

**Centering Prayer – James Carow**

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## ACTIVE MENTATION

*Written for my talk at the All and Everything Conference in Saffle, Sweden, this year*

In a kiss, why should  
I wonder what I am  
While the kiss tells  
Me convincingly I  
Do not need to ask?

In a sight of birds  
Why should I pause  
Assess my state and give report  
To ponder over in  
Boring times?

In a catching of the breath  
Why should I worry over what is seen  
When all has gone already  
Into images that can only fade?

In a thought of thought  
Why should I be concerned  
With reasoning, when  
I am filled with fulfilling  
Laughter that erases me?

So time has won,  
But taken nothing from me  
And in immortal victory  
My pleasure lies  
Everlastingly.

*Anthony Blake*

## CENTERING PRAYER

James Carow



James Carow and Thomas Keating

We are not the only ones on a path. God is on a path too. And his path winds its way through our own bodies, minds and hearts. It helps if we give him some space to maneuver, and we do that if we consent to his presence and action within.

The practice of cultivating that consent, for many of us on a Christian path, is centering prayer. It is a prayer of silence and surrender. When we give ourselves over to the divine presence and action within, a new dynamic arises. God takes a more active role in our inner process. A new dimension slowly arises in the inner life. There may be palpable consolation and healing. There may be the felt presence of God. There will, in any case, be a slow unfolding of a deeper relationship with the Invisible.

There is also a gradual purification of our “immature desires” as Thomas Merton so nicely put it. We are willing to cling less tightly to the previous means of transient satisfaction. We flee less vigorously from the pain of life. While I find myself taking one step at a time, putting one foot in front of the other, I also find myself doing so with a clearer sense of the Invisible as something alive, loving, and committed to our eventual union.

Centering prayer is one form of contemplative prayer, that is, prayer which is intended to cultivate silence and openness to God. It proceeds from our own volition. Contemplation itself, on the other hand, may be described as silent prayer being visited upon us from above. It is infused. We cannot do it; we can only receive it. Contemplative prayer, then, is seen as a form of preparation for contemplation.

Centering prayer in its contemporary form was developed by Frs. William Menninger, Thomas Keating, and Basil Pennington in the early 1980's at St. Joseph's Abby in Massachusetts. It is based on the anonymous fourteenth century work *The Cloud of Unknowing* in which the author advises us that “A naked intent direct to God is sufficient without anything else.”<sup>1</sup>

In the practice of centering prayer one

- chooses a word or an awareness of the breath to serve as the symbol of one's intention to consent to God's presence and action within
- introduces the word or awareness of breath with an interior disposition towards consent
- and then returns to the word or breath whenever one notices that other impressions or thoughts have entered one's awareness

There is a repeated redirection of one's awareness towards the word or breath as a symbol of one's intention. This cultivates an interior silence that often restores a deeper equilibrium and sense of peace. It is very healing. It also allows the release of unconscious thoughts, feelings, and desires that may be very disruptive to our immediate sense of calm. But this is also part of the healing process. By cultivating detachment from those thoughts and feelings during prayer, we cultivate detachment from misguided and excessive desires and aversions. Equally importantly, we cultivate a capacity for detachment and presence in the midst of daily activity.

That detachment from the old rewards and worries may add up to repentance or metanoia. This is not regret over prior mistakes. It is a "new mind" in the literal sense of the Greek. As Keating likes to put it, we are changing our programs for happiness. We have been looking for happiness and fulfillment in all the wrong places. We need to look someplace new and that place is in relationship to the higher. Over time we "dismantle the false self;" we begin to live out of our true selves. Thus we judge centering prayer not by the experience during prayer but by its fruits in our daily lives.

I would emphasize five features of this prayer and the spiritual path:

- the essential role of intention
- relationship with the divine
- seeing the divine in all things
- interior healing and unity
- the emergence of conscious, free choice

## **Intention**

In my own experience, the sacred word began as a symbol of my intention to consent, but over time it became a palpable gesture. There gradually emerged a clear interior sense of volition in the act of interior surrender. Now, the focal point that initially served as a symbol and an entry point into silence is no longer so necessary. This naturally varies from day to day, but the quality of the intention—of the surrender itself, really—has grown clearer and stronger over time.

Keating places great emphasis on the fact that centering prayer is a practice of intention not attention. That used to seem rather like a distinction without a difference. But over time it has come to seem very true. One Buddhist writer noted that any mindfulness practice has three aspects: intention, attention, and attitude. Each of those three aspects differs from practice to practice. They may differ in their quality as well as "how much" one puts into it. That is to say, any one of those three aspects may differ in hue as well as saturation. For example, welcoming prayer, a prayer form developed later in the centering prayer movement, calls for a shift in one's attitude and feeling. It is most commonly practiced in the context of negativity, and one begins with a focused awareness of the sensations and feelings of the present moment. One then evokes a welcoming attitude or feeling towards those very sensations or feelings that are causing the discomfort. And finally one lets go of the desire to change the present moment. The essence of it lies in the welcoming. It is a change of heart and a welcoming acceptance of one's own inner

difficulty in the moment. In so doing, it also facilitates a deeper acceptance of oneself while softening the negativity.

So there is a palpable difference in the three practices with which I am most familiar: Buddhist mindfulness puts most emphasis on attention, centering prayer puts most emphasis on intention, and welcoming prayer puts most emphasis on attitude. Each has its own flavor and its own results. While each draws us nearer to our core, centering prayer for me has facilitated the most interior movement.

## **Relationship**

In centering prayer we also emphasize that prayer is relationship. There is something about prayer as relationship that is closely related to intention. When I transitioned from Buddhist meditation to centering prayer, I did not change my posture or my focus on the out-breath as it exits my nostrils. I changed my intention and made it the primary element. Where my previous intention had been a little nebulous, it was essentially to enter into silence. In centering prayer my intention is to consent to God's presence and action within. This is inherently a matter of relationship. When I sit across the table from you sipping my tea and look into your eyes, intention is alive. Keating has always emphasized the centrality of intention and that prayer is relationship, but I never really saw it until one day during a walking meditation between sessions of centering prayer. Then I suddenly began to see the quality of intention as distinct from attention—and how that was linked to relationship. Intention itself somehow brings one into relationship with the Invisible in a way that paying attention does not.

## **Seeing**

One begins to see the divine at work and expressing itself in all things. This is essentially a universal understanding among Christian contemplatives: that as we deepen our connection with God, we begin to see God in all things. To the extent I see God expressing himself in people, I think it is related to me letting down my own defenses and having more compassion. I also find myself more sensitive to nature, and I recall my sense of the profound sanctity of nature the first time I did the movement "Hymn to the Sun" at sunrise.<sup>2</sup> Creation is "saturated with divinity," to borrow an expression from one Hindu teacher.

## **Healing**

We have all been deeply wounded and Keating's psychology emphasizes the childhood origin of much of that. Those wounds and the challenges of early life gave rise to the complexity of illusions and defense mechanisms that we call the false self. Over time, as we mature and struggle to cultivate meaningful lives and relationships, we come to some healing. Centering prayer facilitates that process by opening us to the divine healing influence. It works through prayer and consolation directly. It works through life and our loved ones indirectly.

Healing over time yields a deeper unity. We shed the old defense mechanisms and eventually can come to our true selves. This does not happen overnight, of course. It takes time. But with some healing, the biggest obstacle—our self-reproach—is lessened and we are more easily led by God along our true paths.

### **Conscious choice**

As we mature, our choices in life become more conscious. They are less determined by unconscious desires and aversions. They flow more from what we see, and we see more clearly as the blinders of the false self are lifted. The choice between consenting to the higher and pulling back from one's next step on the path becomes a little more vivid.

### **My personal path**

Not long after beginning centering prayer my inner life changed dramatically. At an extended retreat at Snowmass, Colorado, God opened my heart with “wounds of love” and opened my eyes with deeper insight into myself and my relationship with him. I saw that self-reproach was the single biggest obstacle on the path for myself and many others. I realized that I was more given to devotional spirituality than I ever expected. It was also pointed out that my own interior experiences were “giving forth...both warmth and light to their Beloved.” I would never have noticed or even thought of that had it not been pointed out in a poem by John of the Cross.<sup>3</sup> Over time the significance of that has grown even more clear.

We give warmth and light to the Beloved not just in moments of intense feeling but in all the daily moments of struggle, sacrifice, and awakening. We are “lightening the sorrow of our Common Father”<sup>4</sup> in some real way with every inner and outer movement that draws us closer to the center regardless of whether we feel it or are consoled by it.

But I have also not found it so simple to stay on track. Four years after the Snowmass experience my wife and I moved. I lost touch with my previous supports. I took it for granted that my path would continue like it had been. I did not expect that I could slide into negative states the way I later did. The path then was no longer a process of unfolding, it was a matter of painful struggle. Only after a jarring awakening on an annual retreat did I reconnect and get back on track. Not that I had let go of centering prayer; there were just deeper attachments and a deeper resistance that eventually had to be overcome.

The ongoing practice of centering prayer has brought me back to a clearer sense of where I belong and what I need to be doing. I struggle against my misguided attachments and distractions. I participate in the movements which, more than before, seem to express a link to the Invisible. I engage in dialogue and cultivate relationships to the extent I can. Life unfolds again and myself with it.

