

# **THE FOURTH WAY**

## **A Hazardous Path**

**A personal story by Anthony Blake**

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This essay was first written in 2016. It was then divided and the first part published in Religion and the Arts, Vol 21, 2017, the second part available only online. Eventually, because there seemed to be some interest in it, I decided to make it a small book and publish it in a kindle edition. In doing this I have made several corrections and additions, the most important of which are the illustrations.

I am most grateful for the work of Jack Chromey in formatting the book, and to Mark Fuller for facilitating its appearance on Amazon. It turned out to be a more complicated task than we anticipated and I apologise for any errors still remaining which are due to me.

# The Fourth Way

## A Hazardous Path - Part One

### Introduction

The fourth way requires no retirement into the desert, does not require a man to give up and renounce everything by which he formerly lived. The fourth way begins much further on than the way of the yogi. This means that a man must be prepared for the fourth way and this preparation must be acquired in ordinary life and be a very serious one, embracing many different sides. Furthermore a man must be living in conditions favorable for work on the fourth way, or, in any case, in conditions which do not render it impossible. It must be understood that both in the inner and in the external life of a man there may be conditions which create insuperable barriers to the fourth way. Furthermore, the fourth way has no definite forms like the ways of the fakir, the monk, and the yogi. And, first of all, it has to be found. This is the first test. It is not as well known as the three traditional ways. There are many people who have never heard of the fourth way and there are others who deny its existence or possibility. G. I. Gurdjieff <sup>1</sup>

This essay describes my take on the ideas, practices, and purposes of the “Fourth Way,” introduced by G. I. Gurdjieff a hundred years ago. It does so through my eyes, via a narrative largely based on my experiences with one of Gurdjieff’s leading exponents named John Bennett. I express an unfolding understanding of the Fourth Way rather than attempting to sum up or define it. This Part One covers the decade 1960–1970. Part Two will resume the story from 1970 until the present day. Both parts are mere sketches because I wanted to make a picture of salient points rather than attend to detail. Many significant people and events are hardly mentioned or not at all. Since the essay was first written in 2019 I have now (2023) made some small corrections and changes but nothing major. The main difference is in the larger number of illustrations the essay now includes.

### Beginnings

I was born in 1939, the year war was declared on Germany, and experienced the bombing of my home city, Bristol. Growing up in the beginnings of the welfare state, I was able to go to Bristol University. While at school I faced the issue of suicide (adopting Pascal’s wager to survive), became an atheist and existentialist of a sort, and encountered the names of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky in Colin Wilson’s book *The Outsider* (1956). My passion was physics but I was drawn to cinema, painting, and music, embracing the modern in every field. While at University I met the extraordinary quantum physicist David Bohm and was able to talk with him about almost anything. I read Gurdjieff’s magnum opus, *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950), and visited the place of John Bennett, one of Gurdjieff’s leading exponents. I joined the movement known as *Subud*, which had been spread in the United Kingdom and elsewhere by Bennett. In 1960 I moved to Bennett’s Institute at Coombe Springs, near London.

Coombe Springs was named after a spring house that once fed Hampton Court Palace. During World War 2 it was the headquarters of fuel research directed by John Bennett. Soon after the war, he took over the premises as a center for his spiritual work on lines developed by George Gurdjieff. I came to Coombe just after he had separated from the Indonesian movement called Subud, and I



Elizabethan Spring House,  
Coombe Springs

<sup>1</sup> G. I. Gurdjieff, quoted in Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous* 48

was connected with him until his death in 1974.

In my first encounter with John Bennett, I waylaid him on his way to his lunch at the big house in Coombe Springs with a most serious question (!): “Mr Bennett. What is original sin?” He paused and appeared to consider the question with full attention. His answer was surprising but has never gone from me: “It is not to do what one can do, and strive to do what one cannot.”

I was equally drawn to physics and the theory and practice of mysticism. When, almost by chance, I found myself acting as kitchen boy at Bennett’s establishment at Coombe Springs in Kingston-upon-Thames, and had a chance to talk with him, I appreciated his scientific approach (I had earlier delved into his challenging book *The Dramatic Universe* [1956], his courageous attempt to deal with all human knowledge). During the war he had managed a scientific research center. In the 1960s a group of young scientific types formed around him as he recovered from the pressures ensuing from his involvement in Subud and opened up research under the auspices of his Institute (for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences). This was an “echo” of his previous involvement with scientists such as M. W. Thring (1915–2006) and R.L. Brown (also students of Gurdjieff’s ideas) who collaborated with him on a paper concerning higher dimensions published by the Royal Society of London in 1949 (“Unified Field Theory in a Curvature-Free Five-Dimensional Manifold”).

### Coombe Springs: In the Shadow of Bennett

*I can, therefore I am.* Simone Weil

In being involved, however inadvertently, in transmitting the ideas of Gurdjieff and Bennett, I have often undergone a crisis of conscience. The words of the fakir in Gurdjieff’s *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963), “Let God kill him who himself does not know and yet presumes to show others the way to the doors of His Kingdom” often came into my mind. Could I ever say I was enlightened or awake? The answer is not entirely in the negative, but always in doubt.

As a student—and dare I say colleague—of John Bennett as a very young man, it was inevitable that I should fall into being an echo of him. It is generally known that powerful and charismatic figures tend to overshadow their pupils and, often, the only way for them to become free is to part company from them. Gurdjieff, it seemed, did this for many of his followers, however cruel it appeared at the time. I stayed around Bennett for the most of fourteen years, until his death in 1974. Towards the end I tried to separate but was dragged back by Bennett to take part in his International Academy.

The crucial point here is that Bennett appeared to me and to others as someone who had “got somewhere.” He knew what we did not know. When he spoke of “higher bodies” for example, it was as if he could *see them* (much to her surprise he once told a Norwegian lady that she had her *kesdjan* body) and they were not simply a matter of conjecture; also, he was not simply passing on the words of Gurdjieff but reporting on his own “direct” perception.<sup>2</sup> For me such things were only a matter of reasoning and belief, feeling and glimpses. My sceptical scientific attitude would not allow me to even suggest that I “really knew.” How could one ever know such things? The general assumption was that someday we might also truly know such things; but there was an unease in that there did not seem to be anyone amongst the older pupils who had “made it.” *But one never asked them!*<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Bennett could and often did say that such-and-such “really was like that” I could only say, “It might be so.” As, over the years, I came to speak about the Fourth Way or “the Work” to people more and more my talk became a kind of lament over my inadequacies and also “our” failures to get anywhere.<sup>4</sup> Since I was naturally skilled enough to grasp and even explain Bennett’s ideas, it was no problem, intellectually, to

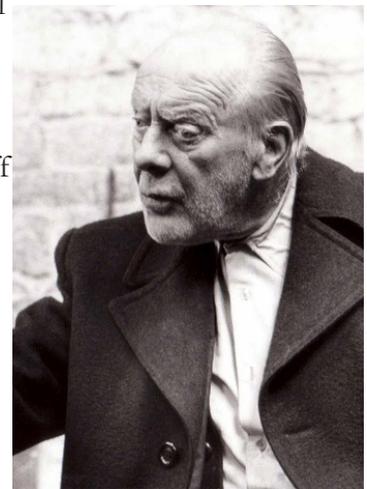
- 2 Kesdjan is taken from an Armenian word for “spirit,” which Gurdjieff applied to the second or subtle body. There was potential for another even finer “body” to which he gave the name “soul.”
- 3 Bennett made a strong point of the difference between what goes on in ordinary awareness—which he called “sensitivity”—and what can occur in true consciousness. Conscious work *cannot* be observed from the outside. It can only be conveyed through conscious communication.
- 4 Perhaps I was influenced by Camus’s novel *The Fall* (La Chute), in which a dissolute lawyer speaks of sin first of all referring to ‘we’ but then segues into speaking of ‘I’

lecture on and discuss the work ideas, but as Bennett's widow Elizabeth once challenged me, "You look good and talk well but do you *believe* in what you are saying." This set me down a path of doing all I could to avoid imparting to people any sense that I was anything or knew anything, being simply the messenger as it were. The situation was easy for me when helping Bennett with his lectures during the last period of his life. I was given the task of answering students' questions about the talks Bennett had given. Ideas were, for me, neutral ground—neither a matter of belief nor of knowing.

It must be emphasized that Bennett provided rational frameworks for many ideas of Gurdjieff and others. In the abstract this was his method of systematics, a discipline of thinking he had involved his small group of young scientists (including myself) in developing in the 1960s. I draw on this discipline every day and regard some of his ideas as major intellectual achievements (though almost entirely ignored by the mainstream) but they may also underpin crucial practical, phenomenological insights; in a word, illuminate what 'work on oneself' might mean. How he came by his primary categories—such as the cosmic triad of Function, Being, and Will—remains totally unknown, as also how he came to adopt the term *hyparxis* (from, I believe, the Neoplatonists)<sup>5</sup> for the all-important third kind of time that was his passion.

People looked to Bennett to explain "Life, the Universe and Everything." It can certainly be said that he developed his own theoretical understanding of Gurdjieff's ideas and writings. For me theory is not just speculation or conceptualization but relates to its Greek meaning of *seeing*. It underlies perception and informs meaning. It is even, so I would aver, the vehicle of "I." Of course I am bypassing the factors of "guts and heart" and I am mindful of Pascal's awakening of his higher emotional center when he avowed the true God, *not* the "god of the philosophers." But the legacy of Gurdjieff *was* full of guts and heart.

Bennett himself was strong on practical action. One of his many lines of insight was on *how we do things*. This was where valuable real-life embodiments of the work ideas were practiced. The formal practices of the Gurdjieff Movements, inner exercises, and group meetings were more than augmented by tasks that involved intelligence and creativity or exercised our inner powers that were largely neglected in education and most social life in the world. But even above all these factors, a tremendous contribution was made by interactions between the highly diverse set of people Bennett gathered round him. I remember a laborer who was a heroin junkie, a lord of the realm, a group of young men and women who had practiced black magic, teachers, salesmen, scientists, artists (the renowned abstract expressionist Gerald Wilde (1905–1986] came to live at Coombe Springs),<sup>6</sup> a World War 1 veteran, an American playboy, even a visit from a porn star, and so on and so on. Just to be there was an education. Though maybe not "meetings with remarkable men," the meetings were remarkable. This gave a background for the *emotional* work of realizing our common humanity.



Gerald Wilde

## Fragments of an Unknown Teaching

I was particularly fortunate in arriving at Coombe Springs when I did. For four years, Bennett had given his establishment and resources over to the propagation of Subud. Subud was an eastern practice, perhaps with Sufi origins, that came from Indonesia and was based on a spontaneous practice called the *latihan*.<sup>7</sup> Bennett had suspended Fourth Way activities such as the Gurdjieff movements, inner exercises, and psy-

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Taylor's (1758–1835) *Introduction to the Philosophy and Writings of Plato* could prove useful here.

<sup>6</sup> Wilde was a member of the hard-drinking post-war Soho coterie and was originally believed to have been the inspiration for Joyce Cary's semi-deranged artist Gully Jimson in his seminal novel *The Horse's Mouth*. He then spent some time during the second half of the 1950s in St Ebba's Mental Hospital where he was subjected to electric shock treatments. He is said to have abandoned painting for twenty years after this but in fact he started again at Coombe Springs in the 1960s, as I can testify since I did some painting exercises with him. Also, he began to create paintings based on Bennett's books.

<sup>7</sup> Subud was founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (born 1901 in Java, Indonesia; died 1987). Subud stands for susila budhi dharma, roughly "right living according to the will of God." The Indonesian word *latihan* simply means practice or even "drill." It is an act of submission that may produce a range of manifestations spontaneously.

chological groups. When he parted with Subud, he restored these practices but it was as a fresh start.

Gurdjieff left a legacy of three products, which were often taken to represent the three main centers of the human psyche: books for intellect, music for feelings, and movements for our sensory motor nature. Although Bennett was obviously centered in his intellect, he had intense admiration for and appreciation of the movements.<sup>8</sup> Bennett taught the movements with the assistance of his secretary Joan Edwards, which was itself a teaching. Bennett could explain them while Joan could do them; neither could perform the other's role at all well. It was a highly productive union of male and female qualities, something often considered important in the Fourth Way.

There has been relatively little written to describe and explain the movements, most people preferring to do them rather than think about them.<sup>9</sup> Bennett, who had first seen the movements in the early 1920s, strongly felt in them the presence of other cultures, Near Eastern and Asian.<sup>10</sup> The emotional and sensory experience carried in them echoed Gurdjieff's first exploration of dance and music in the ballet he proposed in Moscow called "The Struggle of the Magicians," even though performances of the movements as they developed lacked any narrative theme. The cultural side of the movements extended into ritual and provided



Movement no. 17 done in costume in grounds of Sherborne House

people with a direct experience without any ideological overtones. They were sometimes used by Bennett to augment or inform moments of transition such as when Coombe Springs was handed over to Idries Shah (of whom we will speak later when the extraordinary movement known as The Great Prayer was performed every morning as a ritual.<sup>11</sup>

The psychology of the movements is exceptional. They could be called "dynamic meditations," using the terminology of the Indian guru Osho.<sup>12</sup> Osho became a great admirer of the movements and directed his followers to learn and practice them. However, the Gurdjieff movements were disciplined and austere in comparison to Osho's own chaotic meditations. They were works of art. Each movement had a pattern, one that involved a group dynamic with different people sometimes performing different movements from others. A practitioner of them stands between the pattern and his or her own embodied psyche. This gives

8 In his book detailing his time with Gurdjieff in Russia, *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ouspensky vividly describes his discovery of moving center intelligence when he had previously regarded the body just as a thing. "The idea of an independent moving centre which, on the one hand, does not depend on the mind, does not require the mind, and which is a mind itself ..." (114).

9 Dushka Howarth, Gurdjieff's daughter, suggests in her book *It's All Up to Ourselves* that doing the movements appealed to women while talking about the ideas appealed more to men!

10 In the 1950s he made his *Journeys in Islamic Countries*. His diaries, which were read to residents at Coombe Springs and guests as he sent them to his wife, Elizabeth, made a great impact and were later published in book form.

11 A version of this can be seen in the movie *Meetings with Remarkable Men* directed by Peter Brook, based on Gurdjieff's novel of that name. I remember the ritual vividly since I had the role of "turning" slowly in the middle.

12 Osho or Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh (1931-1990) was a mystic, guru, and spiritual teacher, born in India.

rise to learning, experiences, and understanding. It is entirely learning by doing.

The transition and crossover between the Fourth Way practices and Subud was a fascinating time. This was because the *latihan* (exercise) of Subud had no set form or direction, while the practices of the Fourth Way were highly structured and intentional. During the *latihan* people might make movements, sing or chant, even dance, and it was a common idea in Subud that movement was from *within*, while in the movements it was from *without*.<sup>13</sup> Bennett suggested that initially movements such as those of the Mevlevi arose spontaneously<sup>14</sup> and were then fixated. A further idea was that we might learn to enter into the movements in a way that connected us with a spontaneous action though still keeping the set form of the dance. There did not have to be an opposition between the two sides of our nature. This was very much in Bennett's mind, I believe, as he sought after a complete or integral practice.<sup>15</sup> Here is a list of general points characterizing the practice of the Gurdjieff movements:

- a) Meeting and blending of cultures through music and dance.
- b) Balancing inner and outer (some movements have known inner work connected with them, in parallel with their visible gestures), receptive and active modes of “doing.”
- c) Appreciation of bodily intelligence, including learning not through words.
- d) Group action that might lead to forms of worship.
- e) When performed in public, an opportunity for “manifestation.”<sup>16</sup>

What I call the “inner exercises” are highly structured sets of intentional acts of attention. The ones that Bennett taught were derived from Gurdjieff but he added and changed a great deal. Bennett distinguished them from what is generally called meditation, insisting that they were entirely active and intentional. Some descriptions and explanations can be found in articles by myself and Joseph Azize.<sup>17</sup> Suffice it to say at this juncture that they could well claim to be instruments to probe into our inner structure, and also means of awakening more subtle forms of experience. They were and are prime instantiations of Gurdjieff's approach in being intentional and directed rather than relying on spontaneous or random insights, experiences, or group feelings.

The genesis and methods of construction for these exercises were not discussed. It gradually dawned on me, particularly after Bennett's death, that they were constructed according to the psycho-cosmology he had developed from Gurdjieff's ideas. This then led me to consider the possibility that they offered a way of access to phenomena or ways of seeing that were usually considered to belong to philosophy. To illuminate the point I call to mind the famous meeting between Schiller and Goethe in which Schiller could not accept Goethe's claim to perceive and not just conceive such things as the *urpflanze* (or ideal plant). One person thinks about something, the other lives it. Again, the transition from thinking to being, or their relation, has been a matter of philosophical discussion for millennia but rarely has there been any acknowledgement of a way of doing this experientially (or “experimentally”—to adopt the ambiguity of the French term *expérience*). This raised in me the possibility that philosophers were and are “unknowingly” performing inner exercises in conducting their thinking.

The methodological implications of the inner exercises are rarely discussed. They belong to an extraordinary form of phenomenology that Bennett developed and which has always been inherent but rarely discussed in the Fourth Way. One aspect of this can be stated here. It concerns the transition from a subjective to objective relation to one's psychic content. This is easiest to see in terms of thinking. In one state (the “ordinary”), one is inside one's thinking and believes in and identifies with the “self” that appears to

13 This parallels a difference between conscious energy and creative energy in Bennett's scheme of energies. True consciousness is the highest state of intention while creativity comes from within, spontaneously, in a way we are not conscious of.

14 The Shakers were an even clearer example. Their name indicates the spontaneous manifestations they were renowned for in their early days and well into the nineteenth century.

15 Key figures such as Sri Aurobindo aimed for an Integral Yoga to encompass all of human nature. In general, in the Hindu tradition, it is referred to as *sadhana*, and sometimes meant a twenty-four hour a day practice.

16 The word is a reference to the fourth or middle line described in Bennett's *The Sevenfold Work* associated with the third force, both active and receptive.

17 I have made some attempts at this (for example, “Possible Foundations of Inner Exercises”). I know of nothing that addresses the deep questions underlying the nature of the “observation” drawn on in “self-observation.” Azize has written about Gurdjieff's inner exercises in *Gurdjieff Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises*.

be thinking. One is subject to the thinking in the sense of being under its command, so to say. In another state, this thinking is simply something that is going on. It is just a phenomenon; it is not “I.” Once that is established it becomes possible to talk about one’s inner experience with others. The sharing of inner experience is intensely meaningful but usually difficult or non-existent in “ordinary life.” It is all reduced to, “tell me what you are feeling.” Hence I came to regard both “feeling” and “philosophy” as poor reflections of a truly active inner life.

The third main practice of the Fourth Way in Bennett’s circle was the psychological group. As the title suggests these were concerned with psychological observations and their implications. It was a challenging thing to present observations cleanly without interpretation, obsession, and pretence, and with succinctness and clarity. The actual origins of the Fourth Way group are not very clear and there may be many different lines.<sup>18</sup> The best documented material consists of the transcripts of meetings Gurdjieff held during the war (Gurdjieff, *Transcripts of Gurdjieff’s Meetings 1941–1946*). These were somewhat informal sessions with Gurdjieff answering questions, following up on his students’ work, giving out exercises (usually just to individuals and not to the group in general), and making ad hoc remarks. But groups such as those of Orage had been in existence from the early 1920s.<sup>19</sup>

The role of the students was to ask questions and report observations. These were to bring out general principles such as noticing, the work of centers, and so on rather than being designed for the specific work of individuals. One of the most useful lessons of such groups for me was the recognition and appreciation of the diversity of points of view amongst people. People saw things in different ways. This was of immense practical use in helping to offset one’s inevitable subjectivity and conditioning. For me, it was my own necessary preparation for later taking up the discipline of dialogue, though it took me many years to realize this.

In relation to traditional Fourth Way practices it is important to emphasize two psychological tools or powers that became accepted as part of the very fabric of being in “the Work.” These two were sensing and visualization. Sensing is the conscious realization of bodily presence. It has an active nature; whereas the usual view of sensation is that it happens to us from external or physiological events in relation to which we are passive. It has remained an astonishing fact for me that hardly any mainstream psychology pays any attention to the phenomenology of sensation, usually restricting psychotherapy to the elements of thought and feeling where only speech plays any part. Interestingly enough, the psychologist philosopher Gendlin made a study that showed that psychotherapy was effective only if it involved location of states in the physical body. In the practice of the Work, sensing provides a touchstone for reality. In contrast with Descartes, Fourth Way people can say, “I sense, therefore I am.”

The second power is visualization. It is generally neglected in modern education which supports Gurdjieff’s description of this education as a “catastrophe not according to law.” Visualizing is to see rather than simply talk about something or even to think about something.<sup>20</sup> The basic, though rarely discussed, custom amongst people in the Fourth Way—or, at least, something that they might appeal to—was to see what was being talked about almost as something literally before their eyes. This I myself applied in small group work with young science students, to great effect, when I was involved in educational research inspired by Bennett’s ideas.

I cannot overstate the importance of visualization. Its scope includes preparing the future and effecting a kind of future acting on the present. That is to say, for example, the group would be invited to see the end

18 Bennett once claimed that the fourth way psychological groups had an influence on mainstream group psychology and experimental groups such as sensitivity training. This seems unlikely. I had an interesting personal experience of meeting with a leader in the sensitivity training movement to learn more for myself when it turned out he had abandoned it and taken to Fourth Way ideas! My own pursuit of dialogue came from influences outside the Fourth Way. As far as I know there has not been any comparative study of fourth way psychological groups with other methods.

19 Alfred Richard Orage (1873–1934) was foremost a literary critic and widely renowned. He represented Gurdjieff in America and set up various groups. He developed his own understanding of the “work ideas” and was greatly admired by the psychologist Daly King (see his *The Oragean Version*). When Gurdjieff came to America he denounced Orage and his groups—according to his account of these events in the Third Series of writings—but worked extensively with him on the English version of *Beelzebub’s Tales* and wrote of him as his “inner world essence friend.”

20 The contrast between the two modes is most important. In Gurdjieff’s terms it amounts to a contrast between “mentation by form” and “mentation by word.” As a rough generalization, the former can assist in co-operation and mutual understanding while the latter tends to foster argument.

result and not plan how it was to be achieved.<sup>21</sup> I have seen this work with tasks involving one hundred people: they do what is needed, including finding roles, co-operating, and sharing resources with minimum discussion. I like to think of this aspect of visualization as applied teleology. It can also enhance subtle areas of understanding as in the systematics I will speak of later. I want to emphasize, however, that it differs in spirit from the well-known cult of positive thinking and such because it was directed towards objective tasks, usually involving something to be achieved involving many people working in harmony. As such, it could also play a major role in the practice of the Gurdjieff movements. Intentionally forming a picture of what is contemplated does not mean just having a picture; it is to work in a medium that does not follow causal logic. The picture does not do anything; we are rather drawn into it.<sup>22</sup> It must also be mentioned that the phenomenologist Henri Bortoft, a one-time student of Bennett, came to acknowledge the debt he owed Bennett in learning visualization from him (see his preface to *The Wholeness of Nature*). Bortoft saw visualization as a practical skill phenomenology needed to make it work but which was rarely practiced. In a word, it gives a substantial entry into wholeness and not mere description.

