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Colin on the balcony of Queens Grove Studios -
probably drafting a New System Paper - mid 1970s?

The Studios Meetings

In this Volume's 3/2, mention is made of the meetings Colin began to have at his Queens Grove Studios home in London from the mid-70s '...inspired by his desire to reformulate the System in the light of his experience of meditation, and to preserve the insights into the technique which he gained from Maharishi's talks in 1960/1...the meetings...were a focus and sounding board for the New System Papers we have today.'

These monthly (school-term time) Wednesday evening meetings, which lasted about an hour and a half or so, were by friendly arrangement with The Study Society and people came mainly through that link. There were both older Society members and those who might have recently started meditation with a spectrum of interest between System and meditation.

"...The fact that we are a mixture of quite new, and quite old, makes it all the more interesting ... these Wednesdays have been a wonderful training in how to formulate - or reformulate the System, and that is one of the things I promised myself - and you - that I would try to do. How can we gather in all this knowledge, so that it does not get lost?" (from a letter of 10/8/78 to Colin's friend Dr Roles).

The foreword to one of Colin's System reformulation papers develops this theme:-

'The purpose of these Wednesday evenings is to find a way of reformulating the system we were given by P.D.Ouspensky, in the light of any further knowledge and experience we have received since his death, particularly from the Shankaracharya, and from the meditation which belongs to his Tradition.

Try to imagine someone - perhaps one of our own children or grandchildren - living in the third millenium (only some twenty years from now). How can we ensure that the knowledge we have been given is gathered together in a form he would accept and understand?

With this in mind I have tried to start from fundamentals. If you have heard some of it before try to hear it afresh from this point of view.'

Bob Simmons, who often came with his wife Anna to the Studios Wednesdays, wrote a delightful background article about Colin's New System Papers for the Spring 2010 issue of the Study Society's Contact magazine from which the following is extracted:-

'Colin was an architect. For a shy, rather retiring man, it is surprising to discover how radical he was. Starting as a young architect in the family building firm, he developed an interest in the use of monolithic reinforced concrete in domestic buildings and formed a partnership with two New Zealand architects with a similar enthusiasm. The firm of Connell, Ward & Lucas soon became well-known for its work in this medium,

(to 8/2)

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and Colin is credited with a number of landmark buildings, the most accessible of which is 66 Frognal in Hampstead which* he designed for his friends Geoffrey and Ursula Walford. The Walfords were, like Colin, students of P.D.Ouspensky from the early 1930s.

Later Colin worked for the LCC and its successor the GLC, his most famous achievement being the prize-winning Roehampton Estate, for which he was architect-in-chief...

After the war, when Dr Roles took over the direction of what became the Study Society, Colin was a great supporter. But he preserved a degree of independence, unsurprisingly given his radical turn of mind. Though Dr Roles used Colin's work at times, particularly when it came to 'Cosmoses' and 'Triads' on which subjects Colin was without peer, the two often differed in their interpretation of the System, which developed into a friendly and productive competition. Colin was authorised to have his own group, which met once a month in his studio...

Colin was a great enthusiast for the Meditation: indeed he was a great advertisement for it - the shy charm he had always owned now seemed to bubble up like a perpetual inner champagne. He explained, indefatigably, how the Meditation 'worked' using the enneagram...

Colin had told Ouspensky about some of his findings about 'Cosmoses' and Ouspensky encouraged him to go on with his enquiries. He did so, to great effect, compiling a huge number of examples to show the relation between time and size at different levels of the universe from the atom to the galaxy.

Many of us, though, will remember Colin first and foremost for his gentle personal kindness. Whether as architect or friend, he made the world a better place.'

Graham Francis, gives an architect's 'pen-picture' of his Studios meetings recollections:-

'..Colin's Studio was..over garages in a small enclosed area in St John's Wood.. the double-height studio & principal living room would be set up with chairs of different sizes and vintages and a large easel with near A0 size paper arranged with a diagram** on the top sheet turned over to reveal the next beautiful diagram of the evening during Colin's talk.. The room had a wonderful feeling of calm and 'knowledge'..' (to 8/3)

(* see the Memoir Volume in this Archive for more about 66 Frognal and those Modernist Architecture days)

(** see Volume XI's Appendix for examples of these large diagrams, reduced to A4)

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My own memories are based on a few rare visits from the daily demands of our North Devon dairy farm. There would always be a main theme accompanied by a paper Colin specially wrote for that Wednesday with its large explanatory diagrams. The paper, which had usually gone through several drafts and family conversations, would be read in stages by Colin (who got me reading them too on those few occasions). Colin would then use his beautiful diagrams to encourage discussion. My memory is of Colin's warm and total response to everyone's questions, the feeling that he took in the whole meeting's individual and collective requirements at the same time, and his infectious enthusiasm for the inherent elegance of the big System ideas with their ability to explain and assist our spiritual journey in meditation. And, of course, Pamela provided the mainly silent anchor (as well as the coffee and biscuits!)

The Wednesday evenings were of enormous importance to Colin as the beginnings of an audience for his work of reformulation. In his last week he was seeking a theme for the coming Autumn term meetings and asked for suggestions. I think I would now recommend Volume IX All Living as a fresh starting point.

