

Polanyi and the Study Group for the Unity of Knowledge (SGUK)

Gus Breytspraak and Phil Mullins

A Prelude: Polanyi and the Study Group for Cultural Unity

Our 2016 Nashotah presentation focused on the two Ford Foundation-funded interdisciplinary conferences for an international mix of academics and artists at Bowdoin College in 1965 and 1966. This Ford-funded project was an experimental endeavor in which Ford and the conference organizers sought to transform the mainstream intellectual ethos, using Michael Polanyi's philosophical ideas as a catalyst. The project posited an emerging "unsuspected convergence of ideas separately developed in various fields, . . . [by a variety of persons] who should be brought together in a meeting since they actively oppose in their work the scientism, and the related methodological and ontological over-simplifications, which in one or another form are ascendant in every field of scholarly and creative endeavor" (Appendix A, Ford Grant 6500113). This Ford project thus began as a deliberate attempt to encourage an intellectual "movement"—a term used throughout the project correspondence—based in Polanyi's thought, but which would galvanize "convergent" voices.

These Bowdoin conferences were organized by the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity (SGFCU), which was chaired by Michael Polanyi and included Marjorie Grene and Eduard Pols as members of the organizing committee. A Breytspraak and Mullins essay, which grew out of our 2016 Nashotah presentation is forthcoming in *Polanyiana*. This essay draws extensively on Ford Foundation archival records and the Michael Polanyi Papers (MPP), and provides detailed information about the 1965 and 1966 conferences. We treat Polanyi's key role in these conferences, showing how his work in the conferences shaped some of his late writing. In collaboration with several others, but particularly Grene and Sigmund Koch, Polanyi initiated discussion about the SGFCU project in 1963 and 1964. Koch was, during Polanyi's Spring 1964 Duke residency, a Duke faculty member who Polanyi knew and talked to; in October, 1964, he took a new job as Director of Humanities and Arts program at the Ford Foundation. Koch was deeply involved in planning the SGFCU project (and later was involved in both the 1965 and 1966 conferences) and it was the Humanities and Arts program that funded the 1965 conference in January 1965 (\$25,000) and "extended" the grant (\$36,000) for the 1966 conference. Although Koch was instrumental in securing Ford support for this project, it is clear that Grene is the force on the ground, conceiving and implementing (with significant input from Polanyi) the SGFCU project; this project, as the Ford materials and correspondence with Polanyi show, in many ways is simply one more incidence of Polanyi's fruitful collaboration, after 1950, with the Grene whirlwind.

B. Initiation of the Continuing Project with a Re-named, Re-organized, Re-located Group

After the August, 1966 SGFCU Bowdoin conference, the SGFCU was re-organized and re-named the Study Group on the Unity of Knowledge (SGUK), with Marjorie Grene as the principal investigator. The SGUK received a five-year (1967-1972) \$220,000 Ford Foundation grant (Ford Foundation 6700128) in January, 1967. This large, multi-year grant was apparently made because Ford was generally pleased with the experimental SGFCU Bowdoin conferences and wished to continue the experiment with some modifications.

Sigmund Koch continued in his role as Director of Humanities and Arts program at Ford at the time of the new grant application was submitted. Koch had already been deeply involved in the SGFCU and is listed in three SGUK meetings up through March, 1969. He left the Ford Foundation not long into the five-year tenure of the SGUK for a position at the University of Texas, Austin, but was officially added to the SGUK core group and its steering committee (see Grene's Ford Narrative Report, March, 1, 1967-March 1, 1968, pp. 2-3). But Koch eventually resigned from the steering committee after one of the squabbles about SGUK meeting topics among the members of the steering committee (see discussion below).

The cover letter accompanying the grant proposal (Grene to Koch, November 9, 1966) was signed by Grene and include the names of Polanyi (listed as Chairman) and Pols, identified as the "original organizing committee" of the SGFCU. The letter suggests the original organizing committee proposed changing the SGFCU project name to "Study Group on the Unity of Knowledge" subject to the approval by the "expanded committee." Ten names were listed (including Grene, Polanyi and Pols) as those to be included on the "expanded Organizing Committee." All of those listed except two were people who participated in the SGFCU Bowdoin conferences, but eventually the SGUK membership was expanded to about twenty and did include several who had not been involved in the SGFCU. Grene's letter suggested that "at least five and at most seven of the committee members would be active in organizing a given meeting." Effectively, this steering committee made program decisions and eventually there was much conflict between factions of the steering committee.

The SGUK project moved its institutional center of operations from Bowdoin College to the University of California, Davis, when Grene took a faculty position at Davis in 1967. The SGUK grant application is actually co-signed by University of California, Davis officials. Grene was the force behind the scenes pushing for this move, but Polanyi and Koch were the figures who made the public case for this move, despite opposition from Pols and Bowdoin College. George Gale, a Davis graduate student who worked with Grene was hired in 1967 as the project administrator with a central office at Davis; the relatively successful effort of the SGUK to organize and coordinate its many small and large conferences over five years owed much to Gale's skill. Grene seems, above all else to have liked and gotten along well with Gale who was, according to Gale, the only student whose Ph.D. dissertation she ever sponsored! Grene's correspondence with Polanyi late in the life of the SGUK, clearly shows she became quite weary of her difficult role as principal investigator. She had many other responsibilities and also at times was seriously squabbling with Davis colleagues as well as having great difficulty working with the fractious SGUK steering committee; she took steps to move the project from Davis to Boston University where it would be directed by Robert Cohen and Marx Wartofsky. But Ford would not allow this transfer of leadership and institutional sponsorship so Grene continued as principal investigator, although Cohen and Wartofsky did organize some of the later SGUK meetings.

