

Karnak and the Spirit of Performance

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Abstract

This article is an abridged version of a doctoral thesis on the Australian actor, Diane Cilento, and her relationship with the Fourth Way teachings of Gurdjieff, principally inspired by her time studying at Sherborne School in the United Kingdom with J.G. Bennett. While Cilento is best-known for her film and stage work, and also being married to the actor Sean Connery, it is significant to note that she was amongst the initial intake of students when Bennett transformed Sherborne House into the International Academy for Continuous Education in 1971. During her mentorship under Bennett Cilento became immersed in the mystical branch of Islam called Sufism, influenced by such scholars as Hasan Shushud and Bulet Rauf, with whom Cilento helped in the translation of works by the thirteenth century Andalusian saint, Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. Cilento would later collaborate with Bulet again on her BBC documentary on the Whirling Dervishes in Turkey, *Turning*. In the late 1970s Cilento returned to Australia where she introduced to a succession of students and spiritual seekers, via course work at her North Queensland property, Karnak, Gurdjieff's Fourth Way concepts infused with Sufism and Eastern philosophy, and rigorous physical work. In the process, the enterprise created a self-sustainable organic farm. Later, with her husband, the playwright Anthony Shaffer, Cilento built the 400-seat Karnak Playhouse that opened in 1992 which she ran as a performance venue until her death in 2011.

Keywords: Bennett, Cilento, Gurdjieff, Karnak, Connery, Sufi

Introduction

The central position taken in my doctoral dissertation completed in 2023 was that the late Australian actor, Diane Cilento (1933-2011) served as one of the seminal figures in the continuation of Fourth Way teachings in the later decades following the death in 1949 of its founding architect George Ivanovich Gurdjeff.¹ This bold claim is based on the vision and subsequent actions taken in the continuation of the Fourth Way work she undertook while studying at Sherborne House under her teacher and mentor, J.G. Bennett. Cilento did not simply attempt to replicate either what Gurdjieff imparted at the Prieuré des Basses Loges with his Institute of Harmonious Development of Man in the 1920's and later in his 6 Rue des Colonels Renards Paris apartment with his largely female student body during the war years, nor again what Bennett initiated through his International Academy for Continuous Education at Sherborne in the UK during the early 1970s. Rather, Cilento raised the level of teachings to

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¹ Jeremy Johnson, *Diane Cilento, Karnak and the Spirit of Performance*, PhD. (Theatre and Performance Studies), University of Sydney, 2023.

quite a different octave entirely with the establishment of the Karnak Fourth Way school in Far North Queensland throughout the 1980s. The school evolved through the development of 200 acres of Daintree rainforest by Cilento and her students into an oasis of organic self-sufficiency. Later, a further octave was initiated with the construction on the property of the 400 seat amphitheatre which operated as a performance venue from 1992 until Cilento's passing in 2011. Significantly, this opened Cilento up to collaboration with the local Indigenous people, the Kuku Yalanji, and the production of Karnak's laser show *Creation* that ran twice weekly for six years. The Melbourne *Age* newspaper heralded Karnak as "A National Treasure."²

What makes Cilento such a compelling - and even complex - figure within the pedagogy of Fourth Way teachings is that she shares with both Bennett, and obviously, Gurdjieff, the significant attribute of presence and charismatic personality. These individuals were already figures of noteworthy accomplishment prior to their roles in establishing schools. Gurdjieff, though, could hardly have been accused of bequeathing a comprehensive blueprint of Fourth Way principles of self-realization for his acolytes to follow, much less a curriculum to share with aspirants desiring to awaken from the slumber of automatism and mechanical behaviour.

Following his death in 1949, as is the case with so many seers proclaiming awakened spiritual and mental development, there was a 'dilution' of Gurdjieff's teachings, not least through the loss of his ability to personally transfer this knowledge to others. In the decades that followed, the continuation of Gurdjieff's 'Fourth Way' work became splintered into many groups and study centres all over the world, each laying claim to 'real' knowledge both exoteric and esoteric. Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski noted in his essay on Gurdjieff "A Kind of Volcano":

I think Gurdjieff's successors have come up against an enormous difficulty. It's a terrible business, because there is, on one hand, the danger of freezing the thing, of putting it in a refrigerator in order to keep it impeccable; and, on the other hand, if one does not freeze it there is the danger of dilution caused by facility.³

Indeed, the exceptions to any such dilution let alone the freezing of teachings can be found on the roads taken by Bennett and later Cilento. Like Gurdjieff, Bennett and Cilento were unorthodox individuals all of whom received significant backlash for their enterprises undertaken. Bennett was never perceived as a legitimate heir to Fourth Way praxis in the same vein as Jeanne de Salzmann in France, Lord Pentland in the United States, and Mme Sophia Ouspensky in London, as well as their designated satellite offshoots throughout Europe and the Americas. In the aftermath of Gurdjieff's passing amidst the various groups each staking their authoritative position in the continuation of his teaching, Bennett became a pariah amongst orthodox circles. Bennett had already set up his own school at Coombe Springs outside London in 1946, and was certainly not viewed as an authentic transmitter of Gurdjieff's teachings. However, Bennett claimed that, shortly before he died, Gurdjieff had designated him as his successor, charging him with the responsibility and authority to continue Fourth Way teachings in London. Bennett reported that, during his last days in Paris, Gurdjieff had told him "[O]nly

² Diane Cilento, *My Nine Lives* (Sydney: Penguin, 2006).

³ Jerzy Grotowski, 'A Kind of Volcano', in *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings*, eds Jacob Needleman and George Baker (London: Continuum, 1998), p. 101.

you can repay for all my labours”.⁴ Following Ouspensky’s death in 1947, Mme Ouspensky relocated from London to New York, leaving Bennett to assume leadership of Fourth Way pedagogy in the United Kingdom.⁵

Bennett’s heterodox approach, which involved an inquiry beyond Gurdjieff’s teachings, and a willingness to include the teachings and methodologies of other disciplines within the framework of Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way almost at once banished him from the orthodox circles of Gurdjieff praxis. Indeed, more than seventy years later, Bennett still remains an outsider as evidenced by a recent website posting:

In the early 1950s, Bennett expanded the size and scope of his community at Coombe Springs outside of London, and planned a series of public lectures on Gurdjieff’s ideas. This initiative to publicly promote Gurdjieff’s teachings met with strong disapproval from Jeanne de Salzmann. In 1955, she travelled to London and removed Bennett from any role as an authorized teacher of the Work in England.⁶

The groundswell of animosity that Bennett elicited from the legitimated circles of Gurdjieffian teaching would have garnered no end of sympathies from Cilento, given her own clashes over the decades with hierarchical orthodoxies and structures. Bennett’s heterodoxy within Fourth Way praxis would have been one of the signs confirming for her that this was indeed a man in pursuit of truth.

In his autobiography, Bennett recalls a particularly painful meeting with Madame Ouspensky in New York, in which he proposed his ideas for effecting a reconciliation between their respective approaches. He recalls her laughing at him, telling him “[a]ways Mr Bennett wishes to serve humanity. He wants unity and does not see that it cannot come without understanding.”⁷ As Bennett was fully aware, however, Gurdjieff was dissatisfied with any illusion of harmony in circumstances in which substance was lacking, citing one of the aphorisms posted in the study house at The Prieuré: “The worse the conditions the more productive the work: providing you work consciously.”⁸ Bennett expanded this concept, writing that:

[s]o long as we remember that we can do nothing and understand nothing in our conditioned nature we shall be protected from the stupidity of thinking that we are better than those we teach.⁹

The aspect of Bennett’s teaching that affected Cilento profoundly was the importance of perseverance. The key here was to recalibrate her naturally low boredom threshold, and to

⁴ J. G. Bennett, *Witness: The Autobiography of John Bennett* (London: Harper, 1983), p. 266.

⁵ Carole Cusack notes that groups linked to the Gurdjieff Foundation/ Institut Gurdjieff are considered orthodox, and those linked to non-Foundation teachers like John Godolphin Bennett, Francis Roles, Annie-Lou Staveley, and Maurice Nicoll are considered heterodox”. Carole M. Cusack, ‘The Enneagram: G. I. Gurdjieff’s Esoteric Symbol’, *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2020), p. 36, fn 24.

⁶ ‘Gurdjieff’s Successors and Teaching Lines’, *Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way* (2023), p. 8. At: <https://www.gurdjieffandfourthway.org/pdf/Successors&teaching%20lines.pdf>.

⁷ Bennett, *Witness*, p. 275.