### **God's path**

To go back to the beginning, we do well to remember that, from my perspective, God is on a path too. He desires union with us. He desires expression in and through us. That is a complicated, winding path through our complicated psyches in a complicated world that requires doing.

Whatever practice we have that takes us to a deeper place gives God a little more space, a little more room to maneuver in our lives. In consenting to his influence we allow ourselves to be healed and redirected. With his help, over time, we begin to unify around that part in us that is faithful to truth. And God gets a little closer to where he is going.

## Notes

- 1 Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Trans. Ira Progoff
- 2 “Hymn to the Sun” is one of Gurdjieff’s sacred dances or movements, traditionally done at sunrise on the equinox facing east.
- 3 St. John of the Cross, “The Living Flame of Love,” *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pp. 578-579.
- 4 G. I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*, p. 386

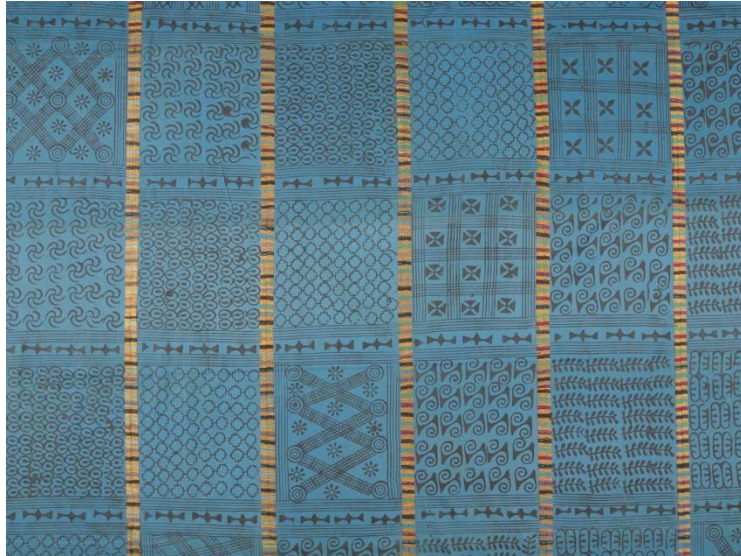
## Further reading:

1. Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing: A New Translation of the Classic 14<sup>th</sup> Century Guide to the Spiritual Experience*. Trans. Ira Progoff. Delta. 1957.
2. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, Trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, Otilio Rodriguez, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979.
3. Fr. Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, Element, 1986. This is the standard introduction to centering prayer. There is an excellent summary of the Christian contemplative tradition and good detail on centering prayer itself.
4. Fr. Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, Element, 1992. Good material on the stages of the spiritual path including a detailed discussion of the night of sense and the night of spirit as described by St. John of the Cross. In these two titles one can begin to immerse oneself in Keating’s view of humanity, God, and the spiritual path. There is a lightness to it that is uplifting.
5. Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, Cowley, 2004. Excellent discussion of centering prayer, the psychology of centering prayer, and the Christian tradition with insights drawn from her background in the Gurdjieff work.
6. David Frenette, *The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening Your Experience of God*, Sounds True, 2012. While I haven’t read the book yet, I have been impressed by David’s presentations and his appreciation of the subtleties of deepening prayer and the experience of God in everything.

## MUSCULPT: A SACRED CLOTH ONCE GIFTED

William Pensinger

Setting aside for the moment the issue of orders of logical-value and how they differ from degrees of freedom of a representation space (logical values operate on and/or in degrees of freedom), one major difference I see between how the third dimension is represented on the two-dimensional



**West African Cloth**

picture plane via linear and atmospheric perspective and how dimensional relations greater than three can be "represented" in lower dimensions is that linear and atmospheric perspective are illusionistic while at higher dimensions than three mathematical metaphor is the essential means relied upon to convey meaning in a lower dimensional context. The difference between these is essentially the difference between simile and metaphor, simile and metaphor not in "natural language" but in mathematics and "form [language] in process". The meaning of the thing is the-thing to the illusionist in his simile-bound mind; metaphor incorporates simile and more, for the meaning of the thing is not-the-thing when metaphorically mathematicized. The illusionist crutch is imposed by the enculturation of post-Renaissance, pre-Medieval, post-Homeric (all too frequent New Realisms are like a saddle-block fever or cyclically reappearing cognitive deficit) single-valued binary logic. This is important because most everything one reads about the area involves that or this attempt to give an illusionist portrait of higher dimensional meaning. All popular accounts I've seen, for instance, of the content of Coxeter's book *Regular Polytopes* (the regular polyhedra in dimensions higher than three) rely on attempted illusionist renderings. Coxeter and other mathematicians who work in this area, however, rely only on algebraic notation. What, exactly, this algebraic notation signifies is open to considerable question. I am sure it reveals something about higher dimensional structures and their "equivalents" (technical definitions of what "equivalent" means relative to polytopes are given; what the meaning is of what these technical definitions mean is open to considerable question: contemporary mathematicians, to the great detriment of mathematics, don't generally concern themselves with the meaning of the meanings they establish or discover) in lower dimensions, but I am equally sure that far more is not revealed than is revealed. Coxeter provides a single-logically-valued binary account of regular polytopes as the regular polytopes (the meaning of the thing is the-thing), which when comprehended with m-valued logics most assuredly are more fully understood as "skew-parallel figures" existing at correspondent "apokritical intervals" defining the degree of "identity in diversity" they mean with their structural



properties, to employ J. G. Bennett's terminology. The term employed in MOON for this meaning is "identity transparency". In modern mathematics, unfortunately, structure is meaning, even when functions are portrayed: the structure of the function is the meaning of the function. Of course, the meanings of the meaning are many, and everyone has their own perspective on those meanings of meaning, but that's what the m-logically-valued is the compass of -- even if contemporary logicians focus on logical structures (this focus being derivative of logic-table-type taxonomic modes of thought).

The premier example of the use of mathematical metaphor to express higher dimensional meaning in two-dimensions is sacred cloths, soul cloths used to convey identity in the act of ritual gift exchange: exchange of value as identity exchange -- the cloth of the sacred being surface-as-measure, the measure of the meaning of identity transparency. In lieu of war, a gift of identity: Marcel Mauss theme. The nested triangular nets, for instance, seen on tribal cloths all over Asia, but most elaborate in Bhutanese textiles, metareference through mathematical metaphor cosmological concepts that are higher dimensional in nature. Indra's net, basically. Tantric Buddhism had its origins in tribal India amongst female weaving guilds, where the back-strap loom metaphorically represented the cosmos through the mathematical ("numerological" in current misassessment through single-valued binary logic) properties of the weaving variables (all the details of ikat weaving, for instance: how many threads of given types in what sequences for given patterns, and so on). We have no reason to be incredulous at the notion that so-called "primitive" tribal peoples employed higher-valued logics, as logics do not have to be formalized to be employed. What is required is utilization of m-gated perineural (glia) switches which are standard issue with human brain, filling approximately 90 percent of the volume thereof. As we well know, single-valued binary neuronal logic was employed for a long time before being

formalized. The warp and woof of surface-as-measure fabric captured meanings in Indra's higher dimensional net via mathematical metaphor, and by metareferential signification set the terms of social, economic, and political relations. The history of the post-tribal world is largely a history of how all this enormous responsibility was taken out of the hands of women -- and how female-generated m-logically-valued perineural significations were transformed into pretexts for warfare by enculturation of single-valued binary neuronal logic.



**Dresses of Zulu Tribe**

The pattern on the cloth was not illusionistic. Just as the object exchanged in ritual gift exchange was not the object exchanged (identity was exchanged) and therefore the exchange was not mere barter, so the pattern on the cloth was not a representation of the thing represented. The meaning of the thing not being the-thing, the pattern on the cloth represented the thing that was not representable, and this was accomplished



not by illusionism but by mathematical metaphor. To experience a Zen Japanese garden as a miniaturization of nature is to not experience that garden at all. To believe that n-dimensional quantum fields represent themselves illusionistically as structured matter within a spacetime continuum is to not experience nature's garden at all. When the illusionist can no longer see meaning as matter-structure, he sees meaning as virtual, as simulacra, for he is simile-bound. Sacred cloths were not hung on the walls of museums or houses, they were topo(logically) wrapped about bodies in motion: sacred dance reenacting the world viewed in its ontogenesis. The image on the cloth may have been deployed in two dimensions, as the contemporary textile scholar sees motif, but for the weaver and the wearer the cloth was "frozen music" given shape by motion in three dimensions: meaning in the form of use, which is music-sculpture, Musculpt. "Meaning is in uses": Swedenborg (and Wittgenstein after him). Lower dimensional motion captures higher dimensional meaning by decomposing over linear-time as the topological warp and woof enfolded as static higher dimensional form -- non-linear operator-time being the m-valued logical operator orchestrating decomposition and re-composition.

