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**Being Valley: An Ethnographic Study of the Processes
of an Alternative School**

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Being Valley

An Ethnographic Study of the Processes of an *Alternative* School

I.

Entering Valley

There's something about this place, I cannot tell you what it is, if you are open, you will feel it, you will know.

Teacher, Middle School

While I walked into my field site hoping to come to grips with the ability of an educational-space to reconcile what appeared to me to be a most crippling contradiction at the time, I came out from it, a mere six weeks later, having received an *invitation* that has impelled me (if unconsciously) to continually reorient my gaze ever since, whatever be my endeavour'. These effects I continue to experience as a consequence of my short fieldtrip speak to the power of the site's institutionalised processes and their potential impact on the site's constituents. It is in this sense The Valley School, Bangalore (hereafter Valley) is unforgettable for me; it has left an indelible mark on me without seeming to want to do so. In what follows I describe as accurately as possible the ways and means it employed (and those that I allowed it to employ) for accomplishing exactly this feat. In other words, I attempt to apprehend my relationship to the school as an actor (as opposed to a merely passive observer). I go about this attempt in what may seem to be a roundabout fashion, which is to say that this is not a line of inquiry I take up directly in this paper; although I come back to the question of my own transformation in the concluding remarks of this paper, the experiences I underwent, and my own actions remain a murmur throughout, observable vicariously through the descriptions of actor – students and teachers primarily – discourses (narratives and practices) that collectively constitute the school.

¹The lasting effects of whatever the field left me with I have only been able to gather with the benefit of hindsight, along with a lot of reflection through the writing of this essay. It is because I have arrived at an understanding of these effects only now that I am claiming my unconsciousness with respect to their influence on my practices in the past. I will not pretend to possess control over whether this continues to happen (consciously or unconsciously) in the future.

This paper then is as much an analysis of the schooling processes I had the privilege to observe or partake in as it is a first-hand account of the effects some of these processes have had on the various actors of the school, including on me. I have explored in depth how the school implicates the actors that constitute it, allowing me to construct a picture of the kind of impact Valley has/the potential of having on its students and teachers (and even outsiders), or more generally, that of the relationship of the nature of a school to its participants. How participants come to co-constitute the school with their various performances, the interactions that take place between them are crucial elements of such an inquiry. Through the course of this study, I am also able to arrive at what I believe to be a resolution to (or possibly a complete reorientation of) my initial query around the school's being in thrall to contradiction. I argue that insofar as Jiddu Krishnamurti's teachings (hereafter *the teachings*) are to reproduce themselves in spirit, Valley must continually construct an *Other* – academic practices that represent instrumental goals – that is to be fought, and which only *the teachings* can help defeat/suppress. *The teachings* are also simultaneously opposed to and a producer of alterity. Therefore, contradiction is not so much resolved as it is relied upon at Valley, in fact, it is the source of the school's ideological sustenance. In the rest of this section I flesh out the questions I started out with along with the conceptual apparatus I have since employed in order to subsequently present my understanding of the schema and logic of Valley.

Questions – Initial and Subsequent

Past experiences as frames of reference

Growing up in a private school that was geared toward a very specific aim – academic success – for its quasi-homogenous population, I was oblivious to the sort of bubble² I occupied at the time. It was my teaching stint at a municipality-run elementary school in Delhi that first alerted me to the *conventionality* of my worldview, and its narrowness. The kind of schooling and parenting I received built (or drilled?) into me a competitive ethic predicated on the construction of an *Other* that coerced me into perpetual comparison. Securing higher grades in examinations was the quintessential marker of superiority where I studied, and despite my best efforts to the contrary, it remained a producer of hierarchies where I taught. Although the kind of education system I was entrenched in as a teacher did not allow for much experimentation, I did manage to stumble onto different kinds of teaching approaches while exploring effective ways to motivate my students.

²I am defining homogeneity primarily with respect to the caste and class backgrounds of the students; a majority of the students at my school belonged to 'upper-caste' and what is known is 'upper-middle-class' backgrounds. This contributed to isolation from certain kinds of social realities, or, in other words, constructed a bubble.

The most non-/anti-*conventional*³ of these approaches together constituted the specter of 'alternative' education for me, and, if only as distant ideas or forbidden fruit – such approaches could scarcely be employed where I taught because of the limited resources at my disposal – enamoured me. While the reputation of Krishnamurti Foundation schools (as 'alternative') far precedes the respective schools themselves, it is also the optic of the *conventional* outsider that contributes to the construction of the mystique that appears to shroud these schools and legitimates them as 'alternative' spaces. It should come as no surprise then that when an opportunity to penetrate this shroud presented itself, I was more than willing to seize it.

The ostensive contradiction

My subjective experiences as a student and a teacher framed my understanding of Valley and informed the sorts of questions I wanted to explore at this site. Both where I studied and where I taught the examination-based assessment-practices marked out quite distinctly what was valued. No words were minced: there were to be "no points for second place;" the spirit of competition pervaded both the most mundane and the most exceptional of school/class activities. With this backdrop, I now confronted a school that appeared to be confined by the same rules and structures – examinations, competition (at least at the high school level) – and yet claimed to be grounded in a philosophy that rejected competition and all comparisons. Valley then seemed to be a space that had ostensibly mastered (at least in theory) what in my teaching experience was a paralysing conundrum – restraining both the construction of material hierarchies and the spirit of competition in the classroom within the paradigm of Board examinations. By exploring the ways in which such a comingling of seemingly opposing forces played out in the context of a school I hoped to first gauge the extent of Valley's mastery in practice, if it existed at all, and, subsequently, to be able to resolve normative questions around the kinds of practices *conventional* schools ought to adopt if they are to limit the dominance of hierarchy-producing competitive ethics in their students. In other words, I wanted to identify whether/the extent to which Valley's practices and strategies could be used to abate the hierarchising effects of more *conventional* contexts.

Subsequent problems

With more time in the field, and through the writing of this paper, however, my focus has gradually shifted from wanting to pass a verdict on Valley's general ability to resolve a contradiction⁴ I ascribed to it⁵ to the web of

³By my (*conventional*) standards

⁴And, secondarily, the normative questions I cited above.

⁵This is not to say the Valley does not battle this contradiction (between its philosophy of non-comparison/competition and its structured competitive examinations) – it most certainly does so every day, as will be seen in my analysis below – but that in my final analysis the quintessential question I wanted to ask of Valley had shifted to another.

meanings that emerged from the actors' subjective understandings of the school's most central conflicts. How actors justified their acts in light of their self-defined conflicts and contradictions, the ways in which they negotiated and constituted the terrain of the school, the techniques they used to do so have come to interest me not only for the normative considerations I outlined above but also as worthy objects of inquiry in themselves.

Methodology

All the lines of inquiry I have mentioned demanded a study of the school's guiding philosophy – Jiddu Krishnamurti's teachings – and the form (and extent) of its adoption by the school's actors – students and teachers primarily – as gleaned from its practical and processual embeddedness in the school. Krishnamurti's writings (especially his letters to his school), student and teacher interviews, and my participation in/observations of practices together constitute the methods by which I collected data – forayed into Valley, if you will.

