

Mysticism and Utopia:
Towards the Sociology of Self-Knowledge
and Human Architecture
(A Study in Marx, Gurdjieff, and Mannheim)

BY

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ABSTRACT

Utopistics cannot advance without critical reassessments of its own heritage. This dissertation explores in an integrative world-historical framework the underlying paradigmatic causes of failure of past utopistic efforts towards a just global society. For this purpose, the conceptual structures of three representative western utopian, eastern mystical, and academic approaches associated with Karl Marx, G.I. Gurdjieff, and Karl Mannheim are critically explored using a postdeterminist dialectical methodology.

The dissertation's contributions are: 1-problematizing Marx's dialectic itself as a breeding ground of what contributed to the historical failures of his doctrine; 2-providing an independent academic interpretation and self-critique of the teaching of Gurdjieff, the Caucasian mystic, using all his primary writings; 3-transforming Mannheim's sociology of knowledge into a sociology of *self*-knowledge to help revitalize his original intentions while avoiding his self-defeating arguments; 4-developing a conceptual synthesis beyond the three teachings within the framework of an alternative "human architecture" paradigm; 5-advancing a nonreductive dialectical method cognizant of the challenge posed by subconsciousness in mediations of mind and matter.

A fundamental explanation for human failures in bringing about radical self and/or broader social change is found to be the problem of habituation, i.e., the human propensity to become subconsciously attached to sensations, ideas, feelings, things, relations, and processes. Despite their significant contributions to our awareness of this problem and ways of resolving it, the three perspectives studied are found to be themselves suffering from it. The key obstacles are identified as the habituated dualisms of mind/matter, self/society, and theory/practice still fragmenting utopistic methods, theories, and praxes. These dualisms are responsible for the world-historical fragmentation of the essentially creative human search for the good life into mutually alienated and thereby failing paradigms of philosophy, religion, and science—giving rise to equally fragmented and mutually alienated western utopian, eastern mystical, and global academic movements. It is argued that the splitting of the inherently artful and creative human spirit into its ideological components more or less corresponds to the world-historical transitions from ancient civilizations to classical political, medieval cultural, and modern economic empires—for which the dialectics of nomadic vs. settled modes of life paved the way in the course of an increasingly synchronous global development. The postmodern condition today is the general crisis of all fragmented paradigms, modern and/or traditional. It follows, then, that the good life will not be the gift of a wise few, of supernatural forces beyond, or of an objectively preordained natural or historical progress. Human de-alienation can only be an artful endeavor by each and all—only within a creative humanist framework can the habituated dualisms and fragmentations of philosophy, religion, and science be overcome while assimilating their true meanings and contributions.

The dissertation demonstrates that all philosophical, theoretical, and practical dualisms—which emanate from dichotomizations of reality into matter and mind, and result in alienating

self and social knowledges and praxes—can be effectively transcended through their re-articulation as diverse manifestations of part-whole dialectics. Developing and applying an architectural approach to sociology, the dissertation abandons “house storeys” and similar metaphors still subconsciously fragmenting psychosociological analyses. The habituated common sense definition of society as “multiple” ethno-national and/or civilizational systems of relations among “individuals”—based on ahistorical presumptions of human “individuality”—is rejected in favor of its definition as a singular world-historical ensemble of intra-, inter-, and extrapersonal self relations. It is argued that human life can be harmonious only when it is a world-system of self-determining individualities. World-history is reconceived as a grand human architectural project of building inner and global human harmony. It is viewed as a long-term and large-scale process of splitting of the intra- and inter/extrapersonal realms of human life into a habituated eastern versus western civilizational dualism whose transcendence has been, and will necessarily be, dependent upon creative, conscious, and intentional human effort. Western utopianism and eastern mysticism are treated in terms of whole/part dialectics mediated by the academy, all of which are considered as constitutive parts of an otherwise singular movement in humanist utopistics. Human architecture is introduced as the spatiotemporal art of building alternative part-whole dialecticities in everyday life—of creative design and construction of self-determining dialecticities between here-and-now self-identities and world-historical social structures. Towards this end, the sociology of self-knowledge is proposed as an alternative research and pedagogical landscape for building de-alienated human realities.

Human architecture and the new sociology of self-knowledge relate to one another as practice to research—as whole to part. Human architecture is about tearing down walls of human alienation, and building integrative human realities in favor of a just global society. The sociology of self-knowledge explores how here-and-now personal self-identities and world-historical social structures constitute one another. They seek to creatively institutionalize new conceptual and curricular structures of knowledge whereby the critical study of one’s selves within an increasingly world-historical framework is given educational and pedagogical legitimacy. Utopistics cannot advance without utopistic universities.

