

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

OUR OWN EARTH realm has long been known on the cosmological maps as *mixtus orbis*, the "mixed realm." While the full explanation for this designation is complex, something does seem to get mixed and mingled here. We humans are curiously bilingual; we speak the language of this world with all its charms and nuances, but we also strain toward that invisible other that seems to hover right beyond us in those dazzling glimpses and visions: that intuition of "another intensity," in the words of T. S. Eliot, to which we know we also belong.¹ That invisible but always interpenetrating other is the imaginal realm.

The earlier metaphysical roadmaps, as mentioned, tended to draw a sharp dividing line between matter and spirit, with the result that the imaginal, hovering just on the horizon of our *mixtus orbis*, often appeared to be a world in itself, with no obvious commerce with our own. As the last outpost of the "spiritual" realms, how and why would it bridge the divide into the material realms? In the previous chapter I tried to recast this traditional metaphysical habit in terms of the more contemporary understanding that there is in fact no such "divide" but rather a single continuum of energy manifesting in various degrees of subtlety or coarseness. Transposing the

metaphysical map from its original Platonic milieu to this more Einsteinian one in fact takes us far beyond traditional esoteric understandings of the imaginal, which focused on the personal and elusive nature of this realm, into a new appreciation of its collective and evolutionary importance.

It was Gurdjieff who really got the ball rolling here by adding in the key puzzle piece (undetected through the lens of traditional sophia perennis metaphysics), which he called "reciprocal feeding." He proposed that along the entire Ray of Creation (his equivalent term for the Great Chain of Being), there is a continuous, active exchange proceeding in both directions—not only from higher realms to lower but also from lower to higher—in order to maintain the entire ray in a state of dynamic equilibrium according to a cosmic principle to which he gives the rather unwieldy name "Trogoautoegocrat." Mouthful though the term may be, the idea itself is a remarkably prescient attempt to view the entire created order as what we would nowadays call a "self-specifying system," a whole greater than the sum of its parts, whose chief metaphysical feature is no longer *involution*—the gradual loss of energy as the lower end of the chain plunges steadily toward entropy—but rather an elaborate homeostasis that preserves (and even increases) the energy of the total system as each realm makes its required contribution to the whole.

Gurdjieff referred to this system as "reciprocal feeding" for good reason: the exchange he has in mind involves the actual transformation of cosmic substances—more like digestion than the simple information-sharing favored in contemporary consciousness-based models. The full articulation of this idea leads us swiftly into one of the densest jungles of Gurdjieffian arcana: his notorious "hydrogen tables," a maze of esoteric chemistry in which many an overly cerebral seeker has

lost the plot.² But the idea itself is fairly straightforward and so flagrantly timely for a planet careening toward ecological catastrophe that I believe it's simply no longer conscionable to allow it to be held captive in a maze of Gurdjieffian Fourth Way esoterica. More to our immediate concern here, this broader vision of what amounts to a vast intergalactic bootstrapping is utterly essential if we hope to have some true feeling for what the imaginal realm is all about, beyond just some allusive bandwidth of inner guidance and bedazzling intensity. If exchange is indeed the principal business of this realm, we must picture this exchange from the outset as a two-way street.

What I would like to attempt in this chapter, then, is to offer a nontechnical version of reciprocal feeding, shorn of its quasi-chemical nomenclature but still conveying the gist of Gurdjieff's most brilliant ecological intuition. This will set the cosmological backdrop for a closer and more substantive look at what the imaginal realm contributes to this operation—and more to the point, what we contribute to what the imaginal contributes to this operation.

I should make clear from the outset that what I am about to lay before you is *not* "Gurdjieff 101." Gurdjieff does not even actually use the term "imaginal" in his teaching (although he clearly drank from these same mystical Islamic wells),³ so the synthesis here is my own, culled not only from the Gurdjieff teaching but from what I've learned from Rafe, my own inner work, and the greater Christian mystical tradition particularly as seen through the eyes of my two most reliable guides, Jacob Boehme and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. You might think of it more as my own cosmological reflection, glimpsed while standing on the shoulders of these three visionary geniuses (four counting Rafe), whom I believe are all fundamentally looking in the same direction.