Conceptual apparatus

In following the tenets of Bruno Latour's Actor-network theory, I attempted to not reduce the *actants*⁶ I observed to any presupposed identity-categories or essences that determine their behaviours or acts, rather I followed the actors' performances in their networks in order to observe their techniques of navigating interactions with other *actants*, and the processes of the school. Latour calls this maintaining a certain degree of "flatness" while studying the social. In his own words:

Instead of constantly predicting how an actor should behave, and which associations are allowed a priori, A[N]T makes no assumption at all, and in order to remain uncommitted needs to set its instrument by insisting on infinite pliability and absolute freedom.

(Latour 1990)

Latour's concept of a *collective* is also central to my analysis in that I treat Valley as a *collective* – a "body corporate" or an "object-institution" – that

⁶*Actant* is the term Latour uses instead of actor or agent to mark the agency of nonhumans along with that of humans. For instance, *the teachings*, the students, the teachers, the teachers equipped with *the teachings*, are all distinct actors (or more accurately *actants*) capable of exercising agency. In this sense *actant* is a far more dynamic term than the conventional actor. Actors within *collectives* are constantly interacting with objects, practices, and (other) *actants*; such interactions are constantly producing new *actants* within the *collective* and translating or displacing its goals. It is this notion of constant identity-flux that I wish to signal by my use of this term. I restrict my use of the conventional actor to instances when I wish to specifically mark out humans with agency within the school.

absorbs "a proliferation of mediators [*actants*, processes, artifacts], regulates their expression, redistributes skills" (Latour 1999). It is a space where the various *actants* – students, teachers, administrative staff, workers, parents, outsiders, *the teachings*, the campus – reside and interact, share their competences, translate their goals, and potentially displace the *collective* onto new, different directions. The *actants* I was able to learn from/devote time to the most are *the teachings*, the students, and the teachers. Although to not have interacted with other *actants* as closely is not ideal, but the limited duration of my visit confined dramatically the scope of my study.

I also use categories from other literature to analyse Valley phenomena. In her ethnography on the first Krishnamurti Foundation school – Rishi Valley School (RVS) – *Life at School*, Meenakshi Thapan employs many conceptual oppositions to present her analysis. I find two such pairs especially relevant for framing the processes of Valley: the ideologue and pedagogue teachers; the transcendental and local orders. While both Valley and RVS are founded on *the teachings*, Thapan's conceptual oppositions were induced in a context that differs markedly from the one at Valley in various other respects, and therefore, I use her categorisations simply as heuristic devices to probe my data and construct a rigorous model particular to Valley. Based on my observations from the field, I also construct certain new categories in order to better explain its peculiarities. These do not all build on Thapan's categories, but definitely converse with them. With the help of all these concepts and categories, I intend to trace the paths of various *actants* and their relationship/interactions with one another in order to arrive at what I understand to be the logic of Valley.

II.

Schematic of Valley

What constitutes Valley? Who/What are its main *actants* and what do they do? In order to fully appreciate the processes operating within a school, it is imperative to lay bare the parts that come to bear on it, constitute it. In this section I attempt to delineate the major elements of the field and their interrelationships. Since I conceive Valley as a Latourian *collective*, its goals, *actants*, and programs of action are the categories by way of which I analyse it.

Teacher Typology

Although it is possible to identify several *actants* operating within Valley – and these in the constant process of transforming – I take my starting point as *the teachings*, teachers, and students for reasons I have mentioned in the previous section. While *the teachings* consist in a unified set and the students are far too heterogeneous to warrant classification, it is useful to construct certain ideal-type models for teachers.

In Thapan's conceptualisation, teachers at RVS could be distinguished on the bases of their reasons for joining the school, their commitment to school ideology (*the teachings*) and its dissemination (especially among the students), and the sources of their legitimacy. She refers to:

...teachers recruited through the mainly formal and impersonal mode of recruitment as 'professional teachers' or 'pedagogues' insofar as they look upon teaching as an occupation or career and are in the school in response to a demand for teachers and not because of any prior commitment to the ideology. The second category comprises the 'ideologue teachers' who have been recruited through a more personal and informal mode of recruitment and have taken on the job because of an explicit commitment to the ideology... As a result of [the ideologue's] ability to interpret and disseminate ideological discourse, power derived from the ideology is bestowed on her... [The pedagogue's] power lies in the processes of transmitting educational discourse.

(Thapan 1991)

Building on this framework, I would argue it is rather clear to the ideologues at Valley that being a teacher is merely one of the roles they must perform in order to justify their presence at the school as opposed to a step in the direction of advancing their careers. Accounts such as the following reflect this:

I enjoy being here, and being here requires me to do certain things, and the tax I pay for being here is all the teaching that I do.

Teacher, Middle School

Ideologues then are self-admittedly present at the school for their own selves first and foremost. That they happen to be one of the primary vehicles through which the content of *the teachings* is able to proliferate – they are at the helm of Valley's ideological ship so to speak – just happens to be a by-product from their subjective perspectives. While the pedagogues too are "expected to understand the ideology, and acquire a commitment to the same" (Thapan 1991), they specialise in and therefore are far more concerned with the day to day transmission of academic content; they claim to be at the school, first and foremost, for the students.

It is important to note that these categories are not hermetically sealed, as Thapan too suggests, and I prefer to view them as the two planes on which a teacher developed (or not) at Valley their commitments as well as their

abilities to fulfill those commitments. The level of pedagogic specialisation signifies the degree to/ease and effectiveness⁷ with which a teacher could transmit academic content. The level of ideological specialisation signifies the degree of comfort with the tenets of *the teachings* and its application to one's own life (visualised in Figure 1). A pedagogue then is any teacher both committed to and proficient in disseminating academic content, whatever her level of commitment to *the teachings*, whereas an ideologue is any teacher who believes in *the teachings*, applies them to her own life, and attempts to disseminate their content, whatever her effectiveness in doing so. Such a model then is able to account for peda-ideologues – teachers who come to Valley with great commitment to the ideology, but also have great pedagogical skills (or are able to acquire them over a period) – and ideo-pedagogues – teachers who come in with pedagogical skills or qualification, but also come to be as committed to the ideology as they are to academic excellence. Therefore, teachers arrive at the school with a limited set of skills, and certain core beliefs, but constant subjection to the processes of the school and interaction with various *actants* has the capacity to build new competences and translate initial beliefs and goals⁸. The two most significant facets that define a teacher at Valley, therefore, were not mutually exclusive or at odds with one another empirically.

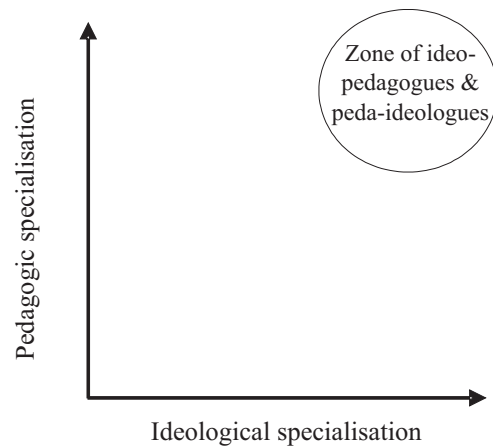


Figure 1. A visualisation of teacher typology

⁷ This is generally measured in terms of the grades attained by the students.

