

# DuVersity Spring 2019

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Mary – Installation in St Paul’s Cathedral 2012 by Bill Viola

## SPECULATIONS ON THE FOURTH WAY

**Anthony Blake**

*These are meandering thoughts claiming no authority. It is hoped the reader will become aware of questions of his or her own.*

During the last century or so, there have been some remarkable people offering esoteric vistas on questions of our reality, inner world and the like, largely based on the idea of forgotten ancient wisdom. This may have been a manifestation of the universal tendency for every era or even generation to portray 'perennial wisdom' in contemporary guises; alternatively, to clothe new ideas in the vestments of 'ancient wisdom'. In general, proponents of esoteric ideas tend to assume that higher wisdom must in some way be eternal and not subject to updates.

I believe Gurdjieff and his student John Bennett (amongst others) opened up a way of enquiry that entailed an ongoing expression and re-expression of our quest to be real. I see myself as engaged in this process. It is, thankfully, not restricted by my own virtue, intelligence or being.

A fellow student of John Bennett, Simon Weightman, once said to me: there can be a real spiritual event which is purely in experience but, when the experience fades later, it is made into Scripture, often using a discarded language or dialect to suggest it is contemporary with the original experience, or even before it. Gurdjieff, one of the remarkable people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, can be accused of 'marketing' his ideas through skilful manipulation of the prevailing idea of ancient wisdom, to which he added the also widespread image of oriental wisdom.

In both respects, Gurdjieff asserted a loss of wisdom in the contemporary West; implying of course that he himself did not lack this intelligence. To support this, he invented or adapted an idea of the *initiate*. That is someone capable of finding out or perceiving what the majority are *unable* to do. The claim to be a holder of special higher knowledge – and to be worthy of it – of course, gives a prestige or kudos that tends to support the authority of the teacher himself. This authority is hard to question, since access to the special knowledge is *a priori* not available to people exercising only use of empirical fact and reason; in other words, acting like scientists and scholars. The latter were, of course, frequently condemned by Gurdjieff and other 'spiritual' teachers. Though Gurdjieff urged his followers to verify for themselves what he taught, there were in fact no means of doing so. He never presented what philosopher of science Karl Popper would propose as a *falsifiable* proposition. Most people do not realise that it is always possible to *verify anything* simply by the selection of supporting evidence and ignoring the contrary. What one can do, in pragmatic terms, is to see whether adoption of the ideas and framework proposed appear to help one in one's aims; just as psychoanalysis, neurological science or even politics might do in their own ways.

The idea that there is something we might call higher intelligence is still widespread, sometimes drawing on fanciful ideas of angels and aliens, but rarely these days addressing the will of a supreme reality. William James in his masterly *Varieties of Religious Experience* abstracts the general foundation of religions in the two propositions (from lecture XX):

The warring gods and formulas of the various religions do indeed cancel each other, but there is a certain uniform deliverance in which religions all appear to meet. It consists of two parts:

1. An uneasiness; and
2. Its solution.

1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is something wrong about us as we naturally stand.

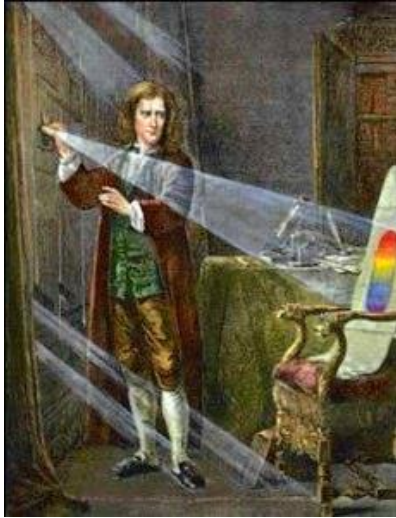
2. The solution is a sense that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers.

I myself frequently argue that modern science and mathematics exemplify a form of higher intelligence that bears comparison with traditional spiritual images of it, including their being 'power houses' hidden from normal view – often in extremely complex technologically rich environments such as the Large Hadron Collider in Europe. One must remember that modern science and mathematics are hidden from view not simply because they are conducted in restricted areas but in the sense that relatively few people can *understand* them. People can 'know about it', as is evidenced by the sometimes remarkable documentaries shown on TV (a contemporary version of the wonderful public science demonstrations popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as the Royal Institution's Christmas lectures instigated by Michael Faraday).

A serious problem in contemporary society stems from the limited understanding the general population has of science and mathematics. Scientific ideas enter general culture in various ways and may be slowly changing how people think; but this is a secondary reflection of the primary intellectual steps behind the ideas that later eventually seize public attention. I am sometimes reminded of Jung's remark that his 'archetypes' cannot themselves be known; only *images* of them can be known. It is a long-standing issue in science, especially physics, that images must be held at a distance, offering only suggestions for research, while mathematics is preferred as a test of reality.

Strictly speaking, archetypal figures such as the hero, the goddess and the wise man are not archetypes, but archetypal images which have crystallized out of the archetypes-as-such: as Jung put it, "definite mythological images of motifs ... are nothing more than conscious representations; it would be absurd to assume that such variable representations could be inherited", as opposed to their deeper, instinctual sources – "the 'archaic remnants', which I call 'archetypes' or 'primordial images'" *Wikipedia*

As with every other remarkable person or powerful spiritual leader, Gurdjieff offers nothing that might usefully inform scientific research, or even archaeological and historic studies. Concerning the latter, his mythological history as written in Beelzebub's tales dates back no further than the Sumerian (in Gurdjieff's language "Tiklamiashian") civilisation 5000 years ago; shows no understanding of human biological evolution and is known to have his facts wrong about prehistory (as when he argued with John Bennett that the Lascaux cave paintings were only 6 to 7000 years old). It is disturbing then to read and hear people claim Gurdjieff was privy to 'higher objective science'.



I can say, as a one-time historian of science, that we can find reflections of this attitude in the past, some of which did indeed inspire science. A case in point is Isaac Newton who believed there had been an ancient science, often called Chaldean, However, what he and others then did was to set about *creating such a science themselves*. Needless to say, Gurdjieffians have contributed nothing to scientific research and many of them have been guilty of preaching an ‘objective science’ that has no substance and ignores the real advances made in contemporary science. We can make an exception for John Bennett’s heroic attempts to marry Gurdjieff’s ideas with contemporary physics, which appear in his magnum opus *The Dramatic Universe*. He modestly described it as a ‘series of footnotes’ to Gurdjieff’s First

Series of Writings of *All and Everything* called *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*.

We might well ask the naive question: what is this superior wisdom, objective science, higher intelligence and so on that spiritual teachers talk of? Clearly some things once known in the past are forgotten. But this is mostly due to the historical process whereby ‘what things mean’ changes from Epoch to Epoch, or at different time periods. The philosopher Whitehead spoke of what he called the ‘chronoscopic fallacy’ of projecting contemporary attitudes and frames of reference onto the past and judging the works and thoughts of early people from a modern standpoint. Then there are those such as Julian Jaynes who claimed that what thinking or consciousness meant more than about 3000 years ago was quite different from how they appear to us now. This parallels the idea that other cultures, particularly of the East, think or perceived differently from ours. This is even intruded into science: I remember one of my professors at Bristol University saying he thought Japanese culture could have much to offer the thinking required for modern physics.

Speaking of science again, we must recognise that there is a measure of rejection of science amongst the general population. The physicist Heinz Pagels suggested this was due to a fear of the alien. He said scientific discovery opens us to the reality of other entities far removed from ordinary experience. Just think of what strangeness has entered our human in the last hundred years or so: relativity and the warping of space time, quantum entanglement, black holes, dark matter, etc; in biology, the significance of the trillions of alien cells within us just beginning to make its impact; and, then, in evolution, the revelation of other species that have intersected and bred with humans. Science defies common sense. And this produces a certain alienation such that people cling to old ideas and familiar images to ‘shield’ them from the implications of taking scientific discoveries and methods seriously.

Just to state the obvious, science challenges religious beliefs but also supports the view that we *personally* live largely in illusions – a view current in both physics and psychology – something the esoteric fourth way also claims though with a different kind of evidence.

Rejection of science is typical of gurus whose general tendency is to criticise Western civilisation as somehow materialistic or fragmentary. This is somewhat irrational, in so many people seem to forget that it is only in the modern Western world that some measure of support for equality –

especially in the treatment of women – and freedom of speech has been developed. Just about every traditional culture has suppressed women, yet they are often extolled as being on a higher level of spirituality! This actually hints at how much spiritual leadership is permeated by patriarchy and right-wing views. Such upside-downness might well be linked to Gurdjieff's *kundabuffer* he said was implanted by higher powers in humans to make us see: 'reality reflected in their attention upside down.' (The idea of kundabuffer belongs in that esoteric realm where biological organs are supposed to be the location of psychological or spiritual powers; but that is another story)

Within the corpus of concepts and imagery associated with remarkable people is the stark idea that *they see things that we do not*; they do not just have different concepts but *live* in another reality one might say. Such an idea, I suggest, relies on the fact that these people do not offer evidence and calculation in support of their claims. They may suggest that people 'see for themselves' as, for example, Steiner might do – because he does invite people to acquire clairvoyant vision – but there is rarely any provision of what in scientific thinking is called inter-subjective testing. There may be a promise of an alternative kind of empiricism, not based on standard methods of research and reasoning; in the main, but there is no working community sharing information and supporting independent verification. There are no – as far as I know – conferences where the 'superior people' may compare and argue their ideas and findings. In no small part this state of affairs is supported by a widespread tendency to regard silence as providing a more meaningful communication than articulate speech! In other words, the claims of the remarkable people we are considering seem to be deliberately made such a way that they are not open to ordinary discourse.



The Dalai Lama made strong attempts to develop a dialogue between modern science and Buddhist ideas, and many meetings were held bringing monks and scientists together. But, despite good will on both sides, no progress was made.

Gurdjieff himself, who often cited various 'ancient manuscripts' as the sources of his esoteric knowledge, never presented any such documents (he even invented a then seemingly contemporary newspaper article in his *Third Series*) so that it was not possible to check on any of his claims. In part, this may have been due to his cultural conditioning, as he came from a region invested with the merging of fact and fiction with little regard for evidence in strictly Western terms.

So far, we have, in our rapid survey of what remarkable men taught, stayed within the provenance of *fact*. But there are shadowy and deep issues that concern *value*. This has to do with questions of truth and meaning. For instance, central to the teaching of Gurdjieff is the idea that what we call 'consciousness' is only a *fake*. He more or less says that what we call consciousness is the surface appearance – and more, the *veil* over the true underlying consciousness, which he identified in common language with what we call our 'subconsciousness'. Bennett expresses it this way:

The basic illusion concerns the nature of consciousness. What we ordinarily call consciousness is only a reflection of consciousness. The true consciousness is the reverse of what men call consciousness. Behind our ordinary consciousness, there is another consciousness, but it is more true to say that what we call consciousness, our ordinary consciousness, is, as it were, a reversal of consciousness, rather like the negative of a photograph where light seems dark and dark seems light. *Gurdjieff A Very Great Enigma*, p.68

I place this matter in the domain of value because I feel that what is involved is more than a matter of a phenomenon or fact - because it involves choice. Gurdjieff is directing us at that very thing in which, as is widely believed, that we already have in operation *that which knows that we are conscious*. In philosophy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this was a key assertion of Franz Brentano, who had a major influence on Western thought, including that of Freud and Husserl. Gurdjieff, I would say, attacks this common belief and, incidentally, this makes it not surprising that his appeal has never been a popular one. Repeatedly he presents a picture of humanity as a whole as asleep, self deceived, at variance with itself, et cetera, living a life that is *unreal*. He makes the point categorically in his last book *Life is Real Then, Only When 'I Am'*.

To put it another way: we are real only when *we make it so*. John Bennett, one of Gurdjieff's leading exponents, used a Greek word *hyparxis* to signify *ableness-to-be*, a capacity that is to be developed by work on oneself. The double sense of 'self upon self' is most significant.

Given by nature a life as a birthright *we have still from ourselves to live* this life. The double action suggested in such a phrase links with an expression of the cybernetician Heinz von Foerster, here given with a complementary quote from David Finkelstein:

**Heinz von Foerster: "I am the observed link between myself and observing myself."**

**David Finkelstein: "An observed observer cannot observe."**

I find these two statements having as great an impact as anything in mathematical physics yet I am hard put to explain them. A few years ago, I rendered Foerster's statement into a quasi-mathematical form:

$$I = I (I)$$

I suspect that Gurdjieff's *self-observation* has the limited form of subject looking at object - in his terms, one centre observing another - while his *self-remembering* involves all three centres at once. The latter condition I identify with *will* which I regard as the ultimate principle of Gurdjieff's ideas; it might be expressed in this bare abstract formulation:

$$2 \rightarrow 3$$

such an idea can be found in known philosophy such as that of Hegel - the negation of the negation - and Peirce - in his 'trichotomy'. What is these days called 'mindfulness' is merely 2-fold; without the third it leads to nothing.