The Ray of Creation

Gurdjieff actually makes use of *two* cosmic maps, and to situate the imaginal sphere of operations within his teaching, you have to overlay them.

The first, and probably more widely known of these (because of its close tie-in with the enneagram and the Law of Seven), is his Ray of Creation, which, as I have mentioned already, is the Gurdjieffian version of the Great Chain of Being. In most respects this follows the standard processional model of traditional sophia perennis metaphysics, with progressively denser and colder kingdoms emerging out of that initial fiery explosion of the divine will-to-form that sets the whole thing in motion. The counterentropic trajectory is not at first clearly visible.

What is immediately interesting about this map, however, is that the entire ray is located within the *physical* universe—although of course, the word *physical* here must be expanded to the widest and wildest reaches of our cosmological imagination. Gurdjieff's "Megalocosmos," the vast celestial canvas on which his map is drawn, stretches even beyond the fourteen billion years of our present "universe story," reaching back into that implicitly endless matrix from which big bangs emerge like virtual particles. It is on the grandest possible cosmic scale that his vision plays out.

So too, the realms on this ray are not named by spiritual or theological names, as is typical of sophia perennis metaphysics. You will not find here logocic realms, angelic realms, heaven and hell realms—or for that matter, imaginal realms. Instead, you will find actual interplanetary locations, named in an order that some of you may find strangely familiar: *dominus* (Holy Absolute), *siderum* (all galaxies), *lactera* (Milky Way, our galaxy), *sol* (our sun), *fatum* (fate, our own solar system or

sphere of planetary influence), *mixtus orbis* ("mixed realm," our planet earth), *regina coeli* (queen of the heavens, the moon)—or *do, si, la, sol, fa, mi, re, do*.

Wait a minute! Isn't that our modern Western musical scale?

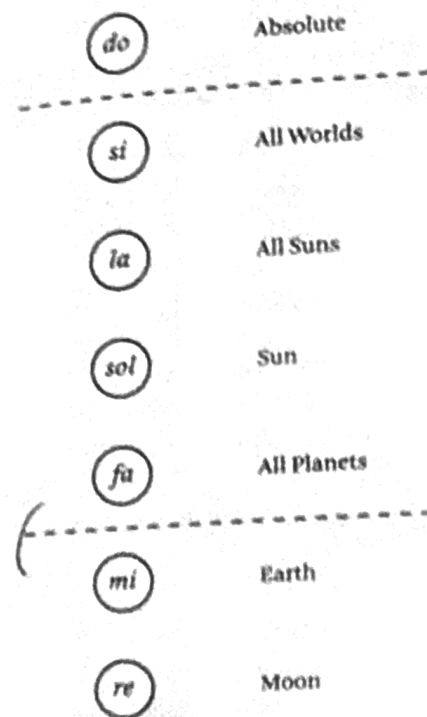
Indeed, it is. And this is where the second fascinating feature of the Ray of Creation comes in. According to Gurdjieff, our modern major scale actually preserves in the names of its notes and the arrangement of its intervals a vestigial memory of an ancient esoteric teaching about the "cosmic solfeggio" (as contemporary Gurdjieff commentator James Moore wittily dubs it), not only in the way in which the created order originally came into existence but also in the way in which energy is continuously transmitted and replenished along the Ray of Creation. That knowledge is still there, hidden in plain sight in the musical scale, to be dug out by those so inclined; its articulation dovetails precisely with what in the Gurdjieff Work is known as the Law of Seven, the Law of World Maintenance.

This is not the place to get sidetracked into a lengthy discussion of the Law of Seven. Those of you who wish to can read more about it in my book *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* as well as in any number of Gurdjieffian textbooks.⁵ But from the point of view of imaginal exchange, it does yield up one very interesting piece of data, again a stable feature of the Law of Seven. If you look at the schematic that follows, you notice those two lines cutting across the map, between *do* and *si* near the top and between *fa* and *mi* closer to the bottom. These correspond to the "hesitation" points on the ray—half steps on the musical scale—where a new infusion of energy, or a different kind of energy, must be introduced in order to keep the whole ray flowing on trajectory. Otherwise the whole thing will veer off track or be halted at a threshold it cannot cross. In Gurdjieffian terminologies, these are the "shock" points,

the places where the entire progression is the most vulnerable but, equally, the most permeable.