C. The Presumed Polanyian Framework

Clearly, the SGUK began as a re-modeled version of the SGFCU, trading on its connections, good record, and prestige, with the Ford Foundation. Polanyi's backing was important; at least some at Ford still in 1970 regarded the SGUK as "the Polanyi Project" (Lowry to Pols, 5 June 1970, Grant 6700128)

Polanyi's general outline of modern intellectual history is presumed in the SGUK grant proposal. Polanyi's cultural criticism and his alternative "post-critical" philosophical ideas are highlighted in early correspondence about a possible SGFCU grant. They are an easily recognizable backdrop in the 1965 SGFCU grant proposal and they remain the backdrop for the SGUK grant.

The SGFCU Ford proposal identifies the misguided "ideal" that emerged in Western culture after the seventeenth century, an ideal which "carries with it a new conception of the nature of things: all things whatsoever are held to be intelligible ultimately in terms of the laws of inanimate nature." This "reductionist program" has made anomalies of "the finalistic nature of living beings, the sentience of animals and their intelligence, the responsible choices of man, his moral and aesthetic ideals, [and] the fact of human greatness." The existence of these anomalies and "even the existence of science itself—has no legitimate grounds; our deepest convictions lack all theoretical foundation" (Appendix A, Ford 6500113).

The SGUK grant proposal simply presumes this basic Polanyian framework and indicates, in Grene's introductory letter, that a new grant to the SGUK would "continue the work begun by the Study Group during its previous meetings at Bowdoin College in 1965 and 1966." The internal Ford Foundation document evaluating the grant request spends two pages commenting on the Bowdoin conferences and then notes that the SGUK proposal is simply a reapplication "for the type of continuing support it [SGFCU] had sought from the beginning" (p. 4, internal Ford document commenting on SGUK proposal titled "Grant Request-Division of Humanities and the Arts" dated January 19, 1967).

D. Projected SGUK Meetings and Topics

Grene's introductory letter and the grant proposal outline a general plan to sponsor interdisciplinary conferences, large and small (called "major" and smaller "regional" or, in later narrative reports, "exploratory") which treated important intellectual issues of the day which are identified in Grene's letter as "of common interest to our participants." Neither Grene's introductory letter nor the grant proposal do more than suggest what in fact the meeting topics might be.

Grene's letter suggests that meetings (at least the "major" ones at intervals of 18 months) will be "a further series" which focuses on "some of the problems which the previous meetings have shown to be in need of further discussion on an interdisciplinary basis." She identified the next conference in March, 1968 as dealing "with the relation of biology and physics, a problem raised in Professor Commoner's paper of 1966 and the lively and complex discussion which followed it." In fact, Commoner's paper had been roundly attacked by Polanyi who raised the question as to whether Commoner (and others) properly understood reducibility and levels in biology (see the discussion below). Grene suggested that a conference in the winter of 1969-70 "might deal with the problem of meaning as it arises in philosophy, the arts, and the biological and behavior sciences."

The grant proposal itself provided a list of eight possible future topics for meetings: (1) "Relations between Physics and Biology: Identity, Complementarity, or Hierarchy?" (2) "The Nature and Function of Models in the Behavioral Sciences." (3) "The Psychology and Epistemology of Imagination." (4) "Meaning in Language and Art." (5) "Patterns of Discovery

in Art and Sciences.” (6) “The Cultural Implications of Cybernetics.” (7) “Taste and Morality: The Ethical Use and Abuse of Art.” (8) “Ethical Relativism and the Natural Law Tradition.” (Appendix A, Ford Grant 6700128).

E. Polanyi’s Participation in the SGUK: An Introduction

Although it is a fascinating and an important topic in its own right, we will not attempt here to discuss the approximately twenty “major,” “regional” and “exploratory” meetings, which the SGUK actually sponsored during its tenure. The balance of this essay focuses on Polanyi’s participation in the SGUK. Anyone interested in a broader account of the SGUK will find the Ford Foundation archival material for Ford Grant 6700128 a useful resource. Also the major publication, *Interpretations of Life and Mind: Essays around the Problem of Reduction* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971) edited by Marjorie Grene, is an important reflection of SGUK work. This collection of eight essays was presented to Polanyi for his eightieth birthday 11 March 1971 (see p. v).

Polanyi’s direct personal involvement in SGUK programs from 1967-1972 was limited. He did attend three (see discussion below) of the approximately twenty meetings sponsored by the SGUK over its five plus-year life. He may have planned to attend other meetings but could not because of his wife’s or his own health problems. As we discuss below, Polanyi very much wished to convene a European SGUK meeting on “The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History” (his description—see the discussion below) in 1971 but this meeting never came together. The Polanyi-Grene letters shed light on why this was the case.

Although Polanyi’s direct personal participation in SGUK events was limited, he did, as the SGUK letterhead reflects, remain officially a member of the SGUK and received some official communications from Grene (as PI) and George Gale (as administrator) about SGUK events and business. In addition, Polanyi’s correspondence with Grene provided him (as well as Breyspraak and Mullins) with interesting details—often a Grene’s eye view—about SGUK affairs. There are approximately 350 pieces in the Grene-Polanyi correspondence in Box 16, Folders 1-9 of the MPP and clearly this is an incomplete correspondence record. At least 200 letters were written between the fall of 1966 and the end of 1972 (i.e., the period of the SGUK application and funded operations) and many of these letters mention some details about SGUK. In some cases, Grene’s letters provide a candid camera view of the SGUK which is in some tension with the annual narrative reports and other materials in the Ford Foundation archives for the SGUK grant.