Candace Pert, being a peptide chemist, is of necessity an illusionist. She must believe that ligands moving to receptors organize biological activities. What organizes movement of ligands to receptors, or immune cells to ligands, is chemotaxis. Chemotaxis is organized by. . . this is not exactly clear. Contemporary stereochemistry would have us believe that the address of the destination (receptor, for instance) organizes the motion leading to that destination. And the addressing system employed by chemotaxing molecules or cells is very much like that employed



**Ikat pattern**

in American cities and very little like that employed in Japanese cities. The person who received the Nobel Prize for delineating this addressing system, needless to say, did not live in a Japanese city. In this notion, whatever chemotaxes must understand the whole addressing system, be able to read a topographic map, and even then has to be able to speak the language of the neighborhood so as to occasionally ask directions. And if the chemotaxor has to make appointments made with other chemotaxors -- as they all do, if functional integration is to transpire -- then the problem of how chemotaxis is organized is vastly more complex. Moreover, how all this organized chemotaxing takes place in face of the heat-driven random motion demanded by the Second Law of Thermodynamics (at the cellular, molecular, atomic, and subatomic scale levels) is also not exactly clear, in spite of the disorder lent and the order borrowed between scales of motion so as to permit the emergence of complexity.

Once thinking in mathematical similes transits to thinking in mathematical metaphors, however, yet one more "different picture" is no longer required. The meaning of the static higher-dimensional form (defined by wave-function in n-dimensional m-logically-valued Hilbert space of the quantum field) decomposes as the required motion patterns of chemotaxis for the given form of use: passing-time event gradient unfolded out of the enfolded static form of the involved process. This is looking "down" the "ray of creation", ontological-decomposition-wise. Looking "up" the ray, the cognizers prevailing baud rate of consciousness (largely imposed by enculturation) establishes the illusionistic perspective. The baud rate passing-time lapses the strobe light of consciousness pulsing the visual field (even as seen through an electron microscope). An elementary particle is a time-lapsed cognitive image of nonlocal quantum field. If the baud rate of consciousness speeds up, the cognitive image of the particle becomes more and more nonlocal, non-particulate. Atoms and molecules are what one sees when the setting on the strobe lights flashing cycle is changed to have a greater and greater time-step. Tonic and phasic activation of the brain have a lot to do with this. Spatial scale is epiphenomenal of time-step which is epiphenomenal of the baud rate of consciousness: these temporal operations being the logical processes by which the meaning of the higher dimensional static form presents itself as motion in a lower dimensional context. Musculpt is the art-science (Kunstwissenschaft) of the Old Ones by which these matters were explored, performed, sung, signified, gifted, and so on.

## **PREAMBLE TO A PROJECTED BOOK ON THE LIFE AND IDEAS OF JOHN BENNETT**

**Anthony Blake written c. 1985**

This account of the work and ideas of Bennett will be more in the nature of a journalistic account than it will be a sober and scholarly appraisal. It can have no claim on lasting veracity; being a mere impression, even though this impression has had a duration of some twenty years. We are reaching a point at which even events in our own life times are not being caught up with: we look back up the river, but are being carried and tossed by the current in the present. Our gaze is unsteady. There is no time for 'recollection in tranquillity' because things are becoming ever more

complex. Only something in the core of our intellect is able to appreciate and savour this kaleidoscopic tumult of the present. There are no final conclusions on the work of Bennett or on anything; we have no way of establishing here and now just what questions will be answerable in the future, nor the values by which judgments will be made. If we have any sense, we will have thoroughly assimilated the fact that the frame of reference of future time will not be a version of what now holds sway. We look with unbelief at the conditions of life under which people lived in the past but are, of course, unable to anticipate the unbelief that future generations will have over our present conditions of life. Whatever the claims to eternity of anybody, or any system, the 'view from eternity' remains the experience of a subject in his temporality. For me to claim some kind of objective and lasting insight into the significance of Bennett's work would be to vitiate the actual significance it has.

This does not mean that I am going to adopt some 'agnostic' approach and keep on saying that I have no idea of what he meant, which would be to make the present exercise pointless: I do know what his work means in my own present, and, through this contact have some means of assessing its general significance.

The historical flux, which has now reached unprecedented intensity, is not an entirely new thing, nor has been confined to Europe or western civilization; but the modern West is its very epitome. The Rise of the West is almost synonymous with the emergence of the historical flux: the West is Time. It is no accident that in the domain of spiritual matters, the West is regarded as a novice or amateur in contrast to the East which appears as the repository of spiritual values and knowledge. Up until the present, such a view may even be regarded as correct; now, it is no longer so and the work of Bennett belongs to the implied transition. Even though we shall see Bennett as someone gazing towards the East and seeking approval and guidance, he will turn out to be a pioneer in weaning western man from this kind of dependence. He belonged to the watershed of human experience in which a certain long-established view of the disposition of things on this planet was dissolved to make way for something new and unforeseen.

I think it true to say that the West *discovered discovery* and that, once this discovery had been made, there was no return to a, possibly, more serene existence. For it is in the nature of this discovery that any state of affairs becomes, by definition, inadequate. Though it appears, for example, that Francis Bacon's avocation of science as a means of securing *in fact* the Garden of Eden for mankind on Earth concerned only material circumstances, that attitude of mind of his meant that *every* domain of human life was subject to improvement, even the 'spiritual life'. As we come to look closely at the spiritual enterprise of this century, we will see that it was in some kind of contact with an evolutionary force which anticipates and proceeds material progress: progress is more intrinsic to the spiritual life than to the material. What appears to the general public as the spectacle of those they take to be 'spiritual' trying to catch up with the advances in material, social and intellectual life only reflects the lack of spirituality of those who take part in the spectacle. The discovery of discovery means that God Himself is a student of Reality: the God of the West is One who is able to discover more and more about what is really going on. Human life is incomprehensible without some principle that is insatiable for knowledge and experience -

such as is pointed to, somewhat abstractly, by Heidegger in his notion that Being is best disclosed by the question of Being arising in man.

Though we have material for a history of the West's view of the East, we have nothing like enough for the reciprocal view. This must be remembered in what follows. Delving below the forces of power-seeking and greed which are all too easy to see in modern western history, we have to acknowledge that it was the West that sought the East and not the converse: our present day sensitivity over colonial exploitation should not obscure the fact of making contact. Aggression has always been the main way in which cultures came into contact with each other, either by force of arms or by trade. The cultures of the East were sleeping. Their dreams may well have been on a higher level than those of the West - that is, they may well have been 'more spiritual' - but they were relatively out of contact with the evolutionary force which was stirring western man to enter new dimensions of action and thought. Also, the eastern cultures had settled into a form in which spiritual and material values were divorced, a state of mind that it took the West at least a millennium to awaken from; so much so, that even today we can with some truth regard eastern societies as 'medieval' (the significance of the eastern 'dream-world' we will return to later). The story of the contact of the West with the East is rather like that archetype in which someone goes somewhere for one reason but finds, on arrival, that there has been another reason. Such talk of reasons takes us far outside the scope of our modest introduction because it is already suggesting that there may be involved in the affairs of human history far more than human motives. It could also simply mean that there are conscious and unconscious motives. Both views are enigmatic.

All views are like a shape in the mind and the mind is capable of many shapes and movements. The relevance of these shapes to the time-flux belongs to the core of history: we can hardly use history to evaluate the mind-shapes we have since these shapes govern the history that we do. Even the sheer immensity of data gathered in the name of history is a shape in our minds, though something else besides. The thought that lingers in the present whispers through what we call 'history' and attracts to itself the corresponding 'molecules' of information; only by being able to change the thought we are having now can we be free enough to practice history beyond the present.

The study of history is important for the study of Bennett's work which was itself so much concerned with history and its making; as is the study of time. Though he himself was prone to dramatic ideas like 'the spiritual crisis in our time', this was against a background of research into human history since homo sapiens sapiens arose (and even earlier). It must be said right away that his own sense of history made him look to the Middle East for the evolutionary focus rather than to Europe. We shall have much to say on the role of Islamic Sufism in this view. For the moment, I need to put forward the idea that it was in Europe that certain evolutionary potentials were taken up and activated: while Islam stagnated, the West set about, consciously or unconsciously, changing the face of human life on the planet for whatever reason or motive, and western man took on the principle that thought must be by its very nature dynamic and disturbing, however much the individual protagonists expressed their longing for stability and a guaranteed framework of belief (think of Descartes whose personal motive was ostensibly the

restoration of religious faith, yet who laid the foundations of intellectual materialism). Probably, no picture fits the condition of western man better than that of the early pre-men depicted in the film *2001*, driven to innovation by the implantation of images of a better life (reminiscent of Francis Bacon and his *New Atlantis*). The beautiful link made in the film between the very first tool and the space-station misses out the historical role of mental inertia and conservative and counter-progressive social frameworks, all of which man had to be 'tricked out of by fostering his hopes and dreams. What is now taken for granted - but proving in practice to be strangely problematic and difficult - that things can be made better than they are, emerged only after very much difficulty. The discovery of new ways of gathering wealth from the land, the discovery of other lands and resources, the opening up of scientific endeavour towards the stars - these and many other things gave substance to a belief which might otherwise have perished or remained in only a subliminal state.