In the case of the higher (*do-si*) shock point, that bridging energy is provided by the will of the Holy Absolute, still close enough to ground zero to easily span the descending gap. In the latter case, as we will see shortly, the shock point falls right between *fa*, the traditional endpoint of the so-called subtle realms, and *mi*, the beginning of those "dense material realms." And this is exactly the place where traditional metaphysics and I (see my discussion of Gurdjieff's second map, following shortly) locate the imaginal realm. In other words, the *mi-fa* shock point falls right in the middle of the imaginal intertidal zone. In and of itself, if you ponder it deeply, this realization will tell you most everything you need to know about the primary cosmic function of the imaginal realm and our specific human contribution to this sphere of operations. But since these ideas may be very new to some of you not previously familiar with Gurdjieffian metaphysics, rest assured that I will circle back in chapter 3 and unpack them much more systematically.

I like this first map because it is *real*. Not only does it accord with a more contemporary understanding of the relationship between matter and energy, it also situates the whole unfolding *here* (admittedly a huge and vast "here") rather than in some mirage-like "spiritual" realm that floats "above" our visible solar system like a huge celestial theme park. It calls us to order to a path of transformation that does not lead us away from materiality but straight into it and through it. Particularly when we enter those two lowest realms, *mi* and *re*, we are talking about our *actual* earth and our *actual* moon, and we are discussing planetary evolution along lines strikingly parallel to Teilhard de Chardin's. Nor will Gurdjieff let us off the hook here. For him, the major vehicle mediating that *mi-fa*



Gurdjieff's Ray of Creation

Adapted from P. D. Ouspensky,
In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching
 (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 82.

shock is the biosphere—yes, organic life on earth!—and its ultimate recipient is the moon, not our eternal souls. And yes, our conscious attention and willing participation will certainly make a huge difference in how our contribution is mediated and in which realm it is received. But willingly or unwillingly the tribute is exacted, and it is paid in the coin of this realm, in flesh and blood. Our inner work exists within the Megalocosmos and for the sake of the Megalocosmos, not the other way around; it is important never to forget this.

The Worlds

If the Ray of Creation is exterior and cosmic in its orientation, Gurdjieff's second map, his diagram of the worlds, is more interior. In Teilhardian terms, it describes the "within of things." You might think of it impressionistically as a "ray of being" running roughly parallel to the Ray of Creation while offering its own distinctive counterpoint. But again, bear in mind that these worlds (or "levels of consciousness," as we might be inclined to relabel them in the terminology of our own times) are not just interior or subjective experiences, but actual spheres of causality. In Gurdjieffian cosmology, the yang of it never quite drops out of sight.

As I mentioned earlier, from an external perspective the Gurdjieffian system seems to follow the classic sophia perennis model in that the worlds become progressively denser as one proceeds along the ray. A distinctive feature of this system, however, is that for Gurdjieff densification is not simply a matter of increasing "materiality" per se; it is rather that each realm comes under progressively more cosmic laws, i.e., constructal givens, that restrict its freedom and determine its outcomes. The higher "up" the ray, the fewer the cosmic laws. Our own world, near the bottom of the chain, operates under

SCALE	LATIN NAME	COSMOLOGICAL LOCUS
do	<u>Dominus</u>	Holy Absolute; pre-big bang, "eternal cosmic inflation" 1
si	<u>Siderum</u> (All Stars)	The sum potential of all galaxies, all big bangs, all universes, now and forever 3
la	<u>Lactera</u> (Milky Way)	Our galactic system
sol	<u>Sol</u> (Sun)	The center, or "Holy Absolute" of our own solar system
fa	<u>Fatum</u> (Fate)	The planets of our solar system 24
mi	<u>Mixtus Orbis</u> (Mixed Realm)	Our planet Earth 48
re	<u>Regina Coelis</u> (Queen of Heaven)	The moon (youngest and most unstable element of the Ray)
do ₂	<u>Dominus₂</u>	The black hole at the end of the octave, occasioned by the implosion of our sun, which ends the development along this Ray, collapsing all back beneath the event horizon

creation
consciousness
knowing

The Ray of Creation:
A Contemporary Cosmological Interpretation

forty-eight laws (hence Gurdjieff's reference to it as "World 48"), which makes it a significantly dense and mechanical place. The imaginal, in its traditional positioning just "above" ours, is subject to twenty-four laws and hence is significantly more fluid and powerful. From there, the ray takes us back by successive halves to three, the primordial Trinity, and then to World 1, the undivided Holy Absolute. At each upward plateau there are fewer laws, but they are more binding.