Now we must come to the creative and social side of Bennett's Fourth Way. As I intimated earlier, he was experienced in applied science and the management of creative teams. It would have been unlikely for him to have just copied Gurdjieff's ideas. He thought deeply about them, saying that he was following Gurdjieff's injunction to "Think! Think!" rather than wait to be told. In addition, he was well versed in modern physics and its remarkable innovations, and could not but help see that contemporary science and Gurdjieff's ideas and pointers *must* in the end coincide. In simple terms: there can be only one truth. This gives rise to his crucial slogan *integration without rejection* that also provided a theme for his prophetic idea of the Synergic Epoch. In the period after the war, Bennett worked with the idea of developing a six-dimensional geometry involving three kinds of time, first suggested by Ouspensky. The early versions of his magnum opus, *The Dramatic Universe*, following up and expanding on the multi-dimensional idea, were dominated by Bennett's evident need to write an apologia for Gurdjieff's ideas. Bennett took his own fundamental triad of experience—function, being, and will—to relate to the numbers seven, one, and three, and hence to Gurdjieff's cosmology based on the wholeness of the cosmos and the laws of three and seven. It became an exegesis that led into his own vision.

Though drafts of his book were read to groups in the 1950s and he discussed the ideas in many seminars and talks, it was obvious that the majority found it hard going. The problem stems from Gurdjieff himself who taught an integration of cosmology and psychology as in his *Beelzebub's Tales*.<sup>23</sup> In the groups I have seen they are rarely balanced or integrated. Bennett was an exception in holding to their unity. Also, he well understood that it was no good just sticking to the words of Gurdjieff's teachings. Gurdjieff himself had always been an innovator, absorbing many influences but making them his own. But this was not something that most followers of the ideas could take on.

Bennett then took the step of reinterpreting his "Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences" literally.<sup>24</sup> Previously, the outlandish title had been chosen as a smokescreen to bolster its charitable status and hide what it did from the eyes of authorities. Now, in the 1960s, he claimed it should be taken seriously on its own merits and even averred that Gurdjieff's own Institute had been intended as a serious venture to be taken literally.

For me, the appeal was obvious. I had from the start been enraptured by Gurdjieff's special brotherhoods or societies that he describes in *Beelzebub's Tales* and, in another guise, in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. In particular I identified with the character of Belcultassi: the great ancient thinker who discovers something was not quite right in his psyche and gathered some friends together to look into it. But even the prospect

21 This is somewhat recognised in management (scenario planning) and innovation. Concerning the latter, the Russian system TRIZ *Theory of Inventive Problem-Solving in English* highlights visualizing the "ideal final result" and working backwards from it. However, Bennett's use eschewed any planning and depended on commitment and participation in action.

22 This corresponds to the action Gurdjieff called the "law of falling" in which we do not "push" but allow ourselves to be brought closer in.

23 The microcosm-macrocosm parallel is much developed in Gurdjieff's ideas and it was an imperative to expound a theme in which human psychology had an objective place. This was similar to placing the earth and the solar system within a cosmological framework. Gurdjieff saw human experience as relying on energies that were part of the physical universe.

24 See [http://www.duversity.org/institute\\_2.htm](http://www.duversity.org/institute_2.htm). Bennett's Institute was a reflection of Gurdjieff's proposed "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man" and also an acknowledgement of his work in writing *The Dramatic Universe*.

of serious research associated with spiritual lines is fragile. Wolfgang Pauli, for example, gave up on working with the Jungians because they were too ignorant of physics (reported in *Atom and Archetype : the Pauli/Jung letters, 1932-1958*). It is unlikely that active seekers will join up with followers. Creative people do not like to follow fixed systems. Or, as William Blake said: “Each man must create his own system or else he is a slave to another man’s.”

Bennett’s concern with psycho-cosmology informed his openness to new spiritual movements and figures. In my view he had a quest for practical wholeness. I emphasize the practical side because most holistic propagandists seem to spend time talking about the holistic ideal but never practicing, demonstrating, or understanding it. Bennett demonstrated his quest for wholeness in his life with its explorations, meetings, conflicts, and innovations.

Bennett’s concern with practice and wholeness extended into the idea of service. Service meant service to the community. For Bennett I believe this entailed an action that would give to society something that was created by the work of people of the Fourth Way. There was a general idea inherited from Gurdjieff of three lines of Work: for oneself, for the group, and for the world (though sometimes as “work for the Work”). Included in this, for example, would be *path maintenance*: the preservation of means for people to know about and connect with the methods of the Fourth Way. The idea of service included a commitment to the future through the sacrifice of the present. As such it was always at one with spiritual ecological ideas of caring for the future of life on Earth. Indeed, as I will briefly discuss later, it fed into Bennett’s concern for the generation of a new sacred image based on a vision of unconditioned nature.

More pragmatically, the idea of service was connected with the practice of doing tasks which seems to have been a feature of many lines in the Fourth Way. The task is something to do which offers a *challenge*. Psychologically, so Bennett taught, challenge is a condition for stimulating *real consciousness*.<sup>25</sup> Both Gurdjieff and Bennett insisted that the consciousness that most people assume they have is in reality dreamlike and



**The Djameechoonatra, erected in memory of Gurdjieff  
in the grounds of Coombe Springs 1956–1966**

reactional, and real consciousness is behind this façade. It is also to put to the test one’s degree of integration of thought, feeling, and sensation. Bennett would assign personal task to individuals, but also engineer or engage in collective tasks. In the 1950s he created the challenge of building a nine-sided hall dedicated to

<sup>25</sup> This became the basis for his development of the method of “structural communication,” which is briefly discussed later. An outline of the method can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structural\\_communication](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structural_communication).

Gurdjieff. This was an exceptional construction, beautifully executed, and even admired by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was finally completed only in the mid-1960s and within a year or so completely destroyed. Later, he engaged in educational research and was responsible for remarkable innovations.

The idea of service to society was in accord with Bennett's socialistic outlook and even his ideas on human progress. It was and remains a difficult matter to decide what can truly benefit the society that surrounds us. Later, when I read Idries Shah's (1924–1996) teaching stories, I was struck by Bahauiddin Naqshband's account of how he sought to be useful in the court of a ruler, only to resign in deep disillusionment.<sup>26</sup> Bennett himself had been involved in the post-World War 1 negotiations as a translator and saw first-hand the rule of petty egoism and short-sightedness. In spite of this, Bennett appeared to have been convinced that it was possible to intervene in the affairs of men. Many people following some form of the Fourth Way will express similar sentiments. The fundamental idea is probably that if people do develop themselves then they should be able to help their fellow men. If they cannot, then it is questionable whether they have developed objectively.

Gurdjieff had often stated his purpose as contributing to the release of people from the mass psychosis that led to war and immense suffering, something he had seen first-hand. One of his most famous statements was that "two hundred conscious men and women could stop war."<sup>27</sup> He averred that "war was no longer needed." Bennett was to take up this theme in terms of the *Peacemakers* of the Beatitudes and he developed it to center on the *Khwajagan*—the Masters of Wisdom—and the role they sometimes played in defusing conflict, especially as portrayed in the person of one of the last of the lineage (Ubaydullah al-Ahrar, 1404–1490). According to what he told me and a few others, there was a spiritual teacher and farmer in the Ukraine whose influence was crucial in averting the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>28</sup>

For Bennett, service was twinned with sacrifice. He rendered Gurdjieff's way of transformation through "conscious labour and intentional suffering" as *service and sacrifice*. Techniques and practices were a surface thing. The idea of sacrifice was that it released energy to enable one to serve objectively. In a modest form this obtains in creative groups, which are effective to the degree their members relinquish their egos. Obviously, Bennett was inspired by the example of Christ.

## Many Teachers

In the Fourth Way there is not one teacher<sup>29</sup>

At one point in the 1960s, Bennett suggested we work at the production of an encyclopaedia of spiritual techniques. Here, he demonstrated his all-inclusive global outlook and freedom from any Gurdjieffian exclusivity. He also showed his concern for practical methods. From time to time he would suggest that Gurdjieff was important not so much for his ideas as for his command of spiritual technique, or *marifat* (practical wisdom). Sadly, the project came to nothing, probably due to lack of funds, but more importantly due to a lack of people with relevant capacities.

Bennett was uniquely equipped, having traveled in the Near East, speaking many languages and having considerable grounding in history. He could read Sanskrit and Arabic reasonably well and was able to go directly to the sources. The teaching or transmission of the Fourth Way approach is very much limited by the lack of knowledge and experience in would-be students. Gurdjieff clearly stated that the teaching that is available depends on the quality of the students.<sup>30</sup>

26 Just before he died, Shah had asked one of Bennett's students, The Lord Thurlow, to join him in making visits to authorities in the Middle East in pursuit of peace and improving mutual understanding between them.

27 "Two hundred conscious people, if they existed and if they found it necessary and legitimate, could change the whole of life on the earth. But either there are not enough of them, or they do not want to, or perhaps the time has not yet come, or perhaps other people are sleeping too soundly" (Ouspensky 310).

28 I could never verify this story. Bennett believed that there was a Sufi master in the Ukraine living at that time, very similar to Ubaydullah al-Ahrar. This man counted wives of the politburo amongst his followers and these wives were present, serving tea (as the usual staff could not be trusted) to the politicians, at the critical meetings of the Cuban missile crisis. He implied that they transmitted a kind of baraka from their teacher that enabled the politburo to give way to the Americans and save the world from possible nuclear war. As an allied example: my friend Beautiful Painted Arrow, shaman of both Ute and Pueblo traditions, spent many years constructing Peace Chambers throughout the world.

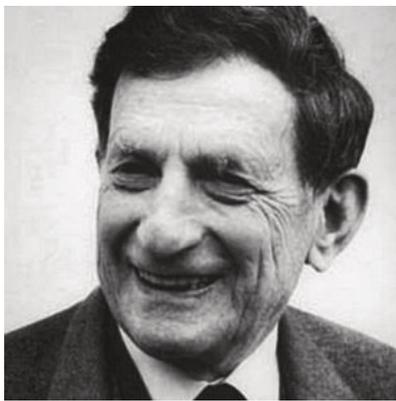
29 Ouspensky 203

30 "The higher the teacher, the more difficult for the pupil ... as the teacher is indispensable to the pupil, so also is the pupil

In a strong sense, the Fourth Way may be only suitable for someone for whom all else has failed. It takes hold in disillusionment. It pays little heed to the “feel-good” factor so prevalent today. During the period I knew him, Bennett had encounters not only with Pak Subuh but also with many other spiritual figures such as the Shiva Puri Baba, Idries Shah, and Hasan Shushud. He met with the Maharaj Mahesh Yogi (and criticized him for ignoring the need for sacrifice) and Peter and Eileen Caddy from Findhorn. These were just the ones I knew of. Before my time he had journeyed to Islamic countries and met Sufis such as Dagesthani and Emir Chikou.<sup>31</sup> These journeys were significant for him—and later for myself—in describing how apparently saintly people could act like narrow-minded bigots. This made such an impression that he could say to us later: “Maybe I am a holy man. But I tell you, a holy man can always make mistakes.”



John Bennet with Pak Subuh



David Bohm

Bennett made it a practice to invite guest speakers to Coombe Springs, representing for example the Moonies or the Druids. He would himself happily address the local Women’s Institute. The biographical details of his various encounters are not so important; what is truly significant is the link between Bennett’s openness to new influences and the thermodynamic laws he knew as a scientist. All closed systems move towards increasing entropy. In ordinary terms, they run down and get disordered. The only way for a system to keep itself alive is by eating new information. Bennett had eaten much of contemporary physics and in the early 1960s he developed a close communication with David Bohm, the renowned quantum physicist.<sup>32</sup> I see these meetings and relationships as part of what Bennett later told me was a matter of sustaining an inner

muscle tone. They would not, themselves, lead to transformation but they would prepare the ground as it were, plough the field or polish the mirror.<sup>33</sup>

Bennett’s experience of highly significant encounters, which I enjoyed vicariously or at second hand, reflected in me years later when I took up the dialogue process as a serious limb of the work. What mattered was the diversity of the ingredients; that they did not fit into a single mold. And, as Bennett remarked to me in later years, everyone has their own style in the Work.

Bennett seems to have taken very seriously Gurdjieff’s saying quoted at the beginning of this section. Anyone who is an “elder” or knows more can teach a “younger” student. He developed this idea and incorporated it in his scheme of the ideal human society. People who were working on themselves and knew something very well could become what he called specialists. Their authority would not go beyond their own speciality. People who were capable of understanding and responding to individual needs could be called counselors. He seemed to portray himself as occupying a fourth category of Initiate that he also named “witness” particularly in relation to himself.<sup>34</sup> The witness is capable of recognizing the people or agencies who have achieved transformation— whether from birth, from work, or from above—and are of a different nature.

This category of people he called psychoteleios (the “arrived”). He can act as a bridge between these transformed people, the ones who have arrived, and the people still caught up in searching. I believe Bennett

indispensable to the teacher ... the teacher cannot go on without the pupil or pupils” (Ouspensky 203). He appears to have considered his own pupils as inadequate for the task of spreading his ideas, so resorted to writing. Even then, he is reported as saying: “They do not have enough words so I cannot talk to them.”

31 Published under that title as *Journeys in Islamic Countries*.

32 I published a record of the meetings between Bohm and Bennett as *The Bohm-Bennett Correspondence 1962-1964*.

33 As al-Ghazzali said, “Dear friend, your heart is a polished mirror. You must wipe it clean of the veil of dust that has gathered upon it, because it is destined to reflect the light of divine secrets.”

34 See the diagram in the chapter “Ideal Human Society” in volume three of *The Dramatic Universe*. Witness was the name he gave to his autobiography. I believe his threefold scheme of psychostatic, psychokinetic, and psychoteleios people was derived from the Gnostic Valentinus.

took this role very seriously and felt it entailed a profound responsibility.

In part, it was a reflection of Gurdjieff's insistence on being able to discern between the real and the counterfeit. People who are searching are very vulnerable to charlatans and deluded leaders (as I can personally attest and will discuss later). Though Bennett did not emphasize it, the fourth category of people have the role of setting a direction for seekers. He sometimes referred to the need for having a lodestone able to point the way which can work in the given time and circumstances. This is supremely important. The practice of techniques is one thing, but it can never take the place of shaping intentionality according to real understanding. This directionality is connected with the future; whereas the repetition of practices is very much a referral to the past. The question of time and place is truly esoteric.

The role of the witness verges on religion, or relationships with higher powers. It does have to deal with invisible forces. The efforts that people make struggling to work on themselves rely for their meaning or worth on the agencies working in the spiritual world. Gurdjieff seems to have assumed the reality of higher powers and Bennett took this on seriously, especially when he urged his students to learn how to communicate with higher intelligence. This was startling in many ways. Not only was it a powerful statement of belief in the reality of higher intelligences but it seemed to portray a major shift in the role of the witness such as himself. Somewhat in parallel with the ideas of Alice Bailey, who spoke for example of "the externalisation of the hierarchy" (in the book of that name), or the making visible of the higher powers, Bennett was suggesting that the invisible realm would become accessible to people in a new way.

In articulating four roles in the matrix of those engaged in personal transformation, Bennett saw beyond the simplistic division of students and teachers that usually obtains. It is important to appreciate that Bennett's conceptual innovations were developed in parallel with his personal experience of guidance from the unseen world. For him they were not separate. But for people like myself, they were. For all that, there was an unwritten implication that grasping the ideas might be more than philosophy. That is because thinking and acting are not separate in understanding.

An even more important consideration arises from asking the question what are transformed people for? For most people today it is just a matter of personal benefit. But Gurdjieff and Bennett seemed to imply that such people were needed in an objective sense. We have already discussed the idea of service. Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales* even suggests that they are needed to help God run the universe!<sup>35</sup>

In this realm of multiple roles, influences, and agencies, Bennett provided a glimpse of an ecology of spirituality. Instead of regarding the field of what is generically known as human development as a piecemeal commerce of authorities, practices, traditions, fashions, and market forces, it was possible—at least in principle—to see that there might be an organization behind it all. Once, during a meeting held after leaving Coombe Springs, Bennett had us do an exercise that entailed bringing a higher energy to enter into the city of London. This was not explained or discussed. We students assumed he knew of some danger or need. As I saw later, he was sensitive to the play of forces including evil ones. I had acquired a conviction about the working of the invisible agencies is some fleeting visions in my youth, sufficient for me to give credence towards what Bennett was doing though without any firm empirical foundation.

## Integration without Rejection

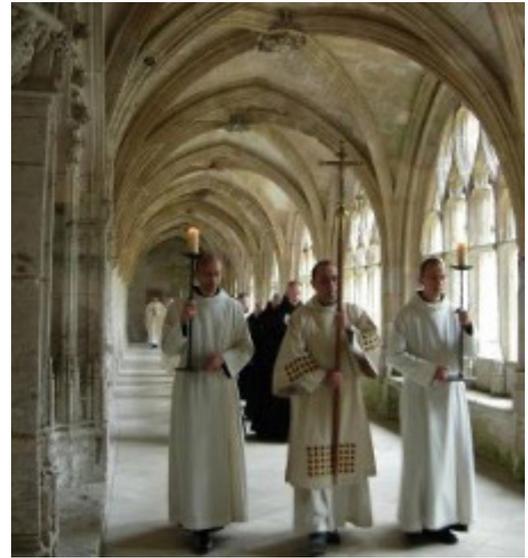
It is likely that Bennett always had a sense of emergent wholeness. It was a dynamic vision; being more open than Ouspensky's idea that what Gurdjieff had brought was incomplete and one could one day find the missing parts. This idea, no doubt, was influential for very many followers of Gurdjieff's ideas, venturing into various traditions, schools, and methodologies such as Zen, Vedanta, Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, the Eastern Church, and so on.

As I have said earlier, Bennett started by seeking a unification with modern physics, then journeyed to the East to meet leaders in Sufi schools. This was surpassed by his adoption of Subud. In one stroke he had made a conjunction of active and receptive lines of work. This was to take some years to work out in

35 "... certain of the Tetartocosmoses—as a final result of their serving the purposes of the common-cosmic Iraniranumange—might become helpers in the ruling of the enlarged World" (*Beelzebub's Tales* 702).

practice. He had to struggle with the tendency of Subud people, on their side, to reject active lines of work. The motto of Subud—Susila Budhi Dharma (translated as “Right Living According to the Will of God”)—implied that efforts applied to activities in life and should not be brought into play in regard to spiritual things. There are in effect only two elements: doing one’s duty, and surrendering to God. Bennett was par excellence a man of efforts and he recounts how even Gurdjieff pleaded with him to spare himself more.<sup>36</sup> More than that, he would always seek relatedness, which requires three directions.

The even more surprising move he made in 1956 was towards the Catholic Church. He came to accept the real spirituality of the church and, as he recounts in his autobiography *Witness*, saw the real body of Christ in the wafer used in the mass he attended at the monastery of St. Wandrille. From then on, he would speak of spiritual energies (he maintained an attraction to the Eastern Church).<sup>37</sup> In retrospect, I believe this made him identify the Work with supernatural action. It was an issue he appears to have contemplated and thought about until the end of his life. His last talks on God and the Work were radical indeed.<sup>38</sup>



Monks in the cloister of St Wandrille

In his fusion of active and receptive, the emergence of the third force was almost assured. And, for many early followers of the Fourth Way, Christ was the supreme expression of the reconciling nature.

Bennett’s involvement in theology was mostly ignored by the majority of his students. He declared that it was a science. The theological overshadowed the psychological.<sup>39</sup> Recognizing that most people would not be able to follow the kind of mentation involved, Bennett was careful not to impose any religious format. This had always been the unwritten law in the Fourth Way. The work could aid people in their religious practice but it should not be identified with any particular religion. He advocated acknowledgement of the divine and also of one’s fellow humans, as in any form of worship, but this was largely restricted to the inner exercises. That he took religion and theology seriously is evident from his highly informative book *Subud and Christian Mysticism* and his technical paper about the source of the Subud latihan (spiritual exercise), which contains discussion of Islamic theology, entitled “Subud-The Sufi Background.” It was of foremost importance to him to understand that the Subud action came from a natural source and although probably creative and beyond consciousness, was not in itself salvation or redemption.

When I came onto the scene at Coombe Springs around 1960, it was the end of the Subud period. Gradually, Bennett was reintroducing Gurdjieff practices. He offered open groups where people could come and observe; also discussions. One discussion I remember vividly was around the question, “What is Work?” and that my answer was “a break in happening.” The week-long Summer seminar of that year was the remarkable “A Spiritual Psychology.” This bore witness to Bennett’s familiarity with Scholasticism though conducted in Gurdjieffian and Sufi terms (including those of Subud). But its most important feature was to make will central after his exploration of multiple levels of being, acting at the junction of the material and the spiritual in us. This was Bennett’s signature: will above being. I keenly remember his comment on a question of mine about equality between humans, when he asserted that people differ in everything *except their will*. Only decades later was I able to find a way of implementing this idea in a practice for groups of people (namely, through dialogue). All of the people around him capable of reflection recognized the paramount importance of what he called will for him and his understanding of everything.

It is enough at this point to take will to mean the invisible capability of every person to originate new con-

36 See the record of his time with Gurdjieff in John and Elizabeth Bennett’s *Idiots in Paris*.

37 Gregory of Palamas was a key figure. See Vladimir Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. This tradition speaks of ‘divine operations,’ an idea very attractive to Bennett.

38 These are largely collected in the book *Sacred Influences*.

39 Bennett sent *The Dramatic Universe* to Pere Bescond, a monk at St. Wandrille (actually researching into the origins of Gregorian Chant) to check his theology against the orthodoxy of the Church. Bescond pointed out many deviations.

tent in action; though he made it to include the operations of the whole universe and beyond, particularly in the sense he consistently said that God is will and not a being. This transcended common difficulties over God, freedom, and creation. Obviously, Bennett had come to this many years before. It is totally unknown when or how. In many ways, it does not sit easily with Gurdjieff's vision and language. Bennett identified Gurdjieff's *okidanokh*—common cosmic active element—with will.<sup>40</sup> Gurdjieff tended to speak in terms of substances while Bennett preferred more abstract terms. Gurdjieff challenged him not to “mathematize” but go for being.