⁸ It is important to note that core beliefs teachers arrive with are accompanied with a sense of curiosity and openness to learn, which, in turn, affords certain flexibility to them and enables their transformation.

A Senior School teacher who came in with subject-matter expertise and little curiosity about Krishnamurti was able to, gradually, across the span of 3-4 years (by his own approximation), marry the academic content he was recruited to deliver with the ideological content of *the teachings* – his students entrusted him with the most intimate details of their lives, they would complete work assigned to them by other teachers in his class without any fear of reprimand, they could choose to hold the class outdoors when they so wished, he would never prescribe homework, and hardly ever asked students to write tests, all his classes were based on discussion, and attempted to question privilege (his own and that of his students), and yet they were not disorderly for the most part. His classes reflected parity of power between students and teacher, and a non-competitive spirit. He was truly able to establish a *relationship* with his students:

To start the theme "urban-rural divide and critical appraisal of development" in one of his classes he used the following discussion question: "do you think we can go and live outside of Bangalore, in a rural setting (why or why not)?" He always sought to jolt students out of their comfort zones, and students responded. In one of the classes there was a heated exchange around human consumption, where a student said: "it feels like everything we do is condemned and criticised, we keep talking, we question, yet we still lead the same lives, don't do anything, what's the point? We will never be happy!" The discussion went on for about 15-18 minutes, well into the next period. Nobody budged.

The ideo-pedagogue in action

A Senior School teacher with no prior teaching experience came to the school having renounced a lucrative career and over time managed to hone his pedagogical skills to become one of the most revered instructors of his subject area. He was able deliver academic content without disregarding the tenets of ideology, but in a slightly different, more direct fashion compared to the ideo-pedagogue mentioned above. In his classes discussions were constantly brought back to sustainability and sensitivity; he decided to show the movie *Animal Farm* to class-IX students (during their culture-class⁹) in order to discuss issues of power and greed. He drove the conversation toward "our reasons for choosing what we choose in our lives – why only certain kinds of careers?" He would explicitly ask students to consider the extent to which their thoughts were aligned to the intent of the school. In one such discussion students expressed the feeling of being burdened by the unsaid, tacit expectations of their parents, and the teacher related this to their "own insecurities and fears," marking out clearly his priorities: "do we feel secure with money or do we get insecure further in order to protect what is ours?" It is not that students were not graded on their work in his classes; they were, in fact, asked to grade their work themselves. By their own admission, students always did "very well" in his subjects.

The peda-ideologue in action

⁹ This was a weekly forty-minute long non-academic discussion-based session for Senior School students, which was usually conducted by an ideologue who also determined its discussion themes. These sessions were designed to challenge students by bringing up contentious moral/philosophical issues.

Actant Goals

If you don't have a Virat Kohli to look up to, how do you push yourself? How do you grow? How do you even know you have it in you?

The sports teacher who did not mind comparing his students with others

I want to make a lot of money. With my background, I never thought I would run after money; my mother is a social worker. I think with money you could easily fund a million people.

The Senior School student who wanted to help others by acquiring wealth

Two students who had seen the TED talk yesterday came to class today saying "this subject is pointless," and we started a discussion on this. Now that is real learning; the students really reflected on the video, it sparks them on a question, and something happens.

The Senior School teacher who wanted to ignite minds

When [the students] go to college, the sports coach there will see them and wonder whether there was any coach at their school. In the last 7-8 years, the time period the more experienced coaches have been around, not even one player has gone on to play a higher level!

The sports teacher who wished to leave a legacy

Each *actant* has certain broad aims and goals it sets out to achieve within the *collective*. The ideologues want to explore *the teachings* and disseminate them, certain students wish to explore certain arts, certain others covet high grades, the pedagogues aim to transmit content as per the prescribed curriculum, *the teachings* exist to spread their ideological content and reproduce themselves, parents want their children to secure admissions to reputable colleges. In order to achieve these goals *actants* employ certain practices that are routinised¹⁰ (and often even black-boxed¹¹) and usually involve aid from other *actants* – I call these subroutines. For instance:

¹⁰ This signifies the regular employment of and reliance on a particular practice for the attainment of a particular goal; a set of routinised practices can be said to constitute a program of action (which is described in the next subsection). A practice that is routinised may or may not be black-boxed.

¹¹ Latour uses this term to indicate a kind of invisibilisation of mediation; routinisation of practices may hamper our ability to view these mediating practices as assemblages and sequences of action, or as having parts that are in turn subject to similar invisibilisation. For Latour, each object, practice, *actant* that constitutes our program of action folds within itself the actions of other objects, practices, *actants*, and so on, and it is this chain or sequence that is susceptible to being invisibilised or black-boxed during performance. In the model I have

A Grade-XII student who desired admission to one of the IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) followed the three-hour-long daily practice of self-study, and enlisted the help of reference books that were not prescribed by the school. Similarly, *the teachings* in order to reproduce themselves relied on study-meets¹² among the teachers, and student-visits to the study-center¹³.

Of course, the mere deployment and routinisation of motivated practices does not guarantee goal attainment. The goals of *actants* may not always agree with the normative goals of the *collective* at large, or those of the other *actants*. A collision of goals may result in the recruitment of new/different *actants* and practices:

To the student desirous of securing a seat at IIT working with the school-prescribed textbooks and study-schedule alone were insufficient, and therefore she recruited new *actants* – reference books – and new practices – self-study – that were gradually routinised in her (personal) program of action.

proposed for Valley, while black-boxing relies on routinisation, routinisation does not automatically imply black-boxing. There may exist practices that are routinised, and yet their construction and constituent elements are conspicuous to the *actants*. For instance, the ideological purpose of the structured study-center sessions is evident to some students and not to others. In case of the former, routinisation occurs without black-boxing – the students are able to break-down the sessions into their constituent parts: *the teachings*, the ideologues, its purpose etc., while in the latter, routines are black-boxed – the sessions occur regularly but the operation of *the teachings* through them are not visible to these students. The invisibilisation of ideological purpose, in this way, allows *the teachings* to extend/maintain hegemony over certain students. *The teachings* are able to partially achieve their goals in this way; the goals of students for whom the ideological purpose of the sessions was invisibilised are possibly translated (come to be more aligned with *the teachings* potentially). Of course, this is not to say the study-center sessions do not tacitly affect all students, but that their effect is varied.

¹²The study-meet is a weekly forty-minute-long meeting of teachers (in separate, voluntarily-formulated groups) wherein parts of a pre-assigned Krishnamurti text are read aloud and discussed. The particular book that is to be read and debated for the rest of the year is determined at the beginning of the academic year.

¹³The study-center functions independently of the school and is specifically entrusted with the task of propagating *the teachings*. It is physically located within the campus, but geographically situated in an isolated corner of it. Teachers attend a monthly whole-staff meeting at the center, and students also attend two/three sessions at the center annually. It also hosts retreats for outsiders for a nominal fee. The sessions are based on message of *the teachings* and usually include videos of talks by Krishnamurti. The study-center is a place where one goes to practice, or live *the teachings*.