⁸ Bennett, *Witness*, p. 275

⁹ Bennett, *Witness*, p. 377.

value process over results and final outcomes: The Work itself was its own reward. In Bennett's pedagogy expectation of instant gratification would only lead to a continuation of disappointment and demoralization. Throughout her life, until she attended Sherborne, Cilento had responded to unfavourable circumstances by simply escaping. Bennett taught, as he wrote in *Creative Thinking*, not to react to “[i]nner resistance” when undertaking a practice, in expectation of spectacular results after a short amount of effort, but instead, when “[s]omething in us revolts and is ready to take any excuse for stopping this and doing something else instead.”¹⁰

While opposition to Bennett largely elicited from other Fourth Way practice groups, resistance to Cilento's New Age concepts came from the local populace in Far North Queensland and the mavens of all things cultural who could not understand why the most acclaimed Australian film star at that time and former wife of Sean Connery would choose to live in the Daintree rainforest rather than the vibrant metropolises of Sydney or Melbourne, or especially her home turf of Brisbane. Of the time when Cilento moved back to Australia she noted in her autobiography:

[T]he Murdoch press had announced I'd started a nudist colony in the Daintree ... Because there was no pigeon-hole that the media could fit us into, and nothing sensational enough to generate the kind of copy to sell newspapers, they insinuated many things. It was widely believed we were into the dope-growing business, or preparing to be, but it wasn't until our second year there that the Police raided us. Rumour abounded and it wasn't long before we began to feel the backlash of being outsiders.¹¹

While a more comprehensive examination of Gurdjieff and his legacy has been documented in both my doctoral thesis,¹² and earlier in my Master's thesis *The Shock of Presence*,¹³ the purpose of this article is to highlight in brief the trajectory of Cilento's role as a Fourth Way teacher, looking at the series of journeys taken prior to the establishment of Karnak.

Cilento's life can be divided into three distinct journeys, each pivotal in the depths of perception and abilities acquired to both comprehend and share the spiritual and creative wisdom aligned with Fourth Way concepts. The wellspring of multi-faceted experiences in Cilento's life enhanced her pedagogical credentials to ensure the Work was both relevant for the people seeking such knowledge within the currency and culture of the times.

From Mooloolaba to the Royal Court

Diane Cilento was the fifth of six children, born on 2 April 1932. Her parents, Sir Raphael and Lady Phyllis Cilento, were distinguished physicians with her father earning a knighthood early in his career from his work on tropical diseases. In an earlier draft of her biography provisionally titled *A Garden Amidst Flames* Cilento claimed that her father spoke some nineteen languages

¹⁰ J. G. Bennett, *Creative Thinking* (Bennett Books, 1998), p. 7.

¹¹ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 415.

¹² Johnson, *Diane Cilento, Karnak and the Spirit of Performance*.

¹³ Jeremy Johnson, *The Shock of Presence Peter Brook and Jerry Gotowski – The Reinvention of Australian Theatre*, Masters Thesis (Theatre and Performance Studies), University of Sydney, 2017.

including Arabic, Malayan, and Mandarin, from which she credits inheriting, to a lesser degree, her quick ear. From a very early age Raphael taught her to recite in Italian the *Ballatette of Cavalcante* and Dante's *O Cierco Mondo*. Cilento writes that “[i]t amused him greatly to have this small creature declaiming the mighty words and lofty sentiments of the great poet at meetings of the Dante Alighieri Society where he [Raphael] was chairman.”¹⁴ Raphael could also be credited for instilling in Diane her earliest connection to First Nation peoples when he taught her the ‘Words of Power’ he claimed an old Aboriginal man had taught him when he was a boy in outback South Australia. Cilento recalls how, when she was very little, she snuck into her parent’s bedroom at dawn and stood at the foot of her parent’s bed where they were both amused and impressed by her reciting:

[U]nti mijiti pull purra curra tangyannina Uljung gnarl pungarrung Nagoorra bobberi
umpoopallati (then three times in falsetto) Pooo … Pooo … Pooo! Erg er … Yerg nyer
…nyarran garran nyarran nyerri Alakazoom … Alakaboubbella.¹⁵

No translation is offered by Cilento for the ‘words of power’ her father passed on to her, though given their respective accomplishments in life these words must have generated a certain effect. For Diane, the bond she shared with her father was forged “[l]ong ago in other eons, without the restrictions of linear time, without the constraints of family ties or any worldly thing [...] I have never had another relationship with a person in my life that was quite so intimate nor so unconditional”.¹⁶

Phyllis Cilento was no less proficient. An advocate of vitamins and children’s health, she authored numerous books and from the 1960s to 1980s, wrote a regular column in the *Courier Mail* under the *nom de plume* ‘Medical Mother’ and ‘Mother M.D.’ Her advice on healthy eating and the benefits of Vitamin E and C became the go to medical source for several generations of Queensland mothers. It is not unreasonable to speculate that Lady Cilento’s widely applied recommendations that children be fed plenty of fresh food along with vitamin supplements may have well contributed to Queensland punching so far above its national weight in producing superlative athletes.¹⁷ Diane inherited her mother’s preference for avoiding preservatives and processed foods, as evidenced by Karnak and the pesticide-free, organic lifestyle Cilento saw as a prerequisite for physical, mental and spiritual growth.

¹⁴ In her 1994 biography of Raphael Cilento, Fedora Gould Fisher notes that many of the “urbane and cosmopolitan members” of the Dante Alighieri Society were “fervent Italian fascists whereas others were Australian scholars interested in Italian culture.” Members’ loyalty as Australian citizens was compromised when Mussolini and Hitler signed the Rome Berlin Axis Agreement (1938) and the “Pact of Steel” (1939) causing Prime Minister Menzies to declare war on Germany. Cilento at this point suspended the Dante Alighieri Society “Until further notice.” Fedora Gould Fisher, *Raphael Cilento: A Biography* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1994), p. 126.

¹⁵ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 5.

¹⁷ In 2018 the Cilento family tried to stop the name change of the Lady Cilento Hospital when action groups demanded the name of the hospital be changed citing comments on Blacks and gay people made by Lady Cilento in the 1930s which were considered now as racist and homophobic. See Josh Bavas and Chris O’Brien, ‘Brisbane’s Lady Cilento Hospital to Be Renamed to “clear up confusion”,’ *ABC News*, 31 July (2018). At: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-31/name-change-review-lady-cilento-childrens-hospital-brisbane/10054784>

The cosmopolitan demeanour of Diane's parents and their progressive ideas in 1940's Australia which contradicted those of their Anglo compatriots must have affected their youngest daughter. For any investigation undertaken into the phenomenology of disobedience, Diane Cilento would be a seminal case study: disobedience was a lifelong trait she never outgrew. By her early teenage years Diane had been expelled from two schools and declared as '*incorrigible*' by a medical counsellor to whom her mother had sent her, hoping to curb her recalcitrant behaviour.¹⁸ Reflecting on a prank she pulled on the headmistress during a dismal stint as a boarder at Glennie Memorial Girls School in Toowoomba, Diane discovered the secret to acting. To escape from school and go into town Diane pretended to be her own mother, calling the headmistress from a phone booth down the road from the school, requesting that Diane be put on a bus the next Saturday to join her as she was giving a lecture in Toowoomba and would not have time to pick Diane up. When the prank worked, Diane repeated it, this time taking along a few other girls from school for a day at the Toowoomba Show. Eventually discovered, Diane was shamed by the Headmistress in front of the school assembly. Expelled from her boarding house, she became, for a short-lived period, the sole occupant of 'Blank House' before being expelled from Glennie.¹⁹ Cilento recalled in her autobiography that:

[w]hat I had stumbled upon in that telephone booth was the secret to 'acting' – and the mystery behind every single confidence trickster, spy, practical joker and defrauder in the business. You have to know beyond any shred of a doubt that you *are* who you say you are. It's as simple, and as difficult as that.²⁰

Following her dismissal from her next school, Sommerville House on Vulture St, Brisbane, which had failed to imbue in the teenage Cilento conduct befitting of a young woman, the Cilento family packed up their Brisbane home and moved to New York to join their father who was by then working at the United Nations, as Director for Refugees and Displaced Persons.²¹

The New York in which the Cilento family arrived in 1947 was hitting its stride as the undisputed cultural capital of the post war world. Even though PS 83 Washington Irving High School on 17th and 3rd could not have been more of a contrast to Glennie in Toowoomba or Sommerville House, Brisbane, Cilento did not last long there either. There were thirty or forty

¹⁸ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 21.

¹⁹ Cilento noted that the headmistress announced in front of the school that Diane was the first girl ever to have to resign from her boarding house and be consigned to Blank House. It was only when Cilento realized how much more freedom she had as the only member of Blank House and how much fun it was to be the CEO and not be under the thumb of prefects and house rules, she advertised on the school notice board for other girls to resign from their house and join her in Blank House. When other girls started joining up and Diane began the interviewing process for prospective candidates, she was then told to pack her bags and leave the school for good. See Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, pp. 28-29.