More importantly, Bennett developed, uniquely, practices related to will so that it was more than philosophical theory; in particular, through his decision exercise. This exercise epitomized the crux of his approach. It involved a precise synergy between the exercise of one's powers and submission to a higher will. As in many things in ordinary life, people assume that they can make decisions. There is much evidence to the contrary. Bennett's exercise involved a structure of seven steps and enabled people to test out and have confidence in the true action of decision-making. It reflected traditional understanding, as can be found for example in the ninth story of the third book of Rumi's *Mathnawi*:

Therefore hath God commanded, “Make an exception,  
 Couple the words ‘If God will’ with your vows.  
 Because the governance of actions is in my hands,  
 The wills of all are subject to my will.  
 Every moment I impart a fresh bias to the heart,  
 Every instant I set a fresh mark on the heart;  
 Each day I am engaged in a fresh work,  
 There is naught that swerves from my purpose”

It was a unification of different levels or kinds of human experience.

Bennett's concern with decision reflected his deep understanding of will. He was also convinced that society needed people who could make real decisions. That is, make decisions that involved the whole of them and were binding. The exercise was practiced on simple things such as deciding to speak to someone the next day but developed to include ways of dealing with “dark” emotions.

## The Last Phase at Coombe Springs

After the separation from Subud (he remained on good terms with its leader Pak Subuh), Bennett had five years at Coombe Springs before he handed it over to Idries Shah. During that time he had established his Institute to the extent that it was engaged in educational research into curricula acknowledged by the Middlesex county council, cooperated with Bob Arbon an engineer in GEEC under Arnold Weinstock, appointed research Fellows and launched a respectable journal under the title of Systematics. All that served as a background to his later creation of an international Academy for Continuous Education, “continuous education” being his term for transformation that would be acceptable to the general public. The small group of young scientists around him were designated ISERG - Integral Science Education Research Group. We would often meet in a basement flat in London, preparing for our intellectual meetings by doing a Subud *latihan*.

Also during the last period at Coombe Springs, Bennett was working on the completion of his magnum opus *The Dramatic Universe*, finishing the last two volumes. He went to the Benedictine monastery at St Wandrille to write and I received his manuscripts back in England to edit and get typed. A final volume was on history and presented an intricately knit story of Earth's history, extending to recent times and even speculating about the future of mankind. What was striking for me was his knowledge of actual historical events, and his ability to see patterns in a global way. In some measure he was on a par with Arnold Toynbee. His perspective on cycles of history embraced hundreds of thousands of years and included the action of higher intelligences. He spoke of Epochs in human history reflecting synchronous shifts of mind across

40 Okidanokh can be split into two Armenian words, oki (“soul”) and danokh (“carrier”).

the planet for periods of around two thousand and five hundred years.

History was a personal reality for him. He spoke of past events as continuing to ensue in their own time and that they were accessible in a living sense. Of foremost importance was his “reporting” on the time of Christ. Some things he wrote came across as close to eyewitness accounts. They were vivid and deeply felt. His last, posthumous book the *Masters of Wisdom* sought to combine Christ, the demiurge and esoteric schools all in one vision. The chapter on the time of Christ actually followed on from some of Gurdjieff’s remarks particularly on the role of Judas. Gurdjieff once told him that he, Bennett, would have to tell the true story.<sup>41</sup>

The claims of making direct contact with living realities of the past were rooted in his ideas on time. I was ready to believe them, in a sense that was closely coupled to belief in spiritual realities, beyond the causality of the physical world though intimately present in them. Bennett made prolonged and deep studies of the phenomenology of time, which culminated in the notion of embodied will he called *hyparxis*—to mean “ableness to be”—quite different from strung out in linear time. Meaningful events could still *be* even though they were, from the standpoint of linear time, left behind us in the past. The even more striking idea was that there were events in the future which *were* even though they did not yet exist for us. He made this the realm the dwelling place of higher intelligence. It was a brilliant stroke to place them not some *where* but some *when*. The *hyparchaic future* was the domain of creativity. Contrary to the usual view of people *doing* something creative, he pointed out that creativity could only operate with things which were not yet set into existence. As may emerge in our discussion the seemingly abstract idea of *hyparxis* held for me significant insight into the nature of “work” in the Gurdjieffian sense, especially as written about in Gurdjieff’s Third Series of writings.

The mind-stretching vistas of his ideas were a match for the mythological icons of Gurdjieff’s *Beelzebub’s Tales*. They were an extraordinary testimony to the depths of the ideas associated with Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way teachings. Bennett’s students or followers tended to divide into two groups: those who could grapple with the ideas, or those who could just listen to their exposition. Young men around Bennett became used to playing with many dimensions and categories of existence, much as we were with the enneagram, Gurdjieff’s emblematic diagram of world processes that became more or less his logo (the Djameechoonatra was designed on the basis of this diagram). In the ISERG group we discussed ghosts, spirits, fields, the quantum vacuum, and so on. These exercises were part of a loose set of practices that engaged us in responding to pure forms as in an act of contemplation. They were, perhaps, experiences or what might have gone into the formation of such ancient systems as the I Ching, Kabbalah, Tarot, and so on. The Fourth Way aims to get into the workshop rather than buy existing products or gaze into shop windows, rather as Rumi advocated:

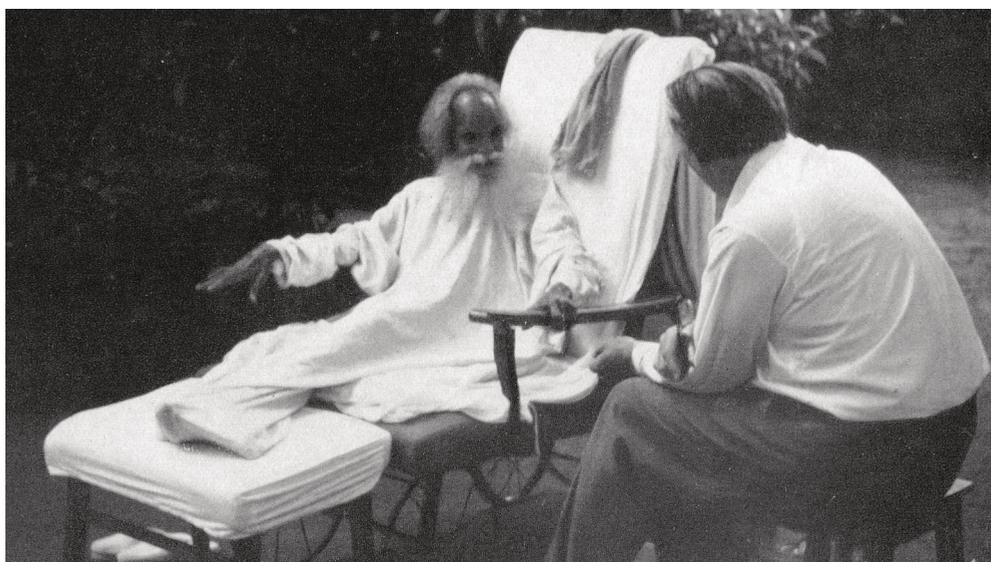
The Real Workman is hidden in His workshop  
Go you into the workshop and see Him face to face

This practice of a kind of contemplative creativity rested on the developing method of *Systematics*. Systematics was established by Bennett as an outcome of many years seeking to rationalize Gurdjieff’s cosmology and see its connections with modern science. It also drew on ideas widely prevalent in the beginning of the twentieth century concerning other dimensions.<sup>42</sup> And it was an echo of Hamlet’s comment: “there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy . . .” In broad terms, it claimed an indefinite range of modes of understanding corresponding to the natural numbers, the series of integers. And part of its rationale was to start from something as unbiased and non-ideological as possible. Bennett had been influenced by C. S. Peirce who himself had pointed out the range of numerical preferences people have had while confessing his own bias towards the Triad (see “A Guess at the Riddle” in *The Essential Peirce*).

- <sup>41</sup> Gurdjieff and Bennett’s interpretation of the role of Judas is a story in itself. In brief, Gurdjieff indicated that Judas was the closest disciple to Jesus and took upon himself a role of blame on His behalf. Bennett later portrayed Judas as “the lamb who taketh away the sins of the world” by his sacrifice. The recent discovery of a Gospel of Judas lends support to the idea.
- <sup>42</sup> Non-Euclidean geometries had arisen in the late nineteenth century but it may have been Edwin Abbott’s “fantasy” *Flatland—a Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) that got the ball rolling. C. H. Hinton had written on the fourth dimension since 1888. Gurdjieff’s pupil, P. D. Ouspensky discussed the idea of a fourth dimension in his major work *Tertium Organum* first published in Russia in 1912. See also Linda Dalrymple Henderson’s *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Art* (1983).

Rather like Schoenberg leaping from traditional seven toned scales to the dodecaphonic or twelve-tone scale, Bennett extended his “qualitative number systems” beyond Gurdjieff’s three and seven to include all one to twelve. It is plain in retrospect that Bennett was working from a very unusual perspective in allowing equal value to disparate worldviews. The more common tendency is to seize on one way of seeing things as the truth. This then becomes, in various guises, forms of religion.

Bennett’s deliberate openness played out in his encounters with spiritual teachers. After engaging with Pak Subuh, he heard of the Nepalese Sage the Shiva Puri Baba and was invited to visit him. He picked up a new Hindu-based system of physical, moral, and spiritual disciplines. After meeting with him twice, Bennett gave lectures on his ideas and wrote the book *Long Pilgrimage* (this book was even cited by the Beatles on television when they gave an interview concerning their interest in Hindu spirituality). As with other spiritual teachers he met, he was given personal advice. In particular, the Shiva Puri Baba urged him to devote time to meditation and less to his efforts and activities. I think Bennett saw for himself that most of what he did was a matter of duty rather than something for his own transformation.



**The ShivaPuri Baba in conversation with John Bennett**

But an extremely important thing appears to have emerged in this period of his life. While he was extending and speaking about communication with higher intelligences he was drawn to a sense of his own personal task or mission. It was to help discover or bring into manifestation *a new form of worship* mainly by creating a new sacred image. In conversations he let slip that he had been given this mission by higher powers and it was his spiritual task, quite different from his teaching activities, which he regarded, as he once told me, simply a duty.

The significance of sacred images had been apparent to him for some time but it must have become more focused since his entry into the Catholic Church. On a few occasions Gurdjieff had spoken enigmatically of higher beings coming into manifestation within the solar system, in a context which involved their visualization and the play of higher energies. The significance of sacred images is highlighted in the last part of the fourth volume of *The Dramatic Universe* when he spoke of the significance of the Virgin Mary and made a comparison between her and the Quran. There were implications that he was feeling his way towards a sense of unconditioned nature that had resonance with Gurdjieff’s idea of reciprocal maintenance as well as with current concerns over planetary ecology, and the background feeling (shared by Jung) for a renaissance of the ancient great mother epitomised in Great Mother.

The period was brought to a close by his encounter with Idries Shah, whose father had married a Scot and lived for a time in England. Shah appeared on the scene claiming that he represented the people who had been the source of Gurdjieff’s teachings (Naqshbandi). Shah was a trickster figure, very modern in

approach in contrast with Bennett who in behavior was quite Victorian even though mentally he was very much a man of the future. Shah brought new material into play such as his teaching stories which develops the corpus of mullah Nasser Eddin tales that Gurdjieff had drawn upon and also compiling hundreds of pieces on Sufi figures and practices, designed to challenge assumptions about causality and progress. Shah was an acute observer and attracted major figures such as novelist Doris Lessing and Ornstein the American psychologist.

From what one could see from the perspective of being a student of Bennett's, it appeared that Idries Shah was giving Bennett the run-around. As usual, Bennett gave Shah all the help he could; eventually handing over his premises at Coombe Springs to him for his work. Bennett acted in a straight-laced way in comparison with Shah. He told me once that Shah's style in the work was to turn it into a joke! But Shah had serious purpose and it turned out later that he wished to help broker peace in the Middle East and planned to visit authorities there with a major English diplomat, a student of Bennett, only to die before this could be realized.

Shah came very close to encapsulating Gurdjieff's teaching in a new format. He spoke of Sufism as existing well before Islam dating its origins forty thousand years ago (to the then supposed explosion of creativity in Europe). He claimed to represent the People of the Tradition, a fairly clear echo of Gurdjieff's ancient societies and the Sarmoun Brotherhood.<sup>43</sup>



Idries Shah

When Bennett left Coombe Springs and went to live in the nearby town of Kingston, Shah staged long weekend parties and would sometimes send some of Bennett's previous students who had gone over to Shah with leftover food: an obvious symbolic act one might say, but also a challenge. The turning point was when Bennett said to such an offer, "No, thank you. I have enough of my own." He was free of Shah and more, he could become his own man. It might even be said that this was Shah's gift to him. Later, after Bennett's funeral, Shah remarked that he was a rarity in "this business" because of his innocence.

Up to that time, Bennett had always cast himself as a student, at best a witness, no matter how great his powers or insight. He had always tried to serve spiritual leaders he came in contact with. Many people trained by him became efficient assistants to others. For example Joan Edwards, who had worked with him for many years and led the movements became Idries Shah's personal secretary. Many of Bennett's people became active in the Subud movement. And so on. Bennett's people were effective and reliable!

While living in Kingston, Bennett became seriously ill. It was a turning point in many ways. What was he going to do next?

He was very keen to get his ideas and the Work widely spread. In relation to this, he had picked up a hint from Idries Shah that music and technology would be important for the development of spirituality in contemporary culture and had taken to following up current pop culture especially in events such as Woodstock. He appeared in Glastonbury and the Isle of Wight festivals; an elderly white-headed gent in the midst the revelling young fans. His understanding was that music gatherings could concentrate energies enabling contact with higher powers.<sup>44</sup>

In this period, the late 1960s, his illness faced him with the prospect of brain damage through uric acid poisoning that would amount to him losing his mind.

He commented afterwards that this has set him free of mind, a major fana.<sup>45</sup> He determined to set up a

43 The Sarmoun were a mythical brotherhood—though accepted as a literal fact by Bennett and others—invented by Gurdjieff to lay claim to an unbroken tradition stretching back to the beginnings of civilization. Shah's People of the Tradition, he claimed, stretched back to very beginnings of Homo sapiens sapiens. I quote from him later.

44 I followed this up a little through contact with Jason Kheen and his connections with the "Rave" scene. Some of our correspondence is available at <http://www.duversity.org/PDF/CORRESPONDENCE%20ON%20RECIPROCAL%20MAINTENANCE.pdf>.

45 The Arabic word fana means "annihilation" and is usually coupled with baqa or "being." One is wiped out on one level but re-stored on a higher one; or "death and resurrection." The fana-baqa idea is discussed in Bennett's *Deeper Man* (228–245).

school in the spirit of Gurdjieff's ideas, perhaps harking back to the Prieuré.<sup>46</sup>

## Endlogue

The story continues with the “Sherborne experiment,” during which Bennett died (1974), and will be *A Hazardous Path, Part Two*. It will describe the aftermath of Sherborne and an encounter with a new teacher, ending with the author's efforts to explore new ways of Fourth Way work, up to the present day (2020).

46 Gurdjieff had often spoken of schools as necessary, claiming that people cannot work on themselves successfully alone but need others, guidance and the right conditions. Bennett made the claim that such schools existed before the rise of civilizations. And he wrote in his book *Enneagram Studies*: “Having examined man's foods, we must examine a rarely explored facet, which is for us the most important. Can the Enneagram help us to understand the cosmic transformation of Man himself? By ‘cosmic’ we mean not just his inner process but the role that he can play in the work of transformation in the world? Let us first picture to ourselves that there is something like a kitchen that has to produce for this world, for life on earth and perhaps for the whole solar system, something that corresponds to a meal. We can also suppose that we people are involved in the process. There are arrangements, organizations or places equipped for carrying out this operation, as a kitchen is, or as the human body is for our own transformation. In a general way we call these places ‘schools.’ They provide the conditions, the means and the equipment. It is possible to make an analogy on the model of the kitchen with all the things that are required in a school. Some people call it an esoteric school but the simple word school is the one I shall use for this” (61). A diagram he put forward serves as the blueprint for his “International Academy for Continuous Education.”



# The Fourth Way

## A Hazardous Path - Part Two

### Introduction

Perhaps I am a holy man. A holy man is someone who can enter higher worlds at will. -

John Bennett, c. 1964

This article continues the autobiographical story begun in ‘The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path’ Part One, and begins with describing how Bennett set up a school to “prepare for a time of troubles”. There follows what happened after his death and my subsequent explorations of the Fourth Way up until now (2019).

### The Sherborne Experiment

Giving away Coombe Springs to Idries Shah had relieved Bennett’s Institute of some debts but left him with few resources.<sup>1</sup> He was visited by various people, two of whom I will mention. The first was John Allen, a creative visionary combining art, science and drama in his Synergia community,<sup>2</sup> who came to learn Bennett’s systematics. I made friends with him and later played a small part in the making of the extraordinary Biosphere 2 his group built in Arizona. Allen’s group studied Bennett’s ideas, which played a significant part in their development of biospherics. The other was a new age charismatic leader Leonard Houlian I never actually met him. It appears that Bennett was positive towards him (even providing him with champagne) but such service and respect were typical of Bennett’s manners.

Bennett was keen to spread the ideas of the Work and also interested in how ‘higher energies’ could come into the general population. He had picked up a hint from Idries Shah that music and technology would be spiritually significant in the near future, and had taken to following up on contemporary ‘pop’ culture, especially events such as Woodstock. He appeared at Glastonbury and the Isle of Wight festivals; an elderly white-haired gent amongst the revelling young fans. His understanding was that music gatherings of this kind could concentrate energies enabling contact with higher powers. He remarked to us that this was more desirable than having mass sex!<sup>3</sup> In this period, the late 1960s, he suffered a severe illness that threatened his very mind through uric acid poisoning. He commented afterwards that this had set him free of mind, a major *fana*.<sup>4</sup> When he recovered, his vision was to establish a school based in life conditions. But it appears that Leonard persuaded him otherwise: he should set up a centre more along the lines of a retreat, away in the country.

Bennett felt he could attract young people and so it proved. He went to the United States and called in on various campuses, even though it was August and thus the holidays, finding an audience and recruiting students. Putting aside the influence of Leonard, he was forced to find a way of dealing with a hundred students or more at a time. An old supporter provided money with which to buy a large property in the Cotswolds. So the International Academy for Continuous Education was born. The title reflected his wish to connect with mainstream society: the idea of ‘continuous education’ was a way of referring to the ‘inner’ or ‘soul’ education people might undertake in their adult years. Like many modern educationists he rejected the common view that education ceased when one ‘grew up’.

A strange thing for anyone who knew Bennett’s history was how thinly supported he was in his new

- 1 Shah wanted a base for his work with people. It is possible that Bennett wanted to make a break with the past and took the sacrifice of Coombe Springs as a way to do this. As Gurdjieff once said, “Must make vacuum.” In the end Shah sold Coombe Springs to developers (who destroyed everything including the djameechoonatra, the nine-sided hall based on Gurdjieff’s enneagram that had been erected by Bennett and his pupils) and acquired an estate in Surrey.
- 2 See ‘Synergia’, in Lawrence R. Veysey, *The Communal Experience: Anarchist and Mystical Counter-Culture in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- 3 I followed this up a little through contact with Fraser Clark, a key figure in the rave scene in London who had been in a Gurdjieff group, and his American colleague Jason Keehn. Some of my correspondence with Jason on the background ideas is at <http://www.duversity.org/PDF/CORRESPONDENCE%20ON%20RECIPROCAL%20MAINTENANCE.pdf>. Accessed 23 November 2017.
- 4 *Fana* means ‘annihilation’, and in Sufism is usually coupled with *baqa* or ‘being’: *fana-baq* corresponds to the Christian ‘death and resurrection’.

venture. He started at the Academy with a bare handful of people to help him. The premises had to be repaired and decorated. People were coming in at the last moment. But at the very centre or nucleus of this chaotic activity was, as Bennett told me in 1971, that he “did not know what he was doing - and didn’t care.” Of course he was highly qualified, able and responsible. He could have been describing himself when he commented at one point that Gurdjieff did not have certainty about what he was doing but had, more importantly, confidence. And he well understood that some things can be done in a hurry that cannot be done otherwise.

The role and sense of an open but contained space plays a significant part in most creative activities. The title of Peter Brook’s book *The Empty Space* typifies this; Brook was also a follower of Gurdjieff’s ideas.<sup>5</sup> In a way, the Academy in Sherborne house could be seen as a theatrical performance: one hundred students brought together in a country house for ten months to seek their souls! Bennett’s move scandalised Gurdjieffians of a traditional, conservative bent. They were in a modality themselves that required regular attendance at groups over a long, and sometimes indefinite, period. There were no manuals or curricula for Fourth Way training (at least at that time). Bennett poured out everything - or at least a great deal - during the ten months, to the extent that Robert de Ropp, an important Gurdjieff group leader, called Sherborne the ‘Bennettron’ (a reference to devices for accelerating particles). There were daily Movements classes, in the mornings a series of up to one hundred inner exercises, lectures on psychology and cosmology, highly structured practical work on the house and gardens, personal interviews and, from time to time, inputs from visiting specialists such as myself, John Allen and Anthony Hodgson (a co-worker with Bennett who consulted to Shell), as well as ventures into the use of *zikr* and meditation.

The creation of the courses held at Sherborne was a remarkable and bold step. Implicit in them was the idea that learning through groups meeting every now and then was too slow and inefficient for the times. I believe Bennett thought that modern people could pick up things more quickly than those of earlier generations. Though not prescribing the *latihan* for his students he had been deeply impressed by the way the Indigenous spiritual movement Subud opened up sensation experience almost immediately.<sup>6</sup>

Strangely enough, he did not teach his systematics. It appeared to me that, perhaps, he did not want to risk the students thinking about the processes they were engaged in because he thought it would confuse them and take too much time. But it was a strange omission; because this intellectual side was, surely, integral to the whole? One must also note that creative thinking tends to dispute authority. He welcomed those who knew nothing of G. I. Gurdjieff and the Work, and had not read books about them. I was wary of this since it increased the tendency for people to let Bennett do their thinking.

I myself was not attracted to attend the Sherborne course. This led, much to my surprise, to Bennett putting pressure on me to do so. The pressure was severe; but also he offered to waive the usual fee for the course in my case. Our relationship reached a climax when he revealed the suffering he was undergoing due to ‘evil forces’ and I agreed to come.<sup>7</sup> He then told me I was to suffer because of the Work. These personal elements are relevant because they relate to some of the more hidden hazards of this path.