To understand more completely the effects of goal-variation and *actant*-interaction on the *collective's* direction, the dominant¹⁴ goal-strands operating within the school must be identified. Valley's goals broadly conform to the two orders – transcendental and local – identified by Thapan at RVS. The two orders can be distinguished with respect to what they conceptualise as primary knowledge – *the teachings* as against academic content – what they consider sources of knowledge – the (inner) self as against (external) society – and what they value – the production of a new kind of human through self-knowledge as against knowledge reproduction through transmission of educational content. According to her:

[That RVS exists at the level of both these orders] is its paradox and in a certain sense, it is what lends it the quality of a 'different' kind of a school. There is in the school a continuous effort to achieve a certain balance between the two orders. This is what makes it a somewhat unusual school constantly in the process of becoming, as it were, rather than the more commonplace, well-defined, established schools. In fact, RVS as an educational institution makes sense because of the bearing of one order, with its attendant form of discourse, upon the other and the relationship between the two orders.

(Thapan 1991)

Ideology

The transcendental and local orders correspond rather well to both the two (dominant) strands of goals – the ideological and the instrumental – and the two (dominant) sets of practices – the *invitational* and the academic – I observed at Valley. This first strand of goals – the ideological (corresponds with Thapan's transcendental order) – flows directly from *the teachings* and guides the functioning of the school in the most general, normative sense. Most teachers recognise the primacy and significance of ideological goals, which find their expression in the explicitly stated *intent* of the school:

The schools exist to cultivate a new 'human mind in all its relationships and activities' that will lead to social transformation by ordering our own lives, since society as it exists today is riddled with war and conflict, the cause of which is the fragmented mind; the 'new mind', however, will be whole.

Paraphrased from Krishnamurti (2006)

¹⁴I determine the dominance of particular goal-strands and action-programs by the frequency of their mentions during my interviews and observations. Because I only interviewed a limited number of persons and was privy to a fraction of the total number of interactions at the school during my stay, the possibility of the dominance of other goal-strands and action-programs cannot be ruled out.

Social transformation is central to *the teachings*, but primarily as an effect of "order[ing] our lives" or what Krishnamurti would call "self-knowledge." This marks out the internal orientation of *the teachings*, and, by extension, that of Valley's ideological goals. Therefore, teachers are not expected to teach or transform the lives of children alone, rather they must do this by transforming themselves. Krishnamurti's concept of freedom also shapes the ideological responsibilities of the (ideal) teacher, and defines her normative role. The teachers must cultivate freedom, and a *relationship* of learning – "to watch yourself" in relationships – in order to bring about total responsibility both in their own selves and by extension in their students. The only way for it to come about is the rejection and removal of fear, superiority, and authority – whether of tradition or the authority that one has gathered through experience and knowledge. On freedom Krishnamurti says:

[F]reedom is not disorder; it is not *laissez-aller*. If you have ever demanded this freedom of yourself, you have also built an image, a concept, an idea of what this freedom is, and obviously that is not freedom... Compassion is the essence of freedom... freedom is absolute order... order is harmony.

(Krishnamurti 2006)

The *intent* of the school, to be actualised, depends upon a particular set of routinised practices that can be categorised as *invitation* (detailed under *Programs of Action* below).

Instrumentality

The goals that constitute the second (dominant) strand – the instrumental (corresponds with Thapan's local order) – may be thought of as producing deviations from or obstacles to the first (ideological) strand as they serve to push the *collective* in directions that are contradictory to *the teachings*¹⁵. Although another set of practices (gate-keeping mechanisms) exists at the school to counteract instrumental encroachments, Valley is as implicated in and constituted by myriad social relations that transcend its physical boundaries as is any other *collective*. Pressures of ensuring good academic results and admissions to colleges, competition with peers, comparisons with facilities at other schools, all plague Valley same as they do any other school. No amount of admitting children of ideologically aligned parents, recruiting ideologically aligned (or at the very least ideologically curious) teachers, and harking-back to *the teachings* are able to allay the concerns around the future 'success' of students. These goals are oriented toward future material reality.

¹⁵The effects of dominant goals and practices of the school, the extent to which the *collective* is transformed are examined in detail in section III below.

While the introduction of new *actants* – say, pedagogues concerned with student academic-performance over their personal commitment to ideology – into the *collective* has the capacity to interrupt and displace the ideological goals of Valley, these ideological goals may, in turn, serve to disrupt the fulfillment of instrumental goals from the standpoint of other *actants*. Valley also then seems to be jostling for the achievement of a balance between its two-dominant goal-strands (not unlike RVS with its two orders). What sorts of techniques are employed toward such an end? What are the ways in which *actants* attain their goals? How are goal-interruptions and disruptions that arise out of *actant* cross-purposes dealt with at Valley? These are the lines of inquiry we move onto next.

Programs of Action

Valley's general program of action consists primarily in its academic and *invitational* practices. These sets of practices reflect the instrumental and ideological goals of the school, and appear, at the outset, to be working at cross-purposes. I argue (later) that it is their co-presence that is essential to Valley. However, before delving into this interrelationship, it is necessary to mark out what they each comprise of in themselves.

Academic

In eleventh Valley gives you the space, in twelfth, psychologically, you get into the rat race, not that Valley is pushing you, but subtly you are in the rat race. But I am way better off than my friends [from outside Valley]. They think I am very lucky.

Student, Class XII

Exams matter but that's not the only thing. We don't fear it so much.

Students, Class XI

Instrumental goals are effected by the subroutines I call *academic*. They primarily include (but are not limited to) time-bound lessons, fixed time-tables, assignments, homework, extra-classes, test-orientation, Board examinations. These can be conceived as ideological deviations insofar as they (directly or indirectly) serve to promote comparison and a spirit of competition¹⁶ within Valley. Despite the best efforts of teachers, the lives of students are qualitatively different in their Board-examination Grades (X and XII) as opposed to their lives in other Grades. Instrumental goals dwarf ideological ones in these Grades despite no qualitative change in the *invitational* subroutines. In most other Grades, however, the *invitational* form of implementation of academic practices helps conformity to ideology

¹⁶Although time-bound lessons and fixed time-tables do not seem to, in any direct way, promote the spirit of competition, they are essential elements of Valley's academic action-program that enable the attainment of instrumental goals, and therefore indirectly facilitate competition.

(discussed in next subsection). Although academic practices are institutionalised and enforced to their greatest degree in the Senior School (and especially Grades X and XII), their tremendous impact on the Middle and Junior School curricula cannot be overlooked. Their formalisation at the Senior School level has a domino-effect down the Grade-chain at Valley:

During the annual curriculum planning meet, which took place right before the beginning of academic year 2016-17, the Middle School mathematics teachers were requested to make coursework far more rigorous and dramatically increase the level and numbers of problems practiced in their grades in order to meet the heavy demands made on the students by the Senior School mathematics curriculum (ICSE). Certain Senior School mathematics teachers wanted drastic changes to be made even to the Junior School curriculum which was supposedly "too light."

Invitation

I have been functioning quietly; if you're quiet nobody comes and questions you, nobody is nosy.

Teacher, Senior School

[The students of Biology] are more ambitious, they are fortunately or unfortunately already moulded by the pressures that have been put on them, they are not rebelling anymore, or they have not started yet, maybe later they will. I don't have a problem with them per se, but I don't want to upset them. So, when I teach Biology I become very content heavy, and informative. But at the same time, I am also looking at avenues where I can knock the doors of the other side.