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Gurdjieff and Mysticism: Archaeology of an Eastern Teaching (pp. 249-263)

As a utopian movement, mysticism has been concerned with the development of methods, theories, and practices of personal self-knowledge and change for the attainment of “perfect” inner states despite worldly suffering. Since such ideal inner states have often been associated with or are considered to be derived from the assumed perfect being of God, mysticism has often been associated with religious doctrines and/or experience. While many academic scholars treat various historical forms and paths of mysticism as heretical offshoots or branches of various established religions, it has been strongly argued by practitioners of mysticism themselves that their teachings constitute the very embryonic core and esoteric fountainhead of all religions. Gurdjieff’s teaching does not seem to deviate from this broad characterization of the nature and purpose of the world’s mystical traditions.

As a modern teacher of mysticism, Gurdjieff (1872? - 1949) is widely credited for having made mysticism accessible to the west and for having been one of the founding fathers of the so-called “new religious movements.” Depending on whether the physical, emotional, or intellectual dimensions of human organism is exercised in retreat from social life as the initial launching ground for efforts towards the ultimate goal of all-rounded individual self perfection, broadly three traditional ways of the fakir, the monk, and the yogi were distinguished from one another by Gurdjieff. Suggesting that these three “ways” to self-perfection are more prone to failure since their trainings take longer (thus often unrealizable during a single lifetime) and their retreating adepts become often vulnerable to habituating forces upon reentry into social life, Gurdjieff himself favored an alternative “Fourth Way” school in world mysticism. He characterized this approach as one concerned with the parallel and simultaneous physical, emotional, and intellectual development of individual self knowledge and change to be pursued not in retreat from, but in the midst of, life.

Gurdjieff’s biography was consciously and intentionally cast by him in total mystery. He did not present in a straightforward way the story of his life and ideas in his oral or written teachings, but fragmented and intertwined them in such a scattered form that would require those interested in him to assimilate the whole of his teaching and life’s events in order to understand who he was and what he taught. A careful reading of his major writings in all the three “series,” on which this dissertation research is mainly based, provides a picture of him as an obsessive “seeker of truth” born of Greek and Armenian ancestry in the Caucasus region. As a result of unique childhood experiences with death, magic, and spirituality in diverse ethnic cultural and religious settings, Gurdjieff became determined to understand the real significance and meaning of organic and human life (and death) on earth. This led him to a wide ranging regional and later global search and experimentation in various religious and secular schools and sources of mystical teaching in the course of which he not only emerged as a specialist in the ancient science of subconscious conditioning and of hypnotism, but also as a missionary of an allegedly still surviving “ancient” mystical teaching that was the fountainhead of all traditional and modern schools of mysticism and world religions. He eventually established his “Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man” in France for a few years before being forced, as a result of an auto accident, to pursue his teaching efforts mainly through writing. Gurdjieff was versed in numerous colloquial languages, specialized in esoteric music, dancing, and various exercises and movements for combined harmonious developments of body, thoughts, and emotions. He died in France in 1949.

Gurdjieff’s first series of his major work *All and Everything*, subtitled *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*, is a deeply satirical and cryptic mythological

presentation of his view of the universe as a harmonious cosmic system in the midst of which the earth and human life have uncharacteristically fallen into disharmony. The second series titled *Meetings with Remarkable Men* is meant to be a semi-autobiographical illustration to the interested seeker of the conditions necessary for a new harmonious living life-style in the midst of ordinary life devoted to the search for cosmic truth. The third series titled *Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am,"* is devoted to the explication of certain organizational aspects of conducting school "work" for the purpose of harmonious development. Especially the first, but also the second, series were meant to be made widely accessible to everyone when published. The third series, allegedly left incomplete, was meant to be kept in circulation only among closest pupils. None of the three series were published during Gurdjieff's life time, however. They were made accessible to the public by his senior pupils only gradually in the course of three decades after his death.

In his first series (published in 1950), Gurdjieff draws up a picture of existence as a sacred but completely material universe created by a unitary God and operated by the primordial laws of Three and Seven. These laws objectively determine how the universe is dialectically created and reciprocally maintained on the basis of a universal food chain mechanism such that everything is food for something else. The inherent mechanically "falling" and deteriorating tendency of life built into the Law of Seven can only be harmonized and kept in balance dialectically through exertion of certain external conscious and intentional "shocks" to its automatic mechanism at definite moments. While God in the higher cosmic levels exerts these shocks "Himself" to bring about the "involutionary" movement of matter down the ray of creation, the process of "evolution" of matter in the path back to God is made possible by the mechanism of appearance of organic and human life on Earth as potentially self conscious and intentional matter. It is through the dialectics of this automatically "falling" life mechanism on one hand and the conscious and intentional process of school "work" on oneself on the other, that the human evolutionary movement in the cosmic food chain back towards God is maintained. Gurdjieff uses the analogy of musical scale to illustrate the octaves of involution and evolution and the specific half-note points between mi-fa and si-do where shocks are applied to enable the octave to move to the next level.