In three subsections below, we discuss, in some detail, what the Grene-Polanyi correspondence and Ford Foundation archival records suggest about the three SGUK meetings in which Polanyi was involved.

a. The Austin, TX, April 1968 Meeting

On April 20 and 21, 1968, there was a SGUK meeting on “The (Ir)reducibility of Biology to Physics and Chemistry” at the University of Texas, Austin. Polanyi attended this meeting but his connection with the meeting is an odd and convoluted one. Polanyi seems not originally to have planned to present a paper, although one of his papers (see discussion below) may, at the last minute, have been circulated by Grene. Grene apparently invited papers on the topic from

Watanabe (a physicist) and Ayala (a biologist). The Ford narrative report (March 1, 1968-February 28, 1969, Grant 67-128, p. 2) indicates papers were sharply criticized by I. Prigogine and A. MacIntyre. Prigogine (who became thereafter a SGUK member) apparently outlined his research which today is regarded as working out the basic ideas about self-organization in dynamic systems theory. The Ford narrative report notes his “illuminating presentation” showing that “biological phenomena can in fact be explained, not by means of orthodox thermodynamical concepts, but by reference to the principles and experimental techniques of irreversible thermodynamics” (March 1, 1968-February 28, 1969, Grant 67-128, p. 2) See Prigogine’s essay in Grene’s SGUK volume, *Interpretations of Life and Mind, Essays Around the Problem of Reduction*. In PK, Polanyi notes his interest in literature comparing living beings to “open systems” and he cites approvingly early work in which Prigogine was involved in the forties (PK, 384, note 1), on this topic. Polanyi may have had a hand in suggesting Prigogine (who was spending some time at the University of Texas in this period) be invited to this meeting. Comments in some of Grene’s letters suggest that she is relying on Polanyi to understand the chemistry and physics in Prigogine’s presentation. The Ford report suggests the views of the biologists at the Austin meeting were sharply criticized (apparently for their mechanistic ideas) by the philosophers, but Polanyi’s views per se are not mentioned in the Ford report (March 1, 1968-February 28, 1969, Grant 67-128, p. 3).

The April 1968 Austin meeting’s topic (mentioned as a projected topic in the original SGUK grant proposal), in fact grew out of the 1966 SGFCU Bowdoin College meeting at which there was a great dispute over the biologist Barry Commoner’s paper (“Is Biology A Molecular Science?”), which is included in Grene’s conference volume, *The Anatomy of Knowledge* (73-102). Polanyi strenuously contended that Commoner misunderstood reducibility and irreducibility. Polanyi subsequently wrote two theoretical biology-related essays which clearly grew out of the 1966 Bowdoin discussion. “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” was published in the August 21, 1967 issue of *Chemistry and Engineering News* (54-56) and “Life’s Irreducible Structure,” a revision and expansion of the earlier essay, was published in 1968 in *Science* (160: 1308-1312). Polanyi’s first attempt publically to respond to Commoner was a May 31, 1967 presentation at the Center for Theology and Science in Chicago (see the introduction to the *Zygon* (3[4]:442) publication “Do Life Processes Transcend Physics and Chemistry?”). Polanyi argues in his essay “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” that “no mechanism—be it a machine or a machine-like feature of an organism—can be represented in terms of physics and chemistry” (*C & En*, 55, also *SEP*, 284). This was almost certainly the position Polanyi took in the 1966 Bowdoin dispute as well as all subsequent presentations and publications.

Scott and Moleski (268-269) report that Polanyi presented “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in New York City on December 30, 1967; this AAAS presentation (apparently “On the Structure of Living Things” [Box 38, Folder 10, MPP]) was a revised form of the recently published essay “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” since Polanyi notes in a February 21, 1968 letter to Grene (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP) that he had great difficulty adding “three pages to the original text” for the AAAS presentation. An edited version of what was apparently the AAAS presentation (or perhaps the earlier Chicago presentation) was published in December 1968 in *Zygon* (3:4 (Dec. 1968): 442-447) under the title “Do Life Processes Transcend Physics and Chemistry?” (which was the general title of the AAAS symposium and the *Zygon* publication (3:4 (Dec. 1968): 442-447) that actually included not only Polanyi’s edited comment but also

symposium presentations of others, including Barry Commoner. Polanyi was invited to make yet another presentation of what is very likely a further revision of “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” (or perhaps a revision of the AAAS presentation) in mid-March 1968 at a Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored meeting at the Bellagio villa (a plush venue loaned to certain groups for meetings) in Italy. All of these presentations and revisions precede the April 20-21, 1968 Austin SGUK meeting and apparently contribute to “Life’s Irreducible Structure.”

The letters Polanyi and Grene exchanged early in 1968 touch upon “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” (“L.T.” in these letters). When Polanyi apparently was revising the published essay (or his AAAS presentation version of it) in early 1968, presumably for the mid-March Bellagio presentation, Grene advises him (Grene to Polanyi, 8, Jan. 1968, Box 16, Folder 2, MPP) she wants to talk to him about the essay. She and others have found the published essay too long and not straightforward. Grene did include the revised and expanded “Life’s Irreducible Structure” in her Polanyi collection, *Knowing and Being* (hereafter KB, 225-240). She clearly considered this revised and expanded version a better essay. Although Polanyi wanted both essays in KB, Grene refused to do this since there is overlap and since the earlier essay was, in Grene’s view, obscurely organized. In the KB publication, the first endnote (KB, 259) identifies “Life’s Irreducible Structure” as an expanded version of Polanyi’s contribution to the 30 December 1967 AAAS symposium. The note also identifies the first half of “Life’s Irreducible Structure” as “anticipated” in the August 1967 essay “Life Transcending Physics and Chemistry” published in *Chemical and Engineering News*.