Teacher, Senior School

Are you here for yourself or for that neighbour of yours?

An ideologue to a pedagogue

Have we earned the freedom that we have? The message we are giving out is that wherever there are students, we need teachers for policing them.

A question posed to Grade-XI students during culture-class

The set of practices specifically geared toward ideological dissemination pervade the school and both the teachers and students partake in them wittingly or unwittingly. It is these invisibilised subroutines employed by the school that I call *invitation(s)*. In their messaging/content *the teachings* do not seek to tell us or show us the Truth, rather request us to explore, experience for ourselves. They ask us to reflect upon tough and challenging questions, to reorient our gaze inward – "watch yourself" – but Krishnamurti is adamant: "I cannot tell you, you have to see for yourself." *The teachings* are an *invitation* to self-transformation. I sub-classify the practices that refer to, or quote explicitly from the letter of *the teachings*, including the ones that encourage self-reflection on themes aligned to *the teachings*, as substantive *invitations*:

Students were expected to attend 3-4 study-center sessions each academic year. Here, more than in other institutionalised spaces of the school, the students got to interact with *the teachings*. They were shown videos of talks by Krishnamurti, and participated in discussions that were themed on the kinds of moral/philosophical issues tackled by Krishnamurti. Students were expected to reflect upon the topics of discussion and share their thoughts. The sessions were focused on underlying emotions, the broad contours of life, and the socio-psychological condition of humans. Certain sessions also focused on holistic awareness of the mind, body – in nature, in relationship.

Weekly culture-classes (ordinarily) conducted by ideologues for Senior School students aimed to bring contentious contemporary issues to the fore. A student recalled a "crazy" statement made deliberately by the late Director of the school during one such class that riled the students up and made them think: "education in children causes divorce!"

Substantive *invitations*

The *invitation* is ideological not only in content, but also in form; it is possible for teachers to deliver academic content in a way that serves ideology. The rejection of imposition or coercion is an extension of the "no fear" and "no authority" principles, and as long as academic practices appear to not be forced and students (or teachers) believe these to exist "for their own good", they can be seen to be ideological (in their form, way of delivery) in the broader program of action of the school:

The same teacher taught two subjects in completely different styles because of the different ways students understood respective subjects. Biology allowed fulfillment of instrumental goals more so than did EVS in the eyes of students, and therefore the teacher felt that discussion-based lessons could be limited to EVS classes, whereas Biology could be taught in a more exam-oriented fashion, for this was what the students wanted. There were no attempts to coerce Biology students (at least within the Biology class itself) into choosing different goals. Their goals (or instrumentality) were challenged outside the class, by way of substantive *invitations* such as the study-center sessions, or culture-classes.

Formal *invitation*

The delivering of exam-oriented lectures that are information-heavy, which in ordinary circumstances are thought to be instrumental, can in this case be rationalised as being a sort of *invitation* in the grander scheme of things; there was no ideological content disseminated in the Biology class, nor was any request for self-reflection made to the students, however, students were "let be," not in order to ignore them because they were deemed beyond hope, but rather because they were to be *invited* in more substantive ways (through dissemination of ideological content) at some later date. Therefore, practices undertaken keeping in view the "bigger picture," even if contradictory to *the teachings* in their content at the moment of performance, are part of *invitation*. Although formal *invitations* are seldom seen as furthering the

ideological goals of the schools, they, in fact, play a most significant role in doing so by creating an unmistakable sense of freedom of choice for the *actants*. *Invitations*, substantive or formal, do not coerce actors into choosing particular courses of action, rather compel them toward a particular direction by invoking an inner sense of responsibility and sensitivity.

Teachers, therefore, must only "look" at the children as opposed to assessing them against some ideal standard, they must not reprimand students for "not performing," or "submitting work late" to prevent coercing these children toward particular kinds of (normative) behaviours. *Invitations* seek to build sensitivity and responsibility in students and teachers alike. It is a technique put to use by the school to build a culture of openness and freedom among the teachers themselves. The weekly study-meet where the teachers congregate to discuss certain parts of one of Krishnamurti's books is another such *invitation*:

Krishnamurti's style of writing is meant to challenge the teacher. It seeks to jolt teachers out of their comfort zones. Discussing it collectively is an opportunity for ideologues to interact with the pedagogues and share competences, redistribute skills. Questions around the significance of examinations and the stresses related to them are raised often in the study-meet. So too are notions of excellence, doing one's best, and the responsibility teachers have to the students, and also to themselves. Ideologues play an imperative role in underscoring this last point at the study-meets: "Valley is as much a space for the teacher as it is for the student, if not more."

Before I go on to examining the effects of the dominant goals and practices of Valley, below I provide an overview¹⁷ of the kinds of practices I observed in the school that can be said to collectively constitute the broad program of action (the *invitation*) of Valley. These practices span various schooling-contexts, and are grounded in some or the other tenet of *the teachings*, or follow them in spirit at the very least. They seek to build in students and teachers sensitivity and a sense of responsibility for their actions:

Not unlike any *conventional* school, a majority of teachers prescribed homework to their students in some way, shape or form at Valley. In my observations of the Middle and Senior Schools students were extended an incredible amount of latitude with respect to their timelines of submission however. Many would not meet their deadlines, but generally were not singled-

¹⁷ What I have presented is the general pattern of practices that I observed, which I do not claim are free of exceptions, nor do I claim to predict future behaviour of actors. The objective behind painting a broad picture is to provide a sense of my general experience of the teaching-learning processes at Valley.

out or scolded for the same. The design of the Middle School curriculum especially lent itself to such temporal flexibility – the same theme would be followed for several weeks. This leniency with respect to work of students corresponded with the pervasive lack of urgency betrayed by the school at a general level – there were no bells, students would stroll in late to most classes, and were provided many intervals during the day.

Curricular work and timelines

Even in times of extreme chaos and duress teachers exercised tremendous restraint. If teachers desired a change in the behaviour of (some of) their students, they (ordinarily) requested, reasoned with and at times pleaded with them, hardly ever scolded them publicly. Even when appeals were made publicly they sought to produce self-reflection among the students. Certain public addresses singled-out types of events for context-reference but never singled-out particular students. The care maintained to do so was discernible. What went for punishment also went for praise; students were never overtly praised for anything, no hyperboles were used, caution was exercised even in encouragement – work was praised, not the person.

Punishment and reward

Multiple slots of cooperative environments, where work-responsibilities were shared, were structured in the school schedule that served to challenge traditional pedagogic, age, and gender hierarchies. Teachers and students shared responsibility for cleaning the dining hall after meals. Senior students were responsible for teaching their juniors the dance-steps to be performed for the school's birthday¹⁸. Seniors had to spend a forty-minute class with their juniors each week (Vertical Group Meetings). The students and teachers were collectively responsibly for singing during the morning assemblies.