The major import of Gurdjieff's *I Am* is the powerful fusion of value (I) and fact (Am). Within this expression is the critical factor identified in Bennett's language as *hyparxis* or *ableness - to - be of I Can*; otherwise spoken of as the *third force*.

Now, to attempt to express and summarise a great deal. I keep to the thread of such abstract notions as that of the third force. Alongside my citation of *I am* and *I can* we include – also from Gurdjieff – *I wish*, making *am – wish – can* a Trinity in which *I is real*.

I cannot over emphasise how much thinking and belief is governed by the simple but misleading common idea of consciousness that ‘I am ‘aware of something’.’ This becomes problematic when we speak of ‘observing oneself’ or ‘self-consciousness’ because something then comes into play which is ill served by speaking, for example, in terms of ‘becoming more conscious’. At best, we might consider the idea of becoming *differently* conscious. A *qualitative* difference is involved. And, to revert to my earlier suggestion, this is a question of *value*. Change of quality relates to value and its operation is *will*.

An example from physics may help: the first a differential of space according to time is called *velocity*  $dx/dt$ . The second differential of space or the differential of velocity with respect to time, is called *acceleration* and written  $d^2x/dt^2$ . Distinguishing the two is vital in physics. They are both motions but qualitatively different. In Newton’s laws, acceleration is change of velocity that is due to what he called a ‘force’, a new factor changing the situation. I take this as a metaphor for the action called in Gurdjieff circles ‘waking up’; which means an awakening or quickening from identification with the serial consciousness in which we live for most of the time. Consciousness is then become something precious – that is, having value – and not a common commodity. And it as a peculiar property of only coming to presence if ‘I’ accept, embrace and *value* it.

It is a hazardous transition. As T. S. Eliot put it, ‘we had the experience but missed the meaning’. Meaning comes with understanding; an experiential state is not enough. As Gurdjieff acutely pointed out: if I believe I am already conscious I am not going to bother to ‘wake up’ and work on myself to become conscious. And it is important whether I regard an experiential moment of waking up as an endpoint or as a beginning. In broad terms, we might understand it as an entry into higher worlds – a portal one might say. It entails a responsibility because, as Bennett sometimes spelt out, it gives the capacity of making *true decisions*. It was to enable us to be capable of service, really helping others and even being of use to God!

My considerations of waking up puts the ball into the student’s court. (Here I echo Kate Bush’s song *Them Heavy People*) It is interesting, by the way, to contrast Steiner and Gurdjieff in this respect. Steiner goes for clairvoyance while Gurdjieff calls for self-remembering. It is arguable that Gurdjieff’s approach as a more stark and demanding because it is directed at the individuality rather than on what it perceives. The whole corpus of Gurdjieff’s teaching can be seen as a device to shock and enable people into seeing something for themselves, which is *this very seeing itself*. But, I’m going to go much further in saying that what they see is *what they individually decide to see*. What the individual sees is an essential part of its destiny or its will to be. The individual *has* to embrace the givens of its life, its natural essence and environment, and become a ‘super-existentialist’ in accepting what its life is but also transcending it to become realised. To put it perhaps crudely: it is not to enter the heaven of beings singing in unison but a multi-verse of divinity. In ordinary terms this is simply to say ‘life is what you make it’ with the Gurdjieff proviso that you have to be *able* to make it so.

This can be taken to be identical with the concerns of any human being. Somehow, each of us seeks a fusion of inner and outer data to realise something 'better'; to attain the Good in platonic terms. Obviously, this is a matter of value. What each of us brings to life is the sense of something more, a feeling of what is missing. Whether we project this into outer advantages or inner realisation, we are compelled to be 'still moving – into a deeper communion' as Eliot put it. Which means that each of us is an esotericist in our own unique way.

Gurdjieff's declaration that *the only true initiation is self-initiation* can be extended to make the content of initiation the individuality itself.

What is there then that is 'objective'? My picture of it draws on images from two quite different sources in the spirit that they can coincide and be the same. The first is the technology of radio telescopes that can utilise different devices widely separated, linking them together to effect a deeper perception.



The second is exemplified in mystical stories such as that of the three dervishes, told by Idries Shah, which speaks of a deep knowledge within humanity.

Meanwhile, Do-Agha, the Second Dervish, set off on his search for the Deep Knowledge. Instead of asking everywhere he went for the local sages or new exercises and postures, he just asked if anyone had heard of the Magic Mirror. Many misleading answers were given to him, but at last he realized where it might be. It was suspended in a well by a piece of string as fine as a hair, and it was itself only a fragment, because it was made up of the thoughts of men, and there were not enough thoughts to make a whole mirror.

When he had outwitted the demon who guarded it, Do-Agha gazed into the mirror and asked for the Deep Knowledge. Instantly it was his. He settled down and taught in happiness for many years. But because his disciples did not maintain the same degree of concentration needed to renew the mirror regularly, it vanished away. Yet to this day there are people who gaze into mirrors, thinking that this is the Magic Mirror of Do-Agha, the Dervish. *Tales of the Dervishes* p. 105

In both we see the need for an intersubjective testing that is really only possible when we have crossed the 'Gurdjieff threshold' (as I call it these days) and are capable of making changes in being to match the expansion of knowledge. Being is here used to mean, as in Bennett's writings, 'degree of inner togetherness'. It is related to the fact that knowledge has not only a quantitative aspect but also a qualitative one, which is the incorporation of mutual relevance; it is the difference between a checklist and a structure. An implication of this perspective is the *value of coalescence*.

In Gurdjieff's psychology, we have various what he called 'centres' like 'brains' or 'intelligences'; but, ordinarily, these are in 'discord'. They do not agree with each other in what they see or want. They are at cross purposes. The aim of 'work on oneself' was to clean up the centres and bring them



into a co-operative state. It is so that they then *coalesce* and *create something new*. In the Gurdjieff teaching, this is to create or realise one's own true 'I'.

"So, my boy, in view of the fact that there continue to flow in the presences also of your contemporary favorites three kinds of independent associations which also continue to evoke different kinds of being-impulses, and at the same time that they have already entirely ceased the conscious actualization in their presences of all those cosmic results by means of which alone the mentioned being-property can be acquired in three-brained beings, then, in consequence, the common presence of each of your contemporary favorites during the process of his existence consists, as I have already told you, as it were, of three quite separate personalities—three personalities which have and can have nothing in common with each other, either in respect of the nature of their arising or in respect of their manifestations.

"Hence it is that there just proceeds in them that particularity of their common presence which is that with one part of their essence they always intend to wish one thing; at the same time with another part they definitely wish something else; and thanks to the third part, they already do something quite the contrary.

"In short, what happens in their psyche is just what our dear teacher Mullah Nassr Eddin defines by the word a 'mix-up'

In classical mysticism, the initial steps are *purification*. This was usually understood as eliminating sin and egoism. Gurdjieff gives a much more concrete and workable idea, advocating that each of the centres *takes on its own proper work*; so that it is then *able* to communicate, commune and coalesce with the others to create a vehicle of the true 'I'. Such a body can receive what Gurdjieff early on called 'the Master'.

Gurdjieff's idea that we can *wake up to who we are* is startling. Most people imagine they know themselves, have direct perception of the real world and understand what they are doing and why. Gurdjieff dismisses all that as *fiction*. He hints (especially in his book *Meetings with Remarkable Men*) that when 'awake' people who 'have their own I' band together *they live in a different world*.

I would assume that the descriptions of this world that come to us are mythological, allegorical, etc. rather than factual. It may be that there are no 'facts' in other worlds as we know them. There may be no other way to communicate the nature of another world than by use of fables. It is striking that Bennett loved the *Fables* of R. L. Stevenson and drew on them for his teaching. Time and again, Gurdjieff points to a kind of writing and telling that is not factual or true in the obvious external sense but in an 'inner sense'. This could be said to be the 'same' as that of dreams and the imagination – or art – but behoves us to discover what is *authentic* in them.

This leaves me to reflect on how Gurdjieff describes the three series of writings called *All and Everything*. Here are his own words:

FIRST SERIES: Three books under the title of "An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man," or, "Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson."

SECOND SERIES: Three books under the common title of "Meetings with Remarkable Men"

THIRD SERIES: Four books under the common title of ‘Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am.’

All written according to entirely new principles of logical reasoning and strictly directed towards the solution of the following three cardinal problems:

FIRST SERIES: TO destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world.

SECOND SERIES: TO acquaint the reader with the material required for a new creation and to prove the soundness and good quality of it.

THIRD SERIES: TO assist the arising, in the mentation and in the feelings of the reader, of a veritable, nonfantastic representation not of that illusory world which he now perceives, but of the world existing in reality.

And here are my remarks:

The first series, *Beelzebub's tales to His Grandson*, was intended to destroy ‘mercilessly’ the readers usual mentation. Gurdjieff claims that this mentation has accumulated over centuries and is defective. I want to emphasise that he is attacking the nature of this mentation are not merely any particular thought or idea. One way of putting it is to say that we do not understand how to understand.

I feel a close connection between Gurdjieff's ideas and those expressed by Krishnamurti in, for example, his conversations with David Bohm called *The Ending of Time*. Krishnamurti looks for what went wrong in human development and identifies it with what he calls ‘thinking’. Bohm himself throughout his life sought for an authentic mode of thinking, as in his book *Thought as a System*.

To make a sweeping generalisation, most people's attempts to ‘understand’ the content of *Beelzebub's tales* simply exhibit the wrong thinking that Gurdjieff attacks. I believe a primary function of the book is that it *can* enable us to reflect in ourselves and see the way we are thinking, how it is leading us astray. In describing the founder of an ancient brotherhood, Belcultiassi, he says:

. . . when this same later Saint Individual Belcultiassi was once contemplating, according to the practise of every normal being, and his thoughts were by association concentrated on himself, that is to say, on the sense and aim of his existence, he suddenly sensed and cognized that the process of the functioning of the whole of him had until then proceeded not as it should have proceeded according to sane logic.  
*Beelzebub's Tales*, p. 294-5

Speaking generally again, it is not appreciated how much goes wrong in us and between us because of the ‘wrong thinking’ which stems from worldviews that make it impossible to understand life. We may be – and mostly are - unaware of these worldviews but they govern how we see and interpret everything.

In the second series, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Gurdjieff says he is writing of the possibility of another world, a more real world than our usual one (where reality is distorted because of our

thinking). This world is illustrated or suggested by his encounters with remarkable men, friends who have to some degree cleaned up their minds. What is rarely noted, it seems to me, is that he situates this making of a new world in friendship, dialogue and mutual cooperation. In my book on dialogue I draw attention to the significance of what is popularly known as 'group consciousness'. As already noted, Bennett in a lecture included in his small book *Gurdjieff A Very Great Enigma*, makes this of supreme importance. Gurdjieff himself never directly speaks of group consciousness, only pointing to the significance of groups of people who can work together inwardly as well as outwardly. In *Gurdjieff – A Very Great Enigma* Bennett says:

The New World will be dominated by active, mobile and much more intelligent forms of social life This is why we have to look to small groups and communities; and above all to the emergence of group consciousness which corresponds to the state of the warm-blooded animals. We need a warm-blooded society, not the present cold-blooded society.

. . . there is fictitious group consciousness and there is real group-consciousness. To understand the difference is very important for anyone who is concerned about the society of the future. It is possible to produce an emotional excitement shared by a large number of people. This is not group consciousness but 'crowd consciousness'. It is quite different and really the opposite. Crowd consciousness is always wasteful even if it is not destructive. Group consciousness is always creative. Crowd consciousness can be produced by external stimulus whereas group consciousness can only be achieved by internal change.

That cooperation is a crucial property of the human species is well known but it needs to be what Gurdjieff would call 'spiritualised'; not dependent upon any external threat or xenophobia. I argue that, just as we should refute the common assumption that we are conscious, so we should question any assumption that we can cooperate impartially. Remember that in human evolution it seems that the power of the 'we' has been linked to rejection and hatred of the 'them'. Cooperation, like consciousness, is assumed to be unnatural possession whereas, I suggest, what we have of them is just rudimentary.