Who were his friends? One of his most faithful followers shocked everyone by lambasting Bennett for his lack of friends and effective isolation. But he did this out of devotion to him. Two of the handful of assistants departed within one or two years, due to disputes. This hinted at his autocratic side, which I myself rarely saw, because I related to him in the realm of ideas. Secondly, and more importantly, there was the issue of groups.

## Groups and Community

The importance of working with others, preferably of diverse temperaments and types, has long been recognised in the Fourth Way. But there were two main modalities. In the first, which is of a hierarchical nature, groups are organised by someone and people allocated by him to them. Such groups are artificial

<sup>5</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968]).

<sup>6</sup> J. G. Bennett, *Witness: The Story of a Search*, 4th edition (Bennett Books, 2005), pp. 339, 343-347.

<sup>7</sup> Note that G. I. Gurdjieff, after his major car crash in 1924, spoke of being a victim of his “old enemies”.

entities. In the second, people meet and learn to co-operate because they have aims in common and need each other to realise them. Such are often not at all hierarchical but established between equals. The paradigm for this modality was written about by Gurdjieff himself, in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.<sup>8</sup> Friendship, creativity and brotherhood permeate this book. No one person is the leader. I used to say to people: the remarkable men are remarkable *because they can work together*. The Seekers after Truth were obviously modelled after the ancient brotherhoods Gurdjieff wrote about in *Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson*, which were not hierarchical.<sup>9</sup>

The two modalities are not exclusive but their differences are very real. I believe this is crucial for understanding the dilemma of groups in the first sense. Bennett could attract people, maybe hundreds or thousands of people, and the introductory groups were lively and inspiring. But the question was: what happens after the introductory groups? Bennett constantly spoke of next steps. He was an avid proponent of making progress. With his usual creativity he invented new things for the groups to do. He set up 'more advanced' groups. These had a rationale in being composed of people with long experience who had assimilated some of the practicalities and knew the Work language reasonably well. Whether they were at all accomplished in Being was moot.

I believe that, since Bennett continued to organise the groups, he was acting as authority in a way that inadvertently inhibited any *self-organisation* in them. Self-organising is essential in self-realisation. At the same time, self-organisation is notoriously hazardous.<sup>10</sup> In a practical sense, there *cannot* be a more advanced group. Advancement, as I would understand it, entails individual decision and creativity. These do not flourish in standard groups. The issue is particularly relevant in regard to Bennett. Progressive spiritual groups were the supposed topic of his last book the *Masters of Wisdom* but he never got to write about such groups in modern times before he died.<sup>11</sup>

In retrospect - but also evident at the time - he had a great influence on some creative *individuals*, whereas the groups claiming to follow him were usually nondescript. Individuals would not form a group and share but could be productive in their own sphere of meaning. Henry Bortoft, phenomenologist and expositor of Goethe was a case in point, going off to do his own thing while drawing on Bennett's know-how. In essence this corresponds to the paradigm of the 'hero's quest' as extensively discussed by Joseph Campbell. The 'hero', after his ordeals, must return to his community with something to give.<sup>12</sup> This relates to the idea of service I have mentioned before.

Groups can only be a temporary measure. He understood their vulnerability to stagnation, as he wrote in the posthumously published book *Transformation*: he says there that after two or three years we should seriously question the value of remaining in any group we are in. Curiously, he even told me that I would get to 'where I need to be' in such a time period if I came to Sherborne. I am sure he meant it literally. He saw something real and at hand, though not very apparent to the people around him, who were still expecting to search and work on themselves in the old ways.

Unfortunately - in my eyes at least - Gurdjieff had established a pattern that entailed thinking in terms of transmission through hierarchy. The simplistic model was that first someone of 'real knowledge' sets up a group. The group develops, producing a few individuals who make progress. They in their turn might set up groups and so on. Such thinking leads to the supposition that there has to be an organiser of teachers. This was the role of Gurdjieff while he was alive. After his death an organisation was set up in which his successor in France took overall control of direction for an increasing number of groups in different countries, involving circles of elders and so on. This development, obviously, echoed the format of the churches, and

8 G.I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London: Routledge, 1963).

9 G.I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* (New York: Penguin Arkana, 1999 [1950]).

10 The best exploration of this idea is in William Penser's novel *The Moon of Hoa Binh*, based on events in the Vietnam War but extending through art, science, sex and the traumas of the twentieth century. See William Penser, *The Moon of Hoa Binh* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

11 J. G. Bennett, *Masters of Wisdom: An Esoteric History of the Spiritual Unfolding of Life on This Planet* (Chicago: Kazi Publications Incorporated, 1996).

12 The monomyth of the hero's journey is described in Joseph Campbell, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949). It is also illustrated by the Amerindian Vision Quest.

was hierarchical and authoritarian. Idries Shah was reported as describing it as a kind of mafia!

The problem remains. Groups can only address general issues, concerns and approaches and cannot enable the individual realisation.<sup>13</sup> Individual progress cannot be specified, so I believe, by any leader but must arise out of the decision of the individual him or herself. When people do make a decision, they separate from the group in principle if not in actuality. Often this means they leave, or are forced to leave, the group.

A few years before he died, I asked Bennett if he thought there was an equivalent to kundabuffer (an organ Gurdjieff proposed was implanted in man by higher powers to prevent him seeing reality) that operated in groups. It was obvious to me and most people that groups of people brought together and left to their own devices mostly tend to degenerate. Members do not listen to each other. Destructive ideas breed while constructive ones are silenced. In reply to my question Bennett admitted that he did not know. It seemed to me increasingly that he did not understand group processes at least as measured by current available knowledge. Amongst Gurdjieff's pupils Bennett was not alone in exhibiting ignorance of group processes.<sup>14</sup> Yet it was obvious to me that enabling groups to manage themselves productively was of the foremost importance.

Bennett's path took him in another direction than educating people in self-organisation. He was seeing the stage or steps beyond the groups as he knew them must entail setting up communities. This had long been a vision for him. In 1947 he went to South Africa to seek a location for a Fourth Way community. Like many other followers of Gurdjieff, the experience of World War II had made him feel that Europe was finished and civilisation faced collapse. The idea of building an Ark to save what was important for the future was very strong in the post-war years.<sup>15</sup> Gurdjieff, in *Beelzebub's Tales*, highlighted the frequency at which information and practices of real understanding were lost to future generations in some kind of breakdown due either to natural causes or some form of mental aberration possessing communities. With this came the idea of consciously preparing for the future so that what was valuable for the meaning of human life would not be lost.

Incidentally, this idea of preparing for the future fused with Bennett's vision of higher intelligence operating from the future; and naturally led to his advocacy of learning how to communicate with higher intelligence and, in the big picture, to his concept of the emergent Synergic Epoch. The latter was far more than a humanistic vision of cooperation between people. Bennett's extraordinary concept was of cooperation between different levels of being which implied different kinds of individuality. This actually parallels current ideas about ecology in terms of co-operation with, and not exploitation, of other forms of life.<sup>16</sup> But it went much further, starting from Gurdjieff's ideas of reciprocal maintenance involving all levels of existence.<sup>17</sup>

In South Africa he met with Jan Smuts, who sensibly advised him to return to Europe, and pointed out that he was not seeing the problems rooted in South Africa. It was an interesting aspect of the encounter that Smuts himself was a profound holistic thinker and had developed his own metaphysics similar to systematics.<sup>18</sup>

At Sherborne, Bennett continued to nurse his vision of a Fourth Way community and latched onto contemporary movements to do with self-sufficiency and alternative technology, the ideas of British economist E. F. Schumacher (1911-1977), renowned for the 'small is beautiful' concept - his niece attended a course at Sherborne - and so on as well as making connections with Eastern ideas of 'powerhouses' (concentrations of spiritual energy in 'monasteries' and locations of 'brotherhoods'). It was very much in sympathy with the Benedictine order, created by Benedict of Nursia (c. 480 - 550 AD) and was a major influence in the civilising of Europe.<sup>19</sup>

The setting up of a Fourth Way community became Bennett's biggest next step. He had nursed the idea

13 Hubert Benoit, *The Interior Realization*, trans. Graham Rooth (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

14 Russell Schreiber, *Gurdjieff's Transformational Psychology* (Present Moment Press, 2012).

15 Kenneth Walker, *Venture With Ideas: Meetings with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* (New York: Pellegrini and Cuddehay, 1952), pp. 2, 5, 136.

16 Callicott L. Baird and Roger T. Ames (eds), *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989).

17 Reciprocal maintenance has been seen as one of the pivotal ideas of Gurdjieff's psycho-cosmology. It stems from a world view in which, contrary to its otherwise marked hierarchical outlook, there is a vision of everything entering into, and being entered by, everything, described as eating and being eaten and which lends itself to an ecological understanding of the whole universe.

18 Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870 - 1950) was a statesman and philosopher. His *Holism and Evolution* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1926) can be seen as paralleling Bennett's systematics.

19 The two principles of the Benedictine Order were summed up as *ora et labora* - "prayer and work".

throughout his sojourn in Coombe Springs but eventually seemed to have come to the conclusion that it needed a completely fresh start. The upshot of this was that in his last days, he purchased land in the United States and inaugurated a centre there. I myself was totally sceptical, and while editing his book on the subject - *Needs of a New Age Community* - felt that he had not studied and absorbed the lessons of the last hundred years or so of attempts to start intentional communities. His attitude was far too idealistic.

He persuaded people on leaving Sherborne to get land, run farms, set up schools for children and so on. What was hardly noticed at the time was his perhaps inadvertent influence on the creation of Biosphere 2. This amazing project was in a totally different mode to small-scale farm-based thinking. Strictly speaking it was not to do with communities at all, but focused on the on the logic of reciprocal maintenance, and, most importantly, sought a powerful new connection between the biosphere and the technosphere that had evolved within it.<sup>20</sup>

There had always been a tendency for spiritual people, including followers of Gurdjieff's ideas, to embrace traditional practices such as homoeopathy and eschew technology. There is great value in learning to work with one's hands and being physical. But, partly because of Gurdjieff's propaganda against modern science, there was a certain amount of backward looking nostalgia about pre-industrial days, local ecology, and so on. Gurdjieff's penchant for new gadgetry and engineering was largely ignored. At the same time, it should be recognised that Bennett's hankering after alternative technology came with his prescient recognition of information technology. He used to delight in saying that one of the most important manifestations of spirituality in the twentieth century was the computer! After Bennett died Claymont Court in West Virginia became largely a copy of Sherborne. It had no leader of sufficient power to guide it on the old hierarchical model. Idries Shah suggested, perhaps tongue in cheek, that they should hire someone from the East! A still current idea expresses it in Gurdjieffian terms as requiring no less than a 'Man no. 5'.<sup>21</sup>

## Curriculum

Young students coming to Sherborne were shocked to see a formal timetable pinned up on the noticeboard. The idea of a school had been taken on in a literal and mundane way. The reality was, of course, that managing one hundred people without such guidelines was next to impossible. An interesting aspect is how much what Bennett attempted to do echoed the outlines of the Institute for Harmonious Development that Gurdjieff had written about in the *Herald of Coming Good*.<sup>22</sup> There was always ambivalence about Gurdjieff's supposed organisations. Were the portentous outlines he wrote just to put about an interesting idea? Or did he ever intend for them to be put into practice? Bennett set up his own Institute in 1946, using its elaborate title as a smokescreen to cover up what he was actually doing. That is, he presented the Institute in an academic light while pursuing esoteric activities such as the movements and inner work. But later on, he began to take the idea of the Institute more literally. He faced the prospect of putting the work into explicit form, with a curriculum of sorts, and a series of steps.

At Sherborne, he divided each year into exoteric, mesoteric and esoteric phases. They were to apply to everybody, which diverged from Gurdjieff's presentations where they were a property of the being level of individuals. The variety of people who came to Sherborne was extraordinary. The range included: Tibetan refugees, vicars, Vietnam vets, hippies, teachers, policemen; the old and the young, children and retirees, and so on.<sup>23</sup> This made it all the more powerful and inspiring. There was a break with the previous period. The students coming to Sherborne had little or no idea what had gone before in Coombe Springs. It seems certain Bennett welcomed this.

20 The model included as its third factor the *ethnosphere* or world of values and culture. This corresponds, though not in the same words, with what Bennett called in the title of one of his books *Making a New World*; it is interesting to contrast the two approaches. J. G. Bennett, *Making a New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

21 Briefly, Gurdjieff proposed a scheme of seven kinds of man. The first four were on the same level and the fifth was a step above, signifying someone with their own individuality.

22 G. I. Gurdjieff, *The Herald of Coming Good* (Edmonds, WA: Sure Fire Press, 2008 [1933]).

23 Travel writer Paul Theroux encountered a Sherborne student, Richard Duffill, who had garnered his education at Working

Man's Clubs. A brief account of Theroux's impressions is at <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/75jul/misery.htm>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

One of the most useful maxims Idries Shah quoted from Sufi tradition was: “Use the materials of the locality.” This can be illustrated by Bennett’s Academy adopting Morris dancing. The village of Sherborne had its own traditional style of this dancing. Somehow Bennett found someone to teach it and it became a requirement for the men (traditionally women did not dance the Morris though things have changed now). It provided a welcome balance to the Gurdjieff Movements on a number of aspects: Morris dancing was intrinsic to that part of the British Isles and not an import from another culture; it required a different way of dancing, more free; and the dances were performed amongst ordinary people, typically in pubs and not in some refined atmosphere. Most important for me to realise is how they manifested spirit culture, as distinct from a supernatural, or spiritual one. Bennett was very sensitive to the world of spirit, the second or energetic world.<sup>24</sup>



**Morris Dancing at Sherborne 1973**

**Left George Bennett, eldest son of Mr. Bennett, middle left Henri Bortoft author of *The Wholeness of Nature*, middle right the author, right John Mason**

In quite another fashion he encouraged to students to put on plays and musicals, and one year they did one of his favourite plays, Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, in which he took on the role of the Button Moulder, a very symbolic act though his acting was rather poor. Such things were largely a matter of finding interesting things for the students to do. There was no attempt to relate acting and drama to transformation. Interestingly, during the first year both John Allen and his group and myself, independently, came to Sherborne to offer theatrical exercises.<sup>25</sup> My own work involved implications of systematics which Bennett caught onto and directed them towards a kind of contemplative meditation, which then faded out (it is too complex to get into here).

Bennett threw in such other subjects as he could manage such as learning Turkish. Later, after his death we had someone teach Japanese. The learning of other languages is, at least, an important aid for developing

<sup>24</sup> Bennett made much use of a scheme of four worlds, largely derived from Sufism. He discussed them extensively in his books *Deeper Man* (Massachusetts: Turnstone, 1978) and *Creation* (Bennett Books, 1998 [1978]). Briefly, they are: 1) World of the Unfathomable or Void – *Lahut*; 2) World of Possibilities – *alam-i-imkan* (the spiritual or supernatural world); 3) World of Energies or Spirit – *alam-i-arvah* (connected with breath); and 4) World of Bodies – *alam-i-ajsam*.

<sup>25</sup> John Allen’s group operated under the name of *Theater of All Possibilities*, and experimented with three-brained acting and cosmic themes. My own work centred on the process of acting and, incidentally, drew for its main exercise on Stuart Holroyd’s play *The Prophet* (1958), concerning a guru called Gurdensky in an occupied city, based on stories of Gurdjieff he learned from Kenneth Walker.

understanding. There were periods when students taught each other things. It cannot be over emphasised how much Bennett focused on his Academy as educational. One of his best explanations of the approach of the Academy was that it aimed at developing the powers or energies of people rather than putting in any particular content.<sup>26</sup> These were the powers of paying attention, moving and sensing, feeling and understanding. This was a consistent unfolding from Gurdjieff's original idea of the harmonious development of the three centres and corresponds to the ancillary concept of the spiritualisation of the centres.

Because of the limited help he had, some of the components of the curriculum came out strangely. In the first year, for example, Dick Holland, the man leading the psychological studies spent most of the time reading from books on the French Revolution. He had been captured by Bennett's ideas on time, which included the possibility that the French Revolution was still in progress and evolving in its own time. All the various activities can be seen as providing a 'cooking medium'. The activities as such do not lead to any transformation; they can be reasonably understood in terms of cultural education. This is said with the implicit assumption that culture as such is not spiritual.<sup>27</sup> I believe that Bennett understood that even so-called spiritual (though it is often taken to be these days) practices do not transform people: anything that we can 'do' cannot accomplish anything in the spiritual world. Perhaps he envisaged the action in the Academy as constituting a kind of 'active surface' such as he envisaged obtaining between different domains in his *The Dramatic Universe*,<sup>28</sup> providing a kind of osmosis and communication.

All this has to be framed within the idea, picked up from traditional sources by Gurdjieff before him, that humans have the possibility of obtaining or realising *two* different kinds of inner body. The first is a natural body that Gurdjieff described in terms which suggest that it is proper to all human beings, though it comes about through living authentically, undergoing suffering and receiving the right education. The 'higher being-body' is, in Bennett's language, supernatural. One can say that it is 'made of God'. Bennett associated the Work with the formation or realisation of this body and he came to state explicitly that "there are supernatural energies that work - we need to connect with them". In saying this he added that "hardly anyone sees this".<sup>29</sup>

Students who so wished could attend Mass at a nearby Catholic Church on some Sundays but it was never made mandatory and they could treat it as an ancillary activity, like the Alexander technique, which was also offered to them (for a fee).

In speaking of the situation in which nearly a hundred largely young men and women were lodged together for ten months we must take account of sex and alcohol. At the end of the first year, students organised a room into which they could go to get laid. In the second year, sexual goings-on were rampant. This led Bennett to give a series of lectures on sex and energies which, though quite profound, had little effect on the situation. Concerning drinking, the nearby village had facilities to buy alcohol that some indulged in excessively. More than once staff were called out to retrieve a student lying drunk in the road. This led, eventually, to Bennett setting up a bar inside Sherborne House itself! In many ways, he was a realist. He wanted containment above all.

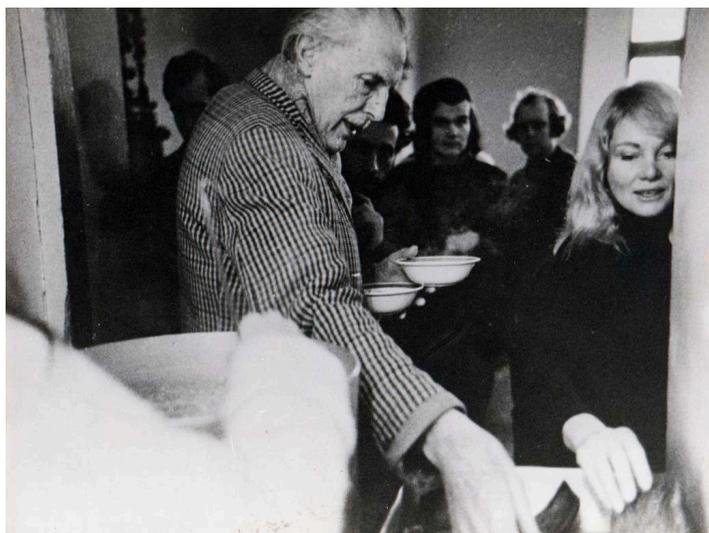
Bennett was quite convinced that we existed within a world of higher intelligence. One time he told us that we need to make ourselves 'interesting' to the higher powers. This was when he set all of us, some hundred people, to dig out weeds from the main lawn with spoons and knives in a drizzle of rain. The humour of this was obvious but it was also deadly serious. The underlying question was: what do we need to do from our side of the 'active surface' to enable communication with higher intelligence?

26 John G. Bennett, 'What makes human communication possible?', *Communication*, vol. 2, (1975), pp. 23-29.

27 The Shivapuri Baba had insisted to Bennett that beauty was not a way to God but rather a distraction.

28 John G. Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (New York: Coombe Springs Press, 1957).

29 John G. Bennett, *The Way to be Free* (Massachusetts: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1980), p. 60; The whole thing that Bennett is going after, what he repeatedly attempts to bring the students to see, is that there is a supernatural action beyond our minds which can work. No one comes anywhere near to seeing this. People who do not have the possibility of understanding have a place, too. But their place is paradise: a dream. If we are able to persist in saying "not this, not that" then we can become free.



John Bennett with Diane Cilento getting breakfast at Sherborne

People of public renown or special achievement came though Sherborne. In the first year the students were bemused by the presence of Diane Cilento who,<sup>30</sup> after she left Sherborne acted in a cult film, *The Wicker Man*, directed by Robin Hardy and written by Anthony Shaffer, and had improvised ‘ancient movements’ for it based on those she had learned at Sherborne. The eccentric pop singer Arthur Brown (I am the God of Hellfire!) speaks of Bennett as “perhaps the greatest influence on me”. To promote one of his albums I took the Sherborne Morris dancers to perform in Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club in London. In the last course, after Bennett had died, the doyen of progressive pop Robert Fripp was a student. We will talk of him and how he manifested the Work later. These are just a few examples.

People with creative specialisms of their own could make use of what Bennett taught. Those without this were more or less sent out under the slogan ‘increase and multiply’. That is to say, they were encouraged to share what they had learned by setting up groups wherever they were. They would put notices in shop windows and notice boards. Older Gurdjieff followers were often upset by their arrogance.

We have talked about the core of meaning Bennett held in regard to supernatural forces and that he did not expect many if any to understand how this was so. What the body of students took away with them was a simplistic pattern of combining movements, inner exercises, lectures and practical work. The spiritual dimension could not be packaged. Bennett had given his students confidence but could not give them wisdom. He did however inspire them, constantly seeking ways to communicate his ideals as much as his ideas. One of his most cherished legacies is the prayer “All life is one”. Created in 1972, originally intended as a short term practice, it has endured since and groups all over the world often use it at their meals together:

“All life is one and everything that lives is holy.

Plants, animals and man, all must eat to live and nourish one another.

We bless the lives that have died to give us food.

Let us eat consciously, resolving by our work to pay the debt of our existence.”

## The Ending

Bennett kept and fostered contacts related to technology and management, though while at Sherborne these seemed to diminish. Amongst his most important connections were those with Eliot Jacques, Clarence King, Albert Low and also Edward Matchett, who taught creative design methodologies and contacted Bennett around 1970. The latter was significant in terms of understanding Fourth Way methodology. A

<sup>30</sup> Cilento, at one time married to Sean Connery, went on a spiritual search that led her to Bennett. She records that she once was reading Bennett’s autobiography *Witness* – which contained some photographs, including one of the great oak tree at Coombe Springs – when, looking out of her window she saw the self-same tree! She had by chance acquired a house on the development of Coombe Springs after it had been sold by Idries Shah. She made a documentary for the BBC series ‘One Pair of Eyes’ that includes some of the only footage remaining of movements at Sherborne, at [https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-Pnbz58jdQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-Pnbz58jdQ). Accessed 23 November 2017.