²⁰ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 25.

²¹ Both of Diane's older sisters, Ruth (1925-2016) who became a doctor and Margaret (1923-2006) a painter, were former alums of Sommerville House. Artist Margaret Olley (1923-2011) befriended Margaret Cilento while at Sommerville House. They both went on to study at The National Art School in East Sydney. Margaret then continued studies taking up residencies in New York, the South of France and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris before returning to Brisbane in 1950 where she taught from her studio at Kangaroo Point. Margaret Cilento was amongst the first Australian artists to exhibit Abstract Expressionist work in Australia. Brisbane Moreton Galleries (1951) and Sydney Macquarie Galleries (1952) Artist Anthony Underhill (1923-1977) credits Cilento for introducing Abstract Expressionism to Brisbane. See Anita Callaway, 'Margaret Cilento', *Design and Art Australia Online* (1995). At: <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/margaret-cilento/biography/>.

mostly African-American students in every class and no-one wore a uniform to distinguish the teachers from the students.²² After another clash with authority during a ‘Secretarial Studies’ class, Cilento absented herself from school altogether, and took to exploring the streets of New York, to which she became hooked.²³

By her own account of school life Cilento missed out on “[t]he extreme titillation of awaiting exam results” and “[n]ever let schooling interfere with my education.”²⁴ Education became, for Diane, visits to the Metropolitan Museum, the Hayden Planetarium, and paying twenty-three cents to sit in the basement of MOMA to take in the movies of Von Stroheim, Eisenstein, and John Ford.²⁵ Cilento’s parents agreed to her request to take ballet lessons at the Michael Fokine School of Dance at Carnegie Hall. Cilento paid for the classes herself by taking on two part time jobs. By the late 1940s, due to the innovations by the likes of Agnes de Mille, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham, dance had become the signature artform for which New York led the way for expression and excellence. Balanchine’s New York City Ballet opened in 1948, the year following the Cilentos’ arrival in New York. Parenthetically, the young empresario - Lincoln Kirstein, responsible for bringing Balanchine from Europe to New York - counted Gurdjieff as the greatest influence on his life from the time he spent with him in Paris.²⁶

Childhood memories of a magical production of *Swan Lake* she had seen in Brisbane years ago bore little resemblance to what went on in the dusty little room in Carnegie Hall in which the teenage Cilento, along with fifty other aspiring ballerinas were being shouted at to perform certain exercises to a piano thumping out the same Chopin pieces over and over. As she recalled, “[t]he vision of myself as a prima ballerina was growing fainter every time I went to class.”²⁷

A chance encounter with a graduating student in a lift at Carnegie Hall led to the opportunity to audition for American Academy of Dramatic Arts (AADA) which occupied the entire top floor of the building.²⁸ On the strength of her delivery of Juliet’s ‘Gallop apace’ speech (*Romeo and Juliet* Act 3, scene ii) given to her to learn for the audition, Diane was

²² Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 36.

²³ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 33.

²⁴ From a 1992 speech given at a Queensland University of Technology graduation ceremony in which Cilento quoted Sir Walter Raleigh who in 1593 described exams as “[a] strange practice, where people who don’t want to know, ask questions of those who cannot tell”.

²⁵ Cilento writes of Von Stroheim being one of her all-time screen idols from his silent films, *Foolish Wives* (1922), *Greed* (1924) and *Queen Kelly* (1932). She recalls a performance in London in the 1950s when playing a doomed Hollywood starlet in the Clifford Odets play *The Big Knife* opposite actor/director, Sam Wanamaker. Von Stroheim turned up in the audience sitting in one of the boxes for an evening performance with a tall French woman “dripping with jewels”. The cast lined up on stage afterwards to meet him. Cilento recalls that Von Stroheim’s manner was exactly like that of his persona in *Sunset Boulevard*. He was ramrod straight and sported a monocle: “Though not a tall man” she remembers, “[h]is presence was electric and his duelling scars shone dully in the onstage working lights”. Cilento recounts that she was tongue-tied with awe when it came time to shake his hand. He covered her embarrassment by “lavishing compliments” on her performance. Cilento finally managed to ask if Hollywood was really as bad as depicted in Odets’ play. “[H]e pondered the question for some time with his head lowered before raising his rather reptilian eyes to mine and saying with deliberation, ‘[M]y dear young lady, it is VERSE!’” Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 78.

²⁶ Lincoln Kirstein, *Mosaic: Memoirs* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994) p. 151.

²⁷ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 36.

²⁸ The student in the lift who suggested that Cilento audition for AADA was then known as Anna Maria Italiano and later changed her name to Anne Bancroft. Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, pp. 37-38.

accepted into the course, barely sixteen years old, requiring parental consent to attend, and a five hundred dollar enrolment fee. The same day as she was accepted into AADA, her parents received a letter from PS 83 informing them of their daughter's truancy. Given that this appeared to be Diane's third strike out for conventional education, her parents agreed to her joining the Academy, noting that their daughter's demonstrated talent for mimicry may as well as be put to good use, her father conceding, according to Cilento, that – “[i]f you're going to act, you'd better be good at it. There's nothing less forgivable than bad acting.”²⁹ During her time studying at AADA, Cilento was apprenticed to the Barter Theatre in Virginia where she understudied all the female roles and played children of both sexes. This is also where she learnt much of the technical and backstage business required by a touring company where everybody is expected to participate in all elements of performance making.

Sir Raphael's workload, with its focus on disaster relief in Palestine, however, had more than doubled since the assassination in 1948 of his colleague, Count Bernadotte, and Raphael now found himself residing almost permanently in the Middle East. Before Diane could start back in New York for the Winter term at AADA, Lady Cilento decided the family had to move back to Australia, via London. There would be nowhere for Diane to stay in New York to continue studies at AADA, as her sister Margaret, who had been working out of a studio on MacDougall St in Greenwich Village was now in Paris and about to take up an artist's residency at a farmhouse near Cassis-Sur-Mer in the South of France.³⁰

Before she left for London, the Head of AADA had given Diane an introduction to Sir Kenneth Barnes who held a similar position at AADA's Unite Kingdom counterpart, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). Given the training acquired from both AADA and a season in Summer Stock, Diane sailed through the audition process, again with Juliet's 'Gallop apace' speech and one of Hilda Wangel's from Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. On the strength of her audition, Cilento was accepted into RADA alongside another Australian, Michael Blakemore, who went on to become one of the most distinguished directors on the British stage.³¹

Cilento remarks upon the rigour and professionalism of the training at RADA.³² A great deal of emphasis was placed on vocal training, not only for stage work but also because RADA served as a finishing school for international students wishing to speak English with a proper accent. No doubt being a colonial female at the Royal Academy was enough for Cilento to be singled out for having the worst accent in the class. However, because she spoke Italian, Cilento completed her first term being assigned a one-line walk-on role in the final year graduate production of Elmer Rice's *See Naples and Die*, a comedic vehicle to demonstrate for agents and industry professionals the talents of the 1951 graduating class which included Joan Collins in a lead role.³³ As a result of that walk-on Cilento received a letter of introduction from Jimmy

²⁹ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 42.

³⁰ The Cassis-Sur-Mer farmhouse residency in the South of France became a transient stop for Australian painters including Margaret Olley and Jeffrey Smart, on a European sojourn during the postwar years.

³¹ Michael Blakemore (1928-) became Resident Director at the Lyric Hammersmith in 1980 have been passed over as Olivier's replacement at the National Theatre, a position that instead was given to his then rival, Sir Peter Hall (1930-2017).

³² Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 50.

³³ Elmer Rice was born Elmer Leopold Reizenstein in New York in 1892. Rice won the Pulitzer Prize in 1929 for his play *Street Scene* set amongst the New York slums. During the 1920s he was considered one of the great playwrights of American theatre. Though a prolific writer up until his death in 1967, his work hasn't endured in the same way as his contemporaries such as Kaufman and Hart and Eugene O'Neill. Although known as a 'realist',

Fraser, the Scottish-born founder of Fraser & Dunlop, which to this day remains one of the leading literary and talent agents in London.

The prolonged absence of Raphael in the Middle East, however, together with knowledge of marital indiscretions, led Lady Cilento to believe the marriage was over, requiring, therefore, the family to move home. At the end of her third term at RADA, Cilento joined her family in their return to Brisbane. During his tenure with the United Nations, Raphael had been instrumental in the creation of the World Health Organization (WHO) and in setting up training programs amongst the fledgling new Arab states to address problems of shelter and food shortage. For this Raphael was made Commander of the National Order for the Cedar of Lebanon. Upon receiving the letter from his wife, however, announcing the end of their marriage he resigned from his position and returned with the family to Queensland.