Bennett, in his metaphysical speculations, supposed that just as the elements of mind – the centres for example – could be coalesced into *soul*, so there would be evolving in humanity a unified human soul. His concept of our entry into what he called the *synergic epoch* was an expression of that vision, though just a hint of a distant future. It signified a painful learning of how to overcome separation without loss of reality.

The third series, *Life is Real* for short, was described as giving the basis for the making of a new world, a *third world*. I return now to Bennett and language that Gurdjieff himself never used: this third world would be the world of *will*. It is totally unlike anything we can imagine. A strange possibility is that we might operate in this world unconsciously! To return to Gurdjieff, in *Life is Real* the Third World is described as the *true inner world*. It seems that were we to come into the Third World then the second world, that we might have felt to be our personal inner world, will be seen to be as external as the world around us.

It is a feature of the third series that much of it is devoted to accidents, failures and renunciation. The book itself is fragmented and incomplete (and its composition argued over by Gurdjieff scholars). But this is only fitting because of its content. When it was published it went through more than one edition, the original one ending in the middle of a sentence (strangely reminiscent of James Joyce's *Ulysses*). All the lessons of the previous two series of writings have been assimilated and transcended. The suggestion given by the concluding part of the first edition is that all we have to do is to live long enough to be realised.

Bennett wrote an extraordinary preface to the book when he hoped to have it published on behalf of Gurdjieff's family. In this, he makes the astonishing claim that what he calls the 'first step' or transformation – gaining one's own 'I' – is just the beginning of a creative unfolding of a new kind of life.

The essential message is that the possession of one's own 'I' is *the starting point of development, not an advanced stage to be reached in the distant future*. To deserve the name of Man' one must have one's own 'I' and yet many seekers never even learn what it means to have a 'will of one's own', that is, to possess one's own 'I'.

John Bennett, *Introduction to the Third Series* – our italics

When most followers of Gurdjieff's ideas would hardly dare to claim that they had developed 'inner bodies' or understood the mysteries of *Beelzebub*, it must seem absurd for Bennett to imply that 'having one's own "I"' is something accessible to 'ordinary people'. In connection with this I want to comment on his attitude to what is called 'imagination'. He did not regard it in the negative way many Gurdjieffians did and explicitly avoided using the phrase 'it's *just* imagination'. In his commentaries on *Beelzebub's Tales* he identifies imagination with the fifth substance, *piandjoehary*, Gurdjieff speaks of in his account of transformations. Gurdjieff himself, in *Life is Real*, speaks of this starkly as *self-deception* and makes the astonishing statement:

. . . as a means for self-perfecting a man can use a certain property which is in his psyche, and which is even of a very negative character. This property can serve as an aid to self-perfecting and exists in people in general, particularly in contemporary people, and especially in you, and is none other than that which I have many times condemned and which people themselves consider an unworthy manifestation for a man who has reached responsible age—of course in this respect also excluding themselves—and it is called "self-deception." (pp. 132-3)

He goes on to say that establishing in oneself the understanding and accomplishment of self-perfecting should be done in the subconsciousness; but, since this is not possible for contemporary people, then: "this can be done only by means of this self-deceptive imaginativeness inherent in him." And he adds:

If you have understood without any doubt what you must do, and how, and fully hope at some time to attain this in reality, you must at the beginning often imagine, but imagine only, that this is already present in you. (p. 133)

In ordinary parlance this means: *to act 'as if' you had real 'I'*. The genius of Gurdjieff and Bennett was to see how the very thing that leads us astray - imagination - can be turned into a means of salvation. There are echoes of this in many fields of endeavour; in the Russian system of innovation TRIZ we *start* from what is called 'the ideal final result IFR' and work backwards to where we are now to see how to get there.

Bennett was an exponent of Gurdjieff's ideas and went to great pains to express what higher possibilities and levels of experience could be like. Nevertheless, he always came back to the proposition that, however far away and beyond us such higher realms seemed to be they are, in fact, immediately at hand in the here and now of what we usually dismiss as 'ordinary life'. In this context he came out with the extraordinary statement *man decides God*. He never explained such an enigmatic saying. For my part, I would like to rephrase it and render it as *man decides 'I'*.

The prospect is terrifying. One is then *totally responsible* for what one does. There is no one else to blame. No reasons. No excuses. I believe this is the true nature of self-remembering. It is far more than a state. On a few occasions, talking with My Bennett about my inner life, we touched upon how the true 'I' does not need anything to support it, not even energy.

In modern parlance it is pure information or, in David Bohm's words, *active information*. Better still is Bennett's favourite word - *will*.

This leads me to the moment when, attending my first seminar conducted by Mr Bennett, the remarkable event held at Coombe Springs in 1965 called *A Spiritual Psychology*, as he took us through the various levels of human selfhood and came to the True Self, I was impelled to ask the question: "Are we all equal at the level of the true self?" He replied that this was not so. People differ in their being. But, he said, they are equal in the realm of will. (Strangely, my question and his reply were not recorded and do not appear in the published book.)

That is a totally original idea; but in fact known instinctively by everyone!

In the arcane language of *Beelzebub's Tales* the word *okidanokh* - the 'omnipresent active element' - was used, according to Bennett, to signify what he calls *will*. Gurdjieff's word seems to derive from Armenian: *Oki* = "soul" *Danokh* = "carrier". The idea of 'soul carrier' seems apposite.

Of critical importance in our story is the non-separation of will and body. Remember that Descartes, often accused of dualism, separated *mind* and body. His 'doubt' which led him to such a result stems from will. *At the same time, it is their unification*. The logic here is triadic but we are wilfully skating over the need to argue and present the case for what must seem an obscure and bewildering idea.

We come to an essential component in the Gurdjieff teachings, also emphasised in Bennett's interpretations. This is the idea of *substances*. The word 'substance' comes from the Latin *substare* 'to stand firm' or be present. The idea that there are different kinds of substance remains in popular thinking - hence the feeling that living things are *substantially* different from non-living ones, even though this is long rejected in natural science. These

days we speak of 'degree of organisation' of material and processes to designate different kinds of entity.

Gurdjieff adopted the language of 'finer states of matter' to speak of different substances and people even imagined there being 'smaller atoms' between or inside larger ones. Bennett seized hold instead of the idea of levels of organisation, under his category of *being* and positioned them in eternity, his second dimension of time. So 'finer matters' were *more within* - but not in a spatial sense.

Bennett reasoned that different qualities of substance could only be registered by consciousness and not by any functional device. In that sense, what is studied by science belongs to a kind of 'flat-land' where everything is on the same level. And we have to *infer* what might be at work which makes things behave as they do.

Prevalent views about reality include some very crude assumptions. One of these is that what is objective is out there and the subjective, in here, are utterly distinct. Another is that the out there is (in spite of questions arising from, say, quantum mechanics) a causal mechanism such that everything that comes into operation arises from a previous operation of 'blind' laws. Further, that the supposed subjective within includes 'free will'. The combination of such incompatible ideas is a travesty of understanding.

In spite of such absurdities I would suppose that everyone looks for some realisation of the engagement of what is within with what is without. This must, I believe, entail a closeness between humanity and the rest of creation without reducing human reality to that of stones and electricity - to put it in a fanciful way. It means extending what we regard as human first of all into all life and then into everything. Of course, this is largely rejected as primitive anthropomorphism.

It must be remembered how stark some prevailing ideas were in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, say, that stemmed from religion. Not only were animals considered to have no souls - hence allowing vivisection free rein - but women were often denied them too! The rise of paganism in the West is, in part, a revolt against the negativity of religion. It is extraordinary also that, in recent times, the great shift has taken place in scientific circles now allowing not only sentience and feeling to animals but even to plants!

There has also been a revolution in attitudes to the body. Classical Europe had long regarded the body as inferior to mind. But, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we hear the poet Walt Whitman singing in celebration of the *body electric*. The change of orientation sidelines Plato, Descartes and Kant and moves us in the direction of Gurdjieff. *Reality is physical*. But the 'physical' is not the supposed world out there seen as a mechanism or system operating blindly but the realm of *presence*.

To cut to the chase: Gurdjieff can help us understand what is often referred to in various spiritual teachings and systems; that what may be regarded as higher intelligence can manifest in us physically in special centres. Incidentally this resonates with what is usually regarded just as a cultural phenomenon: *sacred sites*. Besides numerous accounts in the literature, many of my friends have shared with me their experience of finer energies

concentrated in special places. Gurdjieff himself made use of this in some of his special exercises that drew on such concentrations of higher energy. But these cannot be measured by the consciousness of a machine. Nor are they exempt from the effects of external influences such as prevailing belief systems and herd mentality.

The critical point is that what is claimed by some for the special nature of a sacred site is the physical containment of higher energies within bodies. Bennett speaks of his own experience of recognising in the host carried through the church at St Wandrille as the very body of Christ. This is largely rejected by the majority who consider the nature of the host to be only symbolic and, hence having the presence of Christ only by convention. But, according to Bennett himself, a true symbol does not refer to something by convention but contains it in being: *a symbol has substance*.

The importance of physical location in the body is recognised in some branches of modern psychology, particularly in the work of Eugene Gendlin who surveyed psychotherapeutic practice and concluded that it was only effective when it involved the subject identifying an experience in a location in his body. To drastically cut short vast amounts of explanation, it is sufficient to say that what is involved here is a fusion of the three independent factors – typified in Gurdjieff as the centres of thinking feeling and moving – because only then is there *real consciousness* (made of three) and thus, precisely as Gurdjieff claimed, a real event, a change, an hyparchic moment.

The forces of technology and commerce seem to have separated us from the concreteness of nature and so led us to living in an alternative reality which seems to be suited to the development of what is crudely called ‘artificial intelligence’. In contrast, Gurdjieff and others of similar bent seem to be restoring the sense of an ‘ancient world’ within our very own physical existence. This is palpable in his movements. It is in part why I have worked on creating seminars centred on the paradigmatic phenomena of *gesture*; because gesture is an act we make as incarnated beings in the world, in consort with others.

Although Gurdjieff said it was impossible to share understanding, he seems to have allowed the sharing of substances. This was enshrined in his famous law of the *reciprocal maintenance of everything existing*. There is a specialised area of this that comes up in spiritual literature. This has to do with how *merits* can be given to or shared with other people (in Islam, the term ‘merit’ can be equated with *baraka*; in India with *shakiptat*). What was called the transfer of merits was an acknowledged practice in traditional religion. Gurdjieff spoke about ‘lending’ an energy to a pupil to enable him to make a step that he was then obliged to repay perhaps to another person entirely.

Which leaves me to speculate about an aspect of the fourth way which is rarely directly addressed: how to enable cooperation. The world around us suggests that real cooperation is rare and is most rare in what is taken to be the highest levels of authority. Gurdjieff was always clear that we cannot do what we are not *able* to do. It seems that ableness is substantial. It might be compared to a fuel but this is not enough because ableness is not only power but intelligence. On many occasions Bennett asserted that intelligence was a substance and that

we ourselves are only intelligence if some of the substance comes into us. We can know what to do but not be able to do it unless we have the intelligence.

What we are calling a substance *is able to do something*.

I believe that Doris Lessing – who knew about Gurdjieff but was a follower of Idries Shah – had a sense of what is at stake when she spoke of *the substance-of- we-feeling*. In her Shikasta novels it is the spiritual substance that flows from Canopus to Shikasta.

Before the Catastrophe, in the Time of the Giants, who had been the Natives' friends and mentors, and who had taught them everything, Shikasta had been an easy pleasant world, where there was little danger or threat. Canopus was able to feed Shikasta with a rich and vigorous air, which kept everyone safe and healthy, and above all, made them love each other. But because of an accident, this substance-of-life could not reach here as it had, could reach this place only in pitifully small quantities. This supply of finer air had a name. It was called SOWF - the substance-of-we-feeling [...] The little trickle of SOWF that reached this place was the most precious thing they had, and would keep them from falling back to animal level. I said there was a gulf between them and the other animals of Shikasta, and what made them higher was their knowledge of SOWF. SOWF would protect and preserve them. They must reverence SOWF.