## The Fourth Way, A Hazardous Path - Part Two

crucial component of Matchett's teaching was self-monitoring, based on the idea that in doing a task there should be not only attention to the task but also to the person performing the task; his awareness, commitment, mood, sensitivity and so on.<sup>31</sup> Self-awareness was a cornerstone of the fourth way but it tended to lack the role of a specific task in focussing purpose. A previous contact, Saul Kuchinsky, who had led a research team in Burroughs that claimed to have produced the first pocket calculator, urged that Bennett's systematics should be based on what he called "present moment need."<sup>32</sup>

In keeping with this, Gurdjieff had emphasised in his teaching that one *must have an aim*. Amongst other things a lack of aim entails that there no means to measure one's progress. Gurdjieff said that the Work has no aim of its own, but people 'in the Work' need to have aim. An aspect of it is the engagement of one's intelligence. Nearly all spiritual ways deal in generalities of subjective states and lack anything concrete that might provide benchmarks. Gurdjieff used the term 'will tasks' to refer to aims that challenged his sense of purpose and very being. What I cannot accurately summarise due to my limited perspective and experiences were Bennett's multiple interactions with fellow Gurdjieff pupils and the various spiritual teachers he encountered. Some of the Gurdjieff group-leaders - such as Irmis Popoff, Robert de Ropp and Paul Anderson - encouraged their pupils to go to Sherborne.



Saul Kuchinsky and Ted Matchett



John Bennet with Hasan Shushud

During the period there Bennett was visited by Idries Shah, and another remarkable Sufi - though from a very different school - Hasan Shushud.<sup>33</sup> The Sufi influence on Bennett was considerable, very much helped by his capacity to speak Turkish, and to some degree Arabic. He kept close contact with another 'school' nearby called Beshara, which was based on the ideas of Ibn Arabi. He gave many important talks there with insights into Sufi ideas and practices that were eventually published under the title *Intimations*. Bennett's acquaintance with Sufism started in Turkey in the 1920s when he was stationed there in military intelligence, and also met Gurdjieff for the first time. It expanded with Sheikh Dages-tani and Emin Chikou in the 1950s, then Pak Subuh and Idries Shah in the 1960s, culminating in Hasan Shushud in the 1970s. This was an astonishing range. He then embraced the work of the Venerable Dharmawara Mahathera, affectionately known just as Bhante, a Cambodian monk some of Bennett's students had met in India. In doing so, he accepted the practice of meditation, though as always assimilating it in his own way, even though there is no record of Gurdjieff either practising or advocating such a practice.

Possibly, as Bennett's son Ben insists, Shushud was the major influence as well as being the last. He taught the *itlaq Yolu* - way of absolute liberation - that involved fasting and a 'silent' *zikir*. Bennett even taught this *zikir* at Sherborne. Shushud belonged to what Bennett called northern Sufism which did not centre itself on devotion to the sheikh, as in southern Sufism, but to liberation: 'towards God, in God and beyond God'. Bennett liked the strict austerity of the silent *zikir* and was wary of introducing more spontaneous and releasing forms on his students. He once experimented with such a form that had an action similar to Subud but dropped it when a student passed out.



Bhante Dharmawara

31 Edward Matchett, 'Introduction to the Discipline of Fundamental Design Method', *Systematics*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1973).

32 Kuchinsky produced a journal first called UNIS: A Journal for Discovering Universal Qualities which was a follow up to the original Systematics.

33 Hasan Lufti Shushud, *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*, trs. Muhtar Holland, first published by Coombe Springs Press in the series of publications covering multiple traditions I produced in the 80s.

Bennett appreciated not only the technical aspects of Shushud's work but also his knowledge of the *Khawajagan* the 'Masters of Wisdom' whom he believed were the historical exemplars of the *Sarmoung Brotherhood* Gurdjieff had written about. The picture was resonant with Idries Shah's postulate that what he called 'Sufism' dated back 40,000 years, to the emergence of modern humans. Initially Shushud and Bennett were to collaborate on a book centred on the Khwajagan but Shushud pulled out of this (for reasons which are still disputed but were probably to do with how Shushud could not go along with Bennett's inclusivity and syncretism and, it is said, caused difficulties over payment) and Bennett went on to write his last book *Masters of Wisdom*,<sup>34</sup> a book that he did not complete but was published after his death. Shushud himself had made a book based on the Khwajagan which was published later still under the title *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*.<sup>35</sup>

The significance of all this was in its relevance to the issue of where and how real spirituality was operating on the Earth over the period of human existence. What was the reality of higher worlds in concrete terms? Bennett took it so seriously that soon after his learning of the Khawajagan he adopted or came under Ubaidallah Ahrar (1404-1490) as his main teacher.

While criticising Bennett's methods, Hasan Bey impressed on him that "Your only home is the Absolute Void." This had, to my mind, a strong resonance with how the Shivapuri Baba had advised him. Shushud eventually agreed that what Bennett was doing was more suitable for young Western seekers than his own strict methods of fasting and *ziker*.

The death of John Bennett in 1974 was not a terrible shock, though it affected people deeply. My own feeling was that he was somewhat enlightened and must have secured his welfare in whatever happens next. Students on the course were asked if they wanted to carry on without him and nearly everyone agreed. It is likely that this laid the grounds for what ensued later: the staff of the Academy were proficient and could follow the already established programme, so the program as such became a template for future activities. The inspiration, questioning and breadth of vision that Bennett had no longer operated. It was the usual thing: true artists or scientists get replaced by technicians.

I myself ventured to keep for the future whatever I had gleaned of Bennett's new insights by editing and publishing material from his last talks. These raised questions of reality, God, human destiny and the Work. They were not old formulations. To my naive surprise, the great majority of followers of Bennett took almost no notice of this material, maybe because they had been brought up to regard study as irrelevant to spirituality. It was to be decades before the books I put together found some serious readers.

In contrast, the recorded talks became ever more popular. This contributed to the idea that became fixed in me that spiritual seekers usually have very little 'mental energy' and little interest in developing their thinking. I believe Bennett had long been divided in himself about his work with people. On the one hand he devoted himself to reaching out to as many people as possible and trying to speak to them in terms they could understand. On the other he wanted to pursue in depth the ideas of *The Dramatic Universe* for which he needed colleagues rather than pupils. Early on, while in Coombe Springs, he told me, much to my surprise, he was pleased to "have someone to talk to."

The prospect of *making a contribution to science* lingered with him even when he had neither the people nor the resources to do so. I suppose that this hope - if I am right that he had such - was based on the (probably) fallacious belief that there was a 'higher science' (such as Gurdjieff's 'objective science') which could shed light on and generate insights within 'ordinary' science. Though spiritual ideas have sometimes influenced individual scientists there is no intrinsic connection between them and the actual practice and results of real scientific work. Original ideas in science come from people immersed in current knowledge and practice who are grappling with specific questions. Metaphysical beliefs are no more important than temperament or artistic or technological factors.<sup>36</sup>

34 J. G. Bennett, *Masters of Wisdom* (London: Turnstone, 1977).

35 Translated from the Turkish *Hacegan Hanedani*, Shushud's book drew on two classics, the *Rashahat 'Ain al-Hayat* (Beads of Dew from the Source of Life) by Mawlana 'Ali ibn Husain Safi (now translated by Muhtar Holland) and the *Nafahat al-Uns min Hadarat al-Quds* (Breezes of Intimacy) by Mawlana Abdulrahman bin Ahmed Jami.

36 See Anthony Blake, 'A Critical Essay on the History of Science', *Systematics*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1965).

The mathematician Georg Cantor, who developed set theory, created the scheme of aleph or transfinite numbers, which culminated for him in the Absolute Infinity or God. Scientists and mathematicians often strive to make a unity of their spiritual and technical understanding. I mention Cantor because Bennett used his concepts of transfinite number to lecture on the meaning of creation and the four worlds of Sufism.<sup>37</sup>

## Hiatus

Unusually, Bennett's widow Elizabeth did not simply carry on with her husband's activities but vowed to stop the Sherborne courses after their planned five years. I said 'unusually' because by far the dominant tendency for any organisation is to centre on its continuation and not to question its validity or purpose. I was pleased with Elizabeth's decision, which I talked with her about, and supported her against the Directors of the Institute who saw only a vista of continuing 'success'.

The American community largely turned into a means of running courses imitating those that had been held at Sherborne. The high ideals Bennett proposed for Fourth Way Communities were untenable. I used to remark: "These poor people are stuck with acres of land and only the Beatitudes to guide them!" The Beatitudes were an integral part of Bennett's rhetoric for a Fourth Way community based on humiliation! The importance of humiliation for Bennett cannot be exaggerated. It was historically related to the idea that Gurdjieff followed the way of blame but Bennett had amplified it in a particularly Christian way.<sup>38</sup>

It was inevitable for Bennett to speak of the second coming of Christ, sometimes referred to as the Parousia. He had shown he was hoping for signs of a divine intervention by, for example, his speculation that Pak Subuh was the Ashiata Shiemash Gurdjieff had portrayed in *Beelzebub's Tales*.<sup>39</sup> He later suggested that this Messenger was yet to come. Bennett had outlined the theological systematics for a progressive Christianity and religion in general in volume four of *The Dramatic Universe*.

In the United Kingdom I was involved in setting up another educational Institute; this time a 'College of Continuous Education'. But then an intervention came. A previously unknown guru figure (for personal reasons I do not want to name him based in the United States announced his mastery as equal to Gurdjieff's and found a response amidst a few of Bennett's followers, who were somewhat feeling like lost sheep in the vacuum left by his death. It turned out that this guru could reasonably be described as a cult leader, but he offered significantly new elements of practice and teaching. Even Bennett's widow was initially attracted, though this did not last long.

The yawning gap left by Bennett (he had been importuned to appoint a successor, even that I should be such, but he refused. In ancient Greek the idea of the yawning gap was called *chaos*, a word that did not mean then 'confusion'. It could have been an opportunity for a death and resurrection but it was not made conscious, and hence came to be filled from outside.<sup>40</sup> In times of uncertainty, people look for an authority to assure them. Also, psychokinetic people, as Bennett called them, are at heart unsure of themselves. They are not entirely identified with their possessions, states, activities, et cetera but neither are they settled into some other kind of permanent equilibrium. The existential scene can be described as a collection of insecure individuals who do not have the energy to work together, and hence are tending to look for their salvation from outside.<sup>41</sup> This energy, so I believe, requires a certain quality and intensity and quantity are not enough. Bennett believed that, for example, the churches named in the Book of Revelations were bodies of people capable of carrying a spiritual impulse or an angelic intelligence but finding such in present times is highly problematic.

Interestingly enough, when Idries Shah was working with animator Richard Williams, he had him do a simple animation of the figure shown below. The commentator suggests that, like seeing a cube from a diagram on a page, there are two views: in one the centre is first and attracts the people and conditions, while in the other it is the combining of people and conditions that invokes the higher intelligence.

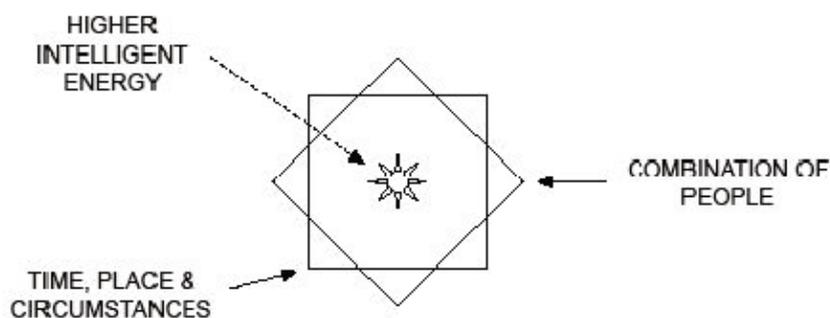
<sup>37</sup> See Bennett, *Creation* (1999).

<sup>38</sup> Gurdjieff has been linked to the Malamati Order, who followed the "path of blame".

<sup>39</sup> John G. Bennett, *Concerning Subud* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), pp. 35-37.

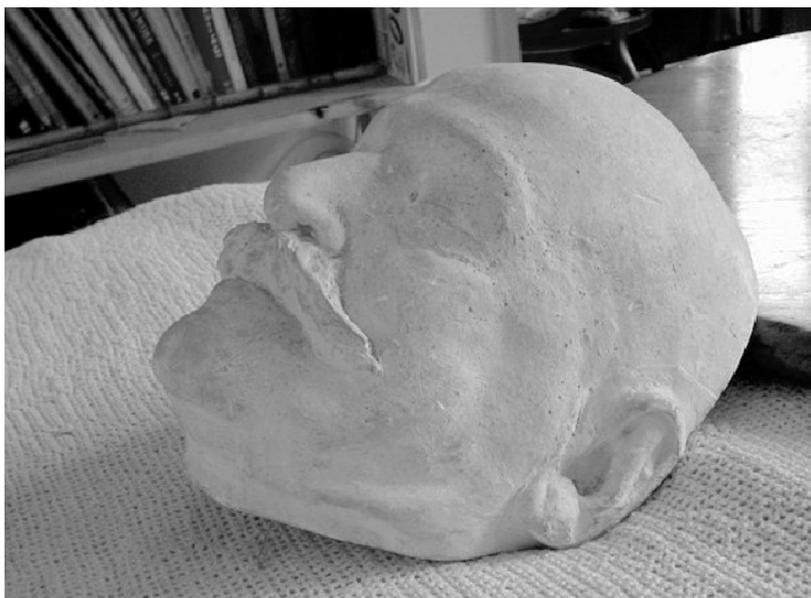
<sup>40</sup> This refers to Gurdjieff's explanations of the Law of Seven in which intervals or gaps can be filled either from outside or inside, or mixedly.

<sup>41</sup> He names two "politics" of conversation as "salvation" and "revelation". See Anthony Blake, 'The Politics of Conversation', at <http://www.duversity.org/libraryArticles.htm>. Accessed 23 November 2017.



Structure of an Esoteric Group.

These days, I have a slogan: “joining a group means losing half one’s will.” The conundrum is that groups are deep and powerful if they are composed of real individuals; whereas, for the most part, groups are composed of people seeking compensation for their weakness of individuality. It is barely recognised how harmful groups can be if continued in the long term. A cult is just an extreme example. People sucked into a cult can be, in many cases, sensitive, intelligent, and capable people. People can be strong in the outer world but helpless in the inner world. When the inner world awakens they need understanding and help and there is no guarantee of them finding it.



Model of Gurdjieff’s head used in exercise

## New Systems from Old

In the milieu of the new guru, Gurdjieff’s combination of the three traditional ways - physical, of the fakir; devotional, of the monk, and intellectual, of the yogi - assumed new significance particularly in its emphasis on the component of physical will, the way of power, exemplified in Amerindian traditions (such as that embraced by Joseph Rael in his dance ceremonies).<sup>42</sup> Physical ordeals were common. They went beyond the previous practice of such things as digging in the rain, or doing movements for hours at a stretch. They were painful, but it must be admitted that their character was rooted in the basic Gurdjieff practice of ‘arms out sideways’, which some could manage for half an hour or more (Gurdjieff spoke of one man who could do it without a tremor for an hour but pointed out he was useless for anything else!) These were not merely endurance tests but to create conditions in which people could come to understand how to relax at a deeper level and find a stillness beyond effort.

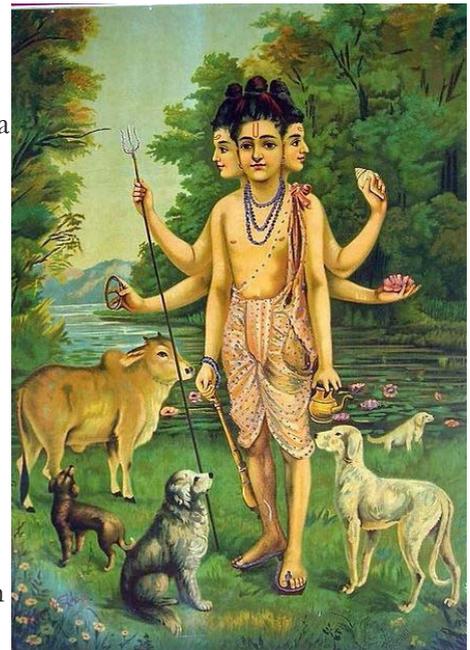
<sup>42</sup> Joseph is a shaman of both Ute and Pueblo traditions. I was privileged to connect with him in various ways, making video-conversations (see on You Tube Conversation with Joseph Rael <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQtyih-bMzQ&t=126s>) He was guide to the DuVersity tour of the South West USA to see various traditional dances. He also introduced me to Peyote.

The most common exercise was to hold out a bust of Gurdjieff at arm's length (see image above). The objective was not mere endurance but more to *understand effort* and the relations between centres. People were often directed to put the bust down 'at the right time'. Pain and sweat were not enough.

Gurdjieff has spoken of the need to *spiritualise* the three centres in us in coming to fuse them into a harmony that he called 'having a real I'. The devotional side was allied to heart awakening, certainly related to Gurdjieff's higher emotional centre. A paramount demand was to *speak the truth from the heart*. This was no invitation to indulge in emotional expression. The real thing was unmistakable. I myself was deeply affected by this spontaneous practice. It deepened my sense of the conscious power of speech as revelation.

There were exercises in higher thinking of some originality, involving humour and paradox, called 'notes'. The guru used writing on pieces of folded paper generated on the spot, to be read, unfolded, folded again and passed around, a simple device but often with considerable impact. All this was quite new to most of us. As was the practice of 'the path of the void' involving a transformation of energies in the belly while traversing a landscape with a companion.

The intellectual side was highly significant. Study was valued, particularly study of the world's spiritual traditions. We had a pretty wide smattering of this from Bennett but now it was even wider and investigated as a whole system. It made us realise that there were real questions involved: was there a totality of world spirituality? Did it derive from a single source or pattern? Could its elements relate to each other in a significant way? The way in which the range of spirituality was presented suggested that there was a world teacher called in the Hindu tradition Dattatreya.<sup>43</sup> Such ideas were of course in some way derivative from Theosophical ones such as those of Madame Blavatsky and Alice Bailey, but the attempt to portray them in an integral system was new. I mentioned the Amerindian tradition and it was interesting that the Medicine Wheel took the place of the enneagram as the integrative template.<sup>44</sup>



Dattatreya  
(Wikimedia Commons).

The scheme was a changing one, even at one time placing Christian existentialism at the summit of the wheel of spirituality. A version of it appeared in the book strangely reminiscent of Bennett's hope to create an encyclopaedia of spiritual methods: *A Pilgrimage of Spiritual Reading*.<sup>45</sup> But there was a tendency, in some ways contrary to Gurdjieff's presentation, to give Indian spirituality a prominent place. Many people were sent to India on pilgrimage, to go to sacred places and meet living masters.

The early atmosphere of deep reaching enquiry and response in the moment was gradually overcome by insistent authoritarianism and exploitation of people for sex and money. This is not unusual in spiritual movements – affecting Buddhist, Sufi and other communities. But it was in radical contrast with the puritanism and innocence of Bennett. For many of us, the advent of this guru was a continuance from Bennett's pattern of radical encounters with spiritual geniuses of various sorts. His ideas extended the range of possibilities. He gave access to direct experiences of things which we had only read about as exotic phenomena - such as giving *shaktipat* or encountering spiritual masters who were dead or distant. But his evident ability to penetrate into the motivations, the hopes and fears, the anxieties and longings of people appears to have led him into control and exploitation.

In these explanations of mine I am bearing in mind Bennett's example of plunging into a new possibility and not being half-hearted, but also his advice to do so only for a very limited time. The new teaching had

43 See Sri Jaya Chamarajendra Wadiyar Bahadur, *The Way and the Goal* (Coombe Springs Press, 1957); and Rene Guenon, *The Lord of the World*, trans. Henry D. Fohr (Sophia Perennis, 2001).

44 This was a shift of basis from the three term system to the four term system and, significantly, the Amerindian culture is largely based on the four directions. Previously when Bennett had encountered Idries Shah and asked about the enneagram, Shah deflected the question and drew attention to the octad, which features largely in Islamic art.

45 Alexandria Foundation, *A Pilgrimage of Spiritual Reading* (Coombe Springs Press, 1982).

a very interesting idea connected with this. It was that any special term or word had only a limited half-life of potency; it must lose its energy or effectiveness over time. I think this idea can be taken in an even more extreme way. Most people feel that if they are doing something they think good or worthwhile then they should continue or even increase doing it; but I believe that if a practice is continued on it is liable to turn into its opposite. This was remarked upon by Simone Weil.<sup>46</sup>

From this viewpoint practice only has value in certain circumstances and only for a limited time. Which thought leads to the question of what constitutes 'work' if it is so contingent. In the context of being subject to a guru or teacher it is by *their authority* that any particular activity can be called work. In a way, it is by the word of the teacher that the activity becomes 'spiritual'. The American guru used movies and board games or anything at hand! (We sometimes watched 11-hour long composite movies!) These considerations particularly apply to the Fourth Way because - as Gurdjieff seemed to say when he began teaching - there are no fixed forms in it. There have been suggestions that a practice vital and effective in one place in time can be quite useless or even harmful in another.

In Gurdjieff's line of teaching prominent place was given to *conscience*. This clearly indicates an act in the individual which makes all the difference in what is done. When there is a heavy presence of a guru or teacher, operating within a group, it is likely that this conscience becomes covered over. There was not, nor can there be, any method of activating and testing conscience. This is because there cannot be anything outside of conscience capable of measuring its truth. It is the 'measure of measures'.

Authenticity is a crucial matter. Starting from Gurdjieff's picture of us being asleep, deluded and fragmented it would seem impossible for any of us to find 'the right direction', that is enter into a path which is effective for our 'salvation'. How can the blind see how to go? Bennett's theme of communication with higher intelligence pinpoints the issue. It is a conundrum.<sup>47</sup> How, if we are so wrong, can we connect with higher powers that we do not even see? Appearances or claims of higher powers in experiences, gurus, texts, etc. may be delusions. But the enigma itself is a fact. I came to consider it all important. We cannot know for sure what is right or true but the realisation of this is essential for any kind of authentic transformation in us. What it entails is not mere scepticism or agnosticism, which are just attitudes of mind, but a concrete grasp of mind itself. It is part of cooking the stuff of mind into a soul, which Bennett characterised as coalescence,<sup>48</sup> a reference to Gurdjieff's idea of the fusion of 'powders'.<sup>49</sup>

## Voidish Genius

The guru from America put the people around him through many ordeals and difficulties but he imparted some capacity to create new types of experience into some of them. I myself was surprised to see what was possible. He helped to break many conditionings, one of which was our misuse of language. The term voidish was often used. It was related to some traditional practices such as exercise of 'yogic language', a supposed deep seated proto-language that involved no concepts. Voidish also applied to the creation of events and experiences 'out of nothing'. It led me to make unusual activities, such as holding group 'meetings' in the midst of Waterloo Station and tapping into, apparently, streams of energy that I had thought, previously, would be possible only in 'sacred sites'.<sup>50</sup>

Voidish genius is a name for genuinely *creative* actions. Such things are usually taken in a narrow subjective

46 In her Notebooks, Weil says that if one acts beyond the actual level of one's virtue it turns to poison or evil. Simone Weil, *Notebooks*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 1956).