Although Grene liked “Life’s Irreducible Structure” better than its predecessor, she was not without criticisms. In her March 13, 1968 letter to Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP), she comments on the essay:

I think we’re on very shaky ground in our criticisms of evolutionary theory and that you must produce much better arguments than you have done so far. They [mainstream evolutionary theory] are confused but so are we. For example, that higher principles can gradually die away doesn’t prove that they can’t gradually appear, just in terms of variation and selection. Nor does it prove anything about how they originate.

Grene suggests some passages in “Life’s Irreducible Structure” are very doubtful and she wanted to carefully go over the essay with Polanyi “before circulating it to the study group—in that case we might have to circulate it at or after the Austin meeting.” Grene thus seems to have planned to include, at some point, Polanyi’s “Life’s Irreducible Structure” as a paper that might have been useful to the SGUK’s consideration of the topic of “(ir) reducibility in biology.”

Grene’s letter goes on to review how much material is already to be considered at the April 1968 Austin meeting. But then she pencils in the margin of her March 13 typewritten letter, “PS The Ayala paper is so bad, I have to circulate your new one—with some misgivings and a few editings—hope you don’t mind.” In a March 21, 1968 letter from Polanyi to Grene (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP), Polanyi replied, “I am glad you will circulate my new paper. It should be marked Draft (Deadline April 25). Please revise what you think necessary. thanks in advance.” Although Polanyi seems to have agreed that his essay could be circulated before or after the meeting, in the Ford narrative report commenting on the Austin meeting, there is no

mention of Polanyi's paper. However a later Grene letter says "Life's Irreducible Structure" was used in Austin.

b. The Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Italy Meeting in Late July and Early August, 1968

There was a small SGUK meeting from July 28 through August 3, 1968 on the topic "Art and Perception" at the Rockefeller Foundation villa in Bellagio, Italy at which Polanyi made a presentation. Grene convinced the Rockefeller Foundation to provide this exclusive villa for an SGUK meeting for twelve people. In many ways, this SGUK meeting, like the April, 1968 Austin meeting, grew out of an earlier SGFCU meeting, in this case the 1965 Bowdoin meeting.

Polanyi's interest in the role of the creative imagination is central to his 1965 opening Bowdoin SGFCU conference address, "The Creative Imagination." This lecture was published as an essay in the Grene-edited 1969 monograph, *Toward a Unity of Knowledge (Psychological Issues, 6[2], monograph 2)* which covers the 1965 conference, and also published in other places in 1966, 1967 and 1968, plus a version of the lecture was used as Polanyi's third fall of 1965 Wesleyan Lecture. The lecture and essay are a first step on the way to Polanyi's later efforts to analyze how imagination plays a special role in making possible meaning in works of art and, ultimately, in symbol, myth, ritual and religion. Polanyi's work on imagination in the 1965 Bowdoin conference is amplified in the 1968 Bellagio SGUK conference presentation on painting.

Other 1965 Bowdoin papers perhaps complemented Polanyi's interest in imagination. Donald Weismann's paper on collage emphasized "the kind of integration of incompatibles that typifies the achievements of art as well as science" (1965 Ford Narrative Report, 8). Polanyi likely was particularly impressed with M. H Pirenne's 1965 Bowdoin conference presentation. Pirenne set forth ideas "about the philosophical applications of visual perception" (1965 Ford Narrative Report, 7), illustrated by using slides of a Pozzo painting on the concave ceiling of a baroque church (an optical illusion). A Polanyi letter from October 1963 (Polanyi to Coghill, October 22, 1963, Box 6, Folder 4, MPP) confirms that Polanyi already was interested in some of Pirenne's work (on optics and art) and its connection with his own ideas; this is likely how Pirenne came to be invited to the 1965 Bowdoin conference to make a presentation.

Grene candidly later told Polanyi in a letter that she thought Pirenne's 1965 presentation was "appalling" (26 August 1968, Box 16, Folder 3, MPP; see also Grene to Polanyi, 28 October 1968 Box 16, Folder 3, MPP, which berates Polanyi for writing a preface to a Pirenne book, and 2 Feb. 1970 [Box 16, Folder 5, MPP] when she again chastises Polanyi for his preface and notes she thinks he "grossly overrate[s]" Pirenne). However, because Polanyi seems to have been captivated by Pirenne's work, it seems likely that Polanyi strongly encouraged Grene to put together the 1968 SGUK Bellagio meeting on art and perception. This was a meeting that brought together Richard Gregory, Rudolf Arnheim, Ernest Gombrich, Iris Murdoch and others; some of these apparently are also figures of great interest to Grene. Polanyi borrowed slides from Pirenne (Pirenne to Polanyi, 17 July 1968 and Polanyi to Pirenne, 19 July 1968 Box 7, Folder 2, MPP) which he used in his Bellagio SGUK presentation which is apparently what is published in 1970 as "What is a Painting?" By late 1968 or early 1969 according to Prosch [*Meaning*, ix]), Polanyi is working on his meaning material, which, we suggest, grows out of his SGUK work on imagination and painting; Polanyi delivers lectures and holds classes on his

meaning material at the University of Chicago and the University of Texas in 1969, 1970 and 1971 (and possibly in 1968 also). Eventually, parts of this material are pulled together (with some excerpts from earlier Polanyi writing and bridge material provided by Prosch—see *Meaning*, 227-228) and published as *Meaning* in 1975, Polanyi's last book, co-authored with Prosch. See the Moleski and Mullins 2005 TAD essay (32[2]: 8-240) for an effort to piece together the chaotic story of Prosch's effort to work with the increasingly mentally fragile Polanyi.

