it. All the ideas and solutions belong to the group, not to individuals. The names of the people who speak ideas are not reported. The goal is "unity, not unanimity."

Socratic Dialogue

A Socratic Dialogue is a search for truth. This approach of course draws its origins and name from the life of Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher. It usually takes place in quite a small group, for example 6 people.

The most important rule in a Socratic Dialogue is to "think for yourself". The dialogue usually starts with a philosophical question, that is, a fundamental question that can be answered by thinking about it. Participants are invited to suspend their judgments, approaching this question with an open mind. They strive for consensus, not because it is necessarily achievable but because the desire for consensus helps to deepen the investigation and to listen deeply to all points of view. They allow their underlying assumptions to surface, unravel, and be examined.

Key to a Socratic Dialogue is that, while the question is philosophical, it is always applied to shared concrete experience, and the group remains in contact with this experience throughout. Participants bring in specific examples, against which what is being said can be tested. General insights are drawn out from this in-depth understanding of concrete examples.

Story Dialogue

As with the circle, it is clear that human beings have always used stories to communicate. Before we had writing, stories were used to convey information and wisdom across generations because they are easier to remember than isolated facts or concepts. We are in a sense, "hardwired" for stories. Yet, we increasingly tend to disassociate the concepts we are trying to convey from personal stories that illustrate them.

The "Story Dialogue" technique was developed by Ron Labonte and Joan Featherstone when working in community development and health in Canada. They saw it as a way to bridge the gulf between practice and theory, and to recognise the expertise that people have in their own lives, and which is best communicated through stories. It uses stories to draw out important themes and issues for a community, moving from personalised experience to generalised knowledge.

In Story Dialogue, individuals are invited to write and tell their stories around a generative theme - a theme that holds energy and possibility for the group. As a person shares their story, others listen intently, sometimes taking notes. The storytelling is followed by a reflection circle where each person shares how the storyteller's story is also their story, and how it is different. A structured dialogue ensues guided by the questions: "what" (what was the story), "why" (why did events in the story happen as they did), "now what" (what are our insights) and "so what" (what are we going to do about it). The group closes by creating "insight cards", writing down each insight on a colored card and grouping these into themes.

Theatre of the Oppressed

During the 1950's in Brazil, theatre director Augusto Boal started asking questions about why theatre had to be in the form of "monologue". Why did the audience have to always be passively consuming the performance? He started experimenting with interactive theatre, creating instead a "dialogue" between the audience and the stage. His assumption was that dialogue is the common, healthy dynamic between

all humans, and that oppression is the result of the absence of dialogue and the dominance of monologue.

Over the past 50 years, the "Theatre of the Oppressed" (TO) has developed into a large system of diverse games and interactive theatre techniques, being used in communities across the world. TO is primarily created as an instrument to enable the "oppressed" to concretely transform their society, by transforming monologue into dialogue. All the TO techniques pose dilemmas and challenges to participants, related to the core social problems and power structures of their particular communities and society at large. The techniques help to move out of the head, and more into the body. This enables people to meet across diversity of cultures and levels of education, and it also allows to access more unconscious dynamics. The TO workshops, now run not only by Boal but by hundreds of facilitators, are a training ground for action not only in theatre but in life.

The most well-known form of TO is called "Forum Theatre". In Forum Theatre a dilemma is posed to the group in the form of a theatrical scene, which usually has a negative outcome. Participants are asked to step into the play and take on the role of one of the actors to try to change the outcome. They are invited to imagine new possibilities and solutions, and to actively try to make them happen in the moment. As a result of the group problem solving, highly interactive imagining, physical involvement, trust, fun, and vigorous interpersonal dynamics, the participants learn how they are a part of perpetuating their own problems and how they can be the source of their own liberation.

N-Logue

One of the common frustrations experienced by many people in dialogue is that a thread of meaning they find is interesting or important fails to be developed by others in the group. The basic fall-back position then to take is that very likely, sooner or later, the thread will be taken up though perhaps not in an easily recognised form. Some people have analysed transcripts of dialogue and found much their surprise that *this is usually the case*. As the number of participants increases it has two contrary results: it is more likely that threads appear to become 'lost', but also it is more likely they get taken up, eventually.

When the number of people involved is drastically reduced, the issue becomes heightened. In a group of two the dialogue is liable to converge into a repetitive exchange. With three people, the development is liable to be erratic because sooner or later one person will break out of any static dyadic exchange. We speak of 'dialogue' here in a specialised sense. The participants are called upon to be both more disciplined and creative than is usually the case in a reasonably sized group. Such situations we have given the name of *N-logue.* They are disciplined exercises in talking in which a type of scripting is used to provide a framework for expression and thinking. Instead of relying on the diversity provided by an optimal number of participants, the players of N-logue have to generate it amongst their smaller number.

We have raised the prospect of a circuit of meaning that flows through *all* the participants and is not restricted to pairings or dyads. This is best illustrated by *trialogue*, an N-logue of three persons; A, B and C let us call them. They are only allowed to speak in sequence A-B-C-A-B-C-A and so on. A is not allowed to speak after B has spoken, so if he wants to respond in any way to what B has said he has to *wait* until his turn. This means that he is responding to what B has said *in the context of what C has said.* In most usual conversations, if B has responded to A then A will often want to argue with B's comment or 'correct' his interpretation. The result is what we call a 'back-and-forth' interaction that leaves C out of it.

What happens then when N, the number of participants, is less than three? Take the case first of *dyalogue* when N = 2. Here we note the observation that the typical form of exchange between two people is 'Yes-But'. B will apparently agree with A but actually disagree with him in some way or other. In dyalogue we replace Yes-But with two different options: Yes-And and No-But. In other words, the participants *consistently* agree or disagree. In the former case, the second person is called upon to *amplify and enrich* what the first has said; just agreeing or repeating is not enough. In the second case, the second person has to counter what the first has said but *in a new way* each time. The participants are called upon to be creative. A *flow of meaning* is enabled.

When N = 1 we have *monalogue* (not monologue). The flow of meaning is in the hands of the single person. To some degree, the action is similar to *free association* for which there are many literary examples (as in James Joyce) and a long history in psychoanalysis. But the single person is not alone. There is an *audience*, those who hear. The work of this audience is to support the speaker by a positive attention. Initially, we had audiences voice support by having them say such things as 'Yes!' or 'Tell us more.' But it was found better for them to avoid any artifice of this kind and just remain silent. A speaker will *feel* the presence of an audience and also whether it is supportive. Having an audience of several people distinguishes monalogue from a typical psychotherapeutic session, particularly because there is not just one person in the listening role with authority. Hence it can be said that the requirement of diversity is operative here even though it is not in speaking.

An individual practicing monalogue needs to feel he can trust the audience. In the full practice of this N-logue everyone should experience being in the role of the single speaker. We can see that this then approximates to pure dialogue itself, a very much extended and spread out version that highlights the independence of what each person might say from what others might say.