47 William James gives a useful summary of the general threads of religious thought, including the sense that "something is wrong" and also that "there is help from higher powers". William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, Dover Publications Inc., 2012).

48 P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (USA: The Library of Alexandria, 1957), pp. 43-44.

49 Gurdjieff talks about four stages in the fusion of the "metallic powders" leading to the formation of the "fourth body" that is immortal.

50 Gurdjieff devised exercises involving "conscious stealing" of higher energies concentrated over sacred sites where pilgrims gathered. He claimed that the energies of prayer were distilled into a higher form that concentrated in the region above the site. Further, this higher energy was not accessible to the pilgrims as such but could be used or "stolen" by people capable of using it. My experiment showed that the centres of convergence of people need not be "holy" at all.

way, as is the case with *kundalini*.<sup>51</sup> With my scientific background I welcomed the chance to participate in tangible actions that were environmental and shared and not merely personal states. It seemed to me that there had always been an implicit thread weaving through the hazardous path Bennett took by way of his encounters with various ‘teachers’. The Gurdjieff teaching had always emphasised *consciousness* but these new influences called on what was more than conscious. Bennett had outlined a scheme of energies in which, first of all, as Gurdjieff and he made clear, ordinary awareness was below ‘true consciousness’. Bennett made another step and spoke of *creativity* as a level of energy ‘beyond consciousness’.

Subud was a creative action. That was why it tended to reject or minimise any conscious effort. The Shivapuri Baba told Bennett directly: ‘Put aside the *veil* [our italics] of consciousness and you will see God’. This, incidentally, is the core of the mathematician Spencer Brown’s enlightenment, which he declared in 1984.<sup>52</sup> Idries Shah hinted at an action that that went on behind any practices or efforts. Hasan Shushud’s way of Absolute Liberation entailed a *fana* or extinction of consciousness altogether. Ubaidullah Ahrar put it in an extreme form:

As soon as I remember You — my secret, my heart,  
And my spirit starts to disturb me during Your remembrance.  
Until an observer from You used to call to me,  
‘Beware, beware — of remembrance beware.’ Do  
you not see the Real? His proofs appeared.  
The meaning of totality joined Your meaning,  
The rememberers when remembering him  
Are more forgetful than the ones who forget to remember Him.  
The Prophet(s) said, ‘The one who knows Allah,  
His tongue is paralyzed.’<sup>53</sup>

Voidish genius brought all this into concrete experience including facing the conundrum of having an experience of what is beyond consciousness! Part of the phenomenology I am not able to explain is that voidishness can actualize *in the body*. I must remark that the fairly common practice of designing a hierarchy of energies or levels can be misleading. A hierarchy entails higher and lower but the meaning of this distinction changes with level. It is as if, when one goes to a higher level, the rules or kinds of order change. The idea of a breaking down of hierarchical order is greatly important. It gives special meaning to the level of energy Bennett called *unitive* (love). In love, *everything is equal*. I believe that this was the vision that drew Bennett on throughout his life.

Creative energy is not ultimate. This has been long expressed in the Gnostic tradition wherein the Demiurgic Creator was viewed as egoistic and that we had need of access to the compassionate and loving God beyond, to set us free from being a subject of his dreams.

## Science

I reason in this way: I am a small man. I have only lived for fifty years, and religion has existed for thousands of years. Thousands of men have studied these religions and yet I deny them. I ask myself: “Is it possible that they were all fools and that only I am clever?”

51 Simon Weightman discusses the case of kundalini in his 2000 *Jordan Lectures on Mysticism*, at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/religions-and-philosophies/events/jordan-lectures-in-comparative-religion/the-jordan-lectures-in-comparative-religion-previous-lectures.html>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

52 Spencer Brown declared himself enlightened in 1984 and defined it as “knowing the laws of creation”. He later compared himself to the Buddha. G. Spencer Brown became famous for his book *The Laws of Form* (Portland: Cognizer Company, 1954). Henri Bortoft (and myself) had attended a course on the “calculus of distinction” delineated in this book that he conducted prior to publication. I am currently in contact with mathematical physicists who draw on his ideas in the hope of finding a way to articulate inner experience more accurately than through mystical metaphors.

53 ‘The Muhammadan Way’, *Classical Islamic Teachings*, at <http://www.nurmuhammad.com/pbuh/?p=1763>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

The situation is the same with science. It has also existed for many years. Suppose I deny it. Again the same question arises: “Can it be that I alone am more clever than all the multitude of men who have studied science for so long a time?”

If I reason impartially I shall understand that I may be more intelligent than one or two men but not than a thousand. If I am a normal man and I reason without being biased, I shall understand that I cannot be more intelligent than millions. I repeat, I am but a small man. How can I criticize religion and science? What then is possible? I begin to think that perhaps there is some truth in them; it is impossible for everyone to be mistaken. So now I set myself the task of trying to understand what it is all about.<sup>54</sup>

Bennett entitled his organisation ‘The Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences’. Its first stated aim was: “To promote research and other scientific work in connection with the factors which influence development and retrogression in man and their operation in individuals and communities; to investigate the origin and elaboration of scientific hypotheses and secular and religious philosophies and their bearing on general theories of Man and his place in the universe; and to study comparative methodology in history, philosophy and natural science.” With this wide remit we can see how Bennett’s investigations into spiritual methodologies, his development of systematics and entry into educational research fitted. Another feature of it was acceptance and assimilation of modern science. Bennett largely – though not entirely - avoided any dalliance with ‘occult science’ and his studies of scientific method made with his colleagues were serious efforts in the history and philosophy of science (my own subject at Cambridge). However, he did not make much of modern psychology. I sought to remedy this.

Working with Bennett’s cosmological psychologies I was struck by his insistence that higher worlds were not far away as if in some distant land, or furthest star, but intimately with us, here and now. He was very fond of Francis Thompson’s poem *In No Strange Land*:

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder) Cry-  
and upon thy so sore loss  
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob’s ladder  
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.  
Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter, Cry-  
clinging to Heaven by the hems; And lo,  
Christ walking on the water,  
Not of Genesareth, but Thames!<sup>55</sup>



Author in conversation with Gordon Lawrence.

54 G. I. Gurdjieff, *Views From the Real World: Early Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York, and Chicago As Recollected by His Pupils* (London and New York: Penguin Compass, 1984 [1973]).

55 Francis Thompson, *Selected Poetry of Francis Thompson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), pp. 130-142.

Bennett's attitude suggested to me a kind of 'hyper-reality' of ordinary life, like existentialism aflame with Christ. The challenge Gurdjieff had laid down was that we were shams, pretend humans and we had to get real.<sup>56</sup> It seemed to me that, pathetic as I was, I could stick to this idea and see what I could make of it for myself. None of the traditional ways had faced this directly; though, once the idea gets hold of you, *it can be seen everywhere*. The common notion of looking for the *antecedents* of Gurdjieff's ideas is rather trivial; it is better to *look forward*.

This was and is not a matter of isolated effort or enquiry. Every moment of awakening is intrinsically connected with every other. In this sense, traditions, religions, movements, etc. seem empty names. It is in the nature of lower mind that it looks outside for agencies to blame for its misfortunes and also for agencies for its salvation. As I learned from group psychologist Gordon Lawrence, there are two 'politics of conversation' - i.e. fundamental ideologies - one of *salvation* and one of *revelation*. The first looks for answers, and looks for them outside of itself. The second looks for meanings and looks for them *amongst the people involved*. It is concerned with what is between them. The two viewpoints reflected the two views of the reconciling force in the Gurdjieffian treatment of the triad: in the one view, the reconciling is *above* the other two, the active and the passive, a rather religious idea; while, in the other, it is *between* them and therefore hazardous.<sup>57</sup>

Not only neurology was introducing us to the dynamic notion of the plastic brain but psychology, especially in the form of group analysis, allied to recent thinking about information and cybernetics,<sup>58</sup> was generating a new view of 'higher information'. There was something abroad that bypassed old notions of *teaching*.

## Transmission

The idea of transmission like that of teaching suggests something coming from somewhere and going to somewhere else. I like to use phrases like 'matrix of understanding' and contemplate not so much a message but a *medium* (I belonged to the age of Marshall McLuhan). After all, Idries Shah once said: 'The teaching is like air', a simile that Bennett embraced. For purposes of organising my thoughts I adopted a fourfold scheme of media of transmission:

CONSCIENCE

PRACTICES      TEACHERS

TEXTS

## Texts

The story of Gurdjieff and his writings is complex and hardly resolved to this day. Suffice it to say that he appeared to have turned to writing after realising he could not transmit what he wanted *through people*. He also claimed that his magnum opus *Beelzebub's Tales* could of itself *awaken* the subconscious intelligence within its readers.<sup>59</sup> Bennett's own magnum opus *The Dramatic Universe* was a response to *Beelzebub*, and my own writings can be seen as a series of footnotes to Bennett's writings. Words were very important for Gurdjieff. He went so far as to say he could not communicate what he wanted to his students *because they*

56 Reference here can be made to the speculative science fiction of Philip K. Dick, and his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), which was made into the film *Blade Runner* (1982) in particular. He challenges the idea that we are "human" and not just "replicants" or simulations of men and women. In his novel there is a "Voight-Kampff" machine test to discriminate between real and replicant humans (reminiscent of the famous Turing test for human intelligence in computers).

57 In Bennett's scheme of Four Cultures see *The Dramatic Universe* (New York: Coombe Springs Press, 1957). Here, there are two that relate to God as Creator in one case, and God as Saviour in the other. The creator attitude puts salvation and meaning above us while the saviour attitude locates them amongst us, hence subject to hazard.

58 This is a rich and complex field including the quantum coupling of observer and observed, the development of second-order cybernetics by Heinz von Foerster and others, and the rediscovery of dialogue by Patrick de Mare and others.

59 Gurdjieff writes in Chapter 48 of *Beelzebub's Tales* that he intended "by means of the first series, to destroy in people everything which, in their false representations, as it were, exists in reality, or in other words 'to corrode without mercy all the rubbish accumulated during the ages in human mentation'; by means of the second series, to prepare, so to say, 'new constructional material'; and by means of the third, 'to build a new world,'" p. 1184.

*did not have enough words.* In Russia, he told Ouspensky: “You do not know how to read. If you could read your own books I would sit at your feet.”

Having spent many years listening to and reading Bennett I was well aware of his passionate wish to speak to people clearly and reveal to them what he saw of the Reality. I also felt that capacity for reading had much diminished in people. I take reading and writing as a profound yoga (in the *Raj* sense of Patanjali). The ‘answers’ are clearly written in the books but few people are able to read them there. Once one can read, then the usual dichotomy assumed by most between book or verbal knowledge and such possibilities as ‘direct truths of the heart’ vanishes. At the same time, articulation of inner experience becomes possible; which is the key to self-direction and communion with others.

## Practices

In Sufism there are two related terms: *ilm* (knowledge) and *hal* (state). Gurdjieff often referred to knowledge and being and the need to keep them in balance. Separately they are like the blind scholar and the stupid saint.

Practices tend to evoke states. They can serve to help people be receptive to higher influences (though they often as not do the opposite). I have earlier mentioned the practices of movements, sensing, visualisation and the ‘morning exercises’, as well as such things as the Subud *latihan* and the *zikr* of Hasan Shushud. I believe such things can be interpreted as acting like ‘carrier waves’ for what, for lack of a better term, I would call ‘higher information’. The key factor is some kind of initiation, the step of *realisation of the practice for oneself*. Just performing a practice is not enough.

The transmission of practices, for the most part, is through an *oral tradition*. This means person to person contact. It was made very clear in Subud where people were ‘opened’ to the action of the latihan by people who had been previously opened, a chain reaching back to Pak Subuh himself. Gurdjieff himself described his transmission of an exercise, say, as working through “illustrative inculcation.”<sup>60</sup> For my own part I have seen that a step is needed for anyone to ‘get’ any practice and am reminded, in this context, of Gurdjieff’s saying that ‘all initiation is self-initiation’. The person transmitting an exercise is called upon to be *really* doing it while he is passing it on to others. They, in their turn, have to make it real.

Bennett developed a corpus of more than a hundred exercises; that is, forms of structured attention of certain form and sequence. Most of them derived from Gurdjieff but Bennett came to add other ingredients from Sufism and Hinduism (*latifas* and *chakras* for example) and his Christianity (as in the exercise of ‘The Eye of the Needle’). For me they were like texts constructed on the basis of the psycho-cosmology of Bennett’s understanding of the fourth way. But I felt they were largely practised by people without any understanding of this. Once understood, however, it opens the way to all kinds of ‘themes and variations’ in this medium. It seemed to me that here was a way of ‘experimental metaphysics’ in which one could not just think about ideas of human reality but experiment with them. John Allen called his sessions for people of this type ‘lab’, short for ‘laboratory’. John was an engineer and writer who founded a work group in Santa Fe incorporating many of Bennett’s ideas. His exercises or ‘labs’ were rooted in acting and he helped me see a wider range of possibilities in the inner exercises than before, and could draw on the theatre as an image of mind.

I proceeded as far as I could to experiment with people from this standpoint, often making a start by asking for someone present to say what they would like to look into. My purpose was to encourage people to be experimental and empirical and not so much ritualistic or attached to experiences. I insisted that people find out or create a reason for doing the exercise as integral to the exercise. I called this approach *experienting*. Though I cannot justify it here, I would say that what I came to do was very much in the line from Gurdjieff’s encounters with people in his groups. Also, it was for me axiomatic that if a practice was authentic in its reflection of human nature then it would naturally evolve and lead the practitioner into *unknown territory*.

## Teachers

In the medium I call ‘teachers’ I want to include all those transactions in which people’s souls are touched,

60 G. I. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real, Then, Only When ‘I Am’* p. 148.

that is their non-delusional self. This entails an intimacy. A teacher is someone who takes on a *conscious role* with respect to another person or persons. It is something very hazardous. In the first instance there is the uncertainty in teacher and student finding each other. But I must also address the probability that there are teachers acting on different levels. There are teachers who just dish out ‘the teachings’ as a matter of rote. The teachers who transmit something that has life or energy are on a different level. Such I believe can convey a practice. Usually, they do so to a *group* rather than to a specific individual. When one comes to the latter we have teaching on yet another level. Such teaching must be conscious.

What is possible with a group and what is possible one on one are different. In Bennett’s terminology of selves, the latter takes place in the *divided self*.<sup>61</sup> Here is the place of what he called ‘will type’ and what others have considered to be the place of ‘knots in the heart’ or ‘chief feature’ or other glimpses of some intrinsic deep seated twist in the psyche that prevents transformation. It is like having one’s *own* original sin. At the same time it is the platform for liberation, the seat of possibly conscious choice (hence we are divided):

True Self	the seat of conscience
Divided Self	the seat of consciousness
Reactional	the stuff of emotional images
Self Material Self	the stuff of routine

In other contexts such as that of animistic cultures and shamanism, the teacher relationship is dedicated to the continuation of the line: the medicine man has to find someone to take his place when he is dead.<sup>62</sup> The literature sometimes speaks of the shaman having to ‘hook’ the pupil rather than the pupil seeking the master.<sup>63</sup> The third level of teaching is rare. One wonders whether, for example, the relationship of Alfred R. Orage with Gurdjieff was of this kind. In the literature the example of Rumi and Shams stands out.<sup>64</sup>

## Conscience

According to Gurdjieff’s character Beelzebub, over the gates of Purgatory is written: “Only he can enter here who is able to put himself in the place of these the other results of my labours”. Which serves to introduce the idea of dialogue - in at least its ideal manifestation - as a teaching without teaching. It is the domain of conscience. Patrick de Mare, the doyen of the dialogue process through what he called the ‘median’ group (roughly 15 to 30 people) named the ultimate goal of dialogue as *koinonia*, which he usually translated as ‘impersonal fellowship’. Though it will seem obscure, I want to say that only through conscience can we really see that we are the same.<sup>65</sup> I take Gurdjie’s words literally: if we can enter into the place of others - or see how and why we are equal - then we are ipso facto in Purgatory. Purgatory is the ultimate place of the Work.

What is a teacher according to the fourth level? He or she touches the True Self, which is creative. This was thought by Bennett to be the place where the Subud initiation took place, hence the common experience that ‘nothing happens’ for many people when they are ‘opened’. It has happened, but beyond consciousness. Then there are contemporary ‘saints’ such as Sri Anandamayi Ma or Mother Meera who hardly teach anything but transmit a grace. Gurdjieff would say that such gifts have to be paid back (by work for other people) before they can truly benefit.

I think it is more than a pious sentiment to say that conscience is the ultimate teacher. Gurdjieff called conscience ‘the representative of the Creator’, or God. It is important not to reify conscience as a thing or

61 The term “divided self” refers to Bennett’s scheme of selfhood, which, like many of his constructs, is fourfold. Bennett ascribes desire, character, and self-awareness to the third, divided, self. It is divided between higher and lower in itself. R. D Laing’s “divided self” in the book of that name is the mentally disturbed ego caught in contradiction. See Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock Publishing, 1959).

62 In Gurdjieff’s idea of the “staircase” leading from life to another level, a “law” is that no one can ascend to a higher step without helping someone else fill the place he is vacating.

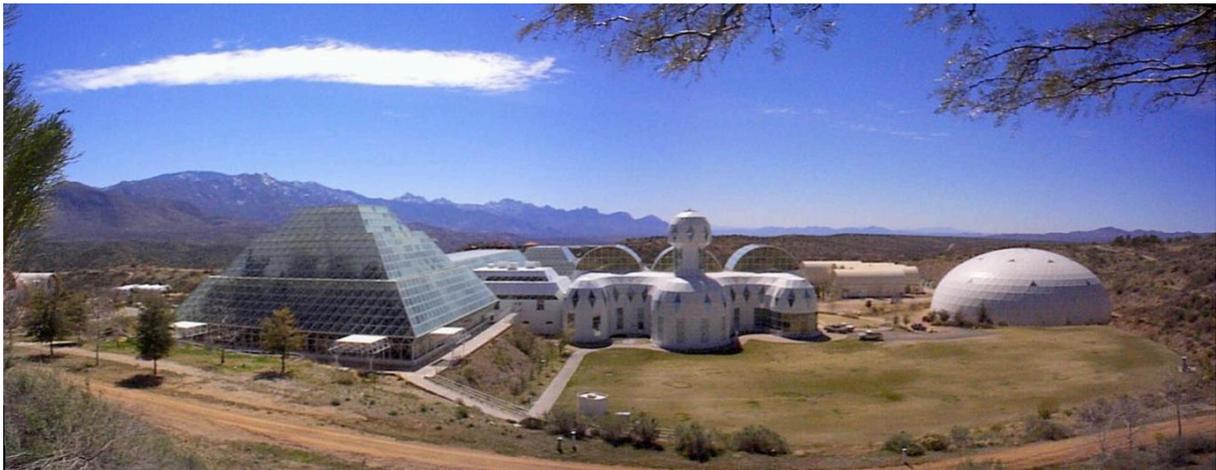
63 This was dramatically portrayed in Alain Tanner’s film *Light Years Away* (1981). Further, Simone Weil insisted that in the Gospels there is no mention of man seeking God, only of God seeking man.

64 Shams or Shams-i-Tabrīzī is credited as Rumi’s spiritual teacher. They are depicted as united in love of God and each other.

65 Gurdjieff had inscribed on his father’s grave the following: I AM THOU, THOU ART I, HE IS OURS, WE BOTH ARE HIS. SO MAY ALL BE FOR OUR NEIGHBOUR.

organ. In conscience, 'teaching' does not come from anywhere but *can inform our acts*. It was the core of the mission of Ashiata Shiemash, the enigmatic 'messenger sent from Above' in *Beelzebub's Tales*, who changed people's lives through awakening them to a perception that had been long buried within them.<sup>66</sup> I believe that such an action can obtain in dialogue, being mindful of Gordon Lawrence's ideas of the 'politics of revelation'.<sup>67</sup> It may be literally true that people can be in a teaching according to conscience through their speaking together. It always struck me with great force that Ashiata Shiemash used no miracles or special powers but simply talked with people.

## Service in the Wider World



**Biosphere 2 (Wikimedia Commons).**

John Allen pointed out to me that Russia at the time Gurdjieff was there was home to many 'cosmists', that is scientists who adopted a cosmic view of terrestrial matters. These included the biogeochemist Vladimir Vernadsky whom we have mentioned before and Konstantin E. Tsiolkovsky, sometimes called 'the father of space travel'. Allen and his colleagues followed this trail and it led them to be among the first westerners to be admitted to the 'forbidden cities' of Siberia with the coming of *glasnost* where they found scientists such as Evgenii Shepelev who had experimented with closed systems including humans<sup>68</sup>. The upshot was that they embarked on a journey of innovation and discovery having the aim of finding out how to support human life on other planets. NASA engineers had paid almost no attention to developing a viable self-sustaining organic environment, relying on transported supplies of food, water and oxygen.

I was involved with the company Allen established with friends, called Space Biospheres, and was engaged to help them write a popular book about their enterprise, *Biosphere 2*.<sup>69</sup> It was a three-brained activity involving science, art and engineering. Biosphere 2 was an 'image' of our terrestrial biosphere built in Arizona. It proved a popular draw and attracted much media attention, until the tide turned and it became subject to attacks in the media that led to a gun-point take over by their main financier. For me the project was a totally extraordinary and much to be welcomed example of creative experimentation in the real world. This was 'the Work' in new guise perhaps. But it had been an esoteric experiment perhaps doomed to failure. It challenged too much of mainstream culture and science to be allowed to survive. Its fate paralleled the suppression of heresies in medieval times.

In the early days of being with Bennett, I was drawn into educational research and the seeds were planted which have grown since into various projects. As a research fellow I was led to practice and facilitate small group discussions. As part of the educational research conducted by Bennett's Institute *structural commu-*

66 Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, p. 359.

67 W. Gordon Lawrence, *Tongued With Fire: Groups in Experience* (London: Karnac Books, 2000).

68 *To Russia with love and Vernadsky: A history of Biosphere 2's Soviet space program connections* by Biospherian Mark Nelson, unpublished manuscript.