A typical Australian teenager Cilento revelled in being back to the surf and the clean white beaches of home. After a week, however, she was overwhelmed by culture shock, observing: “[e]veryone in Brisbane seemed to have taken shots of novocaine.”³⁴ Prior to her leaving RADA mid-course, the director Sir Kenneth Barnes had offered Diane a scholarship to continue studies. Upon receiving a letter affirming that the scholarship was still open, Cilento’s parents agreed to her returning to London, earning her passage in a shared cabin in steerage on the *Strathaird* by scraping together her fare from a combination of family donations, giving dance lessons, and participating in local radio broadcasts.

Cilento’s first film role while still at RADA was as one of the chorus girls in John Huston’s film *Moulin Rouge* being shot at Pinewood Studios. During the 1952 Christmas break Cilento got a job at Bertrum Mills Circus at Olympia in London which required her, in fishnets and sequins, to ride an elephant three times a day in the Grand Parade. Cilento notes in her memoirs how at home she felt amongst the cosmopolitan, multi-lingual crowd of circus folk who hailed from all corners of the world. Lacking any formal inhibitions, they would move around the changing room between shows completely naked except for their boots. In this marginalized demi-monde Cilento found kinship with characters akin to her own sensibilities, perceiving their resilient temperament, non-conformist outlook, and their perseverance in perfecting their skills.³⁵ Cilento conceived of her playhouse as a venue for Australia’s own marginalized demi-monde. In an address to the Mater Hospital in Brisbane decades later Cilento stated of her vision for Karnak to be “[a] future community where people of imagination can live and work together … where they are free to create and interact and learn from each other”.³⁶ It is also from her experience working with circus folk, particularly the lead clown, Coco, how to command attention through both presence and the performer’s total investment into believing the character they were inhabiting, confirming again what she had

Rice felt an acute affinity for German expressionist theatre; see William R. Elwood, ‘An interview with Elmer Rice on Expressionism’, *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1968), pp. 1-7. Joan Collins (b. 1933) was an English actress, known primarily for her television work. Of note was her portrayal of Alexis Carrington in the hit series *Dynasty* during the 1980s.

³⁴ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 54.

³⁵ Cilento writes of her collaboration with the Living Theatre Troupe after their arrest in Italy. See Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, pp. 298-301. One of the main objectives of Karnak and its playhouse was a place where those marginalized from the mainstream performance arena could practice and demonstrate their skills.

³⁶ Diane Cilento, unpublished address to Mater Hospital Brisbane (2002). The typed transcript is kept in the Karnak offices.

understood years before pulling the prank on the headmistress at Glennie. This would become crucial in her film and stage work and later encounter with the Fourth Way pedagogy.

Throughout the 1950s Cilento was busy with back-to-back film and stage work. With all due credit to her agent, Jimmy Fraser, who realized the star potential of his young client, Cilento signed up for a seven-year contract with Sir Alexander Korda's British Lion Films. Cilento's colleague and director, Tony Richardson, noted that while Fraser understood her potential, none of the British film companies she signed with during the course of her career had a clue what to do with her:

With her long mermaid-blonde hair, her sea blue eyes, her long, lithe body, her electricity and sexuality, Diane would have been a great movie star ...[t]heir inability to see what they'd got and their lack of imagination, they'd tried to fit her into their own stereotypes—self-sacrificing nurses or jolly barmaids—to all of which her exotic temperament was completely foreign. Perhaps had she gone to America her whole career would have been different. But there was also a quirky metaphysical side [to her].³⁷

It is this metaphysical aspect evident from her earliest years which is largely absent in the commentary on Cilento's film career. It was not so much the films themselves from which her career and life developed but from the experiences she had and the encounters she shared while filming or during the rehearsal process for stage performances which informed her idiographic understanding and adumbrated the modalities which would impact upon the decisions made decades later.

In this regard, Cilento's most important film while under contract to British Lion Films is the first film in which she was cast—as the sole female character—in Roy Ward Baker's *Passage Home* (1955). Her co-star, Peter Finch, considered an English-born Australian actor, had previously been involved in the production of a documentary titled *Primitive People* by Gaumont British Films, a film about the nomadic Wongurri First Nations people who lived on the shores of the Arnhem territory on the coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Finch's involvement in the filming of the First Nation's people of the Arnhem not only resonates with the earliest experiences of contact between settlers and First Nation people in Australia, but anticipates, — and can be understood as indirectly informing Cilento's subsequent collaboration with the Kuku Yalanji people of Mossman Gorge decades later, which had already been ignited by Raphael's tales of his encounters with First Nation's people he passed on to his children when they were growing up in Mooloolaba.³⁸ Cilento writes how one evening in the bar at Pinewood Studios during the filming of *Passage Home* Finch demonstrated and taught Cilento a dance—the Sandfly dance—which he had learnt from his time amongst the Wongurris. Cilento

³⁷ Tony Richardson, *The Long-distance Runner: An Autobiography* (New York, William Morrow and Company, 1993), p. 131.

³⁸ While only ten years old Raphael was allowed by his father during a school break to join a trekking expedition of Afghan Cameleers. At twelve Raphael accompanied Police Inspector Chance on an overland journey to investigate a murder. At the outpost town of Innamincka Cilento witnessed first-hand the brutal injustices afflicted the Europeans towards the indigenous people. Upon hearing an unfounded rumour of a white man being beaten and killed when he visited a local Aboriginal camp, nine Aborigines were subsequently killed. Cilento recalls his disillusionment with the British Justice system as no one was held to account and no white man had been injured or killed in the first place. See Fisher, *Raphael Cilento*, pp. 6-7.

describes it as “[a]n energetic stomp punctuated with short snorting breaths with one arm waving.”³⁹

Following the filming of *Passage Home* in 1955 Cilento married Andrea Volpe, who she describes as “[M]ichelangelo’s *David* come to life,” at the registry office in Kensington.⁴⁰ While her second husband, Sean Connery, had not liked her working at all, preferring that she conform to the traditional spousal role of homemaker, Volpe was quite the opposite revelling in being married to a beautiful rising screen star and happily encouraging her ambitions. Cilento, so encouraged, continued her career, starring alongside Kenneth More in the film adaptation of J.M. Barrie’s play *The Admirable Crichton*. The film became one of the biggest hits at the British box office in 1956 and it was at its London premier where Cilento first caught sight of Sean Connery.⁴¹ Before signing with British Lion Films, however, and embarking on a career in film, Cilento established a formidable reputation for her stage work, and was one of the core group of artists involved at the Royal Court Theatre at its inception. From the beginning, the new Royal Court Theatre went on to produce, not only works by new writers but what was considered, at the time, to be the more controversial works by writers such as Tennessee Williams, Genet, Wesker, Bond, Beckett, Sartre and Pirandello.

The Royal Court most notably launched the career of John Osborne, whose *Look Back in Anger* (1956) shocked and transformed British theatre, ushering in a generation of ‘Angry Young Men’ playwrights and novelists—of note, Kingsley Amis (1922-1995)—and giving voice to a robust working-class maleness, disenchanted with post war Britain in economic decline, and more than ready to lay siege to the traditionalist class system and its incumbent privileges which no one as yet dared challenge.⁴² Director Peter Brook observed that these plays were aimed at :

[c]rackling the spectator on the jaw … douse him with ice-cold water, then force him to address intelligently what has happened to him, then kick him in the balls to bring him back to his senses again (in Motsa 2006, 274).⁴³

While it would be almost two decades before Cilento herself was introduced to Gurdjieff and Fourth Way concepts and principles, Gurdjieff’s work was an influencing factor within the Angry Young Man movement in the 1950s, most significantly on the aspiring writers Colin Wilson (1931-2013) and Stuart Holroyd (1933-2025), both of whom shared an interest in the paranormal, esoteric, and alternative states of consciousness. This was reflected in their work, particularly in the genre of the artist as mystic: Wilson’s *The Outsider* (1956) and Stuart

³⁹ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 90.

⁴⁰ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 79.

⁴¹ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 124.

⁴² In his obituary of Wilson, Marcus Williamson explained that “John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* had just opened at the Royal Court and the term ‘Angry Young Men’, invented by J. B. Priestley, was first used in the New Statesman the following week and stuck,” see Marcus Williamson, ‘Colin Wilson: Author’, *The Independent*, 8 December (2013). At: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/colin-wilson-author-8991678.html>.

⁴³ Zodwa Motsa, ‘A Scourge of the Empire: Wole Soyinka’s Notorious Theatre at the Royal Court’, in *Alternatives within the Mainstream: British Black and Asian Theatres*, ed. Dimple Godwala (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), p. 274.