. . . coming from Canopus to Shikasta was a small steady trickle of this substance, and continue to come, always. This was a promise from Canopus to Shikasta. In due time - I did not say thousands upon thousands of years! - this trickle would become a flood. . . . They must not spoil themselves by taking too much of the substance of Shikasta. They must not use others. They must not let themselves become animals who lived only to eat and to sleep and to eat again - no, a part of their lives must be set aside for the remembrance of Canopus, memory of the substance-of-we-feeling, which was all they had. 96-7 *Shikasta*

The building of 'fourth way communities' was one of Bennett's foremost concerns. It was still an unfulfilled dream at the time of his death. He seemed to have believed that such communities had existed in the past and that knowledge of this was an inspiration to find out how to create them now. There exist communities and groups based on ethnicity, common interests or professional enterprises but what he meant by a *fourth way* community was to be based on *being* or an 'inward connection' that had to be intentionally created.

I see that a definition corresponding to the idea of an intentional fourth way community might be *the reciprocal maintenance of people 'working on themselves'*. This definition means far more than being in the same state or sharing in common experiences; it entails a *creative exchange of substances*. This might be called 'sexual'. Bennett, though much of a prude, was aware of this. He was fascinated by the mass gatherings of young people in music festivals that grew in the 1960s, saying that such gatherings *en masse* could attract higher energies through group sex but that it was safer through music.

My mentor in dialogue method, Patrick de Mare, declared that dialogue was *erotic* but not promiscuous. Although not involving physical intercourse, dialogue is nevertheless physical.



De mare thought this might be to do with *shared breathing*. Just as Gurdjieff's transformational psychology gives a special place to 'breathing with awareness' as a 'spiritual food' so, in dialogue, there could be a 'speaking with awareness' that could nourish what Bennett called 'group consciousness'.

There is no doubt about it. What is called 'the work', in common with many spiritual traditions, addresses a way of existence and communication between people that is not based on externals but is, still, physical in a special sense. We have, for instance, to see the body as quite 'mental' and thinking as 'bodily' in order to appreciate the kind of physicality meant. It is, for the sake of a better word, made of *intentional substances*. It does not exist unless we make it so. And are able to reciprocally exchange our substance.

The etymological meaning of the word 'consciousness' is *to know together*. It is not fanciful to recall the biblical meaning of the verb to 'know'.

So, well then, it might be that certain kinds of groups can create a substance that can alleviate the evils of the world. To do this requires ableness and know-how. It may well be that there are 'bees' capable of gathering 'nectar' from various sources to make a 'honey' (the idea of the *Sarmoun Brotherhood*) that might feed the 'gods' who can change the workings of time.

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## Taos Pueblo Buffalo Dance - JOURNALS – January 6, 2019

Michael White

*The Taos people say, “We are in one nest”.*

I had a calendar of the ceremonial cycle at Taos and kept it on my desk. When Susan and I decided to make a trip to New Mexico this year I saw that the buffalo dance was going to be January 6<sup>th</sup>. Susan booked the flights and got us rooms at Mabel Dodge Luhan’s Bed and Breakfast. We were in.

On the day of the buffalo dance we awoke at 6:30 AM with a feeling of excitement and anticipation as the first light of the day streamed through the windows at Mabel Dodge Luhan’s house. They have a writer-in-residence program and the current writer, Cyrus Cassells, had asked to ride out to the pueblo with us. We met Cyrus at breakfast and headed over to the pueblo about 9:30. It turns out he is a descendant of Thomas Jefferson through Sally Hemmings and he told us a little of his family history. He teaches at Texas State University at Austin and has traveled the world as a poet doing readings and teaching. He is also an actor and is about to publish a novel.

The pueblo opened at 10:00 AM and I wanted to be there. I had read an account from the 1920s where the dancers emerged from the kivas about 10:30 and did two rounds of dancing, with a feast in between the sessions. John, a friend who lives in the pueblo, said it would start about 2:00 PM in the afternoon. The woman at the pueblo check in desk said the start time would be about 10:30 AM so there was conflicting information. I assumed John would know what he was talking about but certainly didn’t mind being there early to hang out in the pueblo. We walked into the pueblo right at ten o’clock. As we walked in it started to snow. The ground was already covered with six inches of snow and the temperature was well below freezing. Since buffalo love the cold weather, and one point of the dance is to bring snow, it seemed like a very auspicious start. As we walked into the plaza, there on our left, was the northside pueblo, one of the most famous buildings in America. It is the oldest continually occupied building in America, perhaps in the world. This beautiful earth colored adobe palace, five stories tall, is the only multi-storied adobe pueblo that has made it into modern times. The Hopi still have their pueblo building but it has been continuously rebuilt out of



new materials so now much of it is concrete block. Here in Taos they maintain it yearly; it arises out of the earth, is literally made of the earth. It is the tallest of all the pueblos. It is crazy trying to count the five stories since it isn’t built like a modern American building, rather it is built like a mountain. The placement of the rooms looks haphazard but organic, and it is capped with a small apartment at the very top.

The first Spanish to come through, the first damn conquistador, Hernando de Alvarado, sent out by Coronado to make first contact, came to the pueblo in 1540 and from his description it looks now much as it looked then. The creek coming down from Blue Lake bifurcates the pueblo, the northside with its five-story building, then the

southside, four stories, squat and compact, a warren of rooms on top of rooms, with little alley ways between a complex of adobe buildings, many with rounded adobe horno ovens in front on the ground floor. The doors, a relatively new invention, since the people traditionally went in through the roofs, are painted bright blue, standing out against the muted earth tones of the building.

When the Spanish invaded the Rio Grande valley it was filled with multi-storied adobe pueblos, clustered mainly along the Rio Grande and its tributaries. Now there is only one, this one. There are twenty pueblos still here, mostly in New Mexico, the Hopi across the border in Arizona, but only here at Taos has the original building survived, been maintained, and lived in to this day. Many of the other pueblos still occupy the same land, still have their plazas but the old adobe multi-story buildings didn't survive, they were replaced, rebuilt, over and over, often on the same site.

No one knows how old this place is. According to the Taos legends the people fell out of the sky into Blue Lake, then came down the creek to the place of red willows where they built these buildings and they have been here ever since. No archaeologist has ever dug into the buildings. The best guess is that it has been here for over a thousand years, that it was built around the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century of the common era. To me it feels like a miracle that it has survived and every time I step into the plaza it gives me the shivers. I love it here, revere it, honor it, it makes me feel like I have stepped back in time, that I have stepped outside of time. It is an expression of the people, the face, the countenance of the people; it is their body, their dwelling place. And, since it is made of mud, if the people left it, the buildings would wash away into the creek, and return to the earth. Only their annual effort, refurbishing, renewing the adobe, keeps it intact, keeps it whole and, as long as stands, it is a monument to the people who live here, who maintain it.



We slowly walked around the pueblo touring the buildings, stopping in at the few shops that were open. I was expecting to hear drums at any moment marking the start of the dances, but so far nothing. Susan and I decided to go in the church. The church felt warm and welcoming. There was an Ashley woodburning stove in the center of the church. We sat in one of the pews toward the back and took off our hats and gloves.

We were expecting Mark Nelson and three friends from Synergia Ranch in Santa Fe to show up sometime soon. I got a text from Mark telling us to expect them before noon. After a half hour or so sitting in silence I got anxious and wanted to go back out in the plaza. As we left the church the snow was coming down hard. It was beautiful, the air was filled with snow and the mountain behind the pueblo was totally shrouded and the sky seemed to come down right on top of the pueblo, which stood out in dramatic contrast to the white snow filling the air. We made another round with Cyrus and then headed into one of the houses where they were selling hot cider and fruit pies. Susan left to go to the visitor's center. I ordered for both of us and when she came back she had Mark and his three friends with her.

We had met Mark Nelson in October at a Fourth Way seminar hosted by DuVersity in Nashville led by Anthony Blake over from England. Anthony brought Mark in to talk about the Biosphere 2 project. Mark had been involved from the beginning and was one of the eight people who lived in the Biosphere for the full two years of the project. (His talk is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahba3LRXk5k&t=3805s>). We had stayed in touch and he wanted to see the buffalo dance so here we were. He had a good friend, Rio Hahn, who had been a Captain of the Heraclitus, an ocean traveling boat that was a part of the Institute of Ecotechnics. Rio was a bona fide explorer, a member of the Explorer's Club and an equally interesting personality. He had a friend with him, Ildiko Thoth, a Magyar from Czechoslovakia. Mark was accompanied by Susannah Garret, the granddaughter of Pat Garrett, the man who killed Billy the Kid. Cyrus was with us as well and we all occupied one corner of the room and had introductions. It was a very interesting little group; poets, writers, scientists and explorers. We were drinking hot cider and enjoying the warmth from the kiva fireplace in the corner of the room.

At about 12:30 we all ventured out into the plaza, the snow was still coming down, the air alive with the almost sound of the snow falling through the air. We made a round ending up at the east end of the racetrack where we could see the kivas. But nothing was stirring so, after a few minutes, we headed across the plaza back to the church to stay warm until we could hear some drumming. Inside I studied the mural on the wall of the front of the church. The building had high ceilings with large vigas that extended across the width of the building. There was an altar in the front and three big niches in the front wall. There was a doll like statue of the virgin Mary in the center niche. She was about three feet tall dressed all in white with a crown on her head. To her right was another smaller statue of Mary and to her left was a wooden statue of Saint Jerome, the patron saint of the area. Of course, there was a statue of Jesus on the cross hanging in the top center of the wall.

The wall was whitewashed and covered with murals. Looking at them I could see where native imagery began to sneak into the picture. There are tall corn plants with ripe ears of corn and full tassels painted on both sides of the main niches. There are morning glory vines growing up the corn stocks. The corn was an obvious native addition, the importance of corn meal in native ceremony was well known here at Taos and in the other pueblos. But the morning glories were even stranger since I knew the seeds of the morning glories have a psychedelic component that is similar to LSD and the Indians in central Mexico used them in a ritual ceremonial context. To them the psychedelic state was a direct immediate experience of the divine. The feeling of the psychedelic energy, the

altered state of awareness, the added excitement and surging energy were what it felt like to be in the presence of the supernatural.

These two plants painted on the front wall of the church showed how much of the old ways were still alive. Then, in the lower area in the mural were several little clumps of red willows. The pueblo



people refer to their home as the Place Where the Red Willows Grow. All along the creek where it bisects the pueblo there are clumps of red willows. At this time of year the leaves on the willow trees have all fallen and the stems of the trees are bright red, hence the name. In the summer with the full foliage the leaves conceals the red stems,

but in the winter they stand out against the white snow.

I sat in the silence, enjoying the quiet and the warmth but after twenty minutes I got anxious and wanted to get back to the plaza to await the dancers. Our little group made our way over to where we could see the kivas on the northside of the pueblo. There were a few dancers gathered around the kivas, a good sign. Then three of the men, all wrapped in colorful blankets, each one with a single eagle feather on the back of his head, walked down from the kiva and moved the barriers that block the alley that leads back to the kivas. I assumed these men were priests or drummers or part of the choir and that this was a definite signal that the dances were about to begin.

According to Frank Hamilton Cushing, in pueblo culture, animals, acting only on instinct, are more mysterious and more powerful than humans who must rely on them for food and for guidance in spiritual matters. Consequently, they honor them with dances such as the buffalo dance. The buffalo dance is ancient theater before it was separated from religion. The myths that hold the people together are re-enacted each year in the dances, and the ceremonies and the songs. The dances and ceremonies provide a stage for the recitation and re-enactment of their stories. In this drama the actors identify with the roles they play. Putting on the mask of the animals is a transubstantiation, the masked dancer has the power of the animal. In the dance the spirit of the animals come into the village and it is a cause for celebration.

It was a beautiful day, cold, the air filled with snow, the mountain behind the pueblo veiled. We all moved about nervously, anxious for the ceremony to begin. In a few minutes more dancers appeared, all with their buffalo headdresses in place, and I could see a set of deer antlers sticking up over the head of one of the dancers. Then the dancers started in a procession down from the northside kivas in two lines led by an elder wrapped in his blanket. They stopped just before entering the racetrack and just at that moment we heard the whoops and calls of the dancers coming from the southside. Another procession of dancers was moving toward the lower bridge

heading our way from the southside kivas. Now the excitement level in the small crowd grew as the two groups of dancers met just inside the wall where the racetrack crossed into the pueblo. I counted about twenty-five buffalo dancers, one deer dancer and a group of ten drummers and another ten priests or attendants who were dressed similar to the drummers only they didn't have drums. Then there were two men with buckskin quivers on their backs, carrying a bow and a few arrows in one hand, plus there were a couple of other men, wrapped in their blankets carrying a single cane. I assumed the men with the quivers were the hunters and the I knew the canes represented the insignia of the governor of the pueblo and that today, King's Day, was the day of transfer of power to a new governor.