It should be apparent that special care and preparation is needed to enable people to take on the specified roles of N-logues. The speaker in monalogue needs to trust his audience and be willing to go through periods of hesitation and not let himself grind to a halt but keep the flow of speaking alive. In doing this he will learn as best he can to draw on resources he rarely has the chance to access. In dyalogue, the participants need to stick to the chosen format – Yes-And or No-But – and not relapse into the usual mixture of the two. In trialogue, quite specific roles are assigned and, typically, A asks a question, B makes a statement and C generates a comment relating to question and statement (or answer). By common agreement, they can change roles within any given session.

The basic and most important discipline is to *speak when it is one's turn* with the minimum of hesitation, no matter if one feels inadequate. This means that some responses are banal or repetitive in spite of best intentions but this is just as it is in pure dialogue anyway. What matters most from a creative point of view is that anything new that emerges be recognised and appreciated. *Trialogue is the most valuable N-logue for understanding creative thinking.* We suppose that trialogue is what happens 'inside' someone in the process of creative thinking.

The discipline involved can be taxing. Considerable attention is required to come up something when it is one's turn, so much so that participants can have only a peripheral awareness of the whole process. This peripheral awareness is is a deeper consciousness that one can learn to *trust.*

Trialogue can be understood as the 'atom' of dialogue. It moves us beyond dyads into the realm of flow and larger mental space. It entails the emotional demands of living with frustration and sustaining 'long thoughts' – that is, thoughts that extend over extended periods and inform the course of the conversation.

When we come to tetralogue (N = 4) the roles are typically defined in terms of a series of dyalogues. B responds to A in the format No-But; C responds to B in the format Yes-And, D responds to C in the format No-But and A responds to D in the format Yes-And. This is simply a device to give participants a rule they can seek to follow. The effect of a tetralogue is similar to seeing something from various sides (such as, in crude terms, from front and back and from above and below). Beyond four it is hard to assign simple roles but we can imagine that in principle N can be increased towards the optimal number for dialogue.

Looking the other way, we can come to discern the spontaneous arising of N-logues within a dialogue of optimal number. Practice of simple N-logues will probably enhance levels of participation in dialogue.

News Dots
The idea of dialogue need not be restricted to people speaking together face to face because there is a kind of connectivity that operates between elements arising in public discourse. Thus, news items link people, places, groups, companies, etc. and these links can be detected and displayed in two dimensions as in the technique called 'News Dots' (see http://slatest.slate.com/features/news_dots/default.htm). An example is shown below.

This example leads into many others, such as *LogoVisual Technology*, in which the source elements of meaning are not people per se but meaningful wholes or nodes that can be said to 'communicate' with each other in a way indifferent to any particular set of people. News Dots Networks map a kind of dialogue going on in an 'impersonal' way. They are updated frequently.

STORIES OF DIALOGUE

Here are three 'stories of dialogue'. The first two of them reports on meetings of the School of Ignorance (founded by Anthony Judge and others around 1990). The third is some extracts from a report on a Conference related to the work of J. G. Bennett. They are presented here as examples of work done to 're-member' dialogue events. These notes were written shortly after the events they describe and reflect my use of terminology at that time.

1. School of Ignorance, Findhorn, 1994
2. School of Ignorance, Brussels, 1995
3. Extracts from report on Conference, Charles Town, 1994

1. School of Ignorance, Findhorn, 1994
A SELF-ORGANISING GROUP IN DIALOGUE

I was privileged to be invited by Anthony Judge to take part in a meeting of 'The School of Ignorance'. This is a personal report on what happened and what it meant to me. As far as possible, in the spirit of the school, I have tried to avoid generalisations and theoretical conclusions, but I have not quite succeeded.

Twenty people, highly skilled in group processes, development programmes, transdisciplinary conferencing, political negotiation, etc. gathered at Minton House, Scotland to spend three days in dialogue together. Minton House is just next door to Findhorn but is not formally part of the well-publicised Findhorn community. Roughly half the people were new to these meetings, five of which had taken place over the last several years, at irregular intervals and with various memberships. The group was fairly balanced between men and women, though men were in the majority. There was no agenda per se and no leader or 'facilitator' assigned.

It was a very international group, including German, French, Russian, Israeli, Palestinian, Canadian and other nationalities. Some of them had travelled very far to attend and, for the most part, participants financed themselves. Only two of the people were 'locals', in contrast with former meetings, and the overall level of commitment was probably more substantial than before. Most of the participants knew each other through a rich context of mutual associations. I was the exception, in not having met or worked with any of the participants before.

The title of the group - *The School of Ignorance* - was the only, but sufficient, orientation in the context of networking and previous contacts, together with the participant list. Meeting mostly as a total ensemble in the round, from Friday night to Monday lunch-time, the people talked with each other for up to ten hours a day.

All the participants had had long and diverse experience of the usual phenomena of misunderstandings, neurotic projections, fixed ideas, wasted insights, distractions, etc. that come up in groups. Some of these surfaced during the meetings but did not overcome the way 'through meaning'. The maturity of the group showed in the natural adoption of an etiquette of non-interruption and attentive listening. As we learned at the end, on previous occasions there had been single individuals who threatened neurotic sabotage; but this was entirely missing on this occasion. Attention was almost entirely on 'the work', the task in hand, that no-one could define.

We do not know, or could not say, whether anything was at work besides the interactions and dialogues of the participants. There was a certain feeling of *questing* for something that was an 'answer' but would not look like an answer; something that would be relevant to the problems and anguish of the world (Rwanda, Bosnia, the Gaza Strip, etc.). There was a general consensus, almost taken for granted, that very little in the way of intentional 'developmental' programmes was working.

The real, chaotic complexity of the event was integral to its value - another reason for the avoidance of clear-cut conclusions.

1. Membership of the group was by invitation only, with some cross-checking between previous members. Those who were present had managed to find a way of being there (time, money, etc.). It was a highly contingent process.

2. There was hardly any breakaway activity - 'let's stop talking and do something different'. At some point, it was generally accepted that what we were doing was talking and that was what we were doing.

3. A lot was done at dinner, meeting in small numbers around a bottle, etc.

4. Everyone spontaneously changed their position in the circle from session to session and sometimes during the sessions.

5. There were some very individual contributions. For example, one person made a little shrine, struck a bowl, read poems, used the *I Ching*, burned incense, etc. Such contributions were not distractive.

6. The group allowed itself to go right to the edge of distraction without falling off. No-one could tell exactly what distraction was or what the 'rules' were.

7. There were specific issues brought into the spotlight such as the value/threat of Internet. But discussion of these was aligned to upping the degree of 'illumination' they afforded.

8. The reality of a spiritual dimension was generally accepted, with no-one pushing their version of it beyond a certain point.