In *Beelzebub* Gurdjieff explains his unique theory of human species' terrestrial disharmonization by the metaphorical story of how due to unforeseen cosmic reasons caused by negligence on the part of certain archangels, the original planet was struck by a comet and split into the present earth, moon, and a third still undetected satellite—the three representing the male, female, and homosexual tendencies in human organism. This cosmic event made it necessary for archangels to usher conditions of organic life on earth but in such a way that sexes are differentiated into separate organisms. This is the foundation of a disharmony which can still be overcome but only through what Gurdjieff calls "conscious labor and intentional suffering." To assure the automatic propagation of species given such an unfortunate cosmic splitting event, the archangels found it necessary to implant a certain "Organ Kundabuffer" in the early pre-human organisms so that they could not prematurely "wake up" but instead remain in perpetual hypnotic sleep subjected to illusions and pleasure impulses, unaware of the real absurdity of their mechanical existence as suppliers of food for cosmic and divine purposes, and paradoxically always forgetful of their own inevitable death. This guaranteed that they would continually propagate, do not voluntarily commit suicide in mass, and cyclically engage in wars to keep in balance the necessary level of biological radiations necessary for the maintenance of the original earth's split elements in the cosmic chain.

This "organ Kundabuffer," which was originally implanted "at the lowest base of the spinal column" —hence the satirically borrowed name and reversed in meaning of the "liberating" sexual energy known

in Hinduism as “Kundalini”—is nothing but the naturally inherited but essentially no longer necessary human propensity to become subconsciously habituated to and hypnotized by “all and everything” in this world. Although this organ was later removed from the human organism by the archangels who soon realized its harmful effects as an organic obstacle against the need for spiritual evolution of human species to serve cosmic purposes, its “crystallized” consequences have more or less continued in the human organism to the present day. The fragmentation and lack of proper and balanced communication among the three (physical, intellectual and emotional) “brains” in the human organism and the “buffers” that separate them, are what make continued human suggestibility and hypnotizability possible—because the organism basically is fragmented into separate and further internally differentiated physical, intellectual, and emotional selves, each of whom can be manipulated from outside due to the lack of inner communication among them by the organism as a whole. Consequences of the “organ Kundabuffer” can be discontinued and reversed, however, in the earthly “three-brained” beings by awakening to their “terror of the situation” and through a long and arduous process of “conscious labor and intentional suffering” seek a way out of the mechanically perpetuated imprisonment characterizing the ordinary life of humanity. The secretive alchemy of proper sublimation of sexual energy in the human organism occupies a fundamental place in Gurdjieff’s theory of struggle against mechanicalness and hypnotic sleep, of evolution of higher being bodies, and of harmonious development in general. The whole of Gurdjieff’s first series is thus devoted to a “merciless” criticism of all and everything in the “life of man” and exposure of the reader to the real meaning of life so as to assist the deeply eager seeker, as personified in Beelzebub’s grandson Hasein, to find a way out of this eternal, but individually escapable, existential impasse.

Although a careful reading of Gurdjieff points to his overall hope that cosmic universal harmony may at last be established on this uniquely unfortunate planet, he finds the difficulties resulting from original mistakes made by the archangels almost insurmountable in practice. Gurdjieff affirms, in conformity with almost all major mystical schools preceding him, that all humans are by the nature of their organism equally capable of perfecting themselves. But he also expresses his pragmatic belief that due to unfavorable external and accidental conditions of cosmic and social origin, not all but only a limited number of human beings in fact come to realize the need for and actually succeed in “liberating” themselves from the enslaving and alienating conditions of life on earth. Earthly human life is a vast self-fertilizing garden in which only a few self-perfecting individual trees may grow. Gurdjieff treats the failures of all past mystical and religious teachings in ending the alienating conditions of human life not as a matter for dispute, but as a matter of fact to be taken for granted and explained. In other words, here we have a mystical teacher who not only himself “objectively” recognizes and accepts the hitherto failure of all past mystical and religious efforts to end human alienation, but also constructs his whole cosmology in order to “objectively” explain and perhaps rectify this so-called “failure.” Philosophically, theoretically, and practically, Gurdjieff incorporated this “failure” into the very heart of his teaching by using the imagery of two irreconcilable alienated (“life”) and liberated (“work”) river streams that (despite their common source in remote past) now flow in such a way that they could never meet, but drops of which can accidentally splash from one to the other. The point, therefore, is to not search for ways to relink the two rivers *en masse* and thereby change human condition as a whole, but how to live intrapersonally liberated and free in the midst of life’s inevitably enslaving conditions.