I had my first good look at the buffalo dancers. I didn't know what to expect. One account said the dancers in the 1930s had buffalo masks made of bear skin with blackened cow horns. That was definitely not the case now. All these dancers had the real thing, they were wearing actual buffalo heads which were skinned to make them into headdresses. The eyes were empty and the mouths were open slightly with the teeth showing. It was impressive, the heads were large and imposing, some of them had the buffalo pelt down their back. Most, but not all, of the buffalo heads had eagle down prayer feathers attached to the tips of the horns, a few had eagle feathers attached to the top of the headdress. Their bodies were painted in red adobe colored paint with white dots on their arms and legs. They were wearing white kilts with a woven belt around their waists to hold them on and moccasins which had a line of fur around the top - which I assumed was skunk skin since I had seen previous accounts of other pueblos where skunk skin was used to protect them from witches. Each dancer was carrying a single arrow in their right hand with the arrowhead pointed down. They had a band of leather around each arm above the elbow with two small eagle feathers dangling on strings attached to it. It was hard to tell how they could see, they mostly had leather cords of some kind that wrapped around their chests to hold the buffalo heads in place. There were two young boys included among the dancers, they looked about ten or twelve years old and were wearing buffalo heads although they were obviously smaller.

The deer dancer was dramatic. He had a large deer head draped over his head with a full set of antlers with multiple prongs that stood up over a foot above his head. The deer had a bunch of juniper in its mouth. The dancer had a deer pelt covering his back; he was wearing a buckskin kilt around his waist and moccasins. His chest was exposed and painted black as were his legs. He had long sticks that he used like canes in each hand and walked slightly bent over. The drummers were carrying one-sided frame drums. As the procession moved the drum beat reverberated off the walls of the pueblo. The sound of the ten drums all in unison filled the plaza with sounds that resounded in the chest, sounds you could feel, that seemed to come from deep in the earth and fill the air with the pulse of eternity. The men accompanying the drummers were dressed the same as the drummers, they were wrapped in a colorful blanket, a single eagle feather on the crown of their head, aimed to the back. But they were younger than the drummers and they helped the dancers should anything happen with the large headdress or with their moccasins.

I had read everything I could find about the dance, which was damn little. The Taos natives have done an incredible job of keeping it within the walls of the pueblo. But Elsie Clues Parson had

written accounts of two of the dances and had identified the various “actors” in the dance. I was watching closely to see if the same players were still involved.

When all the dancers and drummers were gathered in a group from both sides of the pueblo three women wrapped in blankets stepped out of the crowd and scattered corn meal on the path of the procession. They didn’t lead or go in front of the procession, they just scattered some corn meal on the ground and then disappeared back into the crowd. I assumed they were the Buffalo Mothers but they didn’t seem to have any other role in the drama. In one of the accounts the Buffalo Mothers had moved along with the procession but there was no mention of sprinkling corn meal to sanctify the route for the dancers.

The procession proceeded down the race track, which was lined on both sides with spectators. The native people on the steps and rooftop of the north side pueblo, the local town people and tourists on the other side of the race track. I noticed there were two Sufis in the crowd, dressed all in white with white turbans around their heads. At one point one of the natives in the procession lets out a yell and in response all the native women on both sides of the procession started trilling. It was a wild and unexpected sound that cranked up the level of excitement. The procession moved slowly, the elders drumming and chanting, the buffalo dancers all bunched up shuffling along in four loose knit lines. They made their way to the area in front of the church where the spectators gathered in a circle around them. The drummers were in a semi-circle facing the herd, and the helpers behind the drummers. The drummers were chanting.

Then the buffalo dancers all huddled together in a circle, bent over, hunched and swaying so that it gave the impression of a herd of buffalo milling around. The tempo of the drumming picked up and the chant changed and the dancing started. They had several dance steps or moves they made, forming a hollow square, moving in and out. They also did a serpentine movement in and out of two lines and did a step where they turned around first to one side then to the other. The elders with the drums were chanting during the dance. I had found a translation of a buffalo song from Tesuque pueblo. I assumed the chanting was a song similar to the one I had seen:

*From far away, from Buffalo country  
They come with their little ones  
Rapidly they walk, rapidly they walk  
Buffalo Old Men, Buffalo Old Woman  
Come rapidly with your little ones  
Come with your little ones  
Bring us long life together  
Even now they reach the pueblo*

After about twenty minutes of dancing the herd came back together in a pack and milled around for a few minutes, then someone let out a call, the women trilled in return and I could see movement in the herd. They began moving slowly in four lines. They stopped in front of the northwest corner of the pueblo at the beginning of the race track and began milling around. In a few minutes the drumming changed and they began singing the buffalo songs and the buffalo began

to dance. They did all the same dances they had done in front of the church. When they finished that round of dances they moved further down the racetrack closer to the area where the two groups of dancers had met up. When they got back to where they had started they stopped and did one another repetition of the dances. This time when they finished half the dancers moved up the short side street that leads up to their kivas. When they got to the kivas they stopped and they did one final dance and headed into the kivas.

A small group of us followed the dancers up the side street to within sight of the kivas. They stopped just in front of the kivas and did the final dance. When the dancers disappeared down into the kivas we turned around and went back out to the plaza. I immediately noticed that the other half of the troupe had been moving slowly back across the bridge and were now dancing in the plaza in front of the south side of the pueblo. I didn't want to leave as long as dancers were still dancing. We crossed the footbridge over the frozen creek and noticed someone had made a dance ground with thick straw laid in a circle and the dancers were doing one more round of dances in the courtyard. Then they milled again and moved to the area in front of the kivas on the southside and did one more dance before they too disappeared down the ladders of the three kivas.

As far as I could tell that was the end of the dance. The whole thing lasted about an hour and a half. I felt caught in a time warp. As I was standing watching the buffalo milling in the plaza it felt timeless and, now that it was over, it seemed to have happened in the blink of an eye. It was a shock to step back into linear time. The ceremonial time of the dance echoed deep into the past. The buffalo dancers had been dancing in that way, in that place, again and again, reverberating through time and, when you are in that time, there is a sense of it being the same as it had been for generations, for centuries and you enter a different time. I wondered if the dancers had another round of ceremonies to do after they de-mask? I had read that all the dancers had been abstaining from sex and practicing for the dance for the past four days.

The Taos natives have maintained a noble silence, keeping the meaning of the dances totally to themselves. I heard on this trip that one prominent resident of Taos who has written about the pueblo, both picture books with essays and fictional accounts, had been banned from the pueblo. What happens in the kivas, the inner life, the spiritual life, of the Taos pueblo has remained secret, in spite of hundreds of years of effort by a dedicated cadre of anthropologists, ethnologists, archaeologists and writers of all stripes. And here I sit writing about what I have seen and wondering about the meaning of it all, puzzled at my own role as a writer, seeking to understand what happens in these dances. I want to understand how to address the awful wrongs that have been committed over and over. I want to understand what has driven our psyches, that has brought us to the eve of destruction. I sense a key to this can be found in these indigenous cultures, in these dances. Not that we can ever adopt their lifestyle but that if we are to change the archetypes that have driven us to the brink of destruction we need to find new ways, new ideas, that allow us to restore a balance with the other people who share this globe, with the wildlife of the planet, with the plants and the land itself.

A local artist had written a very brief account where there were fifty buffalo dancers along with six deer dancers and twenty-four chiefs and drummers at a buffalo dance he attended several years ago in Taos. The dancers were painted with red clay and had all sorts of footwear from moccasins



to modern footwear. Other people in the shops around the pueblo told me about dances in years past where over a hundred dancers came out of the kivas. Regardless of the number of dancers it was a magnificent event, it was a time shift where something from the ancient world, something prehistoric, something mythic, still survived and it gave me a feeling of shock from the contact with a way of life so far removed from modern America. I was stunned by it all, I reeled around the pueblo intoxicated by the feeling, disoriented, displaced, my reality distorted.

The pueblo people, in the anthropomorphic dances, see the world through the eyes of the animals. When the people put on the buffalo headdress or the deer headdress they become the spirit of the animal and they dance to honor it and to beseech it to help in all things. The ancient world is still alive in these dances. The deer dance and the buffalo dance are expressions of the ancient ways. The animals know the mysteries and live them in ways that we never can, cursed as we are by thought. The animals know what to do while we, poor humans, have to sit around trying to figure out what we should do. When the dancers put on the mask of the deer or the buffalo, they express mysteries that can't be spoken. In these dances the forces of nature are made visible in a drama that is deep in the blood of the common experience of the pueblo. In the pueblo tribe, compared to modern Americans, people lack our sense of individuation, distinction is shunned, self-assertion decried. When a person speaks they look down to the earth, they say, "Let's go together."

The people hunt the animals, take their life to provide food for the people, and with each death there must be propitiation. There has to be a sacrifice by the people who take the flesh of the animals as their food. The dances are a gesture, a spiritual release of this burden. It is obeisance to the wild, untamed, archaic forces represented by the animals, it is an attempt to repay the debt, to honor their sacrifice. There is no killing, no taking of life, even for food, that can go unanswered and the dance is the expression of the wonder and the mystery of the sacrifices involved in all life.

### **Literary Archaeology**

Elsie Clews Parson, an anthropologist observing the buffalo dance in 1926, counted over 150 buffalo dancers accompanied by four hunters and 25 singers. The dancers were wearing horned buffalo headdresses and robes and were accompanied by other dancers who were dressed as elk, antelope, mountain sheep and deer. They all danced bent over to imitate the movements of the animals. The buffalo dancers had buffalo robes over their shoulders hanging down their backs. They were wearing a black kilt with a leather belt and high-topped moccasins. They had white eagle down feathers attached to the horns and stuck on the headdresses. Their bare arms and legs were spotted with white paint and they had two long eagle feathers dangling from their upper arm. Each dancer carried an arrow in one hand, tip down. The procession was led by painted hunt chiefs, referred to as the watchmen. They were wearing gleaming white kilts, leggings and beaded white moccasins. The buffalo hunters had a white buckskin quiver across their backs. The pueblo officers stood nearby with their ceremonial canes along with a chorus of old men wrapped in colorful blankets. The dancers followed the lead of the buffalo chief in two lines with at least two buffalo mothers between the two lines. The buffalo mothers were wearing embroidered white dresses, woven belts with ribbons and high-wrapped moccasins. They also had parrot and eagle feathers

sticking up on the back of their heads above a spray of iridescent duck feathers. Each woman was carrying a bundle of feathers in one hand. Keshares, the black eyes, appeared and hunted the animals with toy bows and tiny arrows in a ritual meant to honor the game animals, increase the herds and bring good weather. The dancers shook their horns threateningly to scare away illness and bring the snow that swells the mountain streams in a great theater of the powers of nature embodied in the great beasts.

In another account, also by Elsie Clews Parson published in 1936, she wrote a second description of the buffalo dance. In this account the Buffalo Father, who led the procession, had his face painted red, his hands white and he was holding a spruce bough in one hand. The man she called the Fire Society Chief was wearing a buckskin mantle, a quiver on his back, face blackened, a bow with a few arrows in his right hand, feathers in his left. The buffalo men all had two horned headdresses, downy feathers on the tips of the horns, long pelts down the back, with an eagle feathers fan on the back of the head, their face and body blackened with white X marks on their chests, backs, arms and legs. The buffalo women were wearing a white blanket dress with bright scarfs on the left side, arms bare, hands white, face red on top, black on the bottom, with white dots on the cheeks and bangs to the eyes. They had skunk heel bands on their wrapped moccasins. When the dances ended the dancers returned to the kivas for a final dance in front of the kivas. Then they went to the ceremonial house which was marked with spruce boughs by the door.

She reported that the buffalo men had all done four days of retreat before dancing and had to abstain from sex. During retreat they made an altar and circled it with cornmeal. They put the buffalo headdresses on the altar and fed them, all in a room with no fire. During the retreat people who were sick could come and appeal to the buffalo for healing. They also took the buffalo headdress to the sick people's house and put the mask on the head of the sick person. Then they did a final dance at the sick person's home when they complete the dances in the plaza.

Frank Waters described the buffalo dances at Taos and says he never saw more than fifty buffalo dancers at any of the dances he attended in the 1940s. He described the same cast of characters, the buffalo dancers and the Hunt Chiefs. He reported masks made of actual buffalo heads along with masks made of bear skin with blackened cow horns. He said that there were buffalo dances at Tesuque, San Felipe, Cochiti and San Ildefonso as well.