One of the most significant emergent phenomena from this self-organising group was that of *intensive dialogue between two or three, supported by the attention and facilitation spontaneously offered by the rest of the group.* Between three or five - according to different perceptions of value - of these dialogues arose during the course of the meetings. It was as if the whole group was concerned with extracting, distilling, bringing into the light, an 'essence' from the exchange. It had little to do with coming to any 'agreement'. Only certain kinds of exchange were useful in this way. In these, the people felt concern, even pain, and their beliefs were brought into question; there was passion, sometimes anger, and yet a total respect for each other; there was an involvement that was total. Those in facilitation were not concerned with the usual 'process interpretation' but were themselves involved in the dialogue: sometimes taking sides, or offering another side, all the time dedicated to ensuring that the *intent* of what was being said was recognised and clear.

Such events emerged spontaneously and no-one was credited with making them happen. Someone getting angry and passionate - for example, to say: "We've hardly done anything! We're not where it's at!" - might 'inadvertently' release a dialogue between two other people. It was unpredictable.

Significant were some expressions, attempts, to indicate the 'presence of the divine'. All were respected, but not passively. There was always a degree of *challenge* to any statement. One kind of challenge, for example, was to 'make it happen, now'. Another kind was to remind of the obverse, the demonic side; almost to say that one person's divine light could be the very devil. Sometimes, very careful, very precise explanations of the 'presence of the divine' went on; and questions, 'what does this mean? how does it work?'.

There was an important awareness of the lower-level issues *as lower-level* - the male-female split came up as an issue and had some effect, but was superseded and left behind. It was implicitly, and then explicitly, recognised that such issues were not the real meat of the situation. Going 'through meaning' implies a thread woven through the tangle of interchange. It seemed to me that a kind of story, or drama - maybe more than one - was coming to expression, interspersed with other episodes not so strong. But, it was impossible to treat these other episodes as not-relevant.

What was coming into expression was not at all like a single concept but something that could only be articulated through the uncertainties of the total interchange. It had to be *done* as well as thought.

One of the participants made pictorial and verbal notes, but that was his self-chosen work, permitted by the others. There was almost no regard for 'conclusions'. There was a general understanding that each of us had become 'informed' by the event so as to be more effective in what we did afterwards.

It must be understood that very little theory was introduced or 'applied' during the meetings, though some ideas of 'integrative structure' (my term) were offered to the group by a few of the participants. No structural idea, method or theory was ever adopted. What seemed essential was for every member to apply *themselves* totally to the situation, however they might be able. Thus, one person made observations and comments consistently in precisely measured tones; another wandered the room responding to the dynamic of the moment, yet another spoke close to tears, and so on.

Self-organising systems are systems with many autonomous parts, enclosed in some way, out of the interactions of which (within the enclosure) spontaneously emerge various patterns or orders. This is an extraordinarily interesting process when the autonomous parts carry individual *intentions.* Then, we go beyond the bounds of physical systems into the complexities of human communication: mutually defining reality and creating new meanings. It is possible to offer some 'rules' or 'qualities' of engagement in the process of self-organising dialogue that seem to help its meaningfulness.

1. Listen impartially
2. Accept the 'being' of the person speaking, their integrity in their own terms
3. Challenge any statement made for the sake of truth
4. Obey and support the implicit requirement of enclosure for the group as a whole
5. Recognise different levels of intensity, or quality, or immediacy, or meaning
6. Facilitate the higher levels by whatever means: affirm, negate, mediate, enhance, refine, expand, clarify, question, stay silent .... as needed
7. Actively put oneself into the situation as it is and risk oneself concretely in action
8. Bear the pain of contradiction in oneself, encompassing as much as possible
9. Do not accept any one terminology or framework to be adequate to the description of what is going on, or even any combination of them
10. Do not have any specialisms of role such that anyone is fixed in a role or there are any fixed ideas about roles
11. Make the dialogue as natural, individual, immediate, concrete, and direct as possible
12. Allow the possibility of there being an integrative mode of dynamic, conflicting, complementarity (without it having to be specified) coming from a 'group consciousness'

A question of concern to all, and one being worked at through the three days, was how to make a *direction* to be followed when there was no agreed finite task? The question is subtle, since it seems to call upon and yet reach beyond our various judgements of significance. One member could feel that there was no meaningful direction whatsoever or, if there were, that no movement had been made along it. Another could feel almost the contrary, that progress had been inexorable. However, these very differences were themselves part of the complexity of the process. I

believe it to be the case that most of us felt that we could not put the 'right direction' on one side and the 'differences' as in opposition on the other side.

Quite early on, one of the group began to argue that there could be 'the solution' (to the central problems that concern us in the group and in the world at large) *coming to us* and that we would *not accept* it. Another member took exception to any idea of a perfect answer. Similar themes entered time and again into the exploration of 'divine presence' - which someone stated as 'something infinitely better than *this*'. But there was never any 'agreement' or 'resolution' of these issues. Somehow, it went beyond agreeing or disagreeing.

Similarly, we knew that insights reached at one time were being lost at a later time and yet they were not; as if there was another kind of memory. It was true that in the start of every new session it was always somewhat like starting the group up all over again. There was never on hand any apparent dynamic memory of what had transpired in the previous session. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how much can be reconstructed of the course of events, the interchanges and so on, as a *living stream of meaning.*

I believe that it was felt that any attempt to 'define the process' (the desirable process) necessarily precluded this description as a guide to be followed in an explicit way. This was something more - possibly - than not wanting someone else's scheme to be imposed on oneself. We did create events of a high degree of structure, but the emergence of this structure came from the *meaning* of the event. To set up 'general' structures did not seem to be useful, because it would have inhibited the concreteness of the event. All of us were steeped in archetypal forms but we did not wish to choose any of them in particular. So, some of us had a strong desire for structure while inhibiting any move to put it in place. We had to *work from this contradiction.*

Similarly, as I said at the beginning, some of us wanted to do something of relevance to the suffering of the children in Rwanda, while remaining extremely sceptical of all our good intentions and development programmes. Yes and No at the same time.

Contradiction and concreteness, then, seem the main criteria for going in the direction of *meaning*. The quest for structure remains, but this is the structure that belongs to reality, not to our conceptions of it. Implicit in the experiment is the possibility of a group consciousness that is capable of seeing and acting by real structure in a way that escapes the individual mind. By saying this, I find that I have been seduced into making conclusions.

It is not even possible to say that this meeting was a 'good thing' - simply because it begs the question which was at its core. The truth is that, simply, we have to do things together, we have to meet and talk, and no general method will ever 'work'. Contingency and conflict are integral to what we can do. But, in bearing contradiction in ourselves, individually, we seem to be able to make something possible, something of another order to the usual lies and confusion.

This is the 'price of admission' to a mode of operation that must already be there, permeating all human dialogue, but unnoticed in conceptual thought.