Gurdjieff’s “organ Kundabuffer” theory of human disharmonization allows and leads him to suggest that it would in fact be not only wasteful but even harmful to exert energy and attention in the direction of changing *social* life. More important is to conduct spiritual “work” individually and collectively under

the guidance of teachers especially equipped to show the way out of life's seeming impasse. The more this kind of work is done, the more humanity can actually reach the optimal degree of perfection potentially available to it. The optimal degree of harmony thus achieved between life and work would be beneficial to both, preventing otherwise self-destructive developments in either "river" which could threaten human species as a whole. Thus the doctrine of the "harmonious development of man" is to be understood as much in terms of harmonious development of man within "work" as in terms of the "harmonious" development of work and life in relation to one another. In this way, Gurdjieff consciously and intentionally adopted a "devil's advocate" position within the mystical tradition in general, an attitude which was characteristic of his self-confessed idiosyncratic personality traits. He in fact used the uncharacteristically compassionate imagery of "Beelzebub" the devil in his writings to portray himself as a rebellious mystical teacher and to present his unconventional theory of how humanity is in the hypnotic grip of such a universally inescapable (though individually transcendable) life-work dualism.

Gurdjieff characterized the ordinary human "individual" as being actually a multiplicity, fundamentally structured by her or his "three-brained" physical, intellectual, and emotional centers. For Gurdjieff the ordinary individual conditioned by life is actually a "legion" of I's acting independently from one another. Conditions of ordinary life on earth prevent the automatic formation of an actual "individual," a master self, and ultimately a "soul," in the human being, making the attainment of these only a result of conscious and intentional acts on the part of the person her/himself. The journey of self understanding and change must therefore begin with the conscious labor of self-knowledge. Through self-observation, self-remembering, and external considering of one's interactions with others in or outside "work," the actual reality and the complex dynamics of one's inner multiplicity, fragmentation, disharmony, sleep, mechanicalness, and slavery is increasingly revealed to oneself and brought under one's immediate attention. This leads to a deeply felt "shock" to the organism expressed in terms of experiencing the "terror of the situation" of oneself for having been merely a machine, a slave, asleep. Then, through discovering and then melting down, in the heat of intentional physical, emotional, and intellectual exercises and "sufferings," of the chief and subsidiary forms of habituated "buffers" deeply entrenched within and among the three centers, it becomes possible to gradually de-alienate and harmonize one's fragmented body, emotions, and thoughts. This—a second intentional shock to the organism—then leads to the more prolonged awakening of the innate sense of objective conscience already in existence but deeply buried in the subconscious. By means of this one can then unite one's inner human essence and external personalities into a single, indivisible but consciously and intentionally adaptable, whole guided by a singular essential master, a truly "individual" "I." The organism, having died to its mechanicalness through experiencing the conscious and intentional shocks of self knowledge and change, is now exposed to the possibility in time of achieving extraordinary levels of physical health, emotional stability, and intellectual productivity as expressions of higher being bodies. These higher self-experiences of the organism, according to Gurdjieff, are prerequisites for conscious ascendance in the cosmic food chain in the path of fulfillment of cosmic duties towards possible understanding of, and union with, God.

Gurdjieff stressed the power of the mind and consciousness in the three-fold harmonization process. This was manifested in his apparent emphasis, contrary to most other mystical schools, that the pupil is not (and in fact cannot be expected) to follow any teacher or her/his instructions on faith but must at every step test the accuracy and truthfulness of such instructions by her or his own individual efforts and experiences before moving ahead to higher stages of training. For this very same reason, it would be also a mistake to treat Gurdjieff himself as a conventional follower of any branch of mysticism, for he was

more than emphatic in all his lectures and autobiographical writings about the unique circumstances of life and idiosyncratic conditions of his own upbringing which forced him to adopt a synthetic and at the same time detached and independent approach to the assimilation of mystical wisdom from various schools he visited and learned from throughout his travels. Gurdjieff thus consciously and intentionally kept himself apart from all schools of mysticism, adopting a sympathetically syncretic but still skeptical attitude towards all religions and schools he sought contact with and learned from.