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## Review: The Lord of the World by Rene Guenon

Duversity Publications, 2018 (First publication, 1927 *Le Roi Du Monde*)

Michael White

This highly unusual little book runs the gamut of esoterica from theosophical fantasies to an incredibly tangled conglomeration of Hindu, Buddhist, Hebrew, Muslim, Egyptian, Celtic and Greek references. The author, Rene Guenon (1886–1951), wrote a long series of well received books debunking theosophy and taking a deep dive into Hindu and Muslim mysticism. He edited an influential journal on eastern and gnostic thinking and eventually moved from Paris to Cairo and took the name Abd al-Wahid Yahya when he was initiated into the Sufi Shadhili order.

The theme of the book is initiation and it is framed around a search for a mythic “center of initiation called Agarttha”. Agarttha is a place mentioned in a pair of travel accounts: first, *The Mission to India* published in 1910 by Saint-Yves d’Alveydre and, secondly, by Ferdinand Ossendowski in his *Beasts, Men and Gods* from 1924. These books tell of a hidden inner world found at the center of the earth and are written as travel accounts which were highly, if not completely, fictionalized. The Agarttha is a temple of initiation whose high priest is given the title “Lord of the World”. This high priest is modeled on Manu, the legendary law giver, as well as the Greek Minos, and the Tibetan Dalai Lama. He is both civic and spiritual leader who brings laws based on cosmic intelligence. The one quote Guenon provides from the Ossendowski book is from a Buddhist lama, presumably in Mongolia, and it is so far removed from the Buddhist tradition that it comes off as an outrageous parody of anything Buddhist. He then claims the information about Agarttha originated from an ancient sage named Om who lived 300,000 years ago. After four chapters of this Guenon moves on to provide some information that becomes highly relevant to modern esoteric traditions

From this point on the book moves into a more symbolic portrait that represents the center of initiation as a world axis that is a repository of sacred wisdom. This is then refracted as the primordial spiritual influence at the core of all the world’s religious and mystical traditions and in the psyche of each of us. This is the basic organizational principle of matter and energy. He claims we have been separated from this center and become trapped in linear time. In our true state everything is contemplated from the point of view of eternity. This is the primordial state that can be re-established via initiation. This primordial awareness is hidden rather than lost although most people have not the slightest clue about how to participate in it. However, we do see it in our myths and legends and he referred to the search for the holy grail as an image of seeking this hidden state. It is also found in the legends of Dionysos, as well as those around Melchizedek who were both representations of the Lord of the World meant to re-establish a sense of eternity. The Lord of the World is the prototype for all humanity. He has the spiritual influence, the blessing, or investiture to provide the initiation into the perspective of eternity. This in turn brings peace and universal justice. This providential function is reflected in all the wisdom traditions and is represented by the celestial river Ganga, by the holy tabernacle of the Hebrews and by all the Holy Lands of every religion.

Initiation opens to the germ of humanity which we all share. However, while we each possess access to this it is hidden from us by our involvement in temporality. We each share an embryo of immortality, like a chrysalis which requires initiation to grow or blossom into the treasure we all have as our inner-most inheritance. To most of us this is ungraspable and inaccessible, hidden but not lost. He claims that in our Western culture every link with this center of initiation has been broken and if we wish to re-establish it we must look to the sages of Tibet or Tartary. It was part of our heritage in the West but places where it existed, what he calls Omphalos, like the temple at Delphi, are long gone. Those who manage to seek out this initiatory experience he calls the Superior Ones and they are characterized by “indifference” which he refers to as “detachment in action that is nonaction”.

In order to seek out this mystical experience of eternity we have to cross the sea of passions to reach the sanctuary of peace. At the end of the book he talks about a multiplicity of meanings and throws a broad spectrum of symbols from ancient traditions which he claims all represent this initiation. The Agarttha has been found in Lhasa, in Rome, in Jerusalem but he now wants to make clear that the place of initiation is a state not a place, it has no physical location and all these physical locations are only symbols for the state of realization that comes with initiation. The passions that now rule our world are transitory and contingent modifications of our psyche which has at its core the realization of a sense of eternity which liberates us from these conditions and brings us into the primordial state of humanity. Getting to this “Great Peace” is symbolized in the Christian scriptures by walking on water and in the Hindu scriptures by the war described in the Bhagavad-Gita and in Buddhism by the boat that takes us to the other shore.

## **“Making a New World”- Comments from the front lines**

**Peter Basset**

I was getting ready to pull the plug from work a few days before Christmas 2018 and head to our little cabin in the Laurentien mountains of Quebec for a two-week holiday and I thought to grab a book for reading over that period. I noticed the little book by Anthony Blake titled, “Making a New World; Action; Intelligent Uncertainty” and stuck it in my bag. I have a passion for the concept and reality of communication/cooperation with higher intelligence. Little did I realize what a treat I would be getting into. Quoting from the intro to Part-One: *“The main idea of this book is that a “new world” can be made through ideas that become real for us by our own actions. It assumes that we will find the right way if we are being informed intelligently. The issue of making a new world is the how we can operate in contact with a world of higher information”*.

When I asked Anthony how I should approach the writing of a review on “Making a New World”, which is part of the 3-part book, he suggested that I speak personally about what it meant for me. That of course was a problem because while I had thoroughly enjoyed reading the book, my retention of anything I had distilled for myself was close to zero. As I went back to re-read the book with the aim of communicating what it meant to me, I realized that what was in it was carefully

constructed over the 69 pages to build up to a new picture. I am glad I made the effort to wrestle with it and while I will try to convey what it meant to me, I strongly recommend that readers take the time to read this short book to extract their own meaning.

Trying to now boil down what I extracted for myself as the core message, I would say that it is that:

We are information processing beings existing in an information rich reality and that in our more primitive state of development (lower level of intelligence) we lean to “boxing” reality into controllable chunks and we are in a control centric relationship with “the world” (which we perceive to be “out there”) and we are oriented to imposing order on that “world” whether as individuals or even as entire cultures (such as European colonization of other cultures). What I really find useful, is his explanation of how our impulse to establish order can even be extended to an entire culture such as that of the Europeans in conquest and subjugation of other cultures and parts of “the world” or in its worst form, actual genocidal elimination of certain people altogether. This core “control centric” impulse or codifying experience, selecting inputs and controlling the information that comes in dominates us as a species.

A shift from this more primitive approach to reality to a more intelligent approach involves “letting go” of our control centric orientation to one of opening to intelligent information influence from higher levels, being in a more fluid responding mode. Rather than the world being “out there” we recognize that “the world” is a dynamic combination of “out there” and “in here”. This can come into play through the taking on of higher tasks where we lack the information to complete the task and where the nature of the task will effect an inner change/development within us. Through this kind of “doing”, we can enter into a more creative state dynamic “doing” where the center of our intelligence is not in the “little boxes” of preconceived ideas within us but rather in intelligence that is higher than ourselves. This higher intelligence for example could be an accumulating learning (wisdom) that is growing within the atmosphere of this earth through all of the accumulated experiences gathered and through the exchanges of these experiences that result in even higher learning. Through such tasks where we are stretched and learning our inner self can change and consequently our whole frame of reference can evolve. In this state, we are literally involved in making a new world (world creation) where the world is not “out there” but rather this dynamic exchange zone of “out there/in here”. This may be a flimsy attempt to try to articulate what Anthony conveys much more elegantly in the book, but it is a perspective that I have found to be useful for myself in my own quest. It is like a mechanics guide to higher intelligence. Breaking it down into understandable elements and showing how they dynamically work together.

Tony’s book starts by delving into the concept of order and how we bring about order in the midst of the vast information field we operate in. He puts forward a clear explanation of our own internal mechanisms which are operating all the time to “codify” large quantities of information and boil them into recognizable elements that we can then use to move about within the world and how we also simply ignore large amounts of information (deselect). However, our action of codifying is an “action” that creates a new “take” on the world within us and as such we are world creating entities moving within a sea of other world creating entities. I honestly found this a fascinating concept. I tend to think about the world as being “out there” and having been created

at some point in time, namely x billion years ago. The idea that “the world” is literally being created now with ourselves dynamically entwined with other world creating beings in a world creating biosphere within an emerging knowledge noosphere (and on and on) is a much more living thought than the old static picture which has dominated how I see the world.

An alternative to the imposition of control on the external world may be to let certain structures of information come into us and allow them to act on us. This involves “letting go” of control and allowing oneself to be in a more synergistic relationship with information forms that may frankly be of a much higher intelligence grade than the “canned stuff” in our heads. Tony puts forward a fundamental difference between (a) the control impulse and; (b) an opening impulse whereby we allow “attractors” to act on us. Examples of attractors include things like “Art”, “Ideas”, “Powers” or even “Science”. This idea that there are forms of information (information “in” “forms”) that we can allow to influence us he links to Gurdjieff’s “Law of Falling” explained in *Beelzebub*. This is an idea of control by non-control or surrendering to higher influences streaming in rather than codifying the world into a limited number of pre-set boxes into which we fit everything. The alternative is to allow intelligence that is beyond our brains to speak to and guide us. This is the swimming rather than dominating. As he says, *“let us get completely away from this black box of a brain with its peep holes on the external world”*. *“If you don’t restrict life, you get another kind of order altogether. A much more vivid and diversified kind of order, an order that encompasses diversity and doesn’t suppress it”*. This is a shift to a more “intelligent” orientation to life.

Tony further expands from the individual to how intelligence can form in groups, societies and even species and at a higher end take form in esoteric groups who “invoke” higher intelligence and/or “act” in response to a higher pattern. He then moves to the idea of how we are ultimately moving within a spirit of movement of the time within which our spirit can move. This he defines as true communication with higher intelligence, it is intimate to ourselves and not like external data at all. “All the powers of structure and organization including even such features as the individuation of wills and the rest of it can be seen as progressive articulations generated out of the field of information operating on itself”.

I had to read and reread the final chapter of the book, called “Making the New” several times to begin to be able to make sense of it as a whole for myself rather than in its bits and pieces. The bits and pieces by themselves are very interesting however knowing that the title of the chapter is, “Making the New” I struggled to try to understand what he meant by “making a new”. In the final chapter, Tony puts together a series of ideas that do not readily coalesce into an easy to digest concept. It requires some work of thought to put it together.

We can access higher orders of information not by picking up the phone and receiving a transmission but rather by becoming involved in a task which can transform our inner world and for which we need information that we do not have. It is this struggle to “do” to “act” to take on tasks of a higher nature that puts us in front of an internal capacity gap and an information deficiency within ourselves that can bring us into a type of new creation zone where we need a synergetic relationship with some kind of higher wisdom/intelligence and where the act itself is taking us to a new higher level of inner being and resulting in an external change. “The World” is not “out there”. The World is not an external phenomenon that was created but rather the world is

a dynamic informational field acting on itself but also accumulating learning. It is alive. It is intelligent. And we are active participants in making a new world all the time, every moment and everyone has a unique contribution to make to “making the world.”

For me, the idea that we are information processing beings living in a universe that is rich in information, most of which we are not decoding, is a fundamental fact that I accept. I have been trying to shift to a “swimming state” rather than a “control state” for decades and shift to putting my trust in a co-operative way *with* intelligence that is higher than myself not really knowing what that intelligence is. For me, there are signs of intelligence everywhere I look, whether it is the way my body works, its wonder of self-repair, extraordinary complex balancing chemistry and mechanisms to keep the “whole” healthy, the living biosphere with its extraordinary complexity, whether shielding us from ultra-violet radiation, generating and containing oxygen, sustaining living complex systems, sexual reproduction, seeds and flowering plants etc. the list goes on. Then there is the fact that we orbit around a flaming inferno called a sun with clockwork precision and we are situated within an order of blazing suns called a galaxy and there are thousands of millions of such galaxies around us. Something is going on and we didn’t create it and it is not random and it does not look dumb. I take that as fact and therefore conclude that intelligence of a much vaster order than our little species is in operation and preceded us and it would be smart for me to hitch onto it and try to learn what is going on and what I should be doing. Anthony’s book is a fascinating read in developing your own thought for those who are so inclined. Enjoy!