Holroyd's *Emergence from Chaos* (1957).⁴⁴ Both Wilson and Holroyd were acolytes of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky's teaching of Fourth Way principles. Wilson's insights into Gurdjieff's system and the man himself beginning with *The Outsider*, a further chapter in *The Occult: A History* (1971), and his later work *G.I Gurdjieff: The War Against Sleep* demonstrate a superior understanding of Gurdjieff and his Fourth Way System, second only to Ouspensky in terms of the exegesis explaining Gurdjieffian concepts.

One can see how Wilson would be attracted to Gurdjieff from the definition of the Outsider as perceived by Kingsley Amis in his *Spectator* review of Wilson's book:

[*The Outsider*] being the man who has awakened to the chaos of existence, to the unreality of what the literal-minded take to be reality. He does not accept the conditions of human life, and finds relief from its prison only in moments of terror or ecstasy.⁴⁵

Wilson's own interpretation original of what constitutes an Outsider was as follows:

I have tried to show how, for more than two centuries, certain human beings have come to hate their dependence on the material world, and struggled to escape it. I called them Outsiders.⁴⁶

Although there is little evidence of Wilson having a sustained relationship with any of the known Gurdjieff or Ouspensky groups or institutions, there is record of him spending at least some time at Coombe Springs with Bennett and his group. His presence there is remarked upon by physicist, Anthony Blake who, while at Sherborne, remembers “[h]eckling him [Wilson] while he led theatre workshops.”⁴⁷ Blake also says that his first encounter with the names Gurdjieff and Ouspensky came from reading Wilson's *The Outsider*.⁴⁸

Bonded in Insurrection and the Influence of Yat Malmgren

In 1955 Cilento was cast as Helen of Troy in the West End production of *Tiger at the Gates*, Christopher Fry's translation of Jean Giraudoux's 1935 *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, a drama based on the Trojan Wars from *The Iliad*.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ This has parallels to Motherwell's idea of artists being spiritual guides in a property loving world. See Carole Cusack, 'Gurdjieff and the Angry Young Men: Stuart Holroyd, Colin Wilson and Waking Up in 1950s Britain', *Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences*, Donner Institute, Turku, Finland, 5-7 June (2019).

⁴⁵ Colin Wilson, *The Angry Years: The Rise and Fall of the Angry Young Men* (London: Pavilion Books, 2014), p. 53.

⁴⁶ Wilson, *The Angry Years*, p. 223.

⁴⁷ Cusack, 'Gurdjieff and the Angry Young Men'.

⁴⁸ Anthony Blake, 'The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path', *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 21, nos. 1-2, (2017), pp. 11-39.

⁴⁹ Christopher Fry (1907-2005) was an Anglican convert to Quakerism. His most famous work *The Lady's Not For Burning* (1948) was directed by John Gielgud. He also wrote *Ring Around the Moon* (1950) adapted from Jean Anouilh's *L'invitation au Chateau*, directed by Peter Brook. See Johnson, *The Shock of Presence*. In 2018, my fellow University of Sydney PhD candidate Neil Anderson directed and performed in Fry's medieval verse drama *One Thing More* (1986), presented at the Rudolf Steiner schools in Sydney and Newcastle, and the Steiner Centre in Sydney.

Directed by Harold Clurman (1901-1980) and starring Michael Redgrave *Tiger at the Gates* was a prestigious, large cast production, upon its transfer to Broadway earning Cilento a New York Drama Critics Award in 1956.⁵⁰ This breakthrough role not only established Cilento as a major star, but also laid the foundation for Cilento as the first female Australian actor to become an international film star, paving the way for others in the decades to follow.

More significantly for this article, it was during the earlier runs of the play prior to its West End opening that Cilento met the Swedish dancer and acting teacher Yat Malmgren (1916-2002), leading to a relationship which completely reshaped Cilento's performance technique. This was a meeting, Cilento later wrote, "[t]hat completely changed my concept of acting in the theatre forever."⁵¹ Malmgren, in his synthesis of the Laban system, was striving towards a wholeness of presence, applicable as much to one's life off-stage as it was to performance. In Malmgren's terms, one's body cannot help but reveal the inner emotions and states implicit in 'being', that are distorted by the pressures of habit and social conditioning. British actor Simon Callow made the prescient observation, "Yat Malmgren's teaching is in many ways in the tradition of modern 'esoteric' teachers like Rumi or Gurdjieff."⁵²

Malmgren's seminal impact on Cilento and other actors of the time cannot be understated, not the least of which being Cilento's introduction of Malmgren to Sean Connery. Cilento credits Malmgren's technique with enabling Connery to subdue the unpleasant edge of the character of James Bond as written in Ian Fleming's novels, allowing him to instead imbue Bond with a wicked sense of humour. Describing the practical aspect of this actorly work, Cilento uses Malmgren's very specific technical language: Connery was able to "[m]ake [Bond] move from 'strong and flexible' in movement to 'light and sustained' in vocal delivery."⁵³ Such a privileging of physical technique over psychological analysis is a hallmark of Malmgren's work, itself derived from the foundational work of Rudolf Von Laban. The characteristics described by Cilento have defined the quintessential cool of 007 for the twenty-six Bond movies over the last seven decades.

Cilento herself writes of the instant rapport between Connery and Malmgren:

Although he had no formal training as an actor and still moved as a body builder, Sean possessed an enormous store of emotional energy, which he reserved even from himself. He was instinctive and intelligent but, at the same time, not confident enough to control what he was doing as an actor. Even then, I knew he had a powerful presence and burgeoning talent.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Harold Clurman (1901-1980) founder of the Group Theatre (1931-1941) is credited as one of the principal architects for establishing Stanislavski's work in the United States. He was married to Stella Adler for twenty years and directed over forty productions. He is credited in Uta Hagen's work *'Respect for Acting'* as the most influential figure who awakened her love of acting. See Uta Hagen, *Respect for Acting* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p. 8. It is again ironic to note that Cilento became attached to Yat Malmgren's movement-based teaching while being directed by one of the seminal proponents for the Method's internalised style of acting.

⁵¹ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 104.

⁵² Vladimir Mirodan, *The Way of Transformation (the Laban-Malmgren system of dramatic character analysis)*, PhD dissertation, University of London (Royal Holloway College), 1997, p. 217.

⁵³ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, pp. 205-206

⁵⁴ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 127.

Connery, for example, worked closely with Malmgren to plan his approach to the casting process for the role of James Bond. Approaching the round of meetings and screentests, Connery thought it best to establish himself as an overpowering physical presence—the alpha male. Malmgren agreed, but added a nuance, advising Connery to think about big cat animals through the preparation and subsequent processes, explaining that “[t]hey are very loose.”⁵⁵ Connery was able to build a presence that was powerful and fluidly relaxed—feline—rather than simply ‘hard’.

Cilento herself urged Connery to take the role of Bond. Indeed, she is quoted in an interview from 1964 saying that: “[I]f it weren’t for me, Sean might never have become James Bond.”⁵⁶ Bray is more sanguine, suggesting that it is “[s]retching things” to say that without Cilento there would have been no Connery. At the same time, he concedes that it is unequivocal that:

She helped mould the Sean Connery we have. While Cilento’s latter-day dissings of her former husband have done her few favours, it remains the fact that she did everyone reading this book a big favour.⁵⁷

The dramatic changes Cilento notes in the years following her marriage to Connery in 1962 multiplied as his fame grew. First, there was a reversal in the relationship dynamic when Connery achieved global recognition with the James Bond franchise, overshadowing Cilento’s hard-won and celebrated success on stage and screen. She was no longer the acclaimed actress educating the ingénue Scottish sailor; instead, she was transformed into the envied trophy wife on the arm of the biggest film star Britain had produced.⁵⁸ Second, by the mid-1960s Connery no longer wanted his wife working at all. His superior financial position was weaponised, according to Cilento.⁵⁹ He encouraged her to let go of her own professional ambitions in favour of a more domestic position in the relationship as a wife and mother. Cilento struggled to accommodate her husband’s wishes. The situation was exacerbated by the tension between Cilento’s spendthrift disposition and Connery’s Scottish parsimony, a tension which Cilento cited as a major reason for her continuing to accept opportunities to work. In the end, the most intolerable factor, overriding all others, Cilento confesses, was her being relegated to “[t]he most ghastly of all roles, the ghostly wife in the background”.⁶⁰

No precedent in twentieth century Britain existed to prepare Cilento and Connery for the Bond mania which took place in the 1960s. The rival ‘Beatlemania’ was quite different for McCartney, Lennon, Harrison and Starr as they were young, single lads in their early 20s and not trying to live a normal family life raising two children in the London suburbs in the midst of a global maelstrom of publicity and speculation. Privacy and security at that time was not

⁵⁵ Christopher Bray, *Sean Connery: The Measure of a Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), p. 73.