c. The Austin, TX Meeting on March 29-30, 1969

Polanyi was apparently in Texas possibly to give his Meaning Lectures and he also participated in the SGUK March 29-30, 1969 meeting on "Scientific Knowledge and Discovery." Grene's Ford report says about the meeting,

Robert Cohen opened the discussion on Saturday of Michael Polanyi's theory of heuristics and of scientific knowledge in general, and Keith Gunderson opened a discussion in defense of the logical reconstruction approach. . . We felt that this weekend's talk had opened a number of questions which ought to be carried further, and so we held a second meeting on this general theme at Boston in October, 1969 (Ford Narrative Report 1969-70, pp.1-2, Grant 67-128).

What Polanyi and Grene's letters following the meeting reflect is Polanyi's waning interest and energy:

I am getting a bit doubtful whether to attend the meeting of the Study Group in October. On second thought I find none of the questions or remarks at the Austin meeting to have been of use to me. Such a meeting exhausts me without corresponding benefits. And in any case this kind of discussion can be conducted more freely and effectively in my absence" (Polanyi to Grene, June 10, 1969, Box 16, Folder 4, MPP).

Polanyi did not go to the October Boston meeting or any later SGUK meetings. As to the Boston meeting, Grene assured Polanyi that Rom Harre who was very keen on Polanyi's ideas would go to the Boston meeting and could represent Polanyi well. She agreed with Polanyi that his presence might impede discussion. The narrative report on the Boston meeting reports that Harre "presented some aspects of his own view rather than continuing the discussion of the problem of heuristics as it had been opened at Austin" (Ford Narrative Report 1969-70, p.2, Grant 67-128). Grene acknowledged this was a side issue rather than the original theme; she suggested a future SGUK meeting might return to Polanyi's heuristics and noted that Cohen was writing a paper about the problems of scientific discovery "and its relation to other imaginative activities, with the question of the reducibility of biological and social sciences to physics . . ." (Ford Narrative Report 1969-70, p.2, Grant 67-128). That Cohen essay is apparently the Cohen essay in *Interpretations of Life and Mind, Essays around the Problem of Reduction*, the Grene-edited SGUK 1971 publication. When Polanyi read the volume in 1971, he commented to Grene about how much he liked the Cohen essay (Polanyi to Grene, 30 Sept. 1971, Box 16, Folder 6, MPP).

F. Polanyi's Uneasy "Fit" in the SGUK

The Polanyi-Grene correspondence is a large but incomplete correspondence stretching over several years. It reads a bit like pieces of a strange mystery novel with many intricate details but much missing; some of what is missing is suggested in the annual reports to the Ford Foundation on SGUK activities. Together the letters and Ford documents reveal some important things about Polanyi and Grene in the late sixties and early seventies, as well as the way the SGUK developed and left Polanyi behind.

Polanyi's June 10, 1969 letter to Grene quoted above makes clear that Polanyi did not find the March 29-30, 1969 meeting on "Scientific Knowledge and Discovery" very fruitful and he recognized his own increasing frailty and that he had other projects into which he wished to put his energy; he declined to attend the follow-up Boston meeting in the fall of 1969. There are signs, however, well before mid-1969 that Polanyi's "fit" in the SGUK was an uneasy fit (at least this is the case if you compare the Polanyi-Grene symbiosis of the SGFCU and Polanyi's centrality to the two Bowdoin conferences).

In early 1968, Polanyi wrote George Gale to inquire about starting a study group in Europe affiliated with the SGUK. He apparently asked Gale to send him some materials, which Gale did, but Gale also advised Grene about Polanyi's inquiry. On Feb 9, 1968 (Box 16, Folder2), Grene wrote Polanyi that Gale had advised her Polanyi was interested in starting "a European (or British) branch of the Study Group."

This seems a sound idea, but please do remember that, although I agree with you that any member ought to be able to propose and organise a regional meeting, the establishment of an affiliated group would be very much something else again and could not possibly be carried out without the approval of the steering committee and of the group as a whole.

It is unclear whether Polanyi simply did not understand the terms of the Ford Foundation grant, or actually wanted to start another group, or whether he simply wished to organize a regional SGUK meeting outside the US (which involved more Europeans).

What is clear is that Grene was worried that Polanyi was taking steps which might publicize the SGUK and Polanyi's role in the SGUK in a way likely to get her into difficulty with the SGUK steering committee and the larger SGUK membership:

Moreover, your TES [TLS—Times Literary Supplement] man is, in my view, a very weak reed on which to hang such an enterprise. And further, whatever you do, please do not allow him to print anything about us without clearing it with me! Otherwise we'll have another write-up of this as a movement to spread the Polanyian gospel and I'll be in hot water all over the place. However devoutly I may happen myself to subscribe to the principles of your philosophy (some of them), I do operate on the thesis that "not Socrates but the truth shall prevail." If you are right we'll discover it sometime ("we" as distinct from "I" but let us get there at our own pace in our own way.

Later in her letter, she apologizes for what she terms her (above) "tirade" and she notes "to put the matter at its most subjective: having just got over two rows, I'd like to avoid another if I can." She also reports that Jacob Bronowski has resigned from the SGUK steering committee.