## **Review *Rethinking Religion in the Theatre of Grotowski* by Catharine Christol, Routledge 2017**

**Anthony Blake**

“Grotowski’s creative work not only holds a religious significance, it allows for an emplaced religious and ecological relationship; Grotowski expands the boundaries of where an emplaced embodied experience of religion can occur. Vasquez suggests that the drive to seek the essence of religion in “some supra-natural agent, or in the unified subjectivity (soul) of the believer,” is at odds with what an embodied materialism can offer. He therefore suggests that

“[t]he focus [instead] should fall on the myriad of discourses, practices, environments, and institutions that accompany our experience of this-worldly transcendence that is, our responses to the insoluble complexity and relative indeterminacy of our existential condition.” p.138  
*Rethinking Religion*

This is a serious and well researched study of the work of the renowned Polish theatre director Fyedor Grotowski that places him in the context of 20<sup>th</sup>-century reformulations of the nature of religion and, perhaps, portrays him as a modern form of spiritual guide, connected with other such figures as Buber and Gurdjieff. Christol addresses the emergence of new age thinking and attitudes; in particular, highlights the treatment of the human physical body as an essential element of the sacred. As orthodox religion declined in its hold on the hearts and minds of people, adherence to

dogma and ritual had to give way to a more experiential approach. This marked a shift in practice away from the forms prescribed in churches to experiential means of participation in which the theatre was a prime example. Christol could well have written a parallel book to this one, delineating equally well the spiritual revolution enacted in the evolution of dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from Delsarte to Bhutoh.

Christol specifically draws attention to connections and or parallels between Grotowski and Gurdjieff. Both were practitioners rather than theorists. Grotowski spoke and wrote appreciatively of Gurdjieff but insisted his own approach was independent. Christol has written an article portraying Grotowski as a fourth way teacher and added that this was not to say that he copied Gurdjieff in any obvious way.

Looking at the history she describes and discusses from a Gurdjieffian perspective, we can find similarities with, for example, Wim van Dullemen's account of the movements or sacred dances created by Gurdjieff. Dullemen is at pains to situate Gurdjieff's creativity within the context of Western exploration of dance. He and Christol are invested in the belief that people such as Grotowski and Gurdjieff, highly unique and creative individuals, were nevertheless very much part of a generic Zeitgeist of changing beliefs and methods in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, both Christol and Dullemen are in agreement in considering what is usually called art can be a modern expression of spirituality.

In some respects, art has taken the place of religion. Perhaps it has been the inevitable outcome of a millennium or more of change from outward forms and rites of communities to inner experiencings and actions of individuals. An obvious feature of this transition has been the modern tendency to evade questions of belief by calling on personal experience. This does not excuse the fact that expressions of such experience must still of course be in the context of collective culture. While there has been emphasis on personal experience there has also been a recognition of value in ancient ritual and historical forms of dance.

In tracing the development of Grotowski's work, Christol brings out the significance of the gradual change from the actor performing for audiences to performance for the sake of the actors themselves - as part of what Gurdjieff would have called 'work on themselves'.

One of the features of the new age, which is also to be found in most so-called esoteric ideas, is that there is a hidden unity behind the various religions that, outwardly, are at variance with each other. It is striking, then, that Grotowski looked to all kinds of ritual, dance, song, et cetera to find as it were the universal elements of meaning in them. These became the *actions* Grotowski researched towards the end of his life and now carried on by his successors Biagini and Richards. The term 'actions' brings us very close to the practice of Gurdjieff's movements and the very idea of work on oneself.

Christol brings out exciting and important detail. She describes how, indeed, the Grotowski school eschewed self-observation in its Gurdjieffian sense and centred itself in the relationship between actor and director. This has enormous bearing on our understanding of what is required, in the spiritual sense, of the state of the actor. Strangely, Christol does not speak of what Gurdjieff himself wrote about acting in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. In the chapter 'Art' he describes



Saturday in events in ancient Babylon organised by an elite group researching methods of carrying information to future generations through theatre. He describes improvisations (that later followers of Gurdjieff attempted with various results to emulate) and, most importantly, a particular state required for performing them. He called this *darthelhurstnian contemplation*:

“Well, then, two of the participants would always come upon these ‘reflectors-of-reality’ or stages, first; and then usually one of them stood for a while and, as it were, listened to his own what is called ‘Darthelhurstnian’ state, or as it is sometimes otherwise said, to the state of his own inner ‘associative-general-psychic-experiencings.’ p. 483 BT

Grotowski wanted to eliminate the influence of historical, ethnic and cultural factors in performance. This led to an emphasis on physical effort and embrace of pain and exhaustion. It has to be noted that Christoph makes no mention of traditions based on this, for example the American native Sun dances which can be described as inducing revelation by ordeal. Though there was certainly a large measure of physical demand in Gurdjieff’s movements, the real challenge lay in their *internal complexity*, designed to separate and reorganise the centre is at work in the students. Sheer effort was regarded as work of ‘honest donkey’. In Bennett’s terminology, it is *challenge* that evokes true consciousness and physical demand is the crudest form of it.

I was taught an exercise involving holding out a heavy bust of Gurdjieff that became quite painful after 10 minutes or so. The point was not the effort or in enduring pain but in *seeing* beyond them. This involves creating a new relationship between the centres – thinking, feeling and moving – but only becomes possible by the deconstruction of the old one. The challenge in Gurdjieff’s movements is not just physical effort but in the holding together a whole complex and sometimes contradictory set of movements – physical, emotional and mental.

It is common to come across the observation that exhaustion of efforts is a necessary prelude to creative insight. But this is a very crude approach. What Gurdjieff brought into the picture was the possibility of a new kind of intention in which the dichotomy of so-called conscious effort and unconscious insight was superseded. In my writings on the fourth way I tend to place great emphasis on the *threefold logic* brought to bear on the theory and practice of transformation. Here I can hardly do more than report Gurdjieff’s frequent definition that understanding is only possible through the independent but mutual operation of all three centres – thinking, feeling and moving. This simple formulation has staggering implications. This cuts across the usual dichotomy between mind and body but also that between internal and external. The coalescence of the three centres is tantamount to creating a real autonomy. This might be called, as Christof does, ‘objective consciousness’ but these words cannot do it justice; in spite of the fact that Gurdjieff himself used such terms in his early teaching.

Christof follows the usual interpretation of Gurdjieff’s ‘super-efforts’ and ‘intentional suffering’ as much the same and consisting in *physical effort*. This does rather, in my opinion, miss the point. One of my teachers often used the phrase ‘making efforts to avoid efforts’ to criticise how we would turn to making physical efforts to avoid intellectual and moral ones. This relates to important ideas about *temptation*. There is an idea that the devil is only interested in people who work on themselves because those who do not, have no soul worth tempting. Those who make efforts risk identifying with their efforts or resultant states. This is known in, for example, Buddhist tradition

and its equation of *Mara* the *evil one* with the pleasure obtained in meditation. The issue of temptation is crucial in Gurdjieff's teaching and is sometimes presented as essential for our development of soul. It probably has its origins in Zoroastrianism.

Gurdjieff strongly differentiated *intentional* suffering from *voluntary* suffering. Illustrating the latter, Gurdjieff talked about bandits sitting immobile in the blazing sun in order to attack people. We can also think of people doing extraordinary things such as walking to the South Pole which have nothing to do with making a soul or inner work. According to Bennett, intentional suffering is that incurred by someone in service of his neighbour. Sacrifice is at its core. Gurdjieff mocked 'saintly' people who might meditate in caves in isolation for years.

Christof does an important job in describing *what* it is that brought into manifestation through Grotowski-like work and speaks of 'spirits' and 'ancestors'. Practitioners of the Gurdjieff movements could do well to take note of this. Bennett spoke explicitly about the significance of the 'spirit world' (called in Sufism the *alam-i-arvah*) in such terms:

. . . in Stevenson's fable, 'The Poor Thing': something is able to bring a man into being, yet it is nothing at all.

There are three or four movements which are special in this kind of way. Schadze Vadze (Number 24) for me has the feeling about it that there is something wanting a body, that wants to be able to manifest and it is looking to us to be able to manifest. If you look at the movements in this way you may gain a different attitude towards them. The movements are not just something that somebody invented in the past and put on a piece of paper to remind them what they were, or something like that. They are something that wants to come into being, wants to be flesh and blood, and when the movement is done by us then it wants to be done rightly. When it finds a body that is doing it rightly, the spirit becomes happy and you yourself feel happy.

*Way to be Free* p. 53

Christof has made the idea of the New Age as 'rethinking religion' the unifying theme of her study. In her seminal paper *Gurdjieff in the Theatre – The Fourth Way of Grotowski* (Religion and the Arts 21 (2017) 209-235) she echoes Peter Brook's impression on first encountering Grotowski, that he represented a lost branch or independent manifestation of the *fourth way*. I think the difference is important. In the fourth way the emphasis on doing things intentionally with purpose, something often lacking or weak in most New Age movements. The idea of the New Age is nebulous but nevertheless useful as a catch-all phrase for a wide diversity of phenomena and beliefs. However, Christof's wonderful survey, centring on the work of Grotowski opens up a vista of the leitmotiv of 'physical spirituality' that calls for an even wider perspective. There has been a significant shift in the twentieth century from the last millennium and its manifestation of *devotion*. I'd go further and suggest that before the devotional millennium there was an age of *intellect*, approximating to the period from Plato to Aquinas.

Gurdjieff's fourth way integrates and supersedes, so he said, the three traditional ways of the Yogi (intellect), the Monk (devotion) and the Fakir (bodily discipline). In my crude picture of historical development these have emerged in some measure of sequence wherein each new phase or emphasis overlays and to some extent submerges the preceding one. It is important to realise that

'embodiment' is only one leg of a tripod. And that Gurdjieff created haunting 'religious' music and a complex set of writings in relation with his sacred dances.

### Other sources

Christof's article 'Gurdjieff in the Theater – The Fourth Way of Jerzy Grotowski' *Religion and the Arts* 21 (2017) 209–235

*The Living Room* Directed by Thomas Richards, with members of the Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle

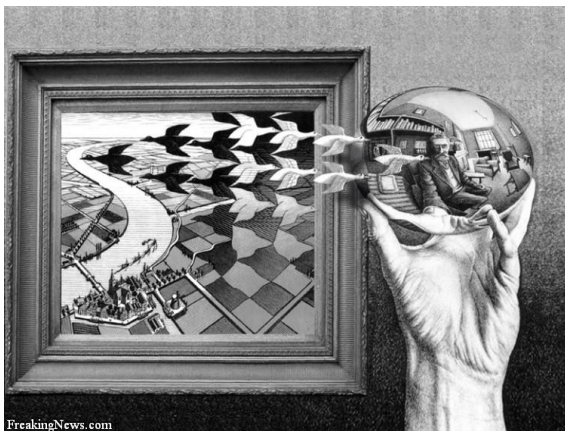


'Here the witness has the chance to shed his anonymity, being an individual, a guest. Within our meeting a performance event unfolds, structured and precise, a living stream of actions based on work with ancient songs of tradition, as well as texts exploring what it takes to awaken ourselves faced to ourselves, the other, and the world.' See video at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=851rUn7-sjY&feature=youtu.be>

*My Dinner with Andre*, movie directed by Louis Malle

*The Gurdjieff Movements: A Communication of Ancient Wisdom* by Wim van Dullemen



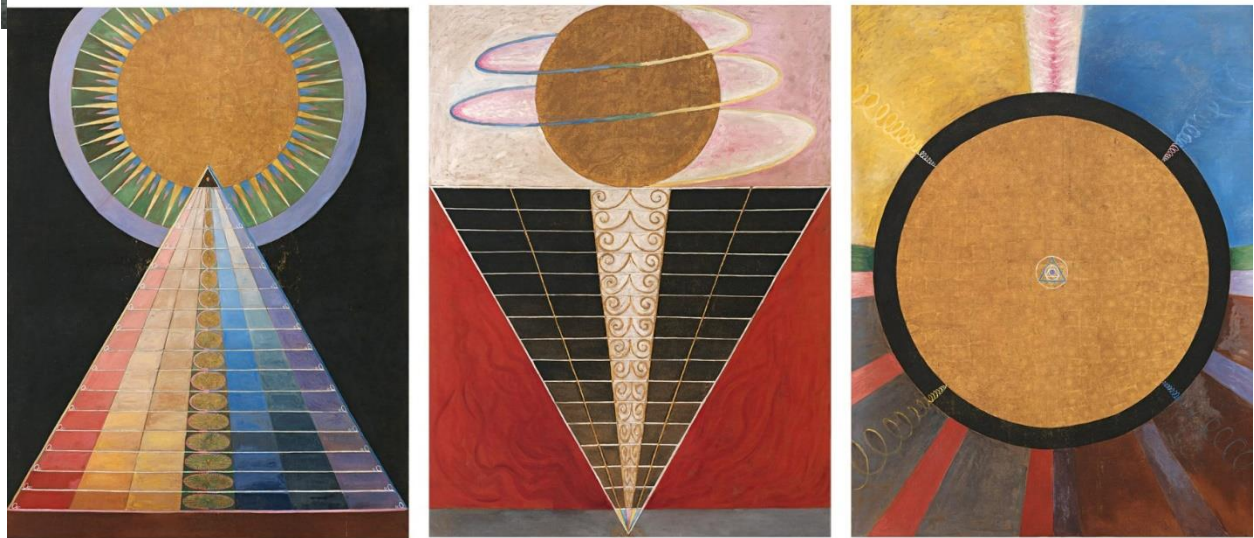
# The Work of Hilma af Klint

Steven Rhodes



The current exhibit of the work of Hilma af Klint at the Guggenheim Museum in New York defies the conventional ways that we talk about art. (It shows there through April 2019. Los Angeles later in the year.) If nothing else, her work has been recognized - rather unanimously - to redefine art history. The fathers of abstract, non-representational art in Western culture - Kandinsky, Mondrian, Kupka and Malevich - have now been shown to be usurped, preceded by decades, and by an unknown woman at that.