All this is expressed in the arising and the fate of the incredible School of Chartres (12th century) and its ideas. The intellectual ferment belonging to this school rose to an extraordinary level. In the writings of Alain de Lille (c. 1128-1200) we find a portrait of the new man, the perfect man, 'the youth' capable of living in harmony with both God and Nature. Naturally enough, this can be bracketed with the *insani-kemal*, the perfect man of Sufism also current at that time and recognized amongst Muslims in Spain but, in the 'West', this was of shocking originality. De Lille was one of the more conservative affiliates of the School; others were more revolutionary, but all were masters of discretion with regard to the powerful authorities of the church. Even so, the visions and ideas of these men would have earned them excommunication and worse even a few generations later and such ideas would not emerge again until the time of the Renaissance, or even later as in the ideas of Milton and Goethe. It seems to us now beyond belief that original thought could have arisen in Europe and overcome the authorities who were effectively the 'thought-police' for hundreds of years. Maybe it was simply because life became too complicated for anyone to control, the complications emerging automatically through technological change and exploration. It is well known that our modern western education developed almost entirely through pressures arising from technological and commercial change. This change required ever more and more 'information-processing' with its concomitant of skills, knowledge and thought. Latent brain-power had to be activated if the potential for more wealth and power were to be realized. Information-processing (quite distinct from the information-handling of bureaucracy) leads towards dynamic thought. The systems used to process information become themselves changed by the products of their usage: this does not happen automatically, but a pressure arises since the old systems become visibly inadequate and destructive of wealth. Today, we can hardly begin to feel the immense significance of the development of new systems of arithmetic and calculation, dominated as we are by the recent emergence of the glamorous computer.

Naturally enough, everyone involved in some process of change considered that there would be limits, that it would not be ubiquitous, even that it would be subject to control! Perhaps only in this century has it become possible to see that change is inherently 'out of control', since we attach our ideas of control to what we know -i.e. to the past - and change means a separation from the past. This has reached a point at which the 'past' and the 'future' are in almost total

divorce. Without at this stage going into what the uncontrollability of change means, we can easily predict with hindsight that, whatever the benefits brought by change, people were bound to become increasingly upset by what was unforeseen and rapidly coming into existence around them. We must add that part of these unforeseennesses would be constituted by a myriad of 'backlashes' or reactions to change incoherently seeking a return to the past, that is, to a state of control. This is obvious in such horrors in our time as the arising of the Nazis. The accelerating process of change brings about a state of psychic shock to do with encounters with the 'out of control' factor: a consequence of this is that *progress and degeneracy become inextricably linked*. Change requires a principle on a higher level than itself to be managed in a thoroughly meaningful way. In the western world, men still believed that this principle could be found in religion - or even art - but change had proved them wrong! The shock of this is still eating away in us.

The twentieth century dawned to the accompaniment of the tense disturbed voices and images of artists everywhere in the western world. So often regarded as a mere reaction to their present times, these voices and images can also be seen as expressing a terror of the future — as if many of the extraordinarily gifted individuals energized by the vast changes of the nineteenth century were responding to some collective image of a future so alien and inhuman that only the beauty of despair could remain. Creative geniuses such as Schoenberg and Wittgenstein forged new languages in an attempt to secure a foothold in the world of meaning to take the place of what was in process of destruction. As the shape of man and his being in the world blurred and shifted in the domain of art, scientists were breaking the fabric of common sense in a way never before so extreme. The new science of psychology was getting ready to communicate a picture of man as an entity almost by definition out of touch with his own nature and divided against himself: a man unaided was unable to reach himself, subject as he was to self-deceptions intrinsic to the existence of his ego. Religion died except as a last bastion of values when men were forced to admit the incompatibility of the universal claims of the different belief systems; and, as a repository of values alone and not knowledge because of their rejection of learning from experience, that is, change.

Gurdjieff was making his way in Russia - an unknown Caucasian who was to base his practical message concerning the true substance of human hopes on the proposition that men hardly ever know what they are doing or how to change anything deliberately, instead, being changed all the time and subject to external forces of which the Marxist ones were only the most insignificant and superficial. The young J. G. Bennett was soon to take part in the 'war to end wars' - in which he received a wound which released a vision of the changeless in the changing - with to us unknown dreams of the future but certainly with formidable energy and the power to see the shape of the world from the vantage point of eternity - and realize that this was not enough. At that time, perhaps, the political turmoil and social change of western Europe may have seemed far removed from the disturbances east of the Balkans; but Bennett would have been conscious of the deep underlying connection between the war in Europe and the eruptions around that time and afterwards which so affected life in the middle east. In the Turkey which was to play such an important role in his life, Ataturk was destroying the hold Islam had exerted and bringing his

nation into contact with western culture and , later, there was to occur that horrific near-genocide of the Armenians, stemming from events in Kars, the birthplace of Gurdjieff (the fate of the Armenians present before us again in the futile suffering in Lebanon where many of them sought refuge). Bennett worked in military intelligence in Turkey and encountered human suffering and the 'mysteries of the east' together. He could not realised that the events of the Russian revolution were to enable him to make contact with the man who would dominate his life more than other - Gurdjieff.

Bennett's contact with the turmoil of Europe and its boundaries in Asia, in which he personally witnessed the suffering of displaced persons, saw the folly of archaic ideas in the World War and, later, was able to see first-hand the play of personal egotism in the decision-making which created conditions for the next Great War, gave substance to the general idea of social breakdown and intellectual bankruptcy. The religion of the West was ineffective and those of the East locked within their backward cultures: for all his regard for the eastern preservation of essence-values, in the end he could not stomach their narrowness and hide-bound nature even among saintly men. Only in the new mathematical physics could he find the germ of a new world-vision; and he was well aware that such a plane of abstraction by itself could never serve the awakening of a new sense of meaning amongst mankind. But, there was the clue. The mathematics of relativity afforded a view of the totality of space-time, a vision of the whole all at once, itself timeless but containing all time and space. It was a new form of understanding which must have its analogues throughout all of human life: there should be a view within which all human thought and aspiration could be grasped, rather than bits and pieces of this whole selected in conflict with others. This view would be as exacting as relativity - or the mathematics of four-dimensional space-time - but would carry the substance of a vision powerful enough to give direction in the chaos of human life. Since the outer authorities had proved irresponsible and ineffective, this could only suggest that there were 'inner authorities' who would the more strongly appear in this century than ever before as the falseness and incompetence of the visible ones was exposed. How this might happen was unknown. Bennett had little confidence in the entrenched speculations of the Theosophists and was looking for something with empirical and logical power.

It is next to impossible for us to assess the precise effect Bennett's encounter with the new physics had on him. We are only surmising. I project myself into his time and consider how the confirmations of the extraordinary ideas of relativity and quantum mechanics would have influenced me: a kind of visionary faith made real by hard evidence. The language of science had proved capable of expressing wonders without losing its empirical nature. I can only imagine that, in the early nineteen hundreds, Bennett saw a meeting point between the highest reaches of intellectual achievement and the spiritual vision of the inner authorities of the planet. Intellect and faith could not be divorced. The true religion would contain the highest science and that science would be evolving, not a static 'ancient wisdom'. There was no way in which Bennett could have aimed *then* at making contact with higher agents of history. What he would have been turning towards was a kind of knowledge, an order of being, in which an effective answer to the world's crisis was to be found. Like many people before and after him, Bennett would have no doubt remained in the realm of possibilities rather than of concrete manifestation; seeking still a



kind of intellectual pattern in which to resolve the contradictions of human existence; developing a philosophy of some kind of 'spiritual principle' behind the scenes which had the good of all, ultimately, at heart. His encounter with Gurdjieff threw a spanner in the works of any satisfaction with philosophy. In that meeting he met a man of substance, a 'real man', a man who manifests being. At that moment, he was able to recognize that the deeper understanding, the higher science, the inner authorities was to be found in 'real men', no matter what the hidden framework of control might turn out to be for affairs of human history and development. It was also no small thing that he could see that his meeting with Gurdjieff - no matter what feeling of predestination he might have - was essentially accidental, fortuitous: the most important meetings happen by chance.

From his studies of mathematics and from his feeling and knowledge of recent and ancient human history, in the longing for a vision of the whole which would make sense and in reality encompass everything, there were woven the threads of a spiritual search, a search in which his true initiation came from Gurdjieff - whom he was to meet only on two further occasions. The 'new way of understanding' that he sought had its focus in the question of 'real men' - that is, men who knew what was going on and what is to be done - and their communication with the rest of mankind who, for all their apparent achievements, went on missing the point of their existence on this planet.

Throughout this century, even though intellectuals have come as a matter of course to lament the inadequacy of the intellect for dealing with the underlying problems of life, the same intellectuals have denied the effective reality of any higher level. They tend, even, to get thoroughly pissed-off by the idea. The reason is pretty clear: they want someone to come along and produce the goods which they can recognize ; they want proof in the form of a more creative music, a more intricate physics, a more original social theory and so on. They fail to realize that there is creative music, there is an intricate physics, there are numerous social theories - and these are not the point. Gurdjieff's sarcasm in the face of contemporary science and art is, in its way, a reflection of this misconception of the intellectual: what is at stake is not creativity but something deeper still.