I want to sketch these worlds for you as I have come to understand them. Rather than merely summarizing the attributes ascribed to them in the standard Gurdjieff/Ouspensky version⁶ I will expand and occasionally completely redraw them. Some of these associations may be new to you (a few of them surprised me as well!). And while this "scenic route" may take us a little out of the way, I hope you will find the time well spent—if for no other reason than to reawaken a sense of wonder at "the scale of the thing," the utter vastness of the playing field upon which this cosmic drama unfolds. On a more practical level, these small thumbnails will serve as the functional basis for many otherwise "out of nowhere" connections I will be making from time to time in this book. You may find yourself referring back to them frequently, as I myself have already begun to do.

○ World 1

World 1 is the Holy Absolute. The Godhead. The "inaccessible light," the holy impenetrable, ineffable, unknowable monad before "God took perceptivity and divisibility," as Jacob Boehme describes it.⁷

Of course, this is one of those giant forks in the road where the mystical traditions of the Christian East and Christian West split theologically. For the Western theological mind—with a

few notable exceptions—there is no "Godhead behind God." The Trinity is the full, total, irreducible expression of the whole of divinity. The mystics of both branches, of course, have always smiled serenely at this. They know better.

This world corresponds with *do* on the Ray of Creation, or *dominus*—the Holy Absolute.

⊕ World 3

World 3 is the primordial ternary, whereby the Godhead—ever indivisible and unmanifest—brings himself into "perceptivity and divisibility," i.e., a "manipulable" inner configuration that will support "the impressure of nothing into something" (again, Boehme's words),⁸ thus launching the long march toward outward manifestation. For both Boehme and Gurdjieff, this fundamental reconfiguration of the inner monadic ground inexorably requires threeness, and what will emerge many worlds later as the theological doctrine of Trinity is in fact merely a distant echo of this more primordial upwelling of the Law of Three, rightly named by Gurdjieff as the "Law of World Creation." Indeed, following a brilliant lead handed to us by Boehme, we can say that it is only in this realm that one can properly begin to invoke the term "consciousness" (*con-scientia*, meaning "with-knowing"), because until there is a "with," there can be no "with-knowing" but only the bare, inscrutable will of the monad (which Boehme calls *scientia*). Consciousness is not the fundamental ground of all being. It is rather the first manifestation—which occurs in World 3—of perceptivity and divisibility. The two are joined at the hip.

This world corresponds with *si* on the Ray of Creation, or *siderum*—all the stars, all the galaxies, all possibilities, infinite possibilities.

⊗ World 6

This world launches the inaugural leap into outward manifestation, that first declension in Valentin Tomberg's spectrum of energy, where consciousness "condenses" into "psychic force" and begins to move as an actual energy stream, creating, animating, and shaping the created order. On traditional metaphysical maps it corresponds to what is known in the East as the "causal" and in the West as the "logoi." By whatever name, it is primordial substantiality, the highest and most powerful expression of the pure creative eros that brings all things into being. It is the world that quivers into life when Teilhard writes, "The physical structure of the universe is love," or when he remarks, equally astoundingly, "Love is nothing more than the impressure, left in the heart of the creature, of the physical convergence of the universe."¹⁰ Eros as logoi force, pure generativity, the blue of the flame in the heart of the monad. For J. G. Bennett, this is the demiurgic world from which the entire created order emerges. In the Gospel of John, this is "the Word." For that other John, my crazy, wild-hearted Greek, it is the *Zoi*, the pure life force, tugging against his entrails like a force 8 wind. The big bang is here; this is where our universe story begins. And while opinions may vary on this point, my own take is that it is the highest realm that can be directly touched and borne while still in human form. It is beyond personal; it is itself the great intertidal zone between the unmanifest and the primordial manifest. I would call it the true logoi realm: pure spirit, pure causality, pure eros moving untempered by any sort of human mediation like the wild, roving spirit font it can only be.