In her February 15, 1968 letter to Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 2), Grene laments that Gale sent materials to Polanyi without consulting her: "If he [the TLS man] writes us up I'm sure I'll be in for still another row—oh dear." What all this seems to suggest is that the SGUK steering committee, even in early 1968, is a fractious group. Polanyi's role, his connection with Grene and perhaps what we dubbed above the "Polanyian framework" (underlying the SGFCU and the later SGUK grant) were matters Grene was sensitive about in the context of the steering committee making programming decisions. She also clearly feared publicity identifying the SGUK with Polanyi. The TES [TLS] man who Grene regarded as a weak reed was Walter James, a British journalist (Polanyi to Gale, 21 February, 1968, Box 16, Folder 2) who Polanyi had earlier worked with. Polanyi's response to Grene's February 9 letter sought to reassure Grene, but what he said is itself puzzling:

Do not worry about the speculative discussion of a European branch of the Study Group. This is merely an exercise in propaganda with a view to the interest of a foundation which is supporting my work. Should, contrary to expectation, something actually develop in this direction, I shall draw you in well in time. (Polanyi to Grene, 16 February 1968, Box 16, Folder 2, MPP).

It is worth noting that about fifteen months later, Polanyi did write Shepard Stone, (10 June 1969, Box 7 Folder 12, MPP) who formerly was affiliated with the Ford Foundation and who became the President of Association International pour la Liberte de la Culture, the organization that succeeded the Congress for Cultural Freedom (hereafter the CCF, which was in part formerly funded by Ford) after the CCF collapsed soon after the CIA funding of the CCF became public knowledge. Polanyi reminded Stone about the SGFCU and SGUK projects sponsored by Ford:

. . . a group of intellectuals, ranging from physics to poetry, are involved in this movement now. They still pursue the lines of the programme drawn up under my chairmanship. They share a sense of the cultural crisis, arising from a mechanistic conception of man, particularly in the universities from which this mentality spreads into the mass media.

In a somewhat indirect fashion, Polanyi asked about funding and his request seems to be an appeal to Stone as the director of the successor of the now defunct CCF whose European work needs to continue. Polanyi asked Stone if his new organization might "take some interest in the enterprise of the Study Group. So far we have done very little in Europe and the openings for it remain untouched."

Polanyi also in this period seems to have made proposals to Grene for additions to the SGUK membership and the steering committee but Grene seems to have rejected these out of hand: "My dear, you are wrong about Wigner—he may 'love consciousness' and of course he's charming and your old friend—but he has no idea what the score is" (Grene to Polanyi, 22 December 1968, Box 16, Folder 2). She then identifies the plurality of steering committee votes (including her own) which she foresees as against Wigner. Polanyi was also interested in adding J. C. Eccles who provided a paper that "Why Did We Destroy Europe?" is intended to complement. However, Grene indicates Eccles also probably would not be approved for membership.

In mid-1968, Polanyi definitely made a proposal for a 1969 SGUK meeting although the topic is never clearly identified. George Gale responded to the proposal suggesting a meeting on Polanyi's proposed topic "sounds very interesting and exciting. Marjorie has seen it and I am planning on sending it out in late August or early September to the Steering Committee for their votes. I am sure the proposal will be met with approval" (Gale to Polanyi, 12 June 1968, Box 16, Folder 3). Grene, on September 9, advised Polanyi "as to your weekend meeting, we intend to ask the steering committee's opinion" as soon as the secretary returns to work and the steering committee is available (9 Sept. 1968, Box 16, Folder 3). On September 23, 1968, Gale advised Polanyi his proposal for a 1969 SGUK meeting had gone out and replies were coming in (Box 16, Folder 3, MPP). But Polanyi's letter of October 26, 1968 to Grene mildly complains about the slow response to what he calls "'my meeting'" and asks to be advised "as quickly as possible how this matter stands" (Box 16, Folder 3, MPP). The correspondence does not clearly reflect whether Polanyi's proposal for a 1969 meeting was approved but it seems likely. Comments in letters in this period suggest that Polanyi's original proposal possibly morphed into the March 28-29, 1970 SGUK meeting on the topic "Psychological Models," which Polanyi did not attend. In general, it appears that Polanyi's role in shaping SGUK was declining in 1968 and 1969.

It also appears that over several years of the life of the SGUK the fractious nature of the SGUK steering committee became more and more a problem. Steering committee friction started early in 1968. Polanyi was provided a Grene's-eye view of the steering committee conflict in letters, but he seems to have tried to stay out of the conflict, although it may have affected responses to Polanyi's input. In a February 28, 1968 letter (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP), Grene tells Polanyi, "Dreyfus has been put on the steering committee [at the February 1968 Montreal meeting] (over the dead bodies of Koch and Silber who are furious)." In August of 1969, John Silber, a University of Texas, Austin philosopher who has become a dean and is a member of the steering committee, proposed at a steering committee meeting three future SGUK meetings on behalf of four or five members of the SGUK (including Texas colleagues Koch and Weismann). These topics were "The End of Art," "Man and the Environment" and the "Problem of the Universities" and Grene's notes (Box 16, Folder 4) on the steering committee meeting imply that things are now moving forward toward putting together meetings on these topics which will help to complete the programming of the final years of the SGUK. In her Sept. 3, 1969 letter she confides to Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 4) that she regards Silber as a bully who is likely to poison the SGUK project by complaining to figures like Koch, who is now his colleague. Grene's later October 27, 1969 memo (Box 16, Folder 4) to the full membership advises that at a recent October 1969 meeting of the SGUK in Boston the full membership suggested it "would like to be consulted about the further planning of our meetings once we have the outlines of a plan before us . . ." Silber and others who earlier in August had proposed SGUK programming take the plan to have a full membership review as a Grene move to eliminate their program proposals. Silber resigned from the steering committee and there was apparently a dramatic verbal altercation at a meeting. His fiery letter of resignation (Silber to Grene, 16 December 1969, Box 16, Folder 4, MPP) indicates that he resented Grene's accusations of a "Texas take-over" and that she and others were manipulating programming. He regarded the SGUK programming as lacking in creativity and favoring steering committee members like Dreyfus who will yet again be "flogging the computer problem at another meeting." Koch, Arrowsmith and Weismann also soon resigned. This great conflagration almost fifty years ago has today a somewhat comical aspect and it likely will to be regarded as academic politics as usual. But it also perhaps suggests some of the reasons that Polanyi kept his distance from the SGUK.