We have the beautiful insight that 'the artist is the antennae of the race' - meaning that the artist has a sensitivity that responds to the coming wave of the future; but let us consider the idea that 'the real man registers the Present'. It may be a difficult idea, at first. There is a tendency to represent the real man in the guise of an imagined spiritual or holy man who is somehow detached from the exigencies of the present because he is hooked up with some more eternal state than the one we suffer in, buffeted as we are by the pressures and changes of the world and our circumstances. This picture, as is spelt out in the works of Dostoevsky for example, has no foundation in that the 'spiritual man' is even more deeply involved in the affairs of the present but in his own real way. We tend to believe that we are well aware of the Present and that it is some other time or place that is difficult of access (we worry about the future and dream of things past). The truth is quite the opposite: what is most difficult for us is to register just how things are here and now, in this moment and in this place. This is equally so for our personal present, our social present or our planetary present. It takes a special concern to register what is happening and

immediately evaluate its meaning. What is most intimately part of us - our own constitution as living and intelligent beings perpetually undergoing a crisis - is not observed. It seems to require a special strength or resolve, quite distinct from those which lead men into battle or on perilous journeys. Yet, nearly everyone takes it for granted that here and now we have *automatically* what is here and now and that *from* this present we can go onwards towards wider and better things. This delusion is widespread. We are largely a world of dreamers, personally and socially; whether we belong to a political affiliation or a religious one we are equally at sea, because we have never arrived at the starting point which everyone takes for granted.

We are a result of the present not its origin; a product and not an agent.

Lack of contact with the present is conveniently obscured by social transactions which are designed to lead out of the present and not consider whether the present is 'here' at all. In this way, social life is a relief from the trauma of immediate contact. We can generate an artificial present of some intensity as in collective sport, but we do that to be 'taken out of ourselves'. The extension of our horizons weakens the intension of our experience: we live many lives vicariously but, our own, hardly at all. It is becoming increasingly rare for anyone to live his or her own life. So much power of action and even processing of information is instrumentalized outside the living human being that we have reached the point of being run by our own 'creations' - as is strikingly expressed by Lewis Mumford in his word describing modern technological culture as the 'Megamachine'.

However, let us not stray into the well-worn songways of disparaging the crowd and fearing technology. These are not, intrinsically, of much danger - just so long as there enough people who can register what is going on: which means to realize in fact what everyone assumes in phantasy they are doing. The issue here surrounds the consequences of failing to register the present. Foremost is this: that we are incapable of evaluating progress; we cannot find and enhance development; we simply grope in the dark, Secondly, we are never able to have anything of our own but live in a world of ideals and possibilities that gives us unnecessary pain and prevents us from realizing anything of worth to our true selves. These may well appear to be strange words in an age still affected by earlier ideas of general inevitable progress, by the institutionalization of social reform, by the growth of education and by the examples of achievement in all areas of human endeavour. The point is that, whether or not such things are real achievements or not, we have no means of evaluating them directly for ourselves just so long as we have no active contact with the present. That is why history is so difficult as a concrete science, even though its potential for human development and advancement is immense. Our contact with the past is vitiated by our lack of contact with the present. It is as if we live partly in 1920 in one regard, partly in 1940 in another and so on, including a part that lives in 1990 and other parts which are always dreaming in never-never land. Mind has a lot to answer for, especially for its power of being somewhere else and when!

The Present is Time as well; it is the fixed point on the scale of measurement; it is our starting point; it is what it is for us; it is unmistakable beyond any questions of epistemology; it is life and breath, the act of attention, the returning of myself to myself; it is the practical unknown here at hand ('nearer than to me than my jugular vein') it is the hot-bed of existentialist anxiety and

paradox; it is 'I'; it is becoming; it is realization. It has nothing to do with any theory of time. It is the substance of every theory of every kind. Something so fundamental cannot be justified in terms of any framework because any framework lacking it as foundation is devoid of meaning. It is I; and an 'it' that is totally beyond any conception of an object.

Most of us are dreamers and, until we become capable of immediate registration are incapable of any development. What we take to be development is nothing more than a modification of our dreams. True progress is concrete and measurable (*as well as* being mysterious). In these terms, the present age is not making progress but failing to realize itself and requiring some kind of 'aid' to maintain any hold on reality. Imagine, if you will, that we are all hell bent on getting into a collective dream (the 'Whereon' or 'nowhere' of Samuel Butler). Constantly, we thwart each other (*'L'enfer, c'est les autres'* as Sartre says) because each of us has particular habits of dreaming. There is no basis on which we can agree (the only basis being reality). Consequently, the dream world never totally takes hold and we remain vulnerable to reality ('reality' being what we have not faced up to yet). Our collective power of dreaming, which we call social reality, is too weak to overcome the existential anxieties of the individual however much he *wants* to dream. In the midst of this chaos of frustration, we are given some kind of help which enables the planet to lurch on through time and not disintegrate in a spasm of fantasy.

When the question of contact with the present arises, everything becomes relevant. There is no sense in any compartmentalization. The acceleration of change evident in the sciences, which has come to mean that researchers know more and more about less and less, is one of those absurdities which point to the need for a level above intellectual creativity. Such a level must bypass intellectual differentiations and specialities of functioning. I in this life have the question of everything and can have no idea, at the start (which is every moment) of what counts and what does not. It is also a peculiar character of our time period that such a state means an 'everything' on a far vaster scale than before, it means all the data of science and history, all the religions and value systems, the whole gamut of ideas entertained by men of all times and places that we can know, things profane and things holy, the past and the future, the small and the large; anything less is as nothing. And this is not all because it also means everything of ourselves from the gutter to the heavens, from the microsecond of atomic consciousness to the panorama of countless lives, God and the Devil. Yet, so many imagine that they can adopt a convenient partial view or leave to others to do the work of sifting out the most significant things. The information explosion of the twentieth century and its concomitants in art and the exploration of human experience when realized in contact with the present means a naturally expansive mind which is forced to encompass everything in the realization that this 'everything' itself must be only partial, creating room for a God of practical import, not of substitution for reality. The intellectuals who were brought up in the belief that they could find final answers suffered terribly. Those who saw the beginnings of a search could learn to die happily. One such was J. G. Bennett whom a biographer might describe as in search of his destiny but whom we shall understand as engaged in the same dramatic process as us all who ever touch the sense of 'missing the reality' and struggle to be present. Our experience is more precious to us than our blood but how much of our experience have we ever had?

When I was a child, and even up to my early twenties, I could not hear the sound of a siren or catch the drone of a heavy propeller-driven aircraft, without a sense of fear. As I grew older and came to know more of the events of the last World War I came to feel the effect of these sounds ever more deeply in my mind. Photomagazines my father had, with page after page of bombers, fighters, bombs falling, ack-ack traces, burning targets gave my brain images to wonder with. They were like images of another world that even my father who had been a sergeant-major in the army during the war hardly knew; a more real world than the one of peace in which I shuffled through the pages; one from which I was separated, just gazing entranced at the terrible beauty of the photographs of desolation and destruction, whose aftermath came to me from the drone or the wail across the skies. I was christened the day that war was declared on Germany, lived in Bristol through most of the bombing there and yet could not remember from that time any actual experience of seeing any of the things I might have seen, or heard any of the things I must have heard. Trivial events such as failing to secure metal soldiers in a local shop because metal was restricted to war-use, men cutting off the iron railings outside our house for the same reason, a park in Ilkley where a young child like myself seemed to discover a rifle in the grounds, my failure to lift my father's rifle when he came home on leave - the sunlight sharp and bright on the lino in the hall-way - nor even to pull its trigger: all such fragments never touched on the reality of those great bombers and being in a city under bombardment. But it was not like Beirut, where children see and hear terrible things day after day and the war is there with them; not like Northern Ireland where children see their own mother being shot. Perhaps where I lived was too far away from the main target areas; but my mother assured me that the sky was lit up when the bombers attacked the air-field at Filton. Then, again, I moved with my mother to join my father in Ilkley where he was training troops and may have missed the worst of it - the worst that I can only guess through my countless memories of walking through the bombed-sites of Bristol, gazing with an almost aesthetic appreciation at the fire-places suspended in the air and the weeds growing around empty doorways.

Later my father told me - often associated with his conversion to evangelical Christianity - how he had been denied active service at the front; how he had pleaded to be allowed to go with his mates, to change places with a friend who was terrified at the prospect; how in the end he was the only one to stay behind out of a body of men three quarters of whom were dead or wounded within two weeks of action. And, in the same vein, he also told me the circumstances which prevented him - just after the war when he was stationed in Germany - from visiting the camp at Auswicz; though he remembered friends returning still retching at what they saw. During the war, my father did not fire a single shot at anyone, in spite of the fact that he had been a regular in the army before War was declared. To this date, the only dead person I have ever seen is JG Bennett - a more strange thing than it might seem, since I have tried to see the dead. Once, while driving up the M1 with a girl-friend I saw that there had been a recent accident in the fast lane. I pulled over - not only to render assistance but also to get a sight of a possibly dead body. People came by with reports of a couple who had stepped out into the fast lane in front a car and been smashed to pieces. I set off across the motorway. Then, in a moment, my mind was filled with the

thought of being responsible for ensuring that an ambulance had been called. So, I turned round. The moment was gone.