This world corresponds with *la* on the Ray of Creation, or *lactera*—the Milky Way, our galaxy; the place where it is all unfolding for us.

☀ World 12

World 12 is the Christic. I know this ascription may surprise some of you who are used to seeing "Christ Consciousness" positioned higher, as one of the nondual realms at the very top of the Great Chain of Being. I do not believe this is so. Even World 6, to my way of thinking, is already situated solidly within the causal or logoi bandwidth (*not* in the true nondual, which from a cosmological perspective denotes the unmanifest realms).

We have just seen above that World 6 bridges the gap between the manifest and unmanifest, and as its processional offspring, World 12 would necessarily be subsumed within its overarching causality. Moreover, I concur with the ever-cage-rattling Bernadette Roberts in her insistence that "logos" and "Christ" are not the same, but rather, Christic is the "middle ground" (or mandorla, to give it its plane geometry name) that emerges in the overlapping zone between the human Jesus and the fiery divine logos¹¹—between Worlds 24 and 6, if you want to put it that way. And that is a very good way to picture World 12. It is the world of fully incarnate and embodied love, the fullest of what bodhisattva consciousness can look like in form. It is the endpoint of the personal realms. And it is the world, I believe, in which we must locate what Teilhard envisions as the Omega Point, where all things are summed up in Christ—because this is the last world in which such a summation has any relevance. Beyond, all is summed up in logos. It is the *consummatum est* of a particularly rich and luminous outspeaking of the word *love*, emerging from the fires of eros to its transfigured fullness as *agape*. I will fill in some of these pieces in chapter 7.¹²

This world corresponds to *sol* on the Ray of Creation, or

the sun—the center of our solar system. From here emerges warmth, light, and cosmic ordering.

World 24

World 24 is the “Kingdom of Heaven” as Jesus put it and supremely the home range of the imaginal. It is the world of presence, where the outer forms of physical materiality are illuminated from within by the light that pours from World 12 and above, and where human consciousness—awake, three-centered, and having passed that first conscious shock point (which it supremely tends and mediates)—fully inhabits this physical world, takes instructions reliably from the higher realms, and participates fully in the required cosmic exchange. This is the world of conscious man or woman—“man number four” in Gurdjieffian terminology—who lives awake and willing right there at the junction point where the “the two seas meet,” infusing the staleness of the lower worlds with the vivifying energy of his or her authentic presence.

This world corresponds to *fa* on the Ray of Creation, or *fatum*—our immediate solar system.

World 48

This is the “world” as we know it and transmit it through the best of human culture. It is the world of philosophy, ethics, and religion; the world of intellectual striving and cleverness and of industry, curiosity, science, technology, and the arts—in other words, the first fruits of civilization as best we know them. It is the world of high rationality. The world of high egoic functioning and self-reflective consciousness. The world that Teilhard mostly had in mind when he described the “noosphere.” But for all its giftedness, it still falls just below

that first conscious shock line; hence, it is still, in Gurdjieffian terms, preconscious and “asleep.” It is Prospero’s castle, entrancing and seductive, but ultimately a mirage.

This world corresponds to *mi* on the Ray of Creation, or the *mixtus orbis*. At its best, it symbolizes the fullest flourishing of the biosphere, the “Eden” of the Ray of Creation.

World 96

The thickening deepens. World 96 is the “formatory” world, as Gurdjieff calls it, where everything operates on autopilot, in clichés and thought-bites: stale, conditioned, habitual. There’s not even any real thinking that goes on here, as there is in World 48; it’s all recycled opinions and stereotypes. In Gurdjieffian terms, this is the world of personality, the world of “not-I”; of all that is artificially acquired and that obscures our real essence. It is monochrome, repetitive, and boring—uncreative, stony, and inanimate; the lowest world in which human consciousness can even barely hold its shape.