Spaces of work and play

New teachers were not expected to go through any formal pedagogic training, or even possess any minimum (certificate of) qualifications. They were assigned a mentor who would not necessarily provide technical content-delivery assistance. They were encouraged to take initiative, and seek help informally through casual conversations if the need arose. They were free to choose their approach of delivering academic content, as long as they worked on reforming their notions of fear, freedom, assessment and comparison. A certain amount of deference to ideological goals was expected, but never explicitly demanded. Even a conspicuous lack of pedagogic prowess on the part of the new recruits did not merit introduction of formal pedagogic training. There was a clear attempt to not bolster academic prominence.

Teacher Training

Valley boasted of an art village – a separate compound in the campus where at least eight distinct visual and performing arts were taught. In the Junior and Middle Schools, all students were supposed to try their hands at each of the arts that were on offer. In Senior School, they were permitted to opt for specialisation

¹⁸An annual commemoration of the founding of the school involving planting of trees by the outgoing cohorts of students, and song/dance performances.

in the areas they preferred. The art village provided a counterbalance to the academic (science and engineering) focus of the school.

Science and Art

As can be seen from the descriptions above, Valley's practices, as if walking on the footsteps of *the teachings* themselves, reflect tremendous restraint in their content and form. The explicit dissemination of ideological content is confined to a limited number of contexts, and yet *the teachings* seem to underlie the very fabric of the school. *Invitations* are supposed to extend the qualities such as restraint to the demeanours of teachers and students; they are designed to translate their goals. The *invitation*, then, can be understood to be the dominant paradigm of Valley.

From the standpoint of Valley's ideological goals, the assemblages and practices that represent the instrumental goals of the school are obstacles that must be fought, sidestepped. Insofar as *invitations* are *accepted*¹⁹ by actors, they help remove obstacles, and mitigate instrumental goals. Not all the actors experience the notions of restraint, and "letting be," in the same fashion however; there are different consequences for not *accepting* the *invitations*. The actor-negotiations with respect to school's ideology, the consequences of noncompliance, and other general effects of *invitational* and academic practices on Valley are the subjects of the next section.

III.

Logic of Valley

Having laid out the dominant elements of Valley, I am now in a position to explicate how these combine to constitute the major processes of the school and give the *collective* its direction. In what follows, I detail the major effects of its programs of action by using students' and teachers' own accounts of the feelings and emotions that Valley produces in them. I then move onto the two major processes I believe define Valley, and help us understand how it is able to sustain, reproduce itself.

Integration

Valley helped me marry disciplines, and make connections; it gives you the space to think.

¹⁹ *Accepting* the *invitation* entails having had one's goals translated in the general, prescribed direction laid out in *the teachings*.

Alumnus, Valley School

[Valley] really does allow you to discover who you are, find your feet, find your voice; I credit whatever I have picked up, to an environment like this.

Teacher, Senior School

Many actors at Valley credit the sprawling fields, vibrant flora, and breezy ambience of its hundred-acre campus with the ability of providing a sense of physical limitlessness that extends to the intellect. Such a sense of space – "to think", "to create", "to be" – is lost on no participant of the school. The teachers, students, even the administrative staff are replete with examples and anecdotes that highlight the contribution of such unfettered space (physical and mental) in alleviating physical/emotional stress. I argue that it is Valley's program of *invitation* in conjunction with the topography of the campus that enables the actors to construct, and take comfort in these notions of abundance and freedom that seem to constitute the very fabric of Valley. Below I detail some of the everyday practices that reflect most clearly this relationship between Valley's *invitations* and the notion of freedom manifest to its actors:

The openness of teachers to conduct classes outside of classrooms, the lack of urgency on the part of students to enter classrooms well into the slotted class-times and on the part of the teachers to extract the utmost from each minute spent in class – reflected in their general lack of annoyance (almost to the point of ignorance for some of them) – spoke to the loose/flexible structure of the school, which seemed to not want to burden students with excessive content. Although the urgency was far more palpable as we moved up the Grades, even in Senior School the focus on timeliness was rather paltry compared to my past schooling experiences.

Abundance of time

For the students, flexibility of structure coupled with frankness of conversation helped build a relationship of trust with the teachers. It was the bond they shared with their teachers, the ability to speak to them about anything under the sun which provided the anchor to their experience of the Valley school. Teachers referred to by their first names, or at worst as aunts or uncles (mostly in formal contexts, or out of sincere respect for the old), was extremely commonplace at Valley, and contributed to the culture of openness between students and teachers. "Relationship," as per one ideologue, "is primary, and everything else is secondary." The belief was that if there existed a relationship of trust between a teacher and her students, or any person and another rather, there was no need for instituting discipline and setting rigid curriculums; students were expected to be sensitive in such a scenario and therefore listen. This is borne out by student narratives that reflected most respect for teachers who were passionate, hard-working, or those that were good listeners. Even severe scolding, or being screamed at, was hardly a concern for students, who invariably tended to question themselves first – "could I have done something wrong?" – before questioning the motives of the teacher – especially if it was somebody they respected – in such events.

Freedom of association

Teachers expressed immense surprise at the sheer irreverence (of most students) they experienced when they first arrived. Students were not necessarily expected to defer to authority. Some teachers detailed how painstakingly Valley continued to build such a culture [an allusion perhaps to its program of *invitation*].

Students' freedom of expression

Stronger peer-bonds, age notwithstanding, were also something unique to Valley for the students. Per them, such a privilege was not afforded to "*conventional-school*" students. The lack of competition among students built from a young age – the school had no differentiating examinations/assessments till Grade VIII and no competitive sport at all – brought about a certain sense of unity across vertical (age) groups.

Unity among persons

The existence of a strong sense of space is borne out by the following narrative of a student who describes the plight of new students struggling to cope with the extent of freedom:

Some [students] flip out, they can't take it, they become crazy, Valley is not for everyone, some people are suffering a lot, they can't make friends, they're too much into the regime, they've been in that kinda school, they find it tough to be chill.

Student, Senior School

Camaraderie, strong relationships, loose structures of authority coupled with the subjective physical experiences of space constitute the very sense of freedom that acts as a centripetal force binding students to one another, creating a sense of belonging to the school. In addition, numerous formal and informal environments that by-design flatten what are *conventionally* hierarchized roles of students and teachers, *invite* cooperation among actors, further build school-wide fraternity. Creative freedom, flexible syllabi (at least in Middle and Junior Schools), collective formulation of yearly curriculum (again more so in Junior School than in Senior School), non-invasive monitoring and evaluation of teachers, and loosely structured teacher-mentoring program create a similar sense of freedom for the teachers who appear largely free to follow their preferred modes of teaching/being²⁰ at the school²¹. Teachers therefore "enjoyed" being at Valley²² and could transmit similar emotions to their students who often maintained their connections to the school subsequent to graduating:

²⁰ This is exemplified by the variety of ways in which different teachers teach similar content.

²¹ Such freedoms are certainly not unconditional or unlimited as we will see below.

²² There are certain material benefits of teaching at Valley that brought a certain kind of security.

Students, on numerous occasions, expressed the desire of coming back to Valley once they graduated – some explicitly wanted to teach at Valley, others were not as precise in their justifications. Some teachers had been the students of one of the Krishnamurti Foundation schools previously. Alumni were seen on campus on multiple occasions – most were attending some or the other school-activity (school's birthday, for instance), and others came simply for leisure.