⁵⁶ Michael Callan, *Sean Connery* (London: Virgin Books, 2003), p. 112.

⁵⁷ Bray, *Sean Connery*, p. 46.

⁵⁸ When, only a month after the annulment of her marriage to Volpe, Cilento and Connery married on 29 November 1962, the *Daily Telegraph* headline read “Diane Cilento marries.” *Dr. No* had premiered in London a month earlier, on October 5, and was not to open in the United States until May 1963. See Bray, *Sean Connery* 46.

⁵⁹ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, pp. 245-246.

⁶⁰ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 292

allotted to anyone outside the Royal household or political circles. Cilento's first marriage to Andrea Volpe was annulled following her year-long internment in Vatican Hospital recovering from tuberculosis.

Escaping back to the UK, she resumed her film career while dating Connery, whom the fraternity of Royal Court actors viewed with amused derision. Being as such a working-class Scottish sailor from the slums of Edinburgh with pretensions of pursuing an acting career while being coached by his girlfriend, and later wife, Cilento, Connery was not taken seriously by anyone except Cilento. In the early part of their relationship and marriage when Cilento could utilize her formidable intellect, knowledge of craft, and industry connections to educate Connery, refining his untapped charisma, their respective careers glided along on an even keel. Connery shot to immediate fame with the first Bond film, *Dr No* (1961) and Cilento earned herself an Academy Award nomination for her work in the film adaptation of Henry Fielding's novel, *Tom Jones*. In 1964 she moved with the family to Rome as the female lead playing Catherine de Medici alongside Rex Harrison as Pope Pius and Charlton Heston as Michelangelo in Sir Carol Reed's screen epic *The Agony and the Ecstasy*. By the mid 1960s the divergence in Connery/Cilento career paths had accelerated significantly, and with Connery preferring Cilento to stay home, she put her talents to work writing two novels, *The Manipulator* (1967) and *Hybrid* (1970). Although she continued film work to earn money the most acclaimed role in the latter half of the decade was the female lead opposite Paul Newman in Martin Ritt's Western *Hombre*. Nevertheless, the strains of Connery's fame, financial control and the documented revelations surrounding his physical and psychological abuse of Cilento came to an end when Cilento walked out of the marriage in 1971.⁶¹

At the time of Cilento's decision to end her marriage to Connery, the second- generation feminist movement was beginning to explode. Cilento could have earned herself a prominent place within the movement by forging a new direction capitalising on her position as a single mother and domestic abuse survivor. Instead, she navigated a different and unique path for herself quite removed from the battlefields of the burgeoning gender war.

Cilento's near death from tuberculosis in 1959 and her corresponding internment in the Clinica Morelli was a crucial turning point in the direction her life would take in the 1960s. This juncture of her marriage into the Volpe family that unfolded in the heart of the Vatican and within the closed world of Roman nobility, hardened her against entertaining thoughts of any orthodox structural dogma as the key to spiritual nourishment; it also spurred her ambition to pioneer a life/career narrative without precedence.

Zero Population Growth & In Search of the Miraculous

In the first weeks of 1971, while Connery was in New York doing post sync work on a film, Cilento moved out of their home in Putney:

⁶¹ Andrew Spicer, Sean Connery: Acting, Stardom and National Identity (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

I knew for sure that I could not live the rest of my life in the shadow of 007, and the evidence was weighing heavily on the side of escape.⁶²

Needing money, Cilento had agreed to a job filming what was to become a cult movie, *Zero Population Growth* (ZPG), shot in Denmark. After only a couple of days filming the production had to be shut down, as the machine used to belch the thick smoke of ‘carbocyclic margarine’ into the air to simulate the polluted atmosphere of the future earth proved to be genuinely toxic, making everyone ill. The actors had nothing to do but stay in their hotel or enjoy the erotic entertainments of Copenhagen.

Tiring quickly of the hedonism on offer, Cilento picked up a book her co-star, Don Gordon, had been instructed to read by his wife. Gordon claimed it was freaking him out and had hurled it across the room in rage and frustration.⁶³ Curious as to what literary contents could turn such “[a] usually taciturn and passive actor into such a vessel of wrath” Cilento picked it up and started reading. The book was P. D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*.⁶⁴

Cilento’s life up until that point had been a continual search for the miraculous. Her evasion of conventional paths, traditional systems, or as a follower of any particular group can been observed, in hindsight, to have prepared her for her perceived revelations of the Fourth Way System of belief and her subsequent serendipitous encounter with John Godolphin Bennett, who would serve as her foremost mentor as she approached these non-traditional teachings, in pursuit of spiritual awakening. In Blakean terms, this moment marks a shift in Cilento’s life, from innocence to experience: from 1971, her life involved a conscious and focussed attention towards perceiving an interior understanding of life’s purpose. This revealed how much of her life up until that point had equipped with the necessary understanding and connections to actualize Karnak as both a school for seekers of knowledge, and a creative platform for artists of all disciplines.

Throughout the first part of her life Cilento had unwittingly demonstrated an inability to pursue a sustained objective or goal. She was driven by a terminally low boredom threshold, an inherent appetite for what Maslow refers to as ‘peak experiences’. Her twenty-year career as a film and stage star, moving from location to location and group to group provided a perfect storm, exacerbating Cilento’s innate tendency to flee from situations or conditions she felt were stifling or had nothing further to offer.

In the aftermath of the marriage, Cilento set about reinventing herself, scrutinising both her exterior and inner life. One of her earliest forays into post-Connery self-discovery was, in June 1971, a guided LSD trip after two days of music, mud and overflowing port-a-loos at the Glastonbury Festival. She prepared herself for this new experience with a serious intent of sacred proportions, fasting for twenty-four hours beforehand. The result, she surmised “[c]onfirmed my belief in something beyond the material world.”⁶⁵ What, then, was it that Cilento encountered when she picked up Ouspensky’s book? What resonated for her in his

⁶² Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 304.

⁶³ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 309.

⁶⁴ P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2001 [1949]).

⁶⁵ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 306.

writing? One of the key passages to understanding Fourth way praxis in *In Search of the Miraculous* reads:

‘Know thyself’—These words generally ascribed to Socrates actually lie at the base of many systems and schools far more ancient than the Socratic. The modern man of our times, even a man with philosophical or scientific interests, does not realize that the principal ‘know thyself’ speaks of the necessity of knowing one’s machine. The human machine. A man does not know himself. A Man is a very complex machine, much more complicated than a locomotive, a motorcar or an aeroplane. People know nothing, or next to nothing about the structure, the working, the possibilities of the machine.⁶⁶

Gurdjieff and Ouspensky were estranged for decades: Ouspensky had split with Gurdjieff three times before breaking away permanently to pursue his own version of a Fourth Way institute. C. S. Nott, who was damning of Ouspensky’s interpretations, finding them:

[t]oo theoretical, too one-centred, intellectual-centred; and often I would leave with a feeling of emptiness, of emotional hunger ... I get more from inner work with one lunch with Mr Gurdjieff than from a year of Ouspensky’s groups.⁶⁷ (Nott in Shirley 2004, 215)

Gurdjieff had himself referred to his former colleague as “[h]e who wraps up all thought”, accusing him of having an over inflated intellectual centre and a defensive emotional centre.⁶⁸

Cilento’s nephew Sebastian Cilento, who along with his cousin Giovanna continued studies of Bennett’s Fourth way praxis in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was scathing of Ouspensky’s attempts to eradicate the ego in his students:

[h]e [Ouspensky] imposed a severe and doctrinal approach to the Work: crushing the ‘I’ and the ego through a ruthless and constant application of ‘work on oneself’ to ‘wake up’ and free the human subject from unconsciousness or ‘sleep’, the perceptual prison of mechanicalness. Self-observation and opposing the self/ego being the means through which one could perceptually apprehend unconscious behaviours and attitudes and dismantle their concealed tyranny over our lives, revealing our primordial spiritual nature [...] I never met anyone for whom Ouspensky’s approach delivered anything remotely resembling transformation into a higher order of being. Crushed spirit masticated into disillusionment at the failed promise of the Work was mostly what I saw in the eyes of the outpatients I’ve met over the years from this generation of Fourth Way School.⁶⁹

Bennett, however, had believed that the new epoch for which he was preparing required a unified humanity of awakened individuals. Sherborne became a “preliminary experiment in

⁶⁶ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 104.

⁶⁷ C. S. Nott as quoted in John Shirley, *Gurdjieff* (E-Book: Tarcher, 2004), p. 215.