The major irony in Gurdjieff's teaching and life is that while he convincingly hoisted the problem of human subconsciousness and suggestibility to the apex of the overall challenges facing humanity in the search for harmonious living, as an accomplished hypnotist in the pursuit of his life and teaching mission he actually used and perpetuated these human traits for his own "scientific" aims. Gurdjieff's career as a professional hypnotist was not simply a passing episode in his early life; it was his most central, continuing, and deepening "scientific" interest and pursuit throughout his lifetime. None of his explicit remarks about his intention not to use hypnotism for "personal" gains can be interpreted to mean that he intended not to use hypnotism in his teaching and among his pupils. Gurdjieff consistently saw and characterized his teaching pursuits as an experiment in "objective" science. A careful and independent textual analysis of not only what Gurdjieff said but also what he actually did in his three series of writings demonstrates the degree to which he pursued his writings as a novel experiment in literary hypnotism. Gurdjieff's conscious and intentional fragmentation of information about his life and teaching was not merely a result of concern for pedagogical correctness but an elaborate and systematic effort to fragment and distract the students' attention from the experimental purpose of his teaching and writings, and to raise and spread deep and obsessive curiosities among his readers and followers about his life and teaching. Fragmentations of information about his life and teaching provided the most fertile emotional conditions for effecting and spreading—during his lifetime *and* into his posterity—the hypnotic influence of his life and teaching in his readers' and followers' subconscious minds. Gurdjieff's knowledge of and experimentations with human types, such as his dinner time "Toasts to the Idiots" ceremonies, were not unrelated recreative pursuits in his research and teaching career but parts and parcels of his overall interest in observation, development, verification, and practical demonstration of his "scientific" and "objective" knowledges and experimental skills in hypnotism. Whether he was actually successful in his novel experimentations with literary hypnotism is an important question to explore on its own merit, but this issue must be distinguished from the demonstrable facts of his intentions to pursue and develop his science of hypnotism as a singular aim of his life and teaching.

It is not difficult to see, within the framework of his own cosmology, why Gurdjieff would pursue such a double strategy of educating his readers and followers about the problem of the human subconscious and hypnotizability as the most fundamental obstacle to their search for harmony, and at the same time using hypnotism to spread his own teaching and influence. Certain degrees of knowledge about the nature of human subconsciousness is necessary to free oneself from prevalent types of hypnotic influence; but this does not mean that one may not, at the same time, fall under the influence of another kind of hypnotic conditioning while pursuing the task of "awakening" oneself. From his point of view, Gurdjieff confronted a cosmically structured disharmonized organic life on earth characterized by human mechanicalness, sleep, imprisonment, and inner slavery. In his view, human beings are already under hypnotic influence of ordinary life in the first place. It is not a question of hypnotizing already awakened human beings, but that of confronting a humanity deeply ingrained in the trance of life. For Gurdjieff, human beings cannot be liberated from one influence without falling under another influence. It is a question of splashing from the flow of river of the mechanical life into the flow of river of "work" on

oneself in pursuit of self-perfection to serve preordained divine purposes. It is a question of freeing oneself from subjugation to the mechanical laws of earthly life in order to fall under the cosmic influences and divine laws originating in the Sun Absolute.

The actual subtext of Gurdjieff's hypnotic writings is, therefore, not really that of helping humanity to be liberated from *all* hypnotic influences, but that of being freed from one kind to fall under another kind of hypnotic conditioning. To use his own analogy, the skill of an accomplished shepherd in safeguarding his flock's lives from dangers of the wild is to find a way to convince his sheep to believe that they are not only becoming freed from the constant influence of the shepherd, but that they are their own shepherds ("masters") and in fact teachers of others *par excellence*. Gurdjieff's hypnotic writings aimed at the attraction, conditioning, and spreading, of such "remarkable men" in the service of spreading the story of his life and teaching. This may appear to be a unique feature of Gurdjieff's legacy, but on closer examination proves to be a central characteristic of most mystical and religious teachings. Gurdjieff's example gives a new meaning to why mysticism (and more broadly religion) is "mystical" in the first place, for, without the essential element of deeply "felt" curiosity, mystery, and secrecy built into the teaching no effective means of apparently "voluntary" but actually hypnotic attraction to religion and influence over a vast population would be possible in a cross-generational framework. What makes the endurance of this influence possible is the hypnotic subconscious mechanisms through which it is cultivated and spread by the "shepherd." Whether the "shepherd" is actually aware of this or not is irrelevant here, since for Gurdjieff the sheep can be hypnotized to think that it is a shepherd, and thereby aid in the spread and maintenance of the flock.