In communicating with some of the participants after the event, it seems to me that the most common experience can only be described as a *feeling*. This may be disappointing in regard to explicating cognitive structures but does not exclude this. The type of feeling we (some of us) have is, I believe, of such a nature that it is intimately allied to cognitive insight as it might arise in the moment. It is a feeling that will draw in experience and develop new meanings; and it may well serve us as a guiding companion on our various journeys into the 'unknown country' that lies ahead.

Afterthoughts

Any systematic analysis of the Meeting would be difficult for many reasons. In particular, it would require extensive material on the content of the discussions as well as on the various episodes of process. One of the strongest impressions I received - echoing what I have been faintly groping for over exceedingly many years - is of process and content as becoming one. This does not mean that the content was the process! Far from it. If anything, the reverse. The tendency to look at process as something in itself apart from the content is, I believe, on the whole misleading. *What* is being spoken of and *how* are really not divided at a triadic level of discourse, or the *why.*

We also face the subtlety of the questions: what was the world we shared in? who made it so? Forty years ago, Solomon Asch framed 'the conditions for effective dialogue' and these have hardly been bettered. They hinge on the production of a 'shared psychological field' by talking about the 'same world' and recognising the basic similarities between humans. Bohm talks about the 'informational field' of the dialogue group, which is nearer to what I want to understand.

The Meeting acquires a world primarily through what I call *monalogue* - not monologue - or monadic discourse. Monalogue is not just one person speaking - it is everyone speaking one at a time. This may seem a trivial point. It is not. I am struggling hard to offset the legacy of systematics in its external and 'classical-observer' form. The real monad is a collection of spirits all doing their thing. In time and space they have to speak one at a time (and some say more than others). Monalogue brings the 'people' into a compresence in which the informational field can manifest.

I am supposing that this field in itself is intelligent. If, for example, we gather to pay attention together to means of solving or alleviating certain world problems, then something is attracted to us. We need not picture it as 'outside' of us - it is up to us how to picture it. But if, for example, we say that all that we will ever find is in our own brains, then we still have the question of access to this stuff! It may be that we cannot access what is really valuable if we are in isolation. It may also be true that this dialogue action, whatever it is, does provide the means of access.

When two people *engage* we have a *dyalogue*. In monalogue, nobody is really addressing another person. Everyone who speaks is representing the whole world of discourse. This ceases with dyalogue. The world is split - however it is split at that moment, in that way. Those involved are *caught up* in the dyad they are making. The energy level goes up, and they become a centre of attention for others in the monad. If the discourse does not simply repeat itself, a peculiar kind of creativity emerges - because the two involved have to find ever new ways of expressing their side of the polarity. This is the hardest thing to maintain. Sometimes it can be helped by others in the group. A point is reached when it is hardly possible for the participants to recognise the dyad with which they originally began.

Another thing can happen, a progression that takes us into *trialogue.* At a certain moment in a dyalogue, someone else can intervene in a strong way - to point out the meaning emerging between them - something they cannot themselves do. It may seem inappropriate, but I am intrigued by the tradition that regards the erotic act as not fulfilled without the third. Sometimes, the third is simply the witness but, at other times, the third person takes a physical role. The very fact that there are others present heighten the dyalogue. When a third person also engages, it is a risky act. How should he speak? His is the task of pure meaning. He has to say what it means. But, as soon as he does so, the dyalogue can cease. It is very rare for the dyadic pair to continue - into another realm.

This successiveness of events is typical and sometimes makes it difficult for the participants to grasp the wholeness of what is happening. Put simply, everything that is 'built up' *has* to be forgotten or put aside just in order for something new to happen.

In my own work I have defined certain 'conscious roles for trialogue' and I have some of my students experimenting with them. A takes the role of asking questions, B of giving answers and C of expressing meaning. They act in the sequence A-B-C-A etc. No 'back and forth' is allowed. Some of the results are extraordinary though in a way difficult to define. Some exchanges remind me of Heidegger's 'Conversation on a Country Path' (between scholar, scientist and teacher) in *Discourse on Thinking* (although the people in question had never read Heidegger). There is, evidently, some distinctive form of mentation engendered by this method.

I have also made some tentative experiments in simply setting dialogue into motion and pointing out the bare forms of monalogue, dyalogue and trialogue - leaving it to the participants to notice or make use of these forms as they appear. In this respect, I think that having the forms in mind makes a difference; but it is essential that the people do not try to make them happen or spend time discussing how they should be implemented. The ideas themselves do all that is necessary. Those that I have mentioned are mere exemplars of the richness of the informational field. It may seem perverse for me to say this, but if there is one rule that should always be applied, whatever the set of ideas, it is that they should be *forgotten* when it comes to the Meeting itself.

Whenever such ideas are, on the contrary, brought into expression and made explicit - it will always seem that people reject, ignore, subvert and otherwise throw them away as irrelevant to their situation. That is fine! When they have been put aside, they can do some useful work. In an important sense, what happens when someone brings in a 'guiding idea', such as some conceptual structure of roles, is that this puts him or her *outside* of the monalogue: the intrinsic immune system then gets to work to fight off the invader. It's quite different when someone says: "My God! Did you see what just happened? This is fascinating. What does it mean?"

There is here involved some fundamental question of *authenticity.* This is something very strong. When we agreed to participate in a group without leaders or agendas, this agreement was substantial - and it did not include being sold any system or method as we went along. This is terribly difficult to write about in cold blood, because there were variety of positions about this, and also a very deep concern with the issues. The point is that all the participants felt and sensed almost instinctively when the bonds of the primordial agreement were being broken.

If three people agree to do trialogue, then that is OK, that is what they have agreed to do. It is perfectly possible for people to come to new agreements in the course of fulfilling an old. I had this within my own experience in the group when, through the helpful assistance and heart-felt counsel of another member, I saw that I had permission to speak in a certain unusual fashion. The emergence of such new agreements is extremely important. They can empower new lines of enquiry and ways of approach. Without them, these same things turn into distractions.

It gets a bit mystical when I now go on to say that trialogue brings in dialogue-agents of another order. Trialogue is the step beyond 'people'. People are confined to monalogue and dyalogue. In trialogue we get beyond asserting and denying. These may still remain, but as a role.

If our Meeting came to fruition, it would realise a synergy with a greater present moment. An Idea would be generated that goes out into the world at large and exerts an influence. It has to be an Idea, since this neither asserts nor denies! That is why we may feel that nothing conclusive came out of the Meeting, or only impressions carried variously by its participants. We spoke of the Divine Presence. There is also the bringing to birth of the Idea.

Now, I believe that an Idea is essentially triadic. That is part of the reason why I am still chary of metaphors - because they are sub-triadic. An Idea encompasses its own limitations and alternatives. Somehow! In a sense, nobody can 'do' anything with it. That is its significance. It is both extensive and intensive, etc.