69 John L. Allen and Anthony Blake, *Biosphere 2: The Human Experiment* (New York: Viking Adult, 1991).

*nication* was developed from the framework of systematics. As we said before, this led to the invention of a teaching machine. A commercial company 'Structural Communication Systems Ltd.' was set up to propagate and exploit the method in both schools and business, but it folded within a few years. However, the method re-emerged in the twenty-first century and is still in development.<sup>70</sup>

There is a work of being able to speak about the Work in reasonable and transparent terms, something in which Bennett excelled. But each person has to do this in his or her own way. It took some time before I could really speak with my own voice. It is not a matter of using old jargon and constructs. To speak is a wondrous thing. It is necessary that people 'speak the work' but it is a very hazardous undertaking.

Speaking and oral tradition are vital in the fourth way. This is because there has to be some element of person-to-person action that cannot be mediated by any technology. As Bennett's student Simon Weightman acknowledged, speech is the *being* aspect of language.<sup>71</sup> Gurdjieff himself appears to have made speech a strong practice: his remarks and conversations are legendary, and what matters in them is not so much in what is said but how they fuse minds into a significant moment.

But language in all its aspects was a field of a good work. Bennett led us into a realm of mentation by form through his invention of structural communication, a way of sharing understanding and not just knowledge. Speaking together became for me a major domain of real work, work I simply called dialogue. I came to know of David Bohm's advocacy of *dialogue* as 'going through meaning' and sought out the doyen of this kind of meeting, Patrick de Mare, who became a mentor and colleague.<sup>72</sup>



Patrick de Mare with author at a DuVersity conference

The most important aspect of dialogue that gradually dawned on me was that it involved people treating each other as equals on the level. I saw that this was no wishy-washy 'everybody's opinion is equally valuable' miasma but a very high demand. The quality was not given but a hoped-for outcome, corresponding to the Pythagorean ideal of friendship. This friendship and also true dialogue were only possible between equals.

This realisation brought me back to the seminal experience I had had during the seminar called *A Spiritual Psychology* when Bennett told me that people were equal *only in their will*. Dialogue became for me the field of discovery of such equality, which could not be experienced by any one person or authority but had to come into being through all the participants accepting each other as human.

70 Anthony Blake, 'Gurdjieff and the Legomorphism of "Objective Reason"', in Carole M. Cusack and Alex Norman (eds), *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 237-270.

71 Simon Weightman adapted Bennett's cosmic triad of Function, Being and Will to designate three facets of language: Function – language; Being – speech, and Will – meaning. See Simon Weightman, 'Aspects of the Significance of Language,' *Systematics*, vol. 6 no. 4 (1969).

72 See Rachel Lenn and Karen Stefano (eds), *Small, Large and Median Groups: The Work of Patrick de Mare* (Leiden: Karnac Books, 2012).

## The DuVersity

I became increasingly concerned with method and technique. What could people do together that might pay off in terms of understanding themselves better? I wondered about the issue of ‘superior information’ which involved bypassing conditioning and altering perception. Just telling people things was obviously next to useless. My wonderings led to the formation of a non-profit organisation I dubbed The *DuVersity*.<sup>73</sup> The title harked back to the days with Bennett, when we young men around him dreamt of there being a ‘dramatic university’. The ‘DU’ of DuVersity also picked up on Bennett’s idea of ‘unity in diversity and diversity in unity’. It led to the slogan ‘diversity creates new forms of unity’. It was very much centred in Bennett’s *The Dramatic Universe*, systematics, and the prospect of communication with higher intelligence as well as other projects he left behind. But I wanted very much to bring things up to date and embrace findings in mainstream research. In particular I felt that followers of the fourth way tended to be backward-looking while the world was opening up in new ways. It was no longer useful to posit some esoteric truth in contrast to what was happening en masse. And certainly not useful to fix it in some archaic mode.

Out of the accidents of my own search and encounters I acquired knowledge and techniques in various psychological fields. These were developed through a series of seminars in the 1990s, during which I attempted to speak of or share work ideas without adhering to their customary terminology.<sup>74</sup> The series progressed in a way that gradually reduced the amount of lecturing and increased the amount of participation: the idea of a participative consciousness beyond an observing consciousness became paramount. This led to the idea of a workshop methodology that would bring together several influences that had helped and informed me. My personal inclination towards embracing diversity and finding new ways of integration led me on to pursue this aim. I devised a workshop consisting of seven distinct methods which are listed here, together with their sources:

Inner exercises – Bennett

Movements – Gurdjieff

LVT – Bennett at al

Tissue paper collage – Wallace<sup>75</sup>

Social dreaming matrix– Lawrence

Dialogue (Median Group) – de Mare

ILM (Neural Education) – Matchett<sup>76</sup>

The mistake I made was to assume that giving people the seven practices would lead them to integrate them as I felt I had done. This was quite unrealistic in many ways. One of them was that relatively few people could perceive the form or design of a method distinctly from what they experienced from it. Most were unable to operate at a level in which the several forms could be understood as ‘the same’ and therefore could coalesce.<sup>77</sup> They were experienced extensively rather than intensively. The problem of integration appeared again and again. People could appreciate the work of somebody who did it but could not do it for themselves. It seemed to require a fluidity of thought that was not widely available.

Another instance of this arose in my attempts to run conferences based on themes which Bennett had initiated such as time and higher intelligence. Through the DuVersity I and colleagues brought together people from various schools (though still having some connection with Bennett and his work). But the

73 The DuVersity was founded in 1998 by Karen Stefano and myself. See [www.duversity.org](http://www.duversity.org). Accessed 23 November 2017.

74 These were transcribed and eventually published in three volumes as: *The Reading of Experience* (2012); *Making a New World* (2012); *Inside the Present Moment* (2012).

75 Dr Edith Wallace was a Jungian psychotherapist who studied under Emma Jung and John Bennett. She devised her “Tissue Paper Collage” method while at Bennett’s Academy in Sherborne. The method was taken up and developed by Karen Stefano who co-founded the DuVersity with me in 1998 and co-facilitated these events.

76 ILM or “immediate learning method” was derived from Edward Matchett’s “neural education”, based on listening to music to make a connection with what he called “media signals” or creative influences.

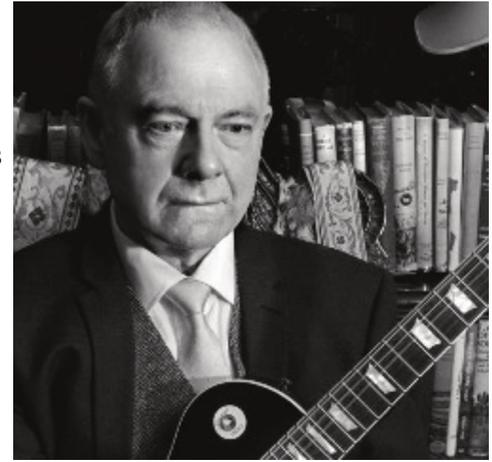
77 Gurdjieff mysteriously emphasises the idea of “sameness” in a passage in the Third Series of his writings as the key to the development of the third brain or understanding.

## The Fourth Way, A Hazardous Path - Part Two

experts who contributed to the conferences did little more than repeat their usual presentations with little regard for the topic and almost no exchange with each other.

My friend Robert Fripp of King Crimson fame has gone another way, that was far more effective. He concentrated on a single thing - performance with a guitar - and through this got a response from thousands of people as they participated in a learning process (based on a tangible structure - a particular tuning he invented).<sup>78</sup> It was a lesson that took me a great deal of time to appreciate.

The DuVersity also undertook ‘pilgrimages’ to Egypt, Peru and so on and incidentally inspired astro-archaeologist Richard Heath to investigate early megalithic culture in the context of the work on ancient harmonic theory by Ernest McClain. I met McClain twice before his death in 2014 and his work helped me expand the domain of systematics.



**Robert Fripp**



**Ernest McClain holding author's lattice model of Bennett's systematics).**



**Tour guide, John Anthony West, also with Gurdjieffian background, in Egypt for DuVersity tour 2002**

<sup>78</sup> David G. Robertson, “Tuning Ourselves”: Fripp, Bennett, Gurdjieff’, *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (2017), pp. 236-258.



is a limitation or privation (*kenosis* in Greek). The fourth way seems to aim at connecting the different levels, so it must have an open programme. It is not simply about ‘raising level of consciousness’ but involves understanding how the different levels or worlds relate to each other and the whole.<sup>82</sup>

Which leads me to the terminology that replaces ‘Fourth Way’ with ‘the Work’. At times I’ve criticised the term ‘work’ from the standpoint of physics in which work = force x distance, because that only represents effort. I would prefer the term action because action = energy x time – and reminds me at least of something like inspiration. In one of his last lectures, Bennett struggled to articulate the sense and meaning of the Work in a way which seems to combine the physical concepts of work and action.

One good advantage of the word ‘Work’ is that it doesn’t readily lend itself to being made into a being. We don’t feel ourselves inclined to talk about ‘Mr Work’ or ‘His Holiness, the Work’. At least we have that big advantage: we have here a word that we are not in real danger of turning into a being like we’ve done with God. We also are not likely to fall into the mistake of thinking that the Work exists in the sense that we’ve fallen into this confusion of thinking of the world as existing, as if it was something in itself. We realize that the Work has to be talked about in a different way from that. We are not the Work, we don’t do the Work, we are not in the Work. The Work isn’t something independent apart from us all. At least there are a whole lot of confusions we shan’t fall into if we’re reasonably careful when we talk about Work. It is not a small thing this. Because if we can get something right about this maybe we can get a whole lot of other things right too.

One great advantage of the word ‘Work’ is this: we don’t really separate the Work from the worker. If we see that it is so, we have something very, very important: when we use the word ‘Work’ we are not talking about ourselves, we’re not talking about what we do and yet we ourselves and what we do are there; and the Work is also what is done to us, its action upon us. It is altogether true to say that the Work is an action upon us. It is also true to say that the Work is what we do. It is also true to say the Work is the reality of our whole life. The beauty here is that you have a word that can, possibly, mean something to us that won’t bring in a false separation. It doesn’t mean for a moment we wish to say that the Work is everything...<sup>83</sup>

## The Present Moment

*Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards* - Søren Kierkegaard

This narrative is a reflection of my life – my character, influences upon me, circumstances, and choices and so on. Any conclusions I draw are coloured by these. One of these is that the fourth way requires a variety of people. This has many facets, including making use of a resonance or correspondence between diversity amongst people in the contextual group and diversity in oneself. It is also to enable understanding. It is next to impossible for a single person to see anything ‘all round’ from all angles. These are some of the reasons why I came to see dialogue as an essential education for ‘the Work’.

There are in fact many indications that the fourth way as it has emerged has tended to concentrate on well-educated white middle class professional people. It is striking and worrying how few black people are included. Leaving aside the latter, as I said in my story of Coombe Springs and Sherborne, Bennett attracted people from all walks of life and valued diversity. He even said to me on one occasion that ‘we (him and I) are no good for each other’, the reason for saying this was that he valued difference and we thought too much alike .

A life has many diverse encounters and diversity may be strung out in time. I have spoken of the multiple Gurdjieff’s accounts of “disasters” afflicting humankind may also represent the same trauma: an act of limitation as must obtain between levels might well be seen as disastrous. Though Gurdjieff spoke in the context of his view of human history, through time, there is also the sense of a “timeless” structure. In the Hindu tradition such transitions are treated as steps of ignorance. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: J. and R. Tonson, 1759).

<sup>82</sup> *The Dramatic Universe Vol. II Chapter 28 The Six Fundamental Laws*

<sup>83</sup> J. G. Bennett, *Sacred Influences: Spiritual Action in Human Life* (New Mexico: Bennett Books, 1989), p. 55.

impacts I had via Bennett but there was a whole stream of encounters and influences which came upon me, as is the case for anyone who ‘seeks a way’. At the time, a meeting might seem a random event but in retrospect prove a critical turning point. We cannot tell in advance. The way is hazardous and reveals a logic only, if at all, in hindsight (as Kierkegaard pointed out).

Taking a bird’s eye view of one’s path in life it might appear like a ‘drunkard’s walk’ but may also suggest some element of ‘intelligent design’. In the fourth way, we relate everything to the here and now; what is inside us as well as what is outside us cannot be separated. I have not spoken much of Bennett’s enquiry into and valuing of hazard, yet it is the foundation of everything he did. To say that it means that doing anything is subject to uncertainty, and risk is involved, is not enough. Bennett saw it as the key to how we, for example, engage with the world process, or natural order. In crude terms, how freedom enters into and creates through accident and necessity substantial meaning.<sup>84</sup> His series of lectures on the subject hardly scratched the surface of what this implies. Though Bennett claimed that the core ‘message’ of *The Dramatic Universe* was hazard, he never managed to draw out what he meant in explicit terms.

He lived his life as he did to *demonstrate* it! The importance of diversity and hazard extends into the invention, transmission and development of transformational *methods*. It is a curious thing that many people imagine we can have a set method for our evolution or personal transformation, as if such a method could be effective separate from the exigencies of individuals, their lives and histories. The practice, modality or form of a method cannot stay still without decay. To continue to be effective for concrete individuals in real time it must itself transform and evolve.<sup>85</sup>

How does this square with trying, for example, to establish an exercise Gurdjieff taught more than fifty years ago as accurately as possible? This is meaningful precisely because of the fifty year gap. One has to recreate the genesis of the exercise. Idries Shah, in his ‘Declaration of the People of the Tradition’, attempted to spell out the vision of a transformational path that is endlessly changing, adapting and developing. Claiming to represent the ‘tradition’ from which Gurdjieff got his ideas, he one time claimed it dated back 40,000 years. This is to tie ‘the Way’ into human evolution, that date often cited as the birth of creativity (in Europe at least).

The knowledge to which we refer is concentrated, administered and presided over by three kinds of individual existing at any given time. They have been called an “Invisible Hierarchy” because, under ordinary circumstances, they are not in communication or contact with ordinary human beings; certainly not in two-way communication with them. In one sense, the way to the knowledge passes through a “chain of succession” in which perception of the ordinary man must have help in attaining a higher degree of contact. Religion, folklore and the like abound with disguised examples of this progress. Many manifestations, taking religious, magical, alchemical, psychological and other forms, are, in reality, vestigial parts of the science to which we refer. Very often, procedures, which are considered to be “Ways of Truth” and the like, are neither more nor less than traces of techniques which have been used in the past to attain the link referred to above.

One of the “difficulties” in this quest for knowledge of a higher order is the very existence, or rather the misuse, of these survivals. That which was, as it were, the chrysalis for a butterfly becomes a prison for the caterpillar which tries to use it to become a butterfly himself. He fails generally to realize that he has to make his own chrysalis.<sup>86</sup>

84 *The Dramatic Universe* III pp. 46-7

85 In an interview the theatre director Jerzy Grotowski speaks about the need for innovation in the work. See Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds), *Gurdjieff* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004): “How to struggle against dilution and at the same time, in this rigorous fight, make possible the step toward an ongoing investigation? In the case of Gurdjieff one finds these two aspects: tradition and research. The burning question is: Who, today, is going to assure the continuity of the *research*? Very subtle, very delicate and very difficult”, p. 101.

86 Documents sent to groups in an early, introductory phase of Idries Shah’s work; ‘Declaration of the people’, first published edition 13 April, 2007, at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/223039265/Declaration-of-the-People>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

## The Fourth Way, A Hazardous Path - Part Two

As Gurdjieff once said, in so many words, the Work itself has no aim and it is we who need aims, which must always be particular and individual. Understanding of the practices should not stay still in any fixed form. I believe that there is not any clear cut division between what came from Gurdjieff and other 'spiritual explorers' such as those Bennett made contact with. However, as an individual I must choose to go this way or that, at any critical juncture. Restricting oneself to one line or interpretation may be sometimes the most intelligent move.

There remains a component of looking to the past and maintaining materials. Interestingly, in regard to Gurdjieff's movements which themselves are threatened with entropy and diminution, a major role has been played by Gert-Jan Blom who has recovered the orchestral versions of the music for some of the early demonstrations in 1923-1924. Blom was apparently told to do this work by Gurdjieff himself in a dream, but he shows no interest in any current Gurdjieff groups.<sup>87</sup>

Fresh light is always needed. Which means the cultivation of independent practical methods in touch with what is sometimes called 'the energy of the times'. In Sufism, from Islamic tradition, new elements of the way enter through the enigmatic figure of El Kidhr, the 'Green One'. This is to personify the influence of higher powers, which Bennett referred to as 'sacred influences'. I was led to dialogue as providing a new vantage point on what 'work on oneself' means. In making the assertion, Dialogue = Self-Remembering, I was first of all merely following the ancient way of the unity of opposites; but the equals sign signifies an act of transformation or understanding not an external identity.

Both dialogue and self-remembering are exactly in and of the present moment; both represent tension in the face of the unknown. They are the epitome of hazard. The audacity is in equating what appears to be as an individual act (self-remembering) with what appears to be collective process (dialogue). I believe them to be the two halves of the same coin.

A basic practice such as 'self-observation' seems straightforward but requires a deep understanding of mind and observation that has hardly yet begun to emerge. Intelligently, Gurdjieff avoided any set definition or description and this is particularly important for the critical act of 'self-remembering'. Such phenomena are not just 'mental' or 'subjective' but we do not have the language to describe them accurately. I myself have tried to make use of recursive mathematical forms and believe that mathematics will have a crucial role to play if 'the work' is to advance.

There is also the idea of 'The Work itself'. The quotation from Bennett we gave earlier puts it as well as anything we have heard. It connects with the idea of 'the Work working'. From the very beginning of my contact with Bennett and those around him it was common to hear the phrase 'the Work works in spite of ourselves'. We know that our efforts and even just remembering the work are sporadic moments. Can there be a twenty-four hour action with no relapse? It is not a matter of a permanent state. Bennett said of himself that he was not conscious all the time but only when needed. He was keenly aware of the misunderstanding most people adopt in treating consciousness as theirs, rather than as something that comes into play according to some higher logic. That is the point he strived to express: there is a higher logic (or higher 'laws'). An implication is that there are worlds in which 'we' have a different presence than in our everyday one. The Work is about how we can relate to these possibilities. For that we need to be *weaned from dependency on images of ourselves*. We must find out 'what works' in this regard.

Here is my picture of the four elements or sources of the fourth way. It is a symbolic expression in which each of the elements is 'mutually relevant' to the others. I like to imagine myself situated in the middle as in a 'field' made of the four sources in a process of response and action:

<sup>87</sup> Blom also edited and published the extant recordings of Gurdjieff playing the harmonium. I have a project to study and preserve the series of movements made by Gurdjieff at the end of his life, called "The 39". Gurdjieff claimed antecedents for his sacred dances in Buddhist, Islamic, Greek and Christian traditions. Another friend Gerard Houghton and colleagues have filmed traditional Buddhist dances in Bhutan and Ladakh at the behest of the Royal Family of Bhutan and leading Buddhists to preserve them, because there is a lack of new generations of dancers. The archives are an unparalleled resource now available to the public in the archives of the New York Public Library. (Tibeta Buddhist Rites from the Monasteries of Bhutan). The dances were videoed by Gerard Houghton who I met through the October Gallery and who also introduced me to the work of William Pensinger. See Gert-Jan Blom, *Gurdjieff/de Hartmann. Oriental Suite: The Complete Orchestral Music 1923-1924* (Basta, 2006).

## THE WORK

### HAZARD      METHODS

### DIVERSITY

I do not know what works in advance of what I do. My doubts and confusions persist in various guises and there is no end to them. My questions reach towards a quest that underlies them, that reminds me of Heidegger's trenchant statement "Man is the question of Being". This appears to have no temporal terminus. Bennett produced the enigmatic statement that progress is *only within the present moment*. The idea of getting better tomorrow is delusional. Many people I know in the fourth way have, in effect, given up on the idea of any 'improvement tomorrow'. What remains is a daily discipline of remembrance and appreciation of 'work with others' – now, no longer a matter of following any teacher but coming together as equals, which is the *hardest test* of our reality.<sup>88</sup>

I believe there has been a change in the general understanding of 'work' from regarding it as a matter of effort and being active towards seeing it as somewhat more receptive. Efforts may be relevant to our being but do not transform us. Practices do not produce a soul. But they may help us to be sensitive to higher influences. What is really at stake? The movement of attitude to the work appears to me to closely follow what was laid out theoretically by Bennett in his treatment of triads as well in his own path. The active, receptive and reconciling elements may be seen as phases in the realisation of something. I believe we may come to some sense of the reconciling akin to the Holy Ghost, the inspiration of communities (churches) and of dialogue, a mutuality of making meaning that supersedes any traditional idea of 'teaching'.<sup>89</sup>

At the moment, one of my main projects is 'The Conversation'. Whenever I can, I seize the opportunity to open (and record) a conversation with anyone connected however loosely with the fourth way.

Since, as I believe, the Fourth Way has escaped from the clutches of old top-down organisation it is to be found, if anywhere, amongst the 'ordinary' people who 'feel' its action.

In my introduction to the 1999 edition of Bennett's *A Spiritual Psychology*, I anticipated some of the concerns which have been voiced here:

It has only been since the 1950s and much more recently that new ideas on the working of groups have arisen. The question now being addressed is precisely how can people come together to cooperate in finding their way—without authority being invested in one person? This has a strong bearing on the present book. Bennett shows us a model of the combination of our spiritual and material natures—but only for the individual. In practice, our search and experience and practices take place within a "community of selves" and not in isolation. The collective situations in which we find ourselves can largely determine what it is possible for us to realize. We have to address how we are together if we are to make headway in our quest. This means that we have to address how we can communicate on the more subtle levels of experience. Strangely, this has never appeared as a prominent feature of the methods used in spiritually-oriented groups. For this reason, such groups have tended to revert back to old models of authority-based guidance.<sup>90</sup>

88 This reminds me of the saying of Jesus in the Gospels: "When two or three are gathered in my Name then am I with them," Matthew 18:20.