Gurdjieff's teaching based on hypnotic conditioning of the subconscious, no matter how well-intentioned it may be as in most mystical and religious teachings, can only be self-defeating. Ironically, in his more explicit mythological discourses in the first series, Gurdjieff himself is the most outspoken critique of the hypnotic method of liberating humanity albeit in its archangelic applications. He does not even spare archangels from the sharp edges of his "stepping on corns" teaching techniques when he criticizes how angels used the "organ Kundabuffer" to save humanity from self-extinction. Gurdjieff's argument is that given the deteriorating "falling" tendency built into the mechanical Law of Seven, it would only be a matter of time until automaticities of the law make the original good intentions into their evil opposites. In the absence of an all-rounded self-knowledge and "self-mastery" over all forms of hypnotic influence, including that exerted by the well-intentioned teacher, the subconscious mind remains only a mechanical and automated process devoid of necessary flexibility in response to the changing conditions of teaching and life. The only way the "spaceship" of human organism can effectively find its right path in the darkness of subconscious interstellar space, to use Gurdjieff's mythological analogy, is the ability of the individual to exert its own conscious and intentional awakening shocks to the organism at appropriate spatiotemporal coordinates. Gurdjieff's own self-hypnotic knowledge and powers cannot substitute for and be implanted onto the pupil's ability to do the same. Otherwise, the previous jolts exerted by an external teacher who will sooner or later also vanish into the oblivion of interstellar space, will continue forever moving the student in predetermined and rigid, automatic, and mechanical paths and journeys while realities of school and world-historical life conditions continue to develop in zigzag and unpredictable directions. This would render the student believing that he or she is on the only right path as revealed by the "prophet from the above," while in reality he or she is as much hypnotized in the "work" river as any other human drop in the mechanical river of ordinary life. The danger of hypnotic teaching is that what may have been positive aspects of a teaching may turn out to become, given the rigidified nature of influences imprinted on the subconscious,

the opposite of what they originally intended to be. The hypnotic influence does not only expose the seeker to the positive aspects of life and ideas of the teacher, but also to its negative aspects. And no matter how perfect a teacher may have been or become, he or she can never be God. After all, even Gurdjieff's archangels, including the most decorated and multi-horned Beelzebub himself, made mistakes.

This study argues that in fact a deeper subtext of Gurdjieff's teaching reveals a subconscious hypnotic identification on his own part with the systems and styles of teaching prevalent in the mystical schools he visited. The particular conciliatory attitude towards the existing and alienating structures of social "life" and the practice of subconsciously dependent modalities of teacher-pupil relationships under the guise of apparent independence on the part of pupils engaged in school "work" may themselves be considered as subconscious pedagogical structures internalized by Gurdjieff in the course of his travels to diverse eastern mystical and religious schools. Nowhere is the self-defeating nature of Gurdjieff's strategy of harmonious development more apparent than in his dualistic attitude towards the separately flowing rivers of "work" and "life." Here, we have a teaching whose program for the harmonious self-development of a select number of human beings is not only carried out in the midst, but in fact is made possible and feeds off the continuing disharmonious, habituated, and mechanical conditions, of human life as a whole. The search for the "secret school" is made at the expense of devil's back riding and forging painted sparrows for "American Canaries." The habituated and habituating forces emanating from a perpetually existing imperfect social life, accompanied by a constant fresh supply of new pupils in the ever reorganized work "school" contexts, feed the seeker/teacher with the very physical, emotional, and intellectual nutrients in struggle against which (through exertion of conscious and intentional "shocks" and suffering to one's organism) he or she can maintain her or his wakefulness. The individual seeker and the "school" collective in which he or she "works" are thus perpetually subjected in their lifetime to two internalized energies or forces: a fettering force or energy from outside which can only be overcome through shocks by another energy consciously and intentionally generated by the seeker, causing a perpetual struggle in her or his being. "Life" then is treated as a "Yezidi circle" within which the seeker necessarily remains in a state of hypnotic sleep unless he or she constantly keeps her/himself awake (in cooperation with her or his teacher and work compatriots) through constant efforts in "conscious labor and intentional suffering." The "harmonious development of man" in work and the disharmonious development of man in life thus become mutually dependent upon and feeding one another. This actually parallels after all, according to Gurdjieff's religious cosmology, why God created the Devil in the first place and assigned him the task of keeping Himself awake as His own alter ego. Paradoxically, this also explained to Gurdjieff at the height of his self-discoveries why he had to endure the continuing struggle of the good and the evil energies within himself, especially in the sexual/carnal realms, which provided him with the key he needed to unlock the mystery of how he could keep himself awake (and thus at "work") in the midst of life.