⁶⁸ William P. Patterson, *Struggle of the Magicians: Why Uspenskii Left Gurdjieff* (Fairfax: Arete Communications, 1996), p. 68.

⁶⁹ Sebastian Cilento, personal communication.

communal living".⁷⁰ Not as an end to itself but as an incubator for producing helpers who would be collectively attuned in body, mind, and spirit, in order to be of service in the practicalities of future new age communities. While Cilento modelled her Fourth Way course on what she had taken from Sherborne, Karnak was in every respect a reflection of Cilento's deep connection to Sufism, a tradition that was foundational for Gurdjieff as it was for Bennett.

The transparency of this strong Sufi pedagogy underpinning Cilento's enterprise is that Bulent Rauf, the founder of Beshara, a school in the UK devoted to the works of Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi, came to Karnak and opened the school with Cilento in 1977. Karnak, of course, also reflected Cilento's personality which could, when required, be every bit as intractable as Gurdjieff's. The life world of Karnak for decades received visitors from every corner of the planet, and the steady onslaught of theatrics, both comedic and dramatic, was a functional aspect of the day-to-day activities. This was as much about keeping Cilento and her third husband, playwright, Anthony Shaffer, entertained as it was about rewiring the automated unconscious habits and fractured centres of both the long- and short-term students, who took it upon themselves to venture into the Daintree to engage with Cilento's unique version of Fourth Way practices.

All the people who mentored Cilento and fostered her initiation into meditative practices and Sufism had connected to her from Sherborne, or directly through Bennett. While he didn't live to see the fruits of his ambitions for Sherborne and the US counterpart, Claymont in Virginia, Bennett nevertheless expanded the concepts of Fourth Way teachings into realms that would have likely stagnated, as has happened to other Gurdjieff/Ouspensky groups, reluctant to seek further threads of complimentary wisdom to disentangle the fine mess Gurdjieff scattered amongst his followers.

Cilento's Way of Hazard

One can see how Gurdjieff and Bennett's heterodox revision of the traditional Christian tropes of faith appealed to Cilento who, like Shaffer, believed Gurdjieff's dictum about the ease with which people by the power of suggestion can be made to "[b]elieve any old tale."⁷¹ More, they shared the Gurdjieffian understanding that whatever was sold to the public hid another private story that could be accessed only by those initiated with the requisite insight and knowledge to receive the truth.⁷² This created problems, particularly in the context of late twentieth century Queensland. Their shared reluctance to follow normative patterns of behaviour and convention in the acceptance of mainstream narratives as factual realities, put both of them squarely in the crosshairs of those seeking to cull the tall poppies.

Cilento differed from both Gurdjieff and his emphasis on blame and Bennett, with his concept of transcendent knowledge of self through humiliation. For Cilento's approach to imparting Fourth Way teaching unfolded in the realm of what Gurdjieff referred to as 'Hazard'. The Gurdjieffian concept of Hazard is implicit to Fourth Way Work in the application of an

⁷⁰ William James Thompson, *J. G. Bennett's Interpretation of the Teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff: A Study of Transmission in the Fourth Way*, Doctoral dissertation (University of Lancaster, 1995), p. 102.

⁷¹ Whitall N. Perry, *Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition* (New York: Sophia Perennis, 2005), p. 23.

⁷² Both Cilento and Shaffer were convinced Christopher Marlowe wrote all of Shakespeare. See Anthony Shaffer, *So What did you Expect? A Memoir* (London: Picador, 2001), p. 90.

activity or process in which ‘shocks’ from the outside are deliberately induced. The purpose being to produce some form of ascension within the octave of the intended outcome. That ‘hazard’ is inexorably linked to the Law of Seven (*heptaparaparshinokh*), and the demiurgic forces governing the evolutionary process. Anthony Blake writes, “[J]ohn Bennett understood that the Law of Seven showed that *hazard* is intrinsic to the conditions of existence.”⁷³

In a speech to a Queensland University of Technology Graduation ceremony in 1992, Cilento spoke about ‘hazard’ explaining that word came from the time of the Crusades when the soldiers would play backgammon on citadel walls during breaks between the sieges. As they threw the dice they shouted “*Az Zar*”! — ‘The die is cast’. This became “*L’azzard*” in French, a “*Azzardo*” in Spanish, and ‘Hazard’ in English. “The truth” Cilento explained:

[i]s that the law of Hazard pervades the whole universe . . . It is inherent in the way things are created [...] To survive in this world you must be ready to adapt, to accommodate the incoming dispensations, the changes of fortune, the throw of the dice . . . If it weren’t so, there would be no evolvement, no life on earth.⁷⁴

The use of hazard and its primacy in Cilento’s pedagogy for awakening consciousness came from the physical environment of Karnak itself as much as it did from Cilento’s innate performative disposition to shock.⁷⁵ The European localities of both Gurdjieff’s Prieuré and Bennett’s Sherborne, though grand, albeit far from luxurious, bore no resemblance to the jungle of tropical Far North Queensland. There, the year-round heat and a relatively unviolated eco-system presented daily confrontations with hazard in the activities demanded of the students and Cilento herself. The humidity and tropical wet of Far North Queensland not only shortened the lifespan of materials and made difficult the work required in the maintenance of a productive farm, but the rainforest itself relentlessly reclaimed the effects of human encroachment. The sheer volume of fauna and insect life living within the eco-system plagued everyone: multiple species of flies, wasps, ants (green, black and bull, some capable of mind-shattering bites), snakes (the venomous taipans, yellow bellies, and brown) spiders, mosquitoes, nettles, and vines provided daily hazards for the students, many of whom, prior to their residency at Karnak, had only lived in controlled urban environments. This vibrant, and largely intact food chain challenged the unexplored boundaries of Bennett’s concept of reciprocal maintenance, as developed and practiced at Karnak, in ways that were unfamiliar to—indeed, unthinkable in the context of—those employed by either Bennett or Gurdjieff.⁷⁶

On more than one occasion a prospective student signing up for a ten month, or even a ten day course at Karnak lasted barely twenty-four hours. By the first day they realized that an

⁷³ Anthony Blake, ‘The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path (Part 2)’, *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2018).

⁷⁴ Diane Cilento, unpublished graduation speech to the Queensland University of Technology, 14 April (1992).

⁷⁵ ‘Shock’ entered the currency of theatrical practice with the writing and teaching of Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski, who both engaged ‘shock’ tactics/ methodologies for the training of performers and in the development of dramaturgies intended to bring audiences and performers into states of heightened co-presence. See Johnson, *The Shock of Presence*.

⁷⁶ In conversation with me Anthony Shaffer related that, during one of his thrice yearly trips to London, Los Angeles, and New York, when he arrived in the Big Apple found none of the keys on his typewriter seemed to work. He took it to local repair shop. When they opened the typewriter they found all the keys had been glued together by a nest of mud wasps who, according the Shaffer, angrily zoomed out of the machine and disappeared out the open door on to Fifth Avenue.

organic retreat in the rainforest run by a former movie star was not all yoga, meditation, massages, and organic juice fasts. It meant mulching fruit trees, slashing undergrowth, building retaining walls, getting eaten alive by mosquitoes, attacked by paper wasps and washing pooh out of their hair from milking goats.

The effect of hazard became even more pronounced after the playhouse opened. Many performances either had to be cancelled or truncated mid show because of torrential tropical rain. Even once a permanent waterproof canopy was affixed over the majority of the four hundred seat audience section, a sudden downpour could be so deafening that a live and unmiked show would need to stop until the storm had passed. And sometimes the storms simply did not pass but settled in for hours. There was also the twice weekly round up in Mossman of Indigenous children for the *Creation* laser show, and the absence of any guarantee as to who and how many would be performing that evening. Indeed, the word ‘creation’ itself, in both Bennett and Gurdjieff’s estimation implicated the notion of ‘hazard’: the very act of creation, in its return to the source, demands a degree of autonomy within the creative process.