G. The Planning for and Demise of the August 1971 Meeting in Europe

What follows is the outline of the unfolding narrative revealed in the Grene-Polanyi letters about the effort to pull together a European SGUK meeting that apparently at one point was projected to occur in August, 1971. The letters tell a reasonably clear story reflecting Polanyi's great hope for this European meeting and Grene's early work to support Polanyi in putting this meeting together followed by what seems to be something like a Grene nervous breakdown about the SGUK and ineffectual later efforts to come up with a way to put together Polanyi's European meeting. Not only Grene's energy for putting together this meeting flags; she seems to acknowledge that her understanding of why Polanyi wished to have this meeting was limited.

On February 27, 1970, Polanyi wrote to Grene (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) straightforwardly asking to convene a European meeting of the SGUK, apparently primarily involving British and Continental scholars interested in Polanyi's writings:

I would like you to consider that I am now in touch with a number of people in England and on the continent of Europe who are interested in the kind of problems my writings have aroused. Your own writing reach out further on the Continent than mind do. So I would like to be given authority to convene one of our week-end meetings, or perhaps even a larger one, on some subjects which I would like to explore.

In a March 27, 1970 letter, Grene advised Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that Edward Pols had resigned from the SGUK, that she was planning to attend a Paris meeting of the SGUK with Derrida in September, 1970, and that she would "bring up the question of your European meeting" with those attending the March 28 and 29, 1970 SGUK meeting in the US. But she could not see "why there should be any problem about it. Do you still want one? Shall I try to get Bellagio? Or will you? Or may I do so on your behalf?" In Polanyi's April 3, 1970 reply to Grene, he advised he would "explain my ideas about a meeting in Europe as soon as I arrive in Chicago, which is to be on Sunday, 19th April." Later in the same letter, he identifies the length of his stay in Chicago (more than a month) and concludes "we may, in fact, arrange a meeting for preparing the European seminar." He also noted that he had finished "Science and Man" (i.e., his Nuffield Lecture delivered February 5, 1970) but that he must quickly deliver the text to the Royal Society of Medicine to be printed and there was not time for Grene to scrutinize the essay.

In early July, there is a letter from William Olson, (the Rockefeller Foundation figure in charge of granting access to the Bellagio villa) to Grene (July 2, 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) advising the Program Committee had not been provided sufficient information about a proposal for a future Bellagio meeting: "The subject is interesting but is so broad that it seems difficult to imagine much headway being made in a matter of three or four days." He also asked about planned publications from this meeting and clearly implies he thinks Grene is again representing the SGUK in requesting use of the villa (as she did for the Art and Perception SGUK meeting held there July 28 to August 3, 1968). Grene replied to Olson four days later (July 6, 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) advising that this SGUK meeting proposal came from Polanyi and that he should write directly to Polanyi (who she was copying) "for further details." She somewhat finessed Olson's question about planned publications by discussing other SGUK publications and ended the letter noting "we do not, however, in general publish the proceedings of our discussions as such and presumably would not do so for the Science and History meeting."

It is possible that when Polanyi was in Chicago in April 1970 he and Grene had the promised discussion about his meeting which Green dubs for Olson “the Science and History meeting.” But there is not much evidence of this in the correspondence record. Grene wrote Polanyi a short note on 7 July 1970 which has the tagline “PS on the Rockefeller Stuff” (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP). This letter simply lists six names which Grene suggests Polanyi has advised are people who might be involved in a European meeting. Grene added the name Lescek Kolakowski who she thinks definitely should be interested and who will be in Oxford from October, 1970. But she ends her note oddly, commenting “Nor can I say really what you want to do.”

On July 17, 1970, Polanyi wrote to Grene (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that he has been too exhausted to work on his projected meeting but he does provide a few relevant comments. This letter (quoted at the beginning of our Nashotah presentation) succinctly identifies the topic of the meeting as “The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History.” He notes that he has been or will be in contact with several people about this projected meeting; these included Patrick Moynihan to whom Polanyi had sent a copy of “Science and Man” and to which Moynihan enthusiastically responded, although he did not commit to attending a meeting. He indicates he will contact Kolakowski if Grene can provide an address. Polanyi outlines his plan to distribute “Science and Man” to several people, apparently persons who might be involved in this projected meeting. Near the end of his letter, Polanyi asked Grene “please let me know what you think about the project. If you do not feel clearly in its favour, I might hesitate to pursue it further.”