These descriptions are derived from a symbol known as the *enneagram*, a nine-fold structure depicting transformative processes in three 'dimensions'. The third dimension or realm is sometimes called 'harmonious reconciliation' - though that is too weak an expression. The whole character of the third phase is reconciliation. I can put it simplistically by saying that the first dimension is that of monalogue, the second that of dyalogue and the third that of trialogue. The culmination is a folding of the trialogue back into itself as a higher unity. Here we have what I mean by the Idea. It is then entirely intensive in the experience of the participants, maybe just like a *feeling* as I suggested at the end of my report.

The notes recorded during the sessions were at the level of monalogue. What is in the feeling of the participants is connected with dyalogue. This can be explained in terms of dyalogue providing energy and interest. What eludes us as people is trialogue in which realm the Idea is born and comes to being.

The phenomenology that could have been recorded would have been very rich. For example, we have to have both a time-based sequence of events and also a recurrent pattern of events. In respect of these both, we participants *came to life* at certain critical 'locations' in our various ways. We participated in certain events and not others and we participated in various roles and not others. These performances must have come out of all our experiences in the larger context, and these were 'driving' us. That is why the Idea can, in principle, address the larger issues. As I understand it, the Meeting was an enactment of a world action. We brought the world into the Meeting in ourselves.

I've spent some time on an *enneagram of world views* (in my book *The Intelligent Enneagram*) and it grows more and more fascinating, with no end to it. The interesting thing is to see the dual play of two quite different tendencies, crudely: each view is being pulled into a deeper integration while reacting against the proceeding one. This dual play is that of the triad and the dyad. We could envisage making a description of six views or orientations for the Meeting, in which various of us tried to put together our various views (on the views!). This would then unfold into a dramatic story. The recurring problem is that any specification of the positions raises all sorts of alternatives and confusions. If we had to justify the enneagram, say, as well as our interpretations of it we could never do anything! And then we are back to where we started.

All this leads me to suppose that the 'informational field' has intrinsic properties of structure that do not need to be 'put' into it. This, maybe, is what people come together to discover, or to renew in themselves. The coming together in groups always takes place within a context of other interactions, largely of a more dispersed kind. The archaic form of 'recapitulation' (or renewal) was that of *story*. As that of 'revelation' (or discovery) was *prophesy*. It remains up to us to inspire ourselves towards the discovery of what we really mean.

2. School of Ignorance, Brussels, 1995
A MEETING IN BRUSSELS
SPACE-TIME GEOMETRY OF CONTAINMENT

Twenty people gathered in one of the rooms at 40 rue Washington in Brussels. The door was labelled 'ignorance'. Inside, we sat in a circle prescribed by tables interlocking with each other. On the Saturday evening we met in the attic room of a house. On the Sunday evening we celebrated in a Greek restaurant. On the last day,

we met in the house in the morning (ground floor) and, as people left, the action 'officially' ended but in fact did not end then.

Even more than last time at Minton, it seems impossible to report on any tangible outcome or conclusion.

The seating meant that there was far less mutual physical contact than at Minton, and it was a much more rigid space. This seemed to make the whole group relatively 'less' and encounters between two or three (outside the main sessions) 'more'. The very nature of the 'containment' of this group was very subtle and complex. At one point, it became quite tangible: when one member quit the group to find that she was locked inside the building. On two occasions, a few members left the main group for a time; both occasions associated with strong passions. Both in time and space, then, this group was a complex entity. I found it afterwards very hard to reconstruct any coherent form and sequence. I don't remember what happened as a story, but as a partial and fragmentary mosaic of glimpsed events and statements. What follows is put down simply for the sake of trying.

Dances of the Dyads

It seemed to me that confrontation *without reconciliation* was more the order of the day. The qualitative model that had emerged from Minton went to the wall. In this may be a teaching:

in no way whatsoever should we work by adherence to any model of what is desirable

There were dominant 'themes': the theme of the violence of the world being present; the theme of 'silence'; the theme of 'demon and angel'; the theme of energy as a 'monster', amongst others I may have forgotten. None of these themes was 'worked through' or 'resolved'. There remained the issues of: false and authentic silence; the alternation between perceived roles of devil and angel; the contradiction or complementarity of passion and truth. Perhaps the big issue revolved the recurrent question of how much and in what way the 'evil' of the world is in the group and what this means. But, for myself, I can feel and sense and 'be' in these themes like no others. Which leads me to suggest that:

reality does not have to be 'understood' - as if understanding could 'encompass' reality - understanding is only a part of reality and, whatever understanding we come to, reality is always more and will challenge what our understanding is - if we are in a reality situation

The main issue for me was that of choice in the moment of intervening or not intervening in the dialogue. I felt that this was the main thing and it pointed to the mind being at a loss. The mind reports, 'I wanted to intervene but I didn't'. So we become involved in something we do not know and do not understand, but which may understand *us.* I confess to favouring the idea of 'another kind of logic' working with the material of the whole. I even feel blatant enough to claim that what is at stake is this:

passing from control from the mind to control from the soul

Pattern

One aspect of our working relates to synchronicity. What one of our members does with this explicitly is indicative. But it is also for all of us. Creating events such as this meeting leads us towards noticing synchronous phenomena. It is quite possible and desirable that we become more sensitive in this area and learn to shift from working in terms of mechanisms to working in terms of *patterns*. I myself was amazed that a locution from the statue of Mary (across the street) proved to be of real intelligence. An important aspect of this area is being suggested to me, from an extension of the

apparent incoherence or 'brokenness' of reasoning that seems to prevail in the collective, that:

what we are finding is a way of speaking with each other that is less and less concerned with 'communication' in the old sense but more and more with transmitting and exchanging who we are: dwelling in our being through speech, we are a pattern dwelling in our being, and through speech we reveal a pattern

The Meaning of Silence

We might, in principle, look forward to speaking with each other in almost unintelligible ways. We might come to accept not making sense in any obvious way. Maybe this would be a mistake and there is a good reason why we try to be clear and rational? We should not deliberately talk nonsense, but realise that *what* we are saying always fails to catch the real process. We are being taught that *we are not understanding*. It is radically important that we refine our analyses and categories, etc. to the utmost we can and with utter effort at precision - just so that we can be shown that none of that 'cuts it'. This is not to wallow in failure but to become open to a wonder. What we often feel or judge as failure is a 'silencing of our effort': a *deep* form of *silence*. Something of another order in oneself, in ourselves, steps forward into the breech and 'speaks'.

Maybe, this 'something' was foreshadowed by a coming of silence into the group. The issue of silence seemed to me to revolve around whether silence came from within (or the soul) or from without (or the mind). There were two kinds of silence that took place. And, no matter what role we played, we could not be sure which was which until it happened.