But Gurdjieff's theory of the Devil as God's alter-ego, does not consistently match his own portrayal of Beelzebub as actually a compassionate being, on one hand, and his theoretical refutation of the objective reality of the dualism of good and evil, on the other. His notion that there is no "objective" evil, and that the evil is the invention of human mind and conduct, that the alienated conditions of human life are a result of actions of "human beings themselves" does not translate into the practical recognition of the transient and artificial nature of his constructed and perpetuated dualism in the "two river" analogy. Gurdjieff's theory thus echoes and justifies, in a rather much more dramatic and explicit way, the belief of all religions and mystical schools that "this-worldly" life on earth is essentially a life of suffering, and as

such merely a testing ground in struggle against which the human soul is purified and/or created for divine and sacred purposes. In so doing, by simultaneously “harmonizing” a part of humanity while leaving the rest to the disharmonizing influences and dynamics of life, the teaching only shifts and circulates the problem of disharmony across persons and generations. It does not solve it.

The fact that suffering, in terms of experiencing of new challenges and shocks to the habituated and ordinary patterns of life, plays a part in human evolution does not necessarily mean that *particular historical forms* of suffering, including those in social life, may not be transcendable. For instance, Gurdjieff does not abandon the “automobile” for the inconveniences of pedestrian mobility, and the amount of “suffering” it may supply for his “work.” He instead cherishes and welcomes it, but seeks new forms of “suffering” for his terrified passengers. Likewise, the fact that human exploitation, domination, and repression have existed historically, does not mean that they are not transcendable—in the fear that there would be no more supplies of “suffering” for the perfect individuals to evolve. The confusion of the absolute and the relative degrees and forms of suffering is an important source of contradiction in Gurdjieff’s dualistic doctrine of work and life. The resulting major inconsistency in Gurdjieff’s thinking about the meaning of life in general, and the perpetual maintenance of the dualism of life and work in Gurdjieff’s “fourth way” teaching, itself contradicts the creative dynamics of the dialectical Law of Three drawn up by Gurdjieff himself which suggests that any dualism of opposite forces is reconcilable with the participation of a third conscious and intentional creative force. The perpetual maintenance of the dualistic conflicting dynamics of life and work rivers is in fact best exemplified by the conflicting tensions in the life and works of Gurdjieff himself personally.

Gurdjieff’s teaching as an extension and representative of all mystical teachings has an inherent tendency to remain self-defeating for in its very efforts to harmonize *intrapersonal* human realms through “work,” it reproduces the conditions of its own disharmony in the *interpersonal* life—both within and outside “school.” As such, Gurdjieff’s teaching, as in all mystical teachings, is unable to effectively contribute to the “harmonious development of man” due to the one-sided *intrapersonal* spatial modality of change built into its philosophical foundations—rendering it an asocial paradigm of self revolution.

Gurdjieff’s “fourth way” does not really take place in the midst of life. The teaching is still kept apart from “life;” only the mechanism of this separation and isolation has changed. Utilization of cryptic languages and secretive means of communication with pupils seems to have simply replaced the earlier forms based on actual physical separations from the everyday current of social life. Instead of caves, forests, and monasteries, we have a system of linguistic and symbolic camouflage and fragmented pedagogy which assures the survivability and activity of the fourth way school in the midst of but apart from life. Such a symbolic retreat from life not only perpetuates the exclusionist tendencies in this path, it also deprives the rest of humanity from critically sharing in, and further developing, the valuable contributions of Gurdjieff’s teaching on the nature and dynamics of human subconsciousness.

Gurdjieff’s teaching has much to contribute to humanist utopistics, but has self-defeating elements built into it as well. While it effectively sheds light on the inner sociality of human intrapersonal reality, it subconsciously throws a fatalistic veil over the interpersonal socialities of life, both outside and *inside* the school, which generate inner human disharmony in the first place. The fact that the teaching became misused in the process of being applied to others in the name of hypnotic science and experimentation, however, must not divert our attention from the useful elements of the teaching when practiced as a *self*-awakening technique for transcendence of one’s own habituated and alienating physical, emotional, and intellectual trances in the midst of everyday life. P. D. Ouspensky, an early but most prominent follower of Gurdjieff provided the fourth way teaching with an invaluable example of how one can appreciate a

teaching without becoming infatuated with the teacher. Although a study of Ouspensky may also reveal substantial subconscious and hypnotic processes at work in his relation to his teacher, a re-awakening to the originally self-critical nature of the teaching has already been built into Ouspensky's interpretation of Gurdjieff work. A re-appreciation, but further critical development and transcendence, of the Ouspenskyan interpretation and practice of the teaching can help restore the self-critical nature of the profound conceptual and pedagogical architecture of Gurdjieff's mysticism.