Alterity

I will be very un-Valley-like and say that I want to make a lot of money and be powerful; I want my BMW when I grow up, I want to roll up in school with a really big car, so that I can show it off to all these guys who're stuck in auto-rickshaws [lots of chuckles!].

Student, Senior School

People who're into dumb competitive exams aren't enjoying themselves. They want the conventional drilling kind of schooling experience.

Student, Senior School

It's got something to do with your parents also, if you've put your child in a KFI school then you should like, you know, not push them into the competitive thing, let them be.

Alumnus, Valley School

We are no better than a gated-community.

Teacher, Senior School

As is evident from the quotes above, students have a very clear conception of what marks Valley out from other (more *conventional*) schools – critical view on the notion of 'success', focus on the "inner" as opposed to "outer" world, a diminished form of teacher authority including approachability, trust and relationship, an overall lack of examination focus (and therefore comparison), and most importantly "the space to think". Each of these aspects is an (direct or indirect) effect of the constant *invitations* made by teachers to students, and to one another. As we saw above, extending *invitations* instead of impositions produces a freedom-sense for the actors that acts as an integrative force for the school creating a strong sense of belonging. While this force binds the school internally, it simultaneously differentiates it profoundly from what is outside its boundaries. In an ironic turn of fate, *the teachings* that seek to allay comparison become the very source of it; *invitations* – *the teachings* in action – provide the grounds for comparisons with other schools. The feelings of difference, uniqueness and having it better than their peers that students of all ages explicitly express lie contrary to the content of *the teachings* inasmuch as the latter represent unity and not fragmentation. Since this palpable sense of difference or markedness can itself be thought of as an obstacle to the ideological goals of Valley, they necessitate abatement through the enlistment of yet more *invitations* or suchlike. *The teachings* that act by way of *invitations*, then, can be thought to be at once (internally) integrative and (externally) differentiating.

Translation

Some teachers remembered being shocked by the irreverence of students, which intimidated them to begin with. They mentioned having to be "careful" about the way they taught when they first came in. It took a lot of time for them to adjust to this new kind of environment.

Plight of new teachers

There was a whole lot of students (and parents) that preferred a far more cut-throat schooling environment for gearing themselves up for the challenge of competitive examination and the "world out-there." The perception of these actors was that Valley was incapable of equipping its students with the prerequisite environment or tools for survival "out-there." Valley faced its biggest attrition (in terms of number of student-transfers/drop-outs) in Grade-X. Both students and teachers cited the above-mentioned reason for this phenomenon.

Unaccepted invitations

We are not cut-off from the outside world, we have taken a decision to follow the [education] system, it is insensitive to not follow it through and constantly question its existence.

Pedagogical rationalization by a Senior School teacher

For certain teachers, the school was far too standardised, and there was too much focus on testing, structure, problem-solving, and hardly enough questioning (even in study-meets). There seemed to be an acknowledgment of the slow conversion of the school into something that conformed to the demands of the market. Influence of the outside world, which was becoming more and more powerful, was constantly invoked as justification. This, according to one ideologue, was what was reflected in the form of too much anxiety, fear about grades and exams.

Direction of *collective* as per ideologues

The extent of the attainment of goals through normative practices is dependent upon the exchange of competences among various *actants* with different goals. Teachers are expected to form a relationship of trust and compassion with the students by fostering an environment removed from fear, authority, and punishment in accordance with *the teachings*. They are expected to build sensitivity by being sensitive. However, various *actants* – pedagogues, students, parents, peers, the external job market – exert pressures on the fulfillment of this aim by enlisting the practices of tests, assignments, and examinations that seek to fulfill aims of a different (instrumental) sort. In a similar fashion, school's ideology can be seen to be exerting oppositional pressures on the fulfillment of instrumental goals of *actants*.

Routinisation of practices in the school can be seen as a displacement of pressures exerted by some of its *actants* onto the *collective*. The constant subjection of teachers to these oppositional practices can be seen as leading to a redistribution of the skills required to deal with the various push and pull

pressures operating within the school, and a potential translation of their initial goals. For instance, some teachers earlier concerned with disseminating academic content or ideological content alone may come to be concerned with securing high grades in an environment removed from fear and authority; or students with the ambition of becoming architects may come to reconfigure their goals towards sustainable designing – both goals of a hybrid, translated nature. Achieving goals, in such cases, may require recruitment and routinisation of new practices and the production of new *actants*. The interaction among *actants* has both intended and unintended effects that collectively give Valley its direction. I discuss these below.

Intended effects

The teachings are the foundation of the school, and teachers one of the primary vehicles through which ideology is disseminated. Following this, teachers at Valley can be understood as being on a journey from pedagogue-hood to ideologue-hood. Specific *invitations* are used to translate the goals of pedagogues – the weekly study-meet subroutine exemplifies the facilitation of such conversion – and the constant extension of *invitations* and its *acceptance* lead to exchange of certain competences between the ideologues and pedagogues.

Both the ideo-pedagogues and the peda-ideologues can be viewed as products of exactly such a process. Over time, interactions with various *actants* facilitate competence-exchange and skill-redistribution; ideologues come to acquire more pedagogical skills and pedagogues become adept at imbuing academic content with ideology (in form or content). Having students play the role of commodity-traders to teach book-keeping and bringing questions around the responsibilities of privilege to a class on entrepreneurship are the examples of new-subroutine recruitments that result from teacher-goal translations. The latter is an example of a teacher injecting substantive *invitation* into her (personal) program of action regarding students, and therefore serving Valley's ideological goals. Not all teachers are able to weave ideology into academic content and achieve such a marriage however. And yet, by using formal *invitations*, and "letting students be," they can align themselves to the "bigger picture" of the *collective*. This reflects a certain belief in the power of the school's institutional structures that are underpinned by *the teachings*.

Although the pedagogic specialisation of teachers is enhanced as a result of the exchange between teachers, the *invitations* are carefully curated to not fixate on academics or skill-development per se – the prominence of art and

the absence of formalised pedagogic training are conscious measures instituted by the school to fix teacher (and by extension student) gaze on the content of *the teachings*. The force away from the *academic* can be felt most discernibly in study-meets where ideologues are constantly able to steer conversation back to the inner-self. Gradually, then, the pedagogues who start-out with far more instrumental goals oriented toward the future material-reality start gazing inward (toward themselves) in consonance with school ideology.

Unintended effects

Invitational subroutines are non-invasive in their form, and do not necessarily produce intended effects. Both teachers and students express the notion of "being wary" of "too much freedom," as this can lead to its "misuse" or a "chalta-hai" attitude, which is a distortion of Krishnamurti's notion of freedom. *The teachings* define freedom in a very specific way – it is tied to the concept of order – and teachers equipped with this knowledge are able to co-opt the ordinarily instrumental concepts of "structure" and "discipline" to contain the proliferation of deviations. The following narrative of a teacher justifying enforcement of certain rules exemplifies this:

Coming on time does not go against *the teachings* of Krishnamurti. We have to differentiate between discipline and sensitivity, if you are late we cannot start our work on time. This is especially important when we do not live in isolation. Being late, in fact, is insensitive. So, coming on time is related more to sensitivity rather than disciplining. We reject certain parents too; if it is not working out with others, there is nothing wrong with parting ways with the others. Enforcing something doesn't mean you are not sensitive, there could be a justified reason for enforcing certain things. Traffic lights are enforced for safety, [school] structure is no different to that. Freedom here has started to mean anything goes, I am not trying to deny questioning, but questioning doesn't mean revolting.