The stepping forward of another order seems to me in *contrast* with a basic phenomenon of the group: when, in order to make a thought 'take effect' or impress others, we step forward into an 'energy-body'. In more prosaic terms, we take on a passionate stance. At times, this energy-stance is like a *monster*. It seems to me to work according to its own laws. The fusion of thought and passion strikes me as a major concern. Is what I'm calling 'energy' a bit like how technology is for us in the world at large?

The energy vector is indifferent to the actual content of thought. Thinking and energy are so to say at right angles to each other.

In the real silence, we do not need this model or any model. It eludes me how we can express the feeling that the 'real' silence contains more information than any combination of speech. But I also feel that we have to have won an 'ableness' to 'be' in the silence and not pretend.

Being There

The fragmentation, indecision and even antagonisms of the group have been suggested as a reflection of the world crisis. I suggest we can flip it in a totally other way and be led into an awareness of ourselves which far transcends what is usually called 'meditation'. Just imagine becoming hip to all these same phenomena as they are operating from *moment to moment* in each of us *individually.*

In the face of this reality of fluctuating complexity, the temptation has been to seek for ever more articulate and elaborate structures -- as if by a sufficient expansion of the order of structure we could keep pace with the expansive complexifying-fragmenting order of things. The message I received was the opposite: that we need to reduce structure to being, to the monad, to just 'what is there'. And *this tends to happen anyway*.

The form that this 'report' has taken suggests something, too: that general conclusions and reporting itself are both suspect; that what counts are specific messages:

by participating through speech in our being we receive instructions for the future

In the ordinary sphere, people learn lessons retrospectively which they then strive to project into the future, because they believe themselves to *have seen*.

it is has cost us a great deal to learn how to be ignorant and still we not know what ignorance is - but, by becoming ignorant, we become capable of receiving new kinds of information that would, otherwise, be occluded by information we have previously believed

and

we are blundering into formats whereby we are 'forced' into admitting the ignorance we already have so that it can have an effect on us

Mutual Cancellation

More than at Minton, every propositional or value-stance expressed by one was rapidly denied, vetoed, or in some way 'cancelled out' by another. In principle, this might mean that we are being forced to relinquish these stances more and more rapidly, rather than we are just becoming more critical and unhelpful towards each other. Maybe, *all* these stances are besides the point and have to be cancelled out. This begs the question of what the hell is left, then? Somebody says: "Shut the fuck up!" (not unkindly). So, what do we do next?

We carry on as before. And every step or proposition is getting cancelled out as we go, so that we do not go anywhere. Perhaps if we 'got somewhere' we would be leaving the *present moment* behind. Perhaps we are being 'forced' to dwell in the present moment, to work at its sustenance, just in order to become aware, gradually, that it is infinitely full. Our values, opinions, ideas, stances, all carry us out of the present moment -- so that we never know what is really happening or why. These thoughts are offered according to the principle

if something appears to be consistently going wrong, let's treat this as a hidden virtue and change our thinking about it

On a more evident level, it seemed to me that there was at work some simple equation of balance between pain and joy, anger and love, cancelling out in the collective but heavily distinguished in the individual. It seems to me impossible to even pretend that what happened in this meeting was the 'same' for all. I left riven by love and hardly know or guess how it was for others.

The impact of the total event of the meeting was so strong and deep, while all the external evidence pointed towards complete uselessness and failure of attainment. Is this another aspect of the 'sum-zero' principle by which our miraculous discoveries are possible without disrupting the balance of the universe?

Zerologue

Sometimes I wonder whether what 'we are after' is akin to 'zerologue': not an increasingly structured and coherent exchange between us but simply a speaking forth into that space which listens for us and in us and is wiser than us. The space many of us have spoken about.

I am tempted into fantasy: that during the meeting other spirits came out of the totality and took over our bodies and we are not the same as we were. When we came together perhaps other beings came as well and God knows what the real transaction was.

In more prosaic terms, I believe that when we focus a certain level of process in our attention that another, higher level of process is also invoked, willy-nilly. This is not under our control and we might as well face it. What is under our control is just what has always been more or less under our control all along. Hence:

we are gradually becoming used to allowing a higher-order process work in us as we work on something together at which we constantly fail and find new ways of failing at

3. Extracts from a Report on a Conference relating to the work of J.G. Bennett, Charles Town, 1994
A Conference of Remembrance and Revelation

Evaluating in the Flow

I must point out that it is next to impossible for any one member of such an event to present an over-all view of what happened that will be generally acceptable. Audio and video tape can provide some objective material but it all needs active interpretation, some pulling out of what it all means! Some sporadic filming and taping was done (in the face of some opposition), including the whole of the last 150-strong meeting that included some very sensitive and personal material

In general, recording suggests some degree of objectivity. What is harder to come to is 'taking the measure' of the course of events: making an evaluation of its form and sequence. Any such evaluation, if it is expressed, contributes to the melange out of which the event is shaped. Willy-nilly, it influences how we comport ourselves in the group operations. We have to ask: What is the 'measure' we mentioned above? A measure implies a standard. In this sort of case, the standard is purposeful and of the nature of values. I would go so far as to say that the measure is of the *amount of God in operation*: the 'God-quotient' to put it blatantly and crudely.

This was somewhat prefigured in the Minton House report, but only very tentatively. The idea of *God* enters for a very good reason that, strangely enough, has very little to do with belief. It is that we enter a region of possible *progress* that, by its very nature, must transcend current evaluation and goal-seeking. It is *not* cybernetic and it is *not* fulfilling an aim. 'God' as purpose beyond our current aims makes some basic kind of sense and serves as a convenient short-hand.

A Change of Content

The conference involved almost two hundred people. These were people who had been touched by the work of John Bennett. Some had been with him in person in the early days (pre 70s) at his centre in Coombe Springs near London. Others had met him during the series of courses he designed (and ran until his death in 1974) at Sherborne House in Gloucestershire, or had attended courses that followed on from the Sherborne experiment in the centre at Claymont in West Virginia. The conference was loosely structured and sessions were run of various kinds. I managed to instigate a series of dialogues, and a session for more than a hundred people.

An important shift came about when the teenagers who had been brought up at Claymont together offered to speak about what they thought and felt. They had loved running free and wild - but with the advantage of many 'extra parents', as some of them put it. They felt they had gained something precious and useful for their lives but, probably, would not live in such a community with their own children. The issue of the youngsters was most important because there was a general feeling that the young were no longer attracted to the 'work' in its traditional guise.

At a later session (in fact, next day) the 'elders' spoke their piece. This was excellent: the voices of experience put together with the voices of inexperience, producing, I believe, in most of us the sense that experience hardly mattered. What is that core sense of which Bennett often spoke when he said: "We are all in the same boat."? There was a sense in which people were beginning to say it *as they experienced it.* This implied or carried with it an increasing sense of lack of central authority, not simply as a privation but as *integral to our story*.