Af Klint lived from 1862-1944, yet her paintings weren't shown in public until 1986. What is truly remarkable is that this was by design. If you haven't



heard of her until now (maybe this very moment) it is because she intended in a way for this to be so. The Guggenheim exhibit is entitled "Paintings for the Future" for good reason. Not only did she see, for various reasons, that her work would likely be received far better after her lifetime, but she decided to actively prepare for it to be shown after her death. Her extensive notebooks, which have been reprinted in one of the recent books about her (*Notes and Methods*, Ed. Christine Burgin The University of Chicago Press, 2018) show meticulous, heroic preparation for what has finally unfolded.

Af Klint was conservatory trained and was employed as a scientific illustrator at different points of her career. As a woman during this time her options to be received as a worthy artist were of course very limited, if not nil. And as with the other ambitious, creative women of her time, she looked to non-traditional, emergent avenues undominated by men to devote her time and energy to. In the twenty years before and after the turn of the century, "Spiritualism" became very popular, in part as an opportunity for women to stake their ground where men had not previously tread.

The most popular and notorious aspects of Spiritualism concerned séances and contacting the dead. There were also crossovers into and tangents with Theosophy. Af Klint was a dedicated Rosicrucian, Theosophist and later Anthroposophist. She was part of a regular, committed group that worked together over decades. Unlike most practitioners and dabblers, they were not

concerned about uncovering past secrets or the knowledge of the departed. Their interest was contact with “High Masters” - beings of higher intelligence - for the purpose of deeper and transcendent understanding and experience. Their ambition was *within*. Their work was ritualistic and creative: they performed “automatic drawing”, giving themselves over to the direction and/or collaboration with a group of “ethereal” beings. After a few years, they were called upon - by one of these beings - to take on a demanding and intensive series of paintings and af Klint stepped up to be the one to take this on.

Normally this is where the story would end. After all, who takes such things seriously? Yet the quality, let alone the scope of af Klint’s work demands that we do.

She built on the Theosophist bent to see patterns of the invisible in the visible. She had the precise experience of a scientific illustrator to draw on: seeing the cosmos in the patterns of plants, the atomic world and the universe at large. How much she was directly engaged in studying the emerging science of her time it is hard to say. There most definitely was a kinship between the elaborate, substantial and creative geometry of her work and that of modern physics with 4-D geometry, hyper-cubes, biology and different scales, etc.. What is clear is that her paintings were explorations. Her diaries and notebooks show the rigorousness by which she searched, developing a very specific vocabulary that wasn’t just to communicate to an audience but also to show to herself what she wished to uncover and understand.

Standing in front of these paintings – some really massive - is a powerful experience. Going up the spiral of the Guggenheim designed by Frank Lloyd Wright museum to view them, takes it to a whole other level. Her major series of paintings is entitled “Paintings for a Temple”. She had the whole plan mapped out including the building design which was never realized. One could argue that here, the temple can be found. In a way the destiny of each – the paintings and the building - finally meet. The works of these two major artists af Klint and Wright are having their own “dialogue” and we are invited.



# Movements of the Soul

DuVersity Seminar, Claymont House, West Virginia, May 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2019

DuVersity events are gatherings of people with an affinity, drawn together to dig deeper into the human experience. There are cognitive inputs, spiritual exercises, participatory explorations and many media; above all we aim for a chorus of voices rather than any singular authority.

The soul is mysterious. We may believe 'it' to be deeper than me'. The vehicle of 'I', the place where Thou may come, what we have distilled from the vale of suffering, the presence of God in us, and much more. In tradition the soul was depicted as a maiden, with no ego to obscure the divine.



Gurdjieff's art in words, music and dancing 'lends' us ways of seeing. Beautiful, provocative and informative in themselves they can be portals opening to different worlds, through which we might come to truly appreciate the plenum of human works and experience – of all ages and places, West and East, ancient and modern, small and vast.

The deeper fourth way *begins* with 'all and everything'.

Hermann Hesse & the idea of Woman: 'There is much that is immortal in this medieval lady. The dragons have gone, and so have the knights, but still she lingers in our midst.'

We have an ambitious programme, hoping to include:

Gurdjieff movements

Music of singing bowls

Gurdjieff contemplations

Observations of the movements of the newly born

Traditional lore of sacred images

Theatre of manifestation

Music of chanting

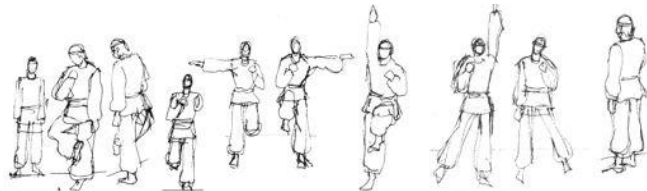
Phenomenology of sacred images according to Bennett

Social dreaming

New ways of worship

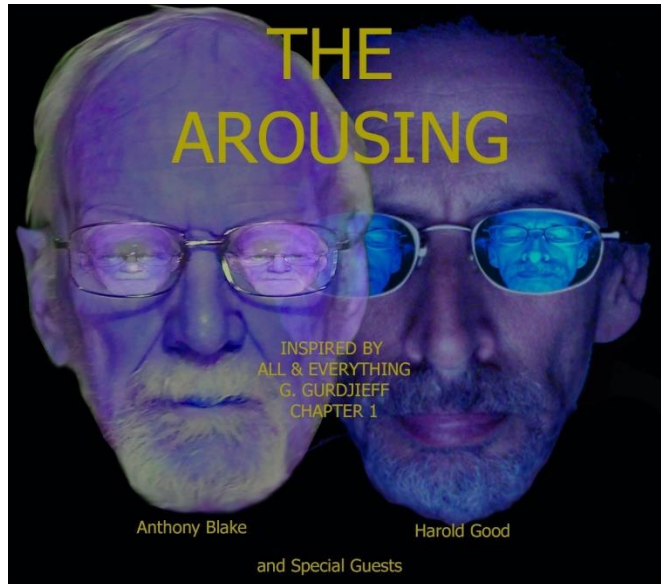
Transmission of baraka

Shamanic postures



## THE AROUSING: with Anthony Blake and Harold Good

An exploration of bringing to life, theatrically, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*.



**This is a multi-year project.**

**The first step is to explore:** *Chapter 1: The Arousing of Thought.*

- In this first workshop we will be approaching the work from the perspective that the book is a blueprint for a live experience, in the same way that a play is.

- Although *Beelzebub's Tales* exists as a work of literature (in that words are printed on the page), the author took pains to express the three-foldness of his requested engagement with the work.

### **Backstory:**

When I was 25, I read *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* - “at least as you have already become mechanized to read all your

contemporary books and newspapers”.

This led to my attending my first work weekend led by Anthony Blake in Daglingworth, England.

*Beelzebub* and the other books associated with the fourth way that I read at the time, caused a shift in the focus of my life and work, which was made visible through theatre arts. My theatre work was also influenced by Grotowski, Peter Brook, and other researchers living outside the normal commercial structures.

It was 30 years later when I returned to *Beelzebub* and the second reading, in 2008. The circumstances of my life at the time left me no other option. It was time for “**as if you were reading aloud to another person**”

That meant to me, as someone who has used theatre as a tool for exploring universal truths, that to read/speak it aloud to another person, to move breath and sound vibration over the verbal score is to transmit directly to another. This process was a reawakening of the oral tradition inherent in the material.

As I read aloud I became cognizant of one obvious aspect of *Beelzebub*. It is replete with beings telling stories to others, speaking to others, persuading and debating others, educating others. They were speaking aloud to others in each case with very specific and defined intentions. As an actor I felt that I was giving a first reading of a script to be prepared for eventual performance.

I found myself recording the episodes over the course of a year every morning. It became clear that I should post the episodes online, I decided that a “nom du voix” was required. The name Harold Good came to me (from Herald of the Coming Good) as the persona that should present this material. I received angelic assistance in the form of two Michael's who contributed images to the recordings and was sent sound files of Mr. Gurdjieff's harmonium playing which accompanied the recordings.

In the course of reading/speaking, and re-reading aloud I completed a third and fourth reading. I continue to listen to the readings and hear more deeply as time goes on.

**“Only then will you be able to count upon forming your own impartial judgment, proper to yourself alone, on my writings. And only then can my hope be actualized that according to your understanding you will obtain the specific benefit for yourself which I anticipate, and which I wish for you with all my being.”**

In 2018 at the All and Everything Conference in Portland Oregon, I was overjoyed to meet again, Anthony Blake, (after 40 years) whose work I had continued to follow, through books and essays. I also knew of his recordings of Beelzebub. He shared his passion for theatre with me and some explorations of his own into the theatrical possibilities of Beelzebub that he had made over the years.

We decided to take a next step.

### **THE AROUSING: This is an invitation.**

WE invite you into a performance and a process in meta theatre. The process is a rehearsal exploration. The performance will share the work with outside eyes at some point.

The work of an actor is disciplined and intuitive to allow “the word to become flesh” and share it with others.

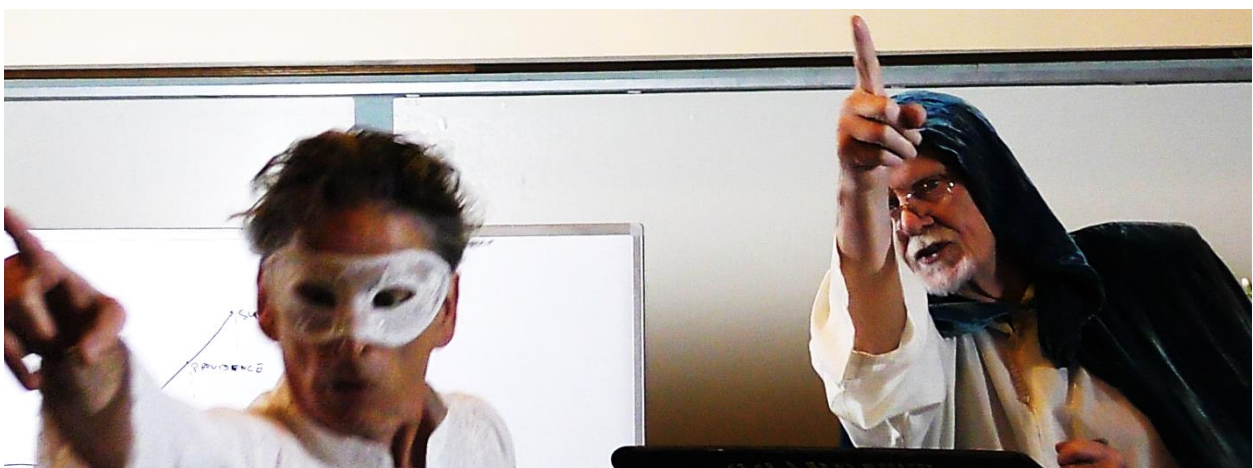
The depths of Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson presents a life time of material to explore.

It is rich with stories, adventures and buried treasure, the ultimate transport for our journey to the stars and inside ourselves.

I am grateful for the restored connection with Anthony Blake. Together we will be offering opportunities to deepen the relationship to the words, thoughts and ideas through breath and voice, movement and interaction.

If you are interested in this exploration please contact us.

In Gratitude, Jeff Burnett aka Harold Good - [workononeself@gmail.com](mailto:workononeself@gmail.com)



**Jesai and Anthony as Ariel and Prospero**