This world corresponds to *re* on the Ray of Creation, or *regina coeli*—the moon; pure geosphere, not yet able to support organic life; the youngest and most unstable element in the chain.

World 192

World 192 represents the hell realms. It is the world of the deeply disordered, anguished, and psychotic, the spawning ground of evil and the demonic, where consciousness has lost all spaciousness and congeals toward an unbearable density. The “bardo realms”—craving, wrath, pride, envy, and desire; obsession fixated to a deadly bullseye-turned-wormhole. Here self-reflective consciousness turns on itself like a rabid dog

biting its master. This is the final outpost before consciousness collapses into outer darkness—or simply goes comatose. Cosmically, it is the collective pain body of humanity and of the planet itself.

This world does not correspond to any point on the Ray of Creation, but I envision it as the endpoint—the bottom *do*—at which the entire octave has run its course and simply implodes.

Below World 192, one can no longer properly speak of “consciousness.” The Gurdjieffian maps continue on farther—to an endpoint at 12,288—but by then we are well into the domain of inorganic chemistry. Some rudimentary sentiency continues to exist into realms 384 and below, but these are at the level of biological cellular function and not yet at the threshold of anything measured along this second map, which as we are working with it here could be described as comprising the “ray of consciousness.”

The Imaginal World

From the foregoing descriptions, you have probably surmised that I see the imaginal realm as quintessentially connected to World 24. And that is indeed a fair surmise, provided you do not fall into the trap of seeing it as a *separate* world, a world even remotely comprehensible apart from the larger relational field it nests within. As we have spoken about before, the essence of imaginal agency is that it is always interpenetrating and interanimating; it is *always* about connectivity.

And yes, the “central channel” of imaginal activity may indeed run through World 24. But if it does so, I would see this operating in accordance with Gurdjieff’s fundamental understanding of the Law of Three—“The higher blends with the

lower in order to activate the middle”—in which case, World 24 is simply “the middle.” The entire range of the imaginal field of operations really spans the gamut between World 12, or the Christic, and World 48, our own distracted and not-yet-truly conscious earth plane. Through the lens of Christian mysticism I have come to envision it as a vast tempering ground in which the overpowering and essentially impersonal force of eros flowing from World 6 can be absorbed and safely transmitted to the lower realms, where it will undergo its ultimate transfiguration into agape through its investiture in finitude.

This is also, therefore, supremely the bandwidth of the *personal*—where, in the astonishing words of Ladislaus Boros, “The humanity of Christ has, as it were, absorbed, and thus neutralized the dangers of man’s meeting with God.”¹³ Writ large, this triad of worlds is the mystical body of Christ, and the imaginal flows through it as its lifeblood.

While exchange between the realms occurs at every point along the Ray of Creation, there are certain features of this imaginal zone of operations that make it a particularly intense locus of activity. Let me simply summarize the three significant dovetails, collated in the composite schematic on the next page that provide such strong clues as to the specific nature of the exchange that goes on here.

First, running right across this extended bandwidth, separating Worlds 24 and 48, is that first conscious shock. This means that a new infusion of energy—or a different kind of energy—must be brought here in order to bridge the gap.

Second, straddling this same gap we find the junction point between what Tomberg calls “psychic force” (“radial energy” for Teilhard) and the more familiar world of “physical energy” (“tangential energy” for Teilhard). We move beyond the familiar realm of physical energy described under the Newtonian laws of thermodynamics into some new and subtler

WORLD	SCALE	COSMOLOGICAL REALM	SPIRITUAL REALM
	1	do	Absolute
	3	si	All Worlds
	6	la	All Suns
	12	sol	Sun
	24	fa	All Planets
	48	mi	Earth
	96	re	Moon
	192	do ₂	Sublunar

Composite Map of the Worlds

bandwidth (classically associated with "prayer," "will," "love," and "attention"), which is also implicitly, according to Teilhard, counterentropic: it concentrates force rather than dissipating it.

Third, we are straddling the gap between preconscious and conscious in the Gurdjieffian sense: between man functioning merely as a highly sophisticated machine and man in the true sense of the term—balanced in all three centers, present, and manifesting at least the beginnings of conscience and real will.

Let's see how all this plays out when we throw ourselves into the mix.