Actors also had to contend with insects attracted to the lights. In a 2013 article in *The Australian*, Oz Opera tour manager Sandra Willis recounted an experience during a 2009 performance of *Madam Butterfly* at the playhouse. A singer, she explained, was walking to the stage and he stood on a snake and it bit him. He stood on the side of the stage and stripped down, presumably with a degree of urgency. The singer’s costume apparently saved him: the snake left puncture marks on his spats.⁷⁷

Less potentially lethal incidents occurred, when animals, both domesticated and wild, would appear out of the dark and wander on stage during a performance. Cilento recalls a moment during their first play, Shaffer’s *Murderer* (1992), when every time the lead actor, John Stanton, exited upstage, one of Cilento’s cats would leap on the table centre stage and start eating the now unattended prop food of roast beef left there. The audience of course, loved this, believing it was part of the show.⁷⁸ Such episodes, over the two decades of the operation of the Karnak Playhouse operations, exemplified the two types of ‘hazard’ at play which, in *The Dramatic Universe* Bennett refers to as ‘Cosmic hazard’ and ‘local hazard’, as Thompson explains:

In Bennett’s account of human creativity and egoism the two aspects—‘cosmic’ and ‘local’ hazard—are welded together such that the latter is seen more as a law conformable‘ aspect of the former than as an out and out aberration.⁷⁹

Cilento’s training and experience as a performer, and a non-verbalised appetite to link the strands of culture, myth, and belief into a cohesive historical narrative served her well as she engaged with *hyparxis*, a concept Bennett had developed from his theory of ‘systematics’.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Joyce Morgan, ‘Oz Opera serves up arias in the outback with Don Giovanni’, *The Australian*, 24 August (2013). At: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/oz-opera-serves-up-arias-in-the-outback-with-don-giovanni/news-story/686b99f6ec5e1efccc11a1fdb7d49187>.

⁷⁸ Cilento, *My Nine Lives*, p. 468.

⁷⁹ Thompson, *J. G. Bennett’s Interpretation*, p. 244.

⁸⁰ The term *hyparxis* evolved from Bennett’s ‘systematics’ work and appeared in volume 4 of Bennett’s *Dramatic Universe* series. According to Anthony Blake, Bennett claimed the word derived from Aristotle, but Blake contends it is more likely to be of Neo-Platonic origin. “The hexad”, from where Bennett sourced the principles

Hyparxis involved, for Bennett, the reconciliation between eternity and time, or as Anthony Blake glosses it, the “ableness to be.”⁸¹ Bennett’s view of *hyparxis* is that one can only operate in a dwelling place of higher intelligence when one is in a pure state of presence, wherein the meaningful events of the past and those in the future place you not ‘somewhere’, but some *when*: the purest creative state of absolute ‘presence’ when one can manifest into a reality that which has not yet come into existence. As such, the *hyparchaic future* was [Bennett contends] “[t]he domain of creativity” [and] “[c]reativity could only operate with things which were not yet set into existence.”⁸² Bennett’s concept seems to mirror what T. S. Eliot was alluding to in *Burnt Norton*, the first poem of his *Four Quartets* (1936), the opening stanza of which parrots Bennett’s concept of *hyparxis*:

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.⁸³

Bennett has not intimated in his writings to having had any personal acquaintance with Eliot. There is, though, a corresponding depth of esoteric knowledge that springs from a shared Christian faith aligning in the understanding of the need for humans to consciously articulate their focus on the present moment in the knowledge of a universal and cosmic order required to be upheld.⁸⁴ Conversely, Cilento was well attuned to Eliot’s poetry, quoting from *Burnt Norton* in *The Four Quartets* to open the narration of her BBC documentary *Turning* (1973) about the whirling dervishes in Konya that coincided with the 700 year anniversary of the death of the Mevlevi order’s founding Shaykh, Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273). This documentary, narrated by both Cilento and Bulent Rauf, pre-empted by several decades the ensuing Rumi industry largely galvanised under the banner of Colman Bark’s free form English adaptation of Rumi’s mystical love poetry.

Cilento in her capacity as a teacher was already an adept in the practical skills associated with ‘presence’ and the ‘shocks’ required to actualize ‘presence’ initially from her classical training at RADA, and specifically from her work with Malmgren. She had no problem grasping deeper aspects of the Gurdjieff work which for others, not versed in these certain practices and skills, would seem revelatory, rather than somatic and practical, as from the

behind *hyparxis* “[a]ppears in the extremely important guise of the *present moment*,” see Anthony Blake, ‘The Hyparxis of the Dramatic Universe,’ DuVersity (2023), p. 3. At: <https://duversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/28.-The-Hyparxis-of-The-Dramatic-Universe.pdf>

⁸¹ Blake, ‘The Fourth Way’, p. 34.

⁸² Blake, ‘The Fourth Way’, p. 34.

⁸³ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 13.

⁸⁴ Although there is no evidence of T.S Eliot having any direct involvement with Gurdjieff, his close friend and editor of the *New Age*, the most influential London literary journal of the 1920s, A.R Orage (1873-1934) left his job and went to study with Gurdjieff at the Prieuré in Fontainebleau. Orage became Gurdjieff’s spokesman for his work in the USA. Upon his death from a heart attack in 1934, Eliot wrote a moving obituary on Orage - Orage holds the unique distinction within Gurdjieff circles of being one of the very few people towards whom Gurdjieff showed great affection and was moved to tears upon hearing the news of Orage’s sudden passing, Louise Welch *Orage with Gurdjieff in America* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp. 136-137.

perspective of skilled performance practitioners. For example, the practical questions with which Jeanne de Salzmann, who worked with Gurdjieff for nearly thirty years, wrestled with in *The Reality of Being* read as the bread and butter of the trained actor. Writing of the challenge of living from moment to moment in a state of impermanence, she notes that:

[I] have to listen to whatever appears, and in order to really listen, I must not resist. The act of listening, of being present, is a true liberation. I am aware of my reactions to everything taking place in me. I cannot avoid reacting, but for reactions not to stop me, I must be able to go beyond them [...] I must feel all the conditioning of the known in order to be free from it.⁸⁵

Clearly, Cilento would have no trouble relating the imperative of listening as an indispensable part of actor's tool kit. One can also see why the theatre director Peter Brook was not only attracted to Gurdjieff's teachings but considered Madame de Salzmann his teacher and mentor for decades. First and foremost, Gurdjieff was a performer of majestic proportions, a fact that is consistently overlooked in accounts and critiques of his work. Whatever the contention about Ouspensky's contribution to this legacy, at the very least, in terms of broadening the scope of his reputation, he fulfilled for Gurdjieff the role James Boswell had played for Dr Samuel Johnson.

Conclusion

Ultimately when looking at the teachings of Gurdjieff, Bennett and Cilento it is necessary to employ an immaterial framework to contextualise the environments both physical and spiritual as well as the political and social climates of the times; factors which impacted the significance of the Work these individuals were undertaking. For Gurdjieff, it was the aftermath of the Great War in Europe and the potential shift in consciousness that he saw as mandatory to harness for the development for humanity. In Bennett's case with the establishment of Sherborne in the UK of the early 1970s came in time to rekindle the embers of the 1960s global hippy movement encompassing alternative spiritual enquiry, anti-war and anti-establishment ethics that along psychedelics and a counter cultural youthquake needed complete structuring. This necessitated Bennett to offer a pedagogical curriculum to not only employ the Gurdjieff techniques but integrate more robust concepts of self-sufficient communities purposed to engage with rather than isolated from the general population. Karnak's inception in Far North Queensland at the beginning of the 1980s came at the time when Australia's two hundred years of colonial history was reaching its ripest fruition, culturally, politically and socially. Over a twenty-year period beginning in 1972 with the election of the Labor Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam (1972-75), a distinctively unique Australian identity forged international recognition due to a cultural revolution led by both the performing and visual arts.⁸⁶ This continued to grow under the political leadership of Liberal Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser (1975-83) with the nation becoming a truly cultural juggernaut on all fronts during the Hawke era of the nation's colonial

⁸⁵ Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being: The Fourth way of Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 251.

⁸⁶ David Throsby, 'Does Australia Need a Cultural Policy?', *Platform Papers* no. 7 (2006), p. 5.

history (1983-1992).⁸⁷ These two decades were indeed Australia's culminating Belle Epoch of its 200 year history under British colonialism.

It is lastly vital to contextualise within the framework of Fourth Way praxis as disseminated by Gurdjieff and later with Bennett and especially Cilento the grounded teachings of an orthodox *sophia perennis* within the traditional blueprints observed by organised religions. For Gurdjieff, this was in the Eastern Russian Orthodox church of his providence, for Bennett, Roman Catholicism and for Cilento, Islam. While these orthodox traditions were not proselytized as a necessary condition to follow for seekers under their guidance, nevertheless, the essences inherent within these foundational faiths were fundamental to grow and nurture complimentary narratives for Fourth Way practices. As Bennett well understood, this was necessary for the Work to evolve and be relevant for successive generations avoiding dilution by way of shifting societal ethics or from the dated currency of cultural change. Cilento's strong connection to the Sufi masters, Rumi, Abdul Qadir Jilani, Hafiz, Abdul Karim al-Jili and significantly Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi with the inclusion of his works, particularly the *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Wisdom of the Prophets) as central to her curriculum of Fourth Way studies marks for her a contentious but seminal position within the Gurdjieff lineage of teachers and guides.

⁸⁷ Josephine Caust, *Art and Politics Government and the Arts in Australia: A Historical and Critical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2023), p. 77.