I did not remember the war. I remembered the Victory celebrations - and so strongly that it was as if I were making a film of them in my mind for my future self - when we all danced in the streets in a community of feeling that I saw dwindle to meaningless isolation as the years passed. What was the War that did so much, that released amidst its atrocities a meaning that present-day England has forgotten in its present degradation and pettiness? All that I had of the war itself was the sheer mental sensation of those sounds from the sky, photos in some magazines (long since destroyed), a gas mask never used (only the smell now left; and an incendiary bomb made into a money box (an object that had frightened my mother though I did my best to assure her that it had no danger).

I lived in my youth somehow within the effect of the War. While in my late teens at school when trouble flared up in the near East I remember being in the streets after dark full of apprehension of being taken away to fight and die. At that moment I was remembering the headmistress at our Primary school sternly trying to communicate to us the possible implications of the Korean War which might include massive British support for the Americans. The War was one great impression irreducible to actual things that had happened to me. The War was a kind of 'over-event', an Encompassing of my life in which my actual life played no part. There never had been a little boy scurrying with his mother up the road to the bomb shelter in the garden of my Aunt; but there had been those bombers and I felt their presence in my heart ever after, at least until that sensation faded with age and the blind succumbing to the present when I lost, as if it were the inner sound of a child-hood song of ecstasy, the thread of that awful meaning of human nature, of history and the questions immediately substantiated in the sickening feeling of that time. More than once, tears had poured out from me as I sat by myself in a cinema witnessing some reconstruction of the Blitzkrieg. I sobbed when I saw Pabst's 'Ten Days to Victory' and felt the death of the innocent Germans as keenly as I would those of my own family. My heart soared from the sense of the glory of self-sacrifice through heroic sagas of the British Air Force, vestiges of which remained when I saw 'The Battle of Britain' in a cinema in Queens, New York and thrilled to the applause of the American audience after the film had finished.

In my late teens, in the traumas of that time of growing intellect and personal fear, I had contact with the chill force of the Holocaust through reading about the concentration camps; but this never compared with the historical sensation of the 'war in the air', which H. G. Wells helped me to fix in my mind first with the book of that name which I heard serialized on the radio and then, most recently, making me entranced in the film 'Things to Come', entranced and appalled at WAR. The Holocaust was beyond my scale of Good and Evil, but stuck somewhere in my brain - as in so many other people's - as an atom of naked and atrocious fact, the isolated stark horror which made human perfidy tangible and hell and damnation a reality. The photomagazines my father had had won over actual memory, but at least I had the sound of aircraft to link with real events. For the concentration camps I had nothing; without an actual trace in the present, without an actual sensation in the mind, whatever happened had no meaning for my existential self, only for my thoughts or feelings. It was not until I had a certain dream that a trace was made.

I dreamt of an amphitheatre in a Nazi hell. Prisoners were dragging stone blocks amidst unspeakable cruelties. The only relief was the subjugation of one of the Nazi devils to the most extreme torture. At certain times, dreams come to enable a contact to be made with suffering outside my experience. I once had another dream in which I saw, heard and *smelt* Africans starving and diseased in a hut. Dreams go further than suffering: my deepest contact with Gurdjieff's 'All and Everything' was in a dream in which, almost incidentally, I saw the intellectual source represented by Plato as a point of light.

How was it possible for that little boy to forget the War in himself and then learn about it afterwards? Or were there always two wars, two kinds of reality? And is there not some universal - that is, deeply individual - problem arising from this state of affairs that only now I am recognizing as if for the first time? We talk to each other about things which do not matter very much. Our language fills the void of our unrealized understanding instead of disclosing it.

If I am about to report on the events connected with another man, even one I 'knew' after a fashion over a period of sixteen years, events which imprinted themselves on me and, as far as I can see, determined certain lines of connection in my life so that this life of mine has become inseparable from these events, then I find that I need this personal confession of lack of connection between the events and the entity writing in this place. Quite simply - I never knew what was happening to me! And, I have never known. Which is to imply, as I do gladly even in a state of incredulous wonder, that I do not know what is happening to me now, that the present is a mystery like every present I have been in (which, perhaps, I have learnt to make mysterious) and, further, that the remembrance of this ignorance in all its forms in my life also fills me with a chill that threatens to take away my life. If I have to set about making descriptions of what makes for the welfare of mankind, invoking some device such as the 'spiritual drama of our time', I want the reader to know, even if he or she will mock at me in disbelief - or lay down the book right now because it most obviously must be without 'authority' - that I have as much direct knowledge of these things as I did of the bombs falling in Bristol, that I had to learn of them through what was said of them in an after-time, that I am by default only an historian reading the present through the past. As is the case with any human being, I cannot give you, the reader, what is indelibly precious though inexplicably so, such as the tear and its reason, the touch on the arm, the moment of choice in a cold kitchen, or any such thing which, in fact, makes up the existential reality of any one of us in any life and which starkly, astoundingly, makes a mockery of our pretentious beliefs and drives a spear through the bubble of any conception of ourselves we might treasure.

I would that I could give you the drooling idiots of this world who play with God and the Devil and bring it all into question, the men that make being human worthwhile because they have really gone to the atom of human experience and broken it into vast energy of delight. I have no doubt of their reality - I have more doubt of my own. Or, shall I say that if God exists then I do not and, if I exist, then God does not? While the subject of this essay- this try, this foray into what is going on - Mr Bennett called himself a 'blind witness', I place myself as a blind and crippled witness, fully exemplifying any of the multiple trends towards degeneracy endlessly commented on by vastly articulate men of my and earlier epochs. I am chosen by no one except myself to

perform this project so near to the meaningless and I have to please myself alone: I do not raise my voice in an attempt to rise above the clamour of the modern babble of tongues, endlessly explaining, commentating, but agreeing somehow in the general confusion of unknowingness. For, in myself, there is the silence of my existence which is inviolate for as long as time lasts. It is as possible for an ordinary-man to think about the spiritual search of mankind as it is for him to think about the war that came after the war to end wars. They are, after all, in essence the same story and the only story; for it is the story of conflict in a reality that rests on an unity without disturbance.

The largely comfortable and indulged people of the West stare dully at their TV screens which show them images of people killing each other. A proportion realize, however dimly, that they have no way of assimilating what is happening to mankind and they know that only if 'one of theirs' or they themselves have caught a bullet or been blasted by a bomb will it mean anything concrete to them. Their minds and our minds and my mind has come up against the fact that, in spite of access to vast, intricate and immediate information on the state of affairs, we remain unmoved. The educational systems can hardly cope with teaching arithmetic! We know great things without knowing what we know. This is the terrifying fact of our condition. It is as if things were so arranged that we have been bombarded with the evidence of mass insanity, given enough leisure to have a chance of increasing our intelligence and yet at failed utterly other than in fostering devices to avoid the issue inherent in being alive on this small planet for so short a time.

The 'spiritual revolution of our time' - which is something that does not bear comparison with the efforts of previous generations, for reasons which we might come across later - is not a matter of earnest strivings of conscience and embracing of all ways of enhancing our consciousness, but a grinding away of any hope that anything can be achieved by going along with any system or mechanism yet in existence. The fate of the planet lies in the 'individual' who has now transcended any alternative, who has exhausted all normal possibilities, for whom there is no way to live which satisfies his intrinsic sense of purpose, because he is that purpose. Bennett proposed that we live at a time when the Megalanthropic master idea - worship of the individual - is giving way to the Synergic master idea - worship of co-operation. The reality is proving to be different and what we face is an immense contradiction between the two master ideas which defines the special character of our Present Moment. The issue of the individual and the collective has raised its stakes and, at this time, neither is being fulfilled. What seems to be impossible - that self-enhanced individuals enter into effective co-operation - is the only way out even if only for the reason that only true individuals *are able* to co-operate together. The language of synergy (working together) is the new super language of the future that has to be born out of the direct communication between individuals. It is not surprising at all that every existing language fails the requirements of both individualization and co-operation am is, as a consequence, degenerating.

Bombs falling from the sky mean more than a mere technological advance in warfare: they signify an incursion into the world of both destructive and creative super-forces, a descent of the 'war in heaven' into human life in a way that has probably not taken place since the beginnings of recorded history. I believe that if J. G. Bennett were alive today he would totally rewrite his



account of human history and look further afield than the region of the Hindu Kush for his agencies of intelligent change. Because of this belief, the reader must once be warned: there will be no impartial assessment here of the corpus of Bennett's work, but an attempt to see what this work would be now; it is a work in progress in which his work in progress is mingled and conjoined. For all our talk, we of this century have hardly begun in practice to operate in the light of the realization that no formulation is final, giving only lip-service to the notion by some weak acceptance of the need to review and update our comprehension and language; few of us are prepared to enter the stream of constant change - as few as there are many who will follow fashion, that bastion of ephemeral confidence - and embrace the apparent disorder of ungrasped complexity, the realities outside our current mental range. For me, it is impossible to speak of Bennett's work as a frozen artifact suspended in the past, waiting to be unveiled and stand naked before my critical assessment: I myself am only a part of that work in the present moment and my insight - and my lack of insight - are moments in the work in progress. What Bennett said is in his books, but what that means is in our present moment of enquiry.