At the end of July, Grene sent Polanyi (28 July 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) a short letter that noted she is assuming his projected meeting is “about history in the sense of what happens and not in the sense of historiography.” She is making this assumption in her effort to clarify matters for Olson to whom she is also going to send “Science and Man.” Grene did take on the role, on Polanyi’s behalf, of trying to place the projected meeting at Bellagio. Near the end of August, Polanyi wrote to Grene (25 August/27 August, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) more about his contacts for the meeting. He has had discussions with at least two Polish intellectuals. Kot Jelenski, who he had worked with earlier in the CCF, had “promised his participation and help in organizing the meeting.” Polanyi had apparently drawn up a list of participants for a letter to Jelenski, but he suggested he will not approach people on the list until he hears Grene’s opinion on them. The other Polish intellectual, Lescek Kolokovski, Grene had earlier recommended to Polanyi when Kolokovski was still in the US before coming to Oxford. Polanyi has now met with Kolokovski who he found receptive; he remarks about Kolokovski’s writing that “judging by his writings I have looked at, he seems just on the point of concentrating attention on the history of our disasters and the prospects of our hopes.” He reports he has sent Kolokovski a copy of “Science and Man” so that later he can resume conversation with Kolokovski. In mid-September of 1970, Grene wrote to Polanyi (18 September 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that she was presuming this European meeting of the SGUK would be after March 19-21, 1971 because she already had another commitment for these dates. She also asked Polanyi to provide any “more news about your proposed meeting.” In a follow-up letter dated September 28, 1970 (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Grene reports “Bellagio turned out [us?] down, now what? Shall we give up?” She asks “what’s the next thing you want me to do about your proposed spring meeting, or do you want to have it at all?”

On October 5, 1970, Grene advised Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) that she has been worrying about

that spring meeting of yours, especially since the Bellagio people turned us down. Honestly, I just don't have the energy to try to organize a meeting at some unknown place, inviting unknown people and managing the financial end without George Gale's help. In fact, I'm bone tired. . .[and want] very badly to get the Study Group off my hands on March first.

George Gale had gone to England to study and March 1970 was the end of the SGUK fiscal year and Grene (later correspondence confirms—see below) tried to give up her role as PI and to move the SGUK project from Davis to Boston University where Robert Cohen and Marx Wartofsky would take charge for the remaining time of the grant. She advised Polanyi, “maybe the Boston people would carry on for you” and she said she will talk to them about this soon. She asked what Polanyi thought about this proposal and ends her letter on this note: “We might be able to have a summer meeting, somehow combined with one of Cohen's, but I don't know; at the moment, I just can't cope with organizing ANYTHING!!”

Two days later (7 October 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Grene again wrote Polanyi a (typed) letter (possibly responding to a very recently received Polanyi letter lamenting his health problems) that affirmed “I too am too weary of life and administration to undertake organizing your history meeting. Possibly the Boston people would do it.” But she notes Cohen and Wartofsky are slow getting projects together and organizing Polanyi's meeting is complicated by the fact that there is no place to have the meeting: “Let's let it be for the moment in any case: ok?” In pen she added following this question in parentheses: “I'm giving up the Study Group absolutely from March.!”

In mid-October (18 October 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), Grene wrote to Polanyi telling him there had been a clarification from the Ford Foundation: she had been misled earlier by a program officer. To have the SGUK grant transferred to Boston would require re-applying for the grant and Ford no longer gave grants such as the SGUK grant and “we'd probably lose the whole thing. So it seems I have to keep on with the wretched thing . . . as we are not spending enough money I'll have to plan your meeting—but March is impossible—we suggest late August.” She advised that Dreyfus was trying to find for “us some Norman chateau” and that she is considering a brief visit to UK in December 1970 to consult Polanyi about the meeting. Polanyi's reply to Grene a few days later (22 October 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) commented “I am happy to hear that you will take up after all the project of our meeting.” He noted a commitment August 18-26, 1971 and asked if it is possible to schedule around this and suggested that “London or perhaps Paris” would be a better site for a meeting since this could likely better accommodate Continental participants. Grene's October 28, 1970 letter (Box 16, Folder 5 MPP) to Polanyi comments “I'm glad you're glad about the meeting next summer; I am not sure whether I am or not. However, we'll try.”

In his letters late in 1970, Polanyi seems at first again to be energetically planning his meeting but then seems to have given up pressing for his meeting. On November 11, 1970 (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), he advised Grene about his own holiday travel plans and suggested that she arrive in London around December 17 in order to “have ample time for thinking over our project.” He asked whether to include Jelenski in this meeting and noted he will in any event

talk to Jelenski before meeting Grene since he values “his knowledge of Continental personnel.” But in another very brief letter to Grene about a week later (17 November 1970, Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) Polanyi wrote “I can well understand that you prefer to delay any action on the meeting I am dreaming of.” He noted that he may travel to the US in March or April 1971 and he will “keep the matter in abeyance until there is a chance to talk to you, be it here or in America.” It seems likely that Grene had written Polanyi very recently (perhaps suggesting again that putting together his meeting was going to be very difficult) and Polanyi’s letter was a response. On November 27, 1971, Polanyi wrote to Grene (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP), “I am grateful to you for your letters, even though your decisions have changed in them in response to my strange project. In a way your acceptances have been a joy, but your refusals have been almost equally refreshing to my lacking faculties.” He notes that he will definitely be coming to Austin in March, 1971, and, after a family reunion in Toronto, will spend six weeks at the University of Texas: “I trust this should give me a chance to talk to you about a number of things and clarify the project of the PLAN.” Grene’s brief 30 November 1970 reply to Polanyi (Box 16, Folder 5, MPP) notes “I didn’t know I’d been vacillating about your meeting—I suppose that’s because I really don’t know what to think about it.” This is the final comment in the Grene-Polanyi discussion of Polanyi’s meeting on the topic “The Effect of the Scientific Outlook on History.”