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Two Concluding Sections of Chapter II

Chapter II: Section F.

ALL AND EVERYTHING ABOUT G. I. GURDJIEFF

Gurdjieff was himself a caucasian Ashokh—perhaps one of the last, and certainly the most well-known, of them.

He was born in the crossroads of a vast variety of eastern religious traditions to an Ashokh father who exerted a tremendous influence on his son's life. It was from his father, and the latter's Ashokh tradition and circles, that Gurdjieff received his own deep and obsessive interest in being an Ashokh himself, in legends of ancient world, in music, in dance, in storytelling, and, most importantly and instinctively, in the experience of being instinctively and powerfully subjected to the hypnotic influence of others. His experience of hearing long lost legends into the early hours of the morning, uttered in a strange dialogue and conversational style, was carried into his style of lectures and writings later in life.

It was as a result of his father's "spiritualizing" experiences that Gurdjieff "repeatedly" learned the ancient epic of Gilgamesh. It penetrated his self-identity so deeply that it was as if Gilgamesh reincarnated in him. He became deeply and obsessively preoccupied with the problem of the meaning of human life, death, and immortality. His life's search, like that of Gilgamesh, became that of search for immortality. Like Gilgamesh who lost his beloved forest brother in battles in search for immortality, Gurdjieff was shaken by the death of his sister, later his father, another sister and her family, wife and mother, and many others in the course of two world wars and numerous local wars, revolutions, and conflicts. The Gilgameshian nature of his searches for truth even in his mature life, and his love for his own Ashokh father, was evident in the naming of his self-styled prophet in the first series, Ashiata¹ Shiemash—i.e., the Ashokh father who to Gurdjieff was as Shamash (the Sumerian sun god) was to his son Gilgamesh.

But Gurdjieff's obsessive search for the meaning of life, death, and immortality soon, during his preparatory age, became coupled with another obsession: to understand how to overcome the increasingly powerful internal conflict over his sexual desires. The commandments of his first tutor had not been helpful. Father Borsh's advice was only a mental prohibitive instruction against the surging sexual desires of the young Gurdjieff. It could not really work. That mental structure, prescribing total

¹"Ata" in Turkish means father and "Ashi" may be an abbreviation for pronunciation of Ashokh in Turkish (Ashikh). Ashokh-Ata would be pronounced in colloquial Turkish as Ashiata.

abstinence during the preparatory age, and complete freedom to indulge in “as much” sexuality as one desired in the adult life, did not seem to work. It perhaps neither worked during the preparatory period, nor did it later in life, when even his cosmological belief of sacred abstinence came into conflict with the freedom of indulgence prescribed by his early mentor. The force of passions brought him even to a life-and-death duel with cannons over a friend’s sister, the result of which was not only a completely new experiencing of his own life and imminent mortality, but also the complete changing of his external life due to his forced exile from Kars to flee from persecution by artillery authorities.

His “confessions” to Bogachevsky was not helpful, either. Gurdjieff’s later confessions in the third series still speaks to the continuity of the inner sexual conflict in him, while the “Persian acquaintance” in the Paris cafe expresses in the first series, in detail, of the dilemmas he had to face throughout his life in terms of crystallization of a sharply dualistic behavior towards women and sexuality. Gurdjieff had personally experienced how early religious indoctrinations and suggestions cannot stop the force of nature. And he had also experienced the power of the subconscious belief systems received during his childhood. Gurdjieff’s obsessive search for the precise significance of sexuality, life, and death, his obsessive and increasing interest in the dynamics of functioning of human psyche, and especially of hypnosis as a healing method, cannot be ignored in the effort to understand the real sources of his teaching. It is these deeply personal factors that led him across practically the whole world in search of answers, and ways to introduce harmony into the functioning of his interior life.

The never ending, sharply dualistic turmoil in Gurdjieff’s interior life thus became the source of “extraordinary” searches, findings, and syntheses, of a vast variety of mystical teachings. He not only seems to have found the original fountainhead of many mystical teachings, but also had, given his own personal reasons and psychological skills, a deeply practical reason to understand and absorb the true meanings and rational kernels of all these teachings. The result of his searches was an intricately woven system of cosmo-psychological teaching, synthesized with his deep Ashokh interest in the art of music, dance, storytelling, and world-historical mythological symbols drawn from ancient and modern mystical legends. The “scientific” core of what he learned, however, was his systematic and practical knowledge of the modern and