It may have been noticed that, so far, I have made little reference to anything like 'the spiritual quest of mankind', 'human development' or similar notions. Somewhat regretfully, these will have to be spoken of, sometimes at some length. I say 'with regret' because they have been made into a debased coinage - by both their advocates and their 'humanist' enemies - and they buy very little today. Mention of such things either irritates the hell out of you or sends you into a realm where thought ceases. Certain ideas (or actions for that matter) have a spiritual power not because of their labels and classification but through the reality by which they arise. I pay my respects to the artists, philosophers and scientists who have wrestled to form the basis of a new common-sense or tradition of evaluation in the present age of chaos: they have the integrity of seekers and creators as long as they feel they have failed to find any collective situation in which they can believe. For the hashers and rehashers whose only ambition is to belong however stupidly to the company of the chosen, there can only be contempt. Spirituality is much too important to be left in the hands of spiritual people. I readily confess to be about speaking of that which is beyond me; which I will do with fullest attention to the points of failure obvious to me, in the sincere brotherly hope that you the reader will acknowledge your failure to 'understand' what I am doing and become appreciative of that which is beyond understanding altogether. The true reader of this book is one who reads with reluctance, even hatred, but finds that he or she is compelled to read to the bitter end (and a bitter end I promise you). So let us, you and I, reader and writer of the same thing, join together synergistically to make of this book, this small collation of words lost amidst the cacophony of the world's printing presses, an excruciatingly happy book in which neither of us (except with a sly grin) will attempt to pull the wool over each other's eyes.

# POEMS

## Michael White

### Music

*...nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage, But music for the time doth change his nature . Shakespeare*



music  
 encodes math  
 math encodes the structure of the cosmos  
 music is a direct connection  
 with this cosmic constitution  
 music does not teach  
 music does not try to explain  
 it is a direct experience  
 of the harmony and beauty  
 that happens when you are sonically captivated  
 in a spellbinding sacrifice  
 that merges into a higher subjectivity  
 that encompasses all people  
                                 all places  
   all times  
 in an elevated presence  
 that unveils the mysterious meaning  
 of the universe



### Awareness

without awareness  
                         there is no experience  
   experience is experienced  
   in awareness  
 without awareness  
                         there is no knowing  
   knowing is known



without awareness                    in awareness  
     there is no identity  
         identity is identified  
             in awareness  
 sensation  
     cognition  
         emotion  
             memory  
                 fantasy  
                     and dream  
  
 appear in awareness  
 which in itself  
 makes no judgments  
 and has no opinions  
 freed from all content  
 naked awareness  
 is the primordial presence  
 of basic human nature



**Meditation**

meditation is  
     experience experiencing experience  
         knowing knowing knowing  
             awareness aware of awareness  
                 sensation sensing sensation

**Nothing you can do**

nowness  
     cannot be attained gradually  
 nonaction  
     cannot be attained by striving  
 relaxation  
     cannot be attained by effort  
 there is nothing you can do  
 nowhere you can go  
 to find the pristine awareness  
 which is the potency of pure presence





from which all experience arises  
abides  
and dissolves

resting freely  
in effortless spontaneity  
breaks though  
as self sprung natural perfection  
where every appearance  
is another wave  
on the ocean of experience  
and the immediacy of the moment  
dissolves duality  
and transcends attachment  
liberating conception and judgment  
from the concerns of the self



## The Book of the Universe

the only thing you can know for sure  
is that you don't know anything for sure  
if you don't know this  
you don't know shit  
don't sweat the problems  
don't cling  
don't have regrets  
don't seek revenge



don't be a victim  
don't dwell on it  
don't cry in your beer  
don't impose your opinions on others  
the universe takes care of itself  
has for a long time  
worrying about it gets you nowhere  
there are always obstacles  
just do what needs to be done  
you can't control what others are doing  
better to act without expectation  
just keep moving  
the way is written in the book of the universe  
which is wide open to our gaze



don't hide your tracks  
don't blame others  
don't take yourself seriously  
don't keep count  
don't be a believer



# MUSIC AND MEANING Sarasota, March 17-19<sup>th</sup> 2017

## Steven Rhodes



The seminar was unusual in that it didn't make a linear logical argument/case about what music is about, how to listen in a certain way, what good music is, etc. I had the impression of both a focusing or a clarity of seeing what was there all along, a returning back to the same thing but each time increasing the depth.

From what I understand there were plans and hopes for there to be more performance with local musicians. Though I get the desire for this, I think it may have

worked out stronger as it did. Being responsible for the playback, my perspective may be different from the rest of the room. I thought that it made the presentation tighter and more unified. Or in the least, I think performing in that context can open up a can of worms. So much can easily go wrong and it takes a lot of preparation and diligence for things to be of high quality.

I'm always wishing for more discussion/sharing at these events. Granted things can easily go off track and it is hard when it's so short and there's so much to give/present.



**Jason Kater demonstrates the monochord**

4' 33"\* was not only the highlight of the weekend for me but informed all of my experience and



**Darlene Franz explains how we made 'duversity' into a melody**

listening from the start. It was in mind from when I saw it on the itinerary but I've also been fascinated by the piece since I read about it about 30 years ago. And this was the first time that heard it performed live! And so that Saturday the street noise and the wind and birds were very much a part my listening. Sometimes when there was other music playing. With regards to 4'33" there are all of the discussions, writings, etc. about the concept of silence - "non-musical" sounds being the music, etc.. This piece and Cage's work as a

whole has obviously been so influential to so many and so many new territories have been explored as a result. This is all really good, useful, interesting and important. But as to the quality of silence - the experience and "inner" reality of it - I've never seen this in any discussion about the piece. This reminds

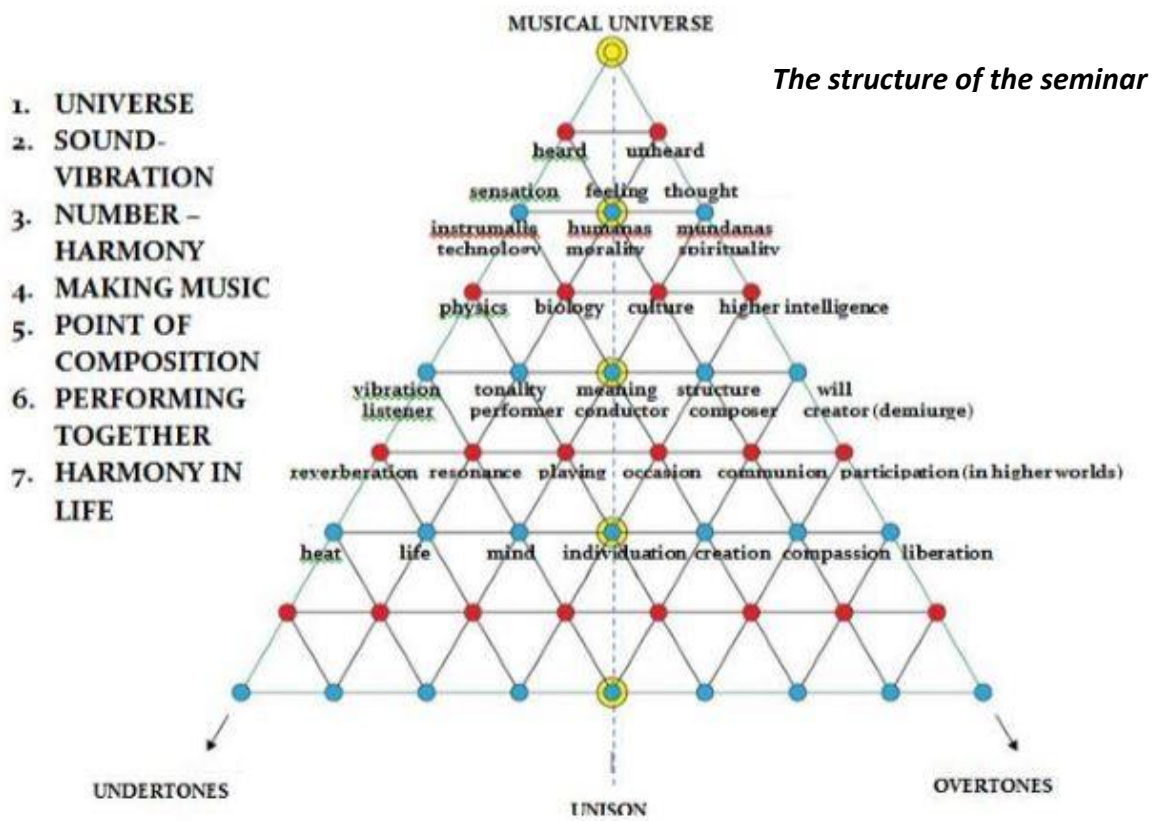
me of one of the great points in *The Dramatic Universe* VOL. 1 about the degree of consciousness of those doing the observing factored out of science.