That both the young and the old had been willing to throw their experiences into the same pot was significant. This was the 'making of a monad' which had the character of 'all this, etc.' which was in process in the present moment. It was an acceptance of the lack of central authority and, consequently, also an invocation of what can compensate for that: some other kind of authority as yet unspecified.

After the teenagers had said their piece, small groups convened as before but, there was not enough time for them to re-convene into the larger group for shared presentations.

Later that day, I was given the opportunity to 'chair' a session. I was asked to open up the format and explore beyond the questions that were being asked. I confess that I already had a visualisation going in me of the *total group* in process together and not in small groups. This has been inspired in me from the Minton House event and the idea of Tony Judge that we should address ourselves to self-organising groups in dialogue on the scale of 100 members. Now, I was in a position to induce such an operation, however marginal might prove my influence.

What I did was to emphasise four main ideas: that Bennett's work extended far beyond its representation by the people at the Conference; that, perhaps in contrast with Gurdjieff, he was concerned with the Unknown as something we have to deal with *directly*; that the word 'work' so often used in reference to his enterprise obscured the importance of communication on all levels, including communication with higher intelligence; and that his last personal task was concerned with the nature of worship in the future. I also commented on his predilection for 'democracy' and what this could mean.

It should be fairly obvious that these descriptions of Bennett's work were also, in fact, a set of cues for the work of the total group. I more or less began my talk by saying that there is a capacity for dealing with this large kind of meeting that has to be developed.

The ensuing action went by itself. Enough of the people could tune into the spirit of these ideas for the group as a whole to begin to take on life. Naturally enough, a few reverted to the old format and left to work in their small groups. The majority stayed. Those with no experience of leaderless groups were rather dismayed by the anarchy. Others were enlivened. A few spoke from their hearts and the energy level rose.

During the course of the ensuing, there was a move to 'sit in silence together'. This I challenged, but without rejection of the value of silence. A group sitting in silence can be a wonderful thing but silence is tricky to manage. Some silence happened. It had to happen as the few leaving had to happen. As so many things have to happen - just in order to point out what is being missed or forgotten or misunderstood - so many things that are neither good not bad but just variations in a play of opposites.

I find it useful to picture to myself a kind of scale or measure: at one end, we have people talking about something that is always 'elsewhere' while, at the other, the people are directly 'doing it' in the present moment. The 'elsewhereness' includes: the past, the future, the larger scale, the higher, the spiritual, the within, etc. Then, speech serves to *distance* people from what they speak about. In the other pole, in contrast, speech serves a *participation* in what is spoken about.

Monadic Dialogue

Some of the participants tried to make experiments in the structuring of the groups. For example, some tried to merge two of the groups together; but it was resisted. The structure laid down continued in effect, even when people disagreed with it. Some stayed away from sessions they did not like. It was astonishing to see the abject slavery that prevailed and confirmation of Anthony Judge's report on his recent experiences during a conference of people being quite 'will-less'. It really seemed to me that we gave up our will to an external authority in accepting the form of proceedings and, once having done so, had no way to regain this will or *initiative*. Because I had been ill on the first day, but had a chance to discuss what was going on with some of the participants, perhaps I was in an advantageous position: I had not taken on the programming and could still do something. I was one of the people consulted before the Conference, as well as being a long-time friend of the main convenor, who was Bennett's eldest son. Having a connection with the 'sponsor' is useful if you want to change things.

I have already mentioned the presentation I gave to open up the possibility of a total group exchange. In previous plenary sessions, the proceedings (so I was told) were long-winded and clumsy, falling back out of real time into mere reportage. When we had the panels of the Young and the Old, the audience was more alive. Here, however, the comments were addressed to the 'panel' and from the 'panel' and there was, as yet, no true interchange. When the total group opened up after my presentation, we began to have some *present moment* expressions: people began to speak of what was moving them or becoming meaningful to them at the time. This is what I call *monadic dialogue* (or 'monalogue') and it is a step forward from mere reportage or commenting.

Because there is a degree of spontaneity at work, some people will feel emotionally released and others will feel threatened or uncomfortable. There is humour and there is anger. This emotion and feeling is a necessary thing. During this process, however, it is very difficult for people to grasp and retain the points that are being made. They are often very personal in tone. There is very little in the way of exchange of one on one. What is happening is that the *group* is beginning to find its own voice.

One interesting aspect of the gathering and the putting together of the several voices, that intrigued me greatly in retrospect (though I had mentioned it in my talk) was its echoing of Bennett's concern with 'structural communication'. He had recognised that effective communication does not take place through the transmission of bits of information but through patterns of information. The process is facilitated when the participants share in a common field of information that has been articulated into discrete units of meaning. Before embarking on the Sherborne experiment, Bennett had not only established a business based on this idea but was using it in the transmission of 'work' ideas. However, because the business failed and structural communication was not used at Sherborne, the method had fallen out of sight. The insight remains. And it raises the question why someone like myself who knew such a method did not even attempt to introduce it into the proceedings.

Holding a period of silence is as much an imposition of a method, only the 'culture' is more disposed towards silence than to articulated communication. Very probably, there is a working assumption that 'more subtle' matters belong to an 'unconditioned' or even 'formless' world where speech can only founder. I think that is a mistake and one that has been fairly precisely laid out by Bennett himself in numerous books.

However that may be, it seems to me that having in one's attention a readiness for such things as 'structural communication' actually invokes the same into operation. This is the critical and usually unacknowledged part of 'emergence' or 'self-

organisation': that there is something capable of *recognising* a manifestation of another order that helps to 'pull' it into being. That is why it may well be essential for participants in groups to have been alerted to certain possibilities or they just will not appear to happen.

My description of the event is being outstripped by my interpretation of it: evaluation and theory exceeding reportage. Added to this, by the nature of the event itself and because of my own state of health, I came away with little awareness of the precise contributions of others to the evolution of the group action. In some ways, this is desirable. It could be said that we do not and cannot know what the others are 'really up to'.

The question of the 'others' in the group is surpassed and redefined by the question of whether or not the 'group' is something in its own right, having an intelligence and consciousness corresponding to its own nature. Interestingly enough, this raises the possibility that the various dispersed 'identities' in the group - signified by the 'people' of which it is composed - can become unified in a way corresponding to the possible unification of the 'many I's' of the single person. It is more than likely that the dominant metaphor someone has for personal unification will influence them in thinking of group unification. For example, one metaphor of personal unification is to 'bring in' a 'master' or authority capable of 'taking control'. A quite different metaphor is that of the 'communion of saints' in which the multiple become perfected together.

Effective Neutralisation

An interesting move in the group dynamics came as a suggestion that people work in pairs so that each person could have chance to say what they wanted to without the intimidation of a group. Many people adopted this suggestion. Others formed the more usual groups.