89 In explaining Gurdjieff's symbol of the enneagram, Bennett did so in terms of his "cosmic triad" of Function, Being and Will constituting the three "octaves" which weave together to create a new whole. My late colleague John Kirby had taken this up in his thesis of the three ages of the church in which the present time is to be seen as the phase of Will and the Holy Ghost. See John Kirby, 'The Religious History of Man as Unfoldment of the Triad of Reality (Function, Being and Will)' in *DuVersity Newsletter* issue 28, at <http://www.duversity.org/PDF/FBW%20part1.pdf>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

90 J. G. Bennett, *A Spiritual Psychology* (New Mexico: Bennett Books, 1999), p. 9.

**Envoi**

So much has been left out of this story that I can hardly claim even to call it a sketch. I want to finish with an item from 1994 when the twentieth anniversary of the death of John Bennett (December 13th 1974) was honoured by more than 150 meeting at Claymont. I was only able to attend because Carolyn Shaffer paid my airfare. There were movement classes led by Walter Goodwin where we had to have two sets of participants making twelve files in all. I was number one in the first file of one of the two sets and George Bennett was number one in the other. George was the organiser and allowed me to conduct some large scale dialogues. One of them I vividly remember because it was one of those occasions when I underwent some kind of deep emotional impact and blurted out that, 'God is US!' This has been with me ever since. I understood it to be my personal testimony to Mr Bennett while marking a commitment deeper than my mind. The most remarkable thing I heard him say was *Nature loves us!*

## Appendix 1: A Gathering in Wales 2016

During the last fifty years or so, many if not most of the ‘old guard’, direct heirs of Gurdjieff’s authority in some shape or form, have died, leaving their groups and followers in a kind of vacuum. Acting leaders have emerged sporadically but very few claim any intrinsic authority. People want to go on meeting together and doing something they can identify as ‘work’. Such identification has tended to be, one might say, formulaic. Typically, if one looks at a ‘work weekend’ there will be some combination of: an inner exercises or ‘sitting’; practical work; Gurdjieff movements, and meetings on themes. Other ingredients are sometimes thrown in such as meditations, *zikrs*, music and art.



Author, foreground right, with group picking up litter from a beach.

Mr Bennett was a hard act to follow. A polymath, he had considerable intellect and knowledge of science and mathematics, wide experience of spiritual techniques from many cultures, was capable of speaking their languages, had short but intense interactions with Gurdjieff, was creator of the ten month intensives held in Sherborne, writer of many books including the formidable *The Dramatic Universe* in four volumes and so on.<sup>91</sup>

The question of what to do in the absence of a leader who takes the role of a superior intelligence or wisdom had been in the minds of some people around Bennett even while he was alive, but nothing had then seemed practicable. When he died, a few people felt the need to find ways of working together in a democratic way, no one wishing to claim authority. At the same time, the formulaic legacy of a ‘work day’ persisted. And engagement with Bennett’s many profound ideas was never strong, largely reducing to merely reading from his books with desultory discussion. A series of annual gatherings in Wales for people interested in Bennett’s legacy was inceptioned several years ago. Evidently, people wanted to be together and do things together and share in common meanings, but it was inevitable that the old formulas would come into operation, because it is not an easy thing for people to self-organise without direction or a structured framework and create new forms. A small group ran the decision-making for the program by default. In

<sup>91</sup> Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (1957).

effect, the meetings were 'disjoint'. My own involvement was as someone who was very familiar with Bennett's ideas, but who also had a sceptical attitude to some of these ideas and to the prospects of achieving a self-organising group. I had, for some time, been looking into self-organising methods and this led me to dialogue, first through the physicist David Bohm and then through his therapist and mentor Patrick de Mare. I persuaded the organisers of the events in Wales to allow me to convene dialogues as part of a programme. There was quite some resistance but, over a few years, acceptance and understanding grew. I was delighted to see emerge some understanding of the difference between dialogue and discussion, coupled with the recognition that discussion rarely led to meaningful communication.

What is more difficult to put finger on was the maturation of the people involved. It was as if the times were changing and we were all moving into a different world (maybe a 'new world' as Bennett spoke of in his book *Making a New World*,<sup>92</sup> which book became the overt theme of the last two gatherings). While numbers of people attending diminished, depths of meaning increased. And while the formulaic continued, new ingredients were entering and being absorbed. For example, in the domain of meditation, besides the Bennett traditional (derived from Cambodian monk Bhante and practiced for more than 40 years) Green meditation, there was an input from Christian contemplation from a new source. Many people made independent contributions, treating with respect the work of others. I can best delineate the direction of change as just in this independence and individualisation of the 'work' in people. All had 'ripened' in their own way, and found a marriage of work with life.

In various communications I have often remarked that I understood Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* as portraying not so much special people but simply people who were remarkable in their ability to work together and accept each other.<sup>93</sup> I had begun to dare entertaining the thought that we could be and might be *already* such 'remarkable men (and women)'.

An important idea was voiced during the last event this year in Wales. I emphasise how much mutual exchange occurred in the dialogue sessions and not in any formal discussions. The theme of the seminar was the same as in the previous event two years ago: Bennett's idea of making a New World. This time, there was not even a reading from his book of that title. People were able to give voice to what making a New World meant to them. It emerged that there was a generally shared feeling that the work had turned into a receptive mode and was no longer centred in active will.

A strong idea put forward by Patrick de Mare, especially concerning dialogue, is that mind is between brains rather than in brains. This came to the fore during the week we spent together. In every activity, it seemed to me that we were participants in a medium, one that permitted us to be and act together, a medium that permeated our actions and experiences without imposition. Whether sitting in silence, chanting, moving or speaking there was a sense of 'swimming' in an intelligent and loving medium; which I would label 'the work' in a new sense of the word. One of Bennett's many simple but revelatory utterances was: 'the Work works'.

Without any need of self-deprecation, abject humility or the like, I felt or believed that the people were making no proprietary claim on the work as they might have had in the past. They were simply happy to join in. What the particular activities were scarcely mattered. We spent most of the day clearing litter from a beach and it was the same as meditating or doing movements.

This was the miraculous; very ordinary in many ways but the real deal, or so I believe. We cannot repeat it, because any imitation separates us from the moving spirit. Yet we can also do old things in the new spirit. I dare to call it new. Further, I wonder it is the case that if we have now moved from the active to the receptive attitude, we may live to see a further movement into the reconciling will when we might happily be friends of God.

<sup>92</sup> Bennett, *Making a New World* (1976).

<sup>93</sup> Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963).

## Appendix 2: Philosophy and Work

### THINKING – WORK – DOING

Thinking can be felt as painful or a useless pursuit. The word ‘thinking’ can be thought of in various ways, for example: just what passes through my head; focusing on the future with intent, or reasoning about what is true. There are countless more. An established modality of thinking is in philosophy, usually considered as something detached from action given time to reflect on universal questions under such headings as epistemology - how do I know? - ontology - what really is? - and theology - what makes reality real?

Both East and West have traditions of reflecting or meditating on truth, though they may differ markedly. They might be associated, though not identified, with Buddhism on the one hand and Christianity on the other. The point is to think as directly as possible on knowing the truth. Thus, for example, we find Descartes exercising doubt in a way that the three modes of epistemology, ontology and theology are combined. Eastern meditation might come to the ‘emptiness’.

Putting aside the extremes of philosophy, the very same questions concern us all. But we say, ‘if we can stop to question’. We have to draw back from life, try to see the wood for the trees and ask questions of ourselves. However intermittently, weakly, confusedly we all have a search for truth, the question of what is real. Intensive and sustained effort in this direction can go very far. Shivapuri Baba says that if we persist in asking, ‘what is the meaning of life?’ we will come to see God.

But, for the most part, especially about questions which deeply disturb us such as who or what we are, we come to an impasse. The sense is that we have to do more than merely think to really know. There are abstract things that can be surely known, such as in the proofs of mathematics which provide certainty in their own terms. But not such things as who or what am I?

In the story of Hamolinadar recounted in Gurdjieff’s *Beelzebub’s Tales*, this philosopher of ancient Babylon pursues the question of whether man has a soul to the point of despair. He abandons reason - the reason he has been using - because it gets him nothing substantial. In Beelzebub’s story, he then flees into the countryside to ‘grow maize’, interpreted by Bennett as ‘work on himself’. We do not know how he then fares. The recognition of thinking, say, being inadequate is built into Gurdjieff’s remarkable explanation of understanding as a fusion and harmonisation of three kinds of intentionality (a word deliberately chosen over the old term ‘centre’) associated with thinking, feeling and acting. In Bennett’s descriptions thinking can follow or obey the will to see, feeling the will to be, and acting the will to do. These three modalities of will have to be realised in practice. We are not considering how this is done because it is a direct matter. When the will to see is exhausted in thinking the will to be can come into play but the goal is for them to come together equally.

We identify this transition with beginning to ‘work on oneself’. Work on oneself concerns being and, pragmatically, is centred in the feelings. In crude terms, we take our ideas ‘personally’, enter a realm where what is real is what is actually coming to be in us, in our flesh and blood so to say, our bodily presence.

We could picture this in terms of making experiments in ourselves. Something like experiment is needed to enable us to pass from the realm of possibilities, beliefs and abstractions to the real. To understand, what I am, my being, must change.

Most people project their thinking outside of themselves so that they themselves do not have face changing who or what they are. These projections create a world of delusion. We need to bring it all ‘home to roost’ as it were: here and now in the present moment. Going into the present moment with purpose is to work on oneself. I test my beliefs in my very existence. This is a kind of intentional existentialism.

However deep work on oneself goes it is not the end. It appears that some people find their inner work empties, falls vacant. Maybe Bennett went through this in the 1950s when all his efforts seem to come to nothing. Perhaps this is the ‘dark night of the soul’ as described by St John of the Cross.

We come to what Gurdjieff described as the supreme goal of the human individual, which is *to do*. One way of looking at this is to say that, ‘Well now I am sorted out, this is the time to get on with the job’. What is the job? - it is what is needed to be done. Who decides what is needed? If we call it God, it is to say

## The Fourth Way, A Hazardous Path - Part Two

nothing but still something. Working on oneself is then a distraction, just as dwelling on one's own virtues distracts from love of God.

Many people recognise how authentic acts do not involve thinking but appear spontaneous without planning or analysis. We want to make the further step of saying that they do not require consciousness of self, as work on oneself demands. In the third realm of doing, consciousness can be understood almost as an aberration, a glitch. It is an almost inexplicable realisation, almost impossible to articulate. 'Doing the will of God' is a wrong form of expression: it is that what we can call God does us in the doing.

### Appendix 3: Dialogue and Theatre

The play's the thing. Shakespeare

In some of his writings, Bennett spoke of the reality and significance of what he called 'group consciousness'. He said it was an important part of the fourth way and would feature even more so in the future. However, in practice he tended to situate it in a group being in silence together. He often spoke of awareness as beyond words, but his triad of language based on his paradigm Function-Being-Will, was Language-Speech-Meaning, where speech appears in the mode of being.

I myself was attracted to the prospect of a group consciousness that did not come about in silence but through talking. In relation to this, I became aware of experiential processes in groups being explored in the wider world of group psychology. (It would be useful to consider the word 'experience' as it is used in French to mean both experience and experiment. Like many of my colleagues, I was struck by the empirical insight of Wilfred Bion, that he published in *Experiences in Groups*, a book on his work in Northfields<sup>94</sup> during the Second World War, where he ran groups with no apparent structure of authority nor set methodology. Hardly any experiments of this kind had ever been tried before.

It was after the death of David Bohm in 1992 that I learned of his work in dialogue<sup>95</sup>. He stressed the meaning of the word dialogue as consisting of dia – through, and logos – meaning, and not exchange between two or more people in a play or movie. I gradually learned that he had evolved a sense of dialogue from many sources including open discussions on meaning, conversations with Krishnamurti and engagement with group analyst Patrick de Mare, who was his therapist at the time of the first Gulf War. I myself experienced the practice of what has become known as Bohmian dialogue through Anthony Judge, a remarkable thinker who was the head of the Union of International Associations (UIA based in Brussels. He is one of the most remarkable men I have ever met. I was in correspondence with him and was delighted to learn of his School of Ignorance<sup>96</sup> and that he was involved in a series of international gatherings for Bohmian dialogue. Meeting for a weekend near Findhorn, Scotland, it gave me an initiation.

It then appeared to me that that the situation of the fourth way community which was facing the demise of many authority figures who could claim descent of some kind from the master, Gurdjieff, was highly pertinent to my enquiry into dialogue. Hierarchical authority was a feature of the dominant organisation claiming to represent Gurdjieff's teachings, known as the Foundation. For my part I regarded the demise of those I came to call the 'golden oldies' as having a silver lining. With my scientific background I was keen on Max Planck's saying that the best way for physics to advance was for the old physicists to die! This seemingly harsh remark depended of course on regarding physics as something that should progress and not stand still.

94 The Northfield Experiments took place at Hollymoor Hospital, Northfield, Birmingham, during World War II. The first experiment was conducted by Bion & Rickman. The second evolved gradually; many people contributed to its success, including Foulkes, Main and Bridger. The experiments were an important landmark in the evolution of theory and practice in group psychotherapy and in the therapeutic community movement. They were not carried out solely as responses to the need for mass treatment of neurotic disorders among army personnel; antecedent factors, the theoretical orientation of the practitioners and the nature of army life were equally important. The two experiments differed in pace and in recognition of the needs of higher-order systems, particularly the military hierarchy. They shared many underlying concepts, including responsibility to society, the therapeutic use of groups (including the hospital community) and an emphasis on process. Lessons learned at Northfield remain relevant to the practice of psychiatry today. *Wikipedia*

95 See his book *On Dialogue*

96 He later (2013) spoke of a University of Ignorance, *Engaging with nothing, the unknown, the incomprehensible, and the unsaid* - <https://laetusinpraesens.org/docsios/univigno.phpsee>. For historical precedent: "Nowadays we everywhere seek to propagate wisdom: who knows whether in a couple of centuries there may not exist universities for restoring the old ignorance." Lichtenberg (1742-1799). <https://www.laetusinpraesens.org/docsios/univigno.php>. See also Bohm *Endarkement*.

The theatre genius Grotowski, who admired Gurdjieff, argued that the fourth way should be strong in research, though the opposite was apparent. I also took to heart Bion's definition of a workgroup. In fourth way circles this word only meant a group identified in some way with Gurdjieff's ideas. In Bion's understanding it meant that such a group had an aim, some way of realising it and also a means of deciding whether they were on an effective path and so on. We also emphasise that workgroup could stop on reaching its goal, whereas the usual group regarded itself as immortal. (This I enshrined in my book now published simply as *Intelligence*, where I wrote: "An action is only intelligent if it can be stopped".

I began to experiment with dialogue in groups wherever I could. In the course of this I decided to make contact with Patrick de Mare, who could well have been regarded as the father of dialogue in UK.<sup>97</sup> To my delight he welcomed me as a colleague, and this led to collaboration with him until his death in 2008. He emphasised the importance of the number of people involved, distinguishing small, media and large. The median group he came to suggest was around 17 members, allowing for diversity while preserving some immediacy of contact. Such a group would be grounded in thinking rather than emotion, as the small group tended to be.<sup>98</sup>

In introducing dialogue to the fourth way people, I knew there would be a reluctance to accept a process in which there was no teacher, no agenda and no explicit methodology. People regarded it as an anarchic and useless activity; but in time many people came round and became supportive. The simple idea that struck me was that if we now have the collapse of hierarchical authority structures then we need to have a way to produce positive direction between us. That is why I found Patrick saying that "mind is not in brains, but between brains" of great significance.

As I was engaged with Patrick de Mare, I was also pursuing a relation with Group Analyst Gordon Lawrence, who advocated a method he called the Social Dreaming Matrix.<sup>99</sup> Both helped me become convinced that self-organisation was a real and important process that could be cultivated.

The Bohmian approach also appealed to me because he was a physicist and drew on his physical intuition rather than as a humanist drawing on literary tradition. His special study was of plasma where apparently random interactions made a coherent whole. The way of working in dialogue where there appears to be a random number of interactions sometimes manages to achieve coherence and meaning through self-organisation and seemed to me to point to the future.

Physics had created the controversy that engaged Einstein who detested the whole idea of uncertainty ('God does not play at dice' he famously said. The big issue was non-locality. It seemed that particles could be connected in a way that allowed for instantaneous communication between them, called 'entanglement', something that Einstein derided as 'spooky action at a distance'. He adhered to the classical belief that only interactions between particles that were local or in contact with each other could be real. The idea that there can be nonlocal connections speaks to how people might be connected also. Thus, in a dialogue group there could be a connection between the people that was not due to their interactions. Physics might help us understand such an idea as 'group consciousness'.<sup>100</sup>

A crucial experience for me in this period was that of discovering that one could enter a higher or more subtle world or state without having to be in silence or meditate and still be able to talk and think without disturbing the inner state. My views about meditation and silence are rather harsh. I have claimed that people who like to sit in silence, and imagine they are in some superior state, actually hate each other. I think that talking exposes us to others whereas silence keeps us hidden, even from ourselves.

97 Patrick spoke of dialogue in terms of what he called the 'median' (or middle-sized) group. His first published book on the subject was *From Hate to Koinonia through Dialogue in the large group. Social Dreaming and Work*

98 Taking the number of people involved into account had led me to consider what I called N-logue. Dealing with relatively few people - 1, 2, 3 and 4 only, not the broad classes of number discussed by de Mare - I devised forms of conversation deriving from the number of people: monologue, dialogue, triologue and tetradlogue.

99 See his book *Social Dreaming and Work*, Karnac, 1998 and the description online by Gila Ofer at <https://groupanalyticsociety.co.uk/social-dreaming-matrix/>. One of my video conversations with him is available on You Tube <https://youtu.be/geyZSvfShKo>.

100 An early researcher into dialogue reported that, whereas he felt while taking part in the dialogue that meaningful ideas were passed over and not attended to, when he came to review transcripts of meetings he found that in fact every idea was taken up and incorporated in the ongoing process. This appeared to be happening 'of itself' and was not in the 'consciousness' of individuals but only in the *group as a whole*.

## The Fourth Way, A Hazardous Path - Part Two

This point leads me on to theatre. It has appeared to me, and others, that there was a tendency in the body of teachings that emerged in the fourth way to concentrate on individuals, rather as a separate beings. The group work was taken to be important there was very little evidence of any substance to it. (I use the word ‘substance’ in mind of Doris Lessing’s phrase ‘the substance of we-feeling’ that she imagined – in her series of novels *Canopus in Argos* - came from a higher world down to our world, Shikasta or Earth. The inner, active exercises, although conducted in groups located in the individual. Gurdjieff’s approach even seems to have focused on generating friction between people. The idea of being loving and supportive was implicitly regarded as indulgence.

Of course, Gurdjieff was well aware of the power of the arts, having created writings, music and dances himself. In his *Beelzebub’s Tales* he tells a story of Beelzebub being in Babylon at the time of the forced gathering there of various peoples and sages in the 6th century BCE. He speaks of a Society for the Adherents of Legominism, legonomism being his term for the intentional transmission of knowledge from the past to the future. On Saturdays the sages would explore theatre. Beelzebub says it was his favourite thing.<sup>101</sup>

Exposure to other people of almost any kind is dramatic. I will say that encounters with others are essential to elicit an encounter with oneself. The word ‘consciousness’ literally means together-knowing and has long seemed to me to suggest that consciousness is something between us rather located in us just as de Mare considered mind to be. I often remark that we do not have minds as such but acquire them when we are engaged in the world with others in tasks and conversations. Such a relational view is now emerging in physics.<sup>102</sup>

Bennett, in his scheme of energies posited a category that was beyond time and space starting with consciousness. This lent weight to the argument that consciousness is not coming out of people but unfolding into them from what David Bohm called the implicate order. The implicate order is qualitatively infinite.<sup>103</sup> It is interesting that in the fourth way literature there is often mention of self-remembering as ‘being seen’. I believe that with the art of the theatre this becomes explicate. This suggests that an audience can act as the presence of the implicate order. There is a sense of this in theatre when the audience is aware of the whole world in which the action on the stage is taking place.

Theatre could be a way of bringing out and exploring how the implicate order unfolds in us. This was implicit in Foulke’s work with groups that inspired Gordon Lawrence to adopt the term ‘matrix’ to mean something akin to Bohm’s implicate order. I must mention here the cross over that can be seen between dialogue and theatre which has been studied as the drama of ideas. I have become engaged in theatrical practice through colleague and friend Jesai Jayhmes (see <https://www.teatrodelatierra.com/> that included what seemed to me an evolution from my making recordings of Gurdjieff’s writings to making them dramatic with a small group that met online.<sup>104</sup> The historical background to the idea of a drama of ideas is centred on Plato who, some claim, was initially inspired to be a dramatist, which led him to the literary innovation

<sup>101</sup> Gurdjieff’s pupil Orage reported that Gurdjieff said his book was for the future, for artists who would take some of his ideas and make them into works of art.

<sup>102</sup> “Science, in Rovelli’s estimation, is not about certainty; it is informed by a radical distrust of certainty. What is real? What exists? Helgoland, beautifully translated by Erica Segre and Simon Carnell, is the beginning of wisdom in these things.” See: Helgoland by Carlo Rovelli review – the mysteries of quantum mechanics <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/23/helgoland-by-carlo-rovelli-review-the-mysteries-of-quantum-mechanics>

<sup>103</sup> “Bohm believed that the weirdness of the behavior of quantum particles is caused by unobserved forces, maintaining that space and time might actually be derived from an even deeper level of objective reality. In the words of F. David Peat, Bohm considered that what we take for reality are “surface phenomena, explicate forms that have temporarily unfolded out of an underlying implicate order”. That is, the implicate order is the ground from which reality emerges.” From *Implicate and explicate order* by Teo Spiller at <https://spiller.si/implicate-and-explicate-order-david-bohm/#:~:text=The%20implicate%20%28also%20referred%20to%20as%20the%20%20E2%80%9Cenfolding%20%20D%29,order%20includes%20the%20abstractions%20that%20humans%20normally%20perceive.>

<sup>104</sup> Gurdjieff’s book *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* was often read aloud in groups but with little skill, rather like the stereotyped image of a reading by an Anglican vicar! My colleague Jesai Jayhmes had seized upon Gurdjieff injunction at the beginning of the book to read in three ways, the second of which was to read it (aloud) as if to someone else. I had long adopted an expressive way of reading the text which was sometimes frowned upon by fourth way people steeped in the ‘seriousness’ of the text. This turned into making a series of recordings, beginning with Beelzebub. Jesai brought his knowledge of acting and performance to coach people in reading texts meaningfully – not, I must say, by putting emotion into them, which is a big mistake but by bringing out the feelings and meaning in them. The work with Jesai led me to write new texts based on Beelzebub, that I came to call ‘post-Gurdjieff Beelzebub’. See on You Tube the video ‘The New Design’ <https://studio.youtube.com/video/SR-JIP7ZDbQ/edit>

of his dialogues featuring Socrates.<sup>105</sup>

The prospect now is to look into the phenomenology of speech in dialogue and theatre as a way of revelation of what is going on in human reality, but might well have the more modest theme of what is going on in human reality, that might well include the more modest theme of the drama of the fourth way.

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<sup>105</sup> See *The Drama of Ideas* by Martin Puchner

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## The Fourth Way, A Hazardous Path - Part Two

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