As with everyone, I sometimes get lost in the emotion, the associations, the intellectual thinking about the significance technically, historically, culturally, etc.. It was a great relief and gift to recognize all of those factors and that they can play an inclusive part that doesn't dominate and isn't in conflict with greater meaning/depth. It's so difficult to not be trapped in hierarchical thinking. That said, the "lower" parts fluidly evoked the "higher" aspects and the "higher" allowed the joy of the "lower".



The Lattice I had not seen before. I've just read the essay on the Meaning Games site (<http://meaninggames.com/views/?p=68>)

This is very, very interesting. I've had glimpses of the interrelationships of systems but it gets so complex so quickly! It almost takes a kind of bravery to embrace something so simple and not being afraid of "artifice". The serious "casualness" that you brought to its presentation was also quite refreshing.





As I remarked during the seminar, there were so many times that I wanted to say “Stop! Let’s talk about that more!” But I suppose that is a good problem to have. So many interesting things raised. And with a group with a broad background of experience it’s that much harder.

So in the end I say Bravo!

\*4’33’’ (four minutes and 33 seconds) is a composition by USA avant garde composer John Cage in which the pianist opens the piano lid for that time period but plays nothing.

## THE DRAMATIC UNIVERSE AND BEYOND

October 13-15, 2017, Nashville, Tennessee

### A weekend seminar on the ideas and practices of John Bennett

The polymath **John Bennett** was a foremost student of Gurdjieff and, from early in his life, sought to reconcile the essentials of traditional spirituality with the discoveries of physical science. This led to him creating new forms of thought while involving himself in the methods of innovative spiritual teachers. His magnum opus *The Dramatic Universe* articulated a worldview of a reality in which human choice was significant. The universe is dramatic because it is built on hazard and uncertainty. Towards the end of his life, increasingly, he spoke of Will as the primary reality.



**Anthony Blake** studied and collaborated with Bennett for fourteen years and helped to continue the courses held at Sherborne after his death in 1974. Since then he has been exploring and developing the implications of Bennett’s ideas in the context of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

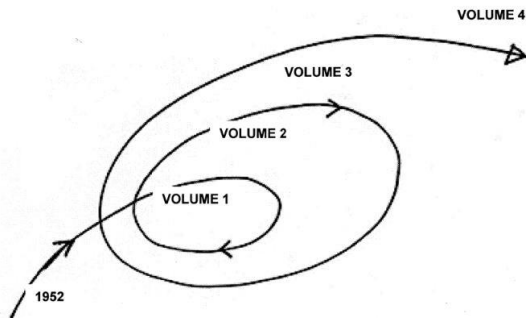
### Outline Schedule

1. Universe – conditions of existence
2. The Supernatural – fact and value
3. Hazard – drama and the war with time
4. Work and Salvation – the demiurge and God
5. Will and Individuation – essence and existence
6. History – progress of the present moment
7. Synergy - the will of our time



## The Hyparxis of the Dramatic Universe

I can represent the progression of *The Dramatic Universe* as a kind of spiral by which I suggest that the writing re-entered itself at each new volume to emerge with a deeper perspective.



The conception of *The Dramatic Universe* came sometime in the 1920s, after the First World War. Bennett grew up in a period when ideas of higher dimensions were becoming popular. He was gifted mathematically - as well as in so many other ways - and wanted to develop his own theories of what lay beyond causality and time in a precise form. To further his spiritual search he

first of all decided to link with the system of Anthroposophy created by Rudolf Steiner (d. 1925) but a meeting with Gurdjieff in Turkey (1920) changed his direction. What remained the same was his desire to marry science with spirituality. He wanted both and was determined to understand what was 'higher' rather than simply believe or resort to rhetoric.

Long before he started to publish volumes of *The Dramatic Universe* he had been writing what became parts of it, going through several versions over the years as he refined his ideas (sometimes with the collaboration of scientists such as Meredith Thring and Bruin Brown). Certain ideas or ways of framing things persisted throughout. One was his 'cosmic triad' of Function, Being and Will which I think might go back at least to the late 1930s. Another was his love of twelvefold schemes, such as for: Values, Energies, Levels of Existence, the Ideal Human Society, Essence Classes, and so on.

I have spoken of ideas and also of ways of framing them. Bennett was keenly aware of the role played by the framework or context in which an idea is being discussed. Sadly, a lot of people talk about things as if they could be considered in isolation apart from everything else. A definition is useless in isolation because the terms used in the definition involve other things which also have to be understood. A framework holds a variety of things together and provides 'places' for them. The way we have of mapping things in terms of latitude and longitude is a framework. We can know whether one place is north or south of another, for example.

As Bennett went on writing and rewriting his magnum opus there was an interplay between the things he wanted to talk about and how he wanted to talk about them or frame them. He well realised that a framework should not impose itself but serve the purpose of showing how different things relate to each other. His framework evolved into what he eventually called systematics.

On the way he also developed a six-dimensional geometry.

In the version (unpublished) he made in 1952 Bennett wove his many strands into a kind of rationalised 'All and Everything'. By then he had studied Gurdjieff's book of that name for some time and regarded his own project as merely 'a set of footnotes' to it. This may be why he confined himself within the restrictions of the Gurdjieff cosmology based on 'laws' of three and seven almost exclusively. In fact he speaks of three special numbers: 1, 3 and 7. 1 is the number of Being, 3 of Will and 7 of Function. He even went so far as to say that there was no sense in any idea of fourfoldness, fivefoldness, etc.

By the time the first volume of *The Dramatic Universe* was published (1956) just a few years later, many things had changed. Twelvefoldness dominated and Volume 1, devoted to Natural Philosophy, was largely based on a hierarchy of twelve levels of existence or degrees of potency, each level representing a 'category of thinking' and constituting what he called systematics.

Many other new things came into the picture, most importantly the word *hyparxis* for the third temporal dimension he considered co-equal with time and eternity. Bennett claimed he took the word from Aristotle but his citation is suspect and it probably came from Neo-Platonism. However, following Aristotle, he made his next volume to be on metaphysics - which just means the subject after the study of nature or *physis* - calling it 'Moral Philosophy' perhaps also in reference to Kant. The categories of thought in Volume 1 were used to apply only to fact or existence. In Volume 2 they were writ large.

Twoness introduced the complementarity of Fact and Value, threeness the structure of Will, fourness dealt with Being and fiveness with the transflux of Essence and Existence. Volume 2 on 'Moral Philosophy' introduces Value, excluded in Volume 1, and Essence as the unconditioned complement of Existence.

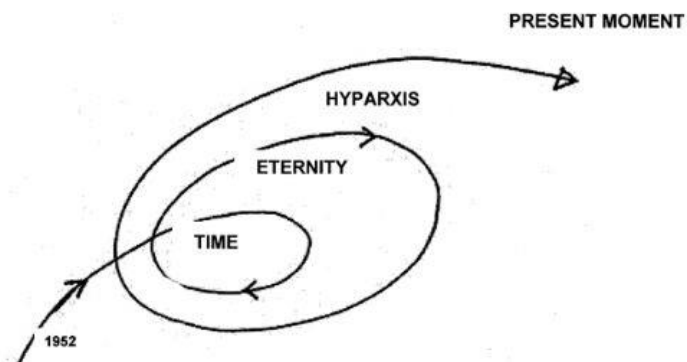
One would expect after such a tour de force that the next volume would continue on this high-powered metaphysical journey and deal with sixness and beyond. Instead, Bennett pauses and tries to set out his framework of systematics in its broadest sense as applying to any content of experience. The new ingredient can be called 'structure'. I was one of a group of young men around him at that time who often met to discuss the formulation of the number-term systems, as well as take part in a series of weekend seminars on all kinds of topics - such as music, cooking and marriage! - to try out the approach. It is significant that that the systematics in such events rarely went beyond the pentad or the fifth stage.

Though Volume 3 is titled 'Man and His Nature' it begins with a discussion of 'organised complexity' and goes on to lay out the characteristics of all the systems from monad (1) to duodecad (12). He had very little to say about the ten and eleven term systems because he never developed any use for them. From then on he ventured into the study of man, looking at anthropology, the human life-cycle and the ideal human society. After the book came out he confided in me that he considered the chapter on Man the worst in the whole work. In this chapter he attempted an orderly application of the systems but the result was stilted and artificial.

In laying out his principles of systematics, he had proposed a linear progression - in what he called 'concreteness' - through the series of systems. But he did not articulate how there was a movement or transformation from one into the next. As a result, the systems appear somewhat suspended apart from each other. Not only that, he was searching for deeper principles that he speculated might have to do with societies and history.

In Volume 4 he came to History and the 'war with time'. The hexad appears in the supremely important guise of the present moment.

The scheme of three dimensions of time which figured so strongly in Volume 1 returns but, in effect, the dimensions are transformed because he is concerned with the domain of harmony where fact and value meet. Hexads were also events and events get structured into history by heptads. He invents new concepts such as the hyparchic future.



After surveying the whole of terrestrial history he ends in making prophecies. For me, the most interesting piece of writing is in the Preface (which of course was written last) where he seems to abandon the notion of any generalised systematics and gives the present moment ultimate status. The spiral picture of the four volumes can be adapted to show an interpretation of them corresponding with the dimensions of time. There is a progression from one volume to the next. The systematics serves this progression but does not determine it.

Where might he have gone next!