In the afternoon, when a session on groups was held, we found the chairs and cushions arranged in a circular manner for the first time. But there was a reversion to the previous format of having an introduction and then splitting into small groups. George, as the sponsor, was able to insert a variation. It would have been impossible for anyone else to have done this. His move was to amalgamate groups in pairs. I myself added a small personal variation in joining a different group to that I had been assigned.

At this juncture, I want to refer to the work that has been done in recent years along the lines of 'Bohmian dialogue'. Here, where there is no agenda, no leader and no technique, some interesting phenomena have been observed. In particular, some people have discovered that what they thought or felt was happening was not true but the opposite. What is that nearly everyone feels in a leaderless group? Surely, it is that all the good ideas get lost in the melee, that no one listens when a suggestion is made to help things run more smoothly, that no progress is made in any direction, etc., etc.? John Briggs, who took part in such a group for two years, writes:

> "I would often times feel myself pitted against the group, unable to persuade the others to see my point of view. However, when I would listen to the tapes I would realise that my point of view had been subtly adopted by everyone. Other people also reported having this experience.
>
> ". . . one of the irritating aspects of 'dialoguing' was our inability to agree on any theory about what was going on. Yet, that seemed fitting, because we began to appreciate our different points of view not as sources of conflict but as sources of dialogue itself - a basis for social creativity. Of course, not everyone in the group agreed with that point of view, either." [Quoted in Martin Weisbord's *Discovering Common Ground*]

The most common complaints about leaderless groups are that they don't get anywhere and nobody listens to anyone else. As the quote suggests, the reality may be quite different. What is seen and felt by a person taking part in such a group is quite different from that 'seen and felt' by the *group as a whole*. The group is operating in an 'expanded present moment': a concept that is apposite here because of the particular inner exercise undertaken at the Conference. However, I must remark that the mutual relevance of the inner exercise to the group 'discovery' was not understood at the time and, speaking for myself, only 'arrived' a few days after the Conference ended! This, again, illustrates the significance of the 'expanded present moment'.

The effective present moment of the person and that of the group are different. This means also that their 'logic' differs: what may seem to be the case in one kind of present moment may not in the other. For the logic of the expanded present moment of the group to prevail, the logic of the persons must be *neutralised.* The whole point of having a group is to tap into a type of intellection and awareness that is not possible in isolation. However, if we imagine that we *as persons* can do this, we are in a contradiction, because the logic of persons *excludes* the logic of the group.

The trick is that *the logic of the group includes that of persons*.

The asymmetry between the two logics is a primary fact that obtains between two levels of operation. The 'greater' includes the 'lesser' but not vice versa. So, what is the lesser to do about this? It cannot cease to act - as the 'silence model' might persuade us to believe - but *it can act severally so that every postulate, every move, is effectively neutralised by another*.

This inevitably means that the group seems to get nowhere and decide nothing. It seems like this to those who participate in it. If, however, they are able to reflect on the totality then, like John Briggs, they may come to feel differently. The progress that is made is *subtle* and, very likely, can never be reduced to or captured in any definitive text or statement. This, of course, raises the question of how the 'result' can be carried and transmitted. The answer to this question is likely to be that it cannot be 'transmitted' at all but can only re-emerge in future experience of a similar kind.

In what I call 'effective neutralisation' the level of intent and understanding of the participants is superseded through a kind of 'mutual cancellation pact'. This may serve to explain why it is that groups appear committed to achieving nothing and their members hell bent on blocking each other as much as possible. The point is a subtle one. No one wants to work in groups with neurotic and dysfunctional people. There has to be a measure of good will.

The precision of mutual cancellation comes about by what I call *dyalogue.* In dyalogue, every proposition invokes its opposite. If the group members can accept this with cheerful mien (even without!) then the deeper action of the group can proceed. If the members of the group cannot accept 'their' ideas being destroyed, the group will not work. The point is: how else is something new or deeper to be learned except through the death of the older and more superficial?

The Holy One

The new amalgamated group I happened to be in proved interesting. At the very least, the necessary vigour of contrasting views surfaced. There were the beginnings of the energy of *dyalogue*. Members of some of the other groups, making their way back to the main hall for the plenary session, stopped by to hear what was going on. When we re-assembled in plenary session, the atmosphere was quite relaxed. There was little of the anxiety that some had felt the previous night, after my talk, when it seemed that 'anarchy' threatened (as some people expressed it).

Here, however, I must confess to a personal hiatus in that I cannot recall nor find record of anything that was said at this meeting. This, in its own way, exemplifies the principle of 'effective neutralisation'. However, from the theoretical standpoint, effective neutralisation is not a null-state. What is neutralised belongs to the personal level and this, in its wake, liberates something on the group level, or in the relatively greater present moment.

In my own reflections I have come to refer to this 'something' as an Idea. The qualifying characteristic for an Idea is that it *neither affirms nor denies.* Agreement and disagreement are both, therefore, irrelevant and it is then impossible not to be influenced by an Idea. In some way or other, the Idea will manifest. Another way of looking at this phenomenon is that the Idea is *pure information* and operates in a way that by-passes the interplay of affirmation and denial, or *authority.* An Idea cannot belong to any person. If a person gives it voice, he or she will do so 'almost under duress' because it has to be separated from their own volition.

This has certainly been my own experience. In the case of the Conference, I found myself giving voice to 'the Idea' during the final total group meeting, the morning of the last day. The form given to this expression was a terse and emotional statement concerning the nature of God and worship.

The main assertion I made was on the following lines:

> The only true act of worship is done by God not by people. Therefore, it seems to me that there is no possibility of ever coming to the act of worship other than what we have. We gather as flesh and blood in a physical space and, often, we try to imagine a higher connection, a deeper reality somewhere else, which we are going to get into communication with - more profound energies, cosmic beings, saints who are dead and transmissions from centuries past - anything except 'here we are'.

> And so, God is you. God is us. And there isn't anything else, there never has been. God is never elsewhere.

> Like Bennett said himself, the greatest fact, mystery, of the last two thousand years is that Man hasn't accepted his salvation. All he had to do was to accept it.

> In the true act of worship, all one has to do is accept it ... because God is us. Like the Simurgh. [The 'thirty birds' described in the Sufi Attar's text *Conference of the Birds* who after many severe trials and losses finally arrive at God to discover that they are He]

When I say that 'I gave voice' to the Idea, it encourages a misconception of ownership or speciality. The Idea remains as the property of the whole and not of any person. My expression must, inevitably, be incomplete. . . .

I also think it is necessary to remark that 'worship' had been one of Bennett's main concerns as he neared his death. It is in the nature of the Idea that it fulfils everything from all aspects. The question of true worship becomes the same as the question of groups acting without a central authority. There is only One and the One is Holy: to play on words, it is both empty and whole. I can only intimate that what I was enabled to say has given me a powerful direction of research.

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