Teacher, Senior School

The use of such notions within the framework of *the teachings* lends them weight they do not ordinarily possess at Valley. The exchange of competences with *the teachings* allows teachers to use techniques that are not available to newer teachers for whom school's ideology might be unfamiliar and therefore the environment far more constricting – they face irreverent, and at times unruly, students who are not always interested in what is being taught without having recourse to *conventional* techniques of introducing "order" or "discipline" in their classes. There is apprehension in using disciplinarian techniques (or any technique couched as "discipline") because of the kind of perception these have the potential to invite from other teachers and students at Valley – any form of authoritarianism is antithetical to the school's ideology in principle and therefore ought to be avoided. The following example bears this out:

A sports teacher wanted to introduce a far more structured games environment for students that included warm-up, drills, cool-down in order to increase the sporting skill and rigour of students and push students more, but found it hard to introduce these changes – he found other sports-teachers set in their ways, not as concerned about these aspects as him. Other teachers, according to him, believed the 'fun quotient' or the informality associated with games and sport would be diminished under such structured regimes. Cautious in conducting even proper warm-ups (did not want to excessively push students), he was extremely bothered by the lack of seriousness of students in sport. Children continuously laughed, poked fun at each other during his volleyball and basketball sessions, and this made him feel helpless. He was unable to scold them, or even ask them to sit out for a game, as he perceived such measures to be against school ethos. He felt he had a lot to offer, but his planning was not appreciated enough. This was a symptom of the "undervaluing of sport" at Valley. He was unable to introduce discipline – a "prerequisite of sport" – mostly because he feared rebellion from students and action against him by parents. This was based on a prior experience he recounted: the contract of a sport-volunteer was terminated because a complaint against him was made to the administration by the parent of a student who was apparently pushed too hard on the field – "the student was made to run just three rounds before a game of football."

The struggle of a new teacher

The teachings then are, in fact, an instrument of discipline in the hands of the teachers. Teachers well-versed with them are able to recruit ordinarily instrumental concepts and justify their use in ideological terms. The ability to use these concepts is directly linked to the *acceptance* of *invitations* made to teachers at Valley, since recruitment of such concepts (and their routinisation in respective action-programs) requires great familiarity and alignment with *the teachings*.

General direction

Ideology-dissemination at Valley is a straightforward process by no means. *The teachings* face constant threat from discourses and practices of new *actants*. These serve to continually translate or entirely transform the intended meanings of *the teachings*. At the same time, *actants* with goals not entirely aligned to the ideology find the school extremely challenging, and face an uphill task in trying to get their voices heard, and goals met. However, as we have seen, the more a teacher is able to internalise Valley's ideological codes, the more she is open to *accepting* its *invitation*, the freer she feels. Such *acceptance* and internalisation equips her to tackle the unintended effects or deviations produced by school's ideology. Either she can translate her goals – maintaining "discipline" ceases to be an important goal for her – or she can rationalise to herself the ideas of "order," "structure," "discipline," and suchlike in the terms of *the teachings*, which ultimately frees her

inhibitions with respect to their tactical use. Teachers who fail to *accept invitations* are likely to be weeded out, and in this sense even though *invitations* are tacit, they can lead to a feeling of confinement and constraint:

I have to play different roles in and outside of school. It is not easy. Students who come to my academy [located outside of Valley] are inclined toward competitive sport, students here are no different. The school does not listen to me, but with time that is possibly going to change, once they trust me more, I hope.

Sports teacher

While students are subject to the same ideological forces as the teachers, I have attempted to show how these forces are felt by the teachers to a far greater extent than the students. The general deference ideology demands of the teachers coupled with the alterity it produces – especially for the students – speaks to its dominance at Valley. The many concerns that ideologues raise about "the drift toward standardisation," appear to have merit but no real teeth.

Reproduction

Within the school, academic subroutines provide the contradictory discursive fodder for *the teachings* to legitimate themselves. The need for ideology springs from what Krishnamurti perceived to be a fundamental problem in society – fragmentation through comparison – which at the level of the school is represented by its academic practices. *The teachings*, to be relevant, rely upon the construction of an *Other*, and, in the process, reify examinations and competition. Valley *invites* its actors to look beyond instrumentality by constantly bringing into view the destruction wrought by comparison, and poses the content of *the teachings* as the way out of disorder. The instrumental goals represented by the academic practices of the school are a necessary condition for the existence of its ideology.

At another level, *invitations* are the source of felt abundance, space, freedom within the school, a fact that most actors narrativise. The perceived lack of imposition they produce is also the centripetal force that binds the school together and constantly works to focus the gaze of its actors inwards (towards the school, towards the inner self). It is also exactly this freedom that allows the school to mark itself out as "unique" or "different" from all the other past/outside experiences and narratives (pertaining to other schools and pedagogic spaces) of its actors. This idea of uniqueness, or difference can be seen as creating a "gated-community," a notion Krishnamurti would have certainly wanted to reject were he alive today, and therefore must be viewed as an obstacle in the path offered by *the teachings*. Valley must invent new

subroutines or further extend its program of *invitation* to curb such goal deviation. Therefore, the locally integrative *invitations* (that are founded on the basis of and for the proliferation of *the teachings*) produce the alterity that produces in turn the conditions for *the teachings* to exist. In other words, *the teachings* are able to produce the conditions of their own reproduction, and in the process, end up also sustaining their relevance.

The program of *invitation* Valley institutes is predicated on the opposition of *the teachings* to externally-produced instrumentality and internally-generated alterity, both of which are necessary conditions of its existence. Krishnamurti, to live on at Valley therefore, relies on these contradictions.

IV.

Leaving Valley

Having physically left Valley, I cannot say I fully comprehend the depths of its intrigues. Having spent time on the field, however, I cannot pretend to not have experienced its uniqueness, and through the writing of this paper, I hope to have presented certain glimpses into some of the aspects that maintain, at least for me, its *alternativeness*. It is not, I believe, Krishnamurti's teachings alone that mark Valley out significantly from other educational spaces, but rather the form in which they have found their way into the very fabric of most of its most mundane, every-day routines.

It would be imprudent to say that a founding philosophy, or a distinct, coherent worldview does not make a profound difference to the kind of education that is generated within a school-space, but it is equally hasty to reduce a school merely to its stated ideology or set of objectives. With this paper, I have attempted to show how Valley, while being incredibly unique, is also no different – it is fundamentally shaped by its founding norms and principles (*the teachings*) and yet extends far beyond them in the way these are actualized, translated by Valley's actors. It is not in their letter that *the teachings* leave Valley with a most remarkable imprint, rather in the form in which they permeate almost all its processes. From where I stand, the content of *the teachings* continuously demanded of me "attention" to my way of operating, while also, at the same time, "let me be." It is this powerful force of Valley's *invitation* – compelling and not coercive; appealing and not imposing – that maintains, for me, its shroud of mystique, and even though I have left Valley, the extent to which it has left me remains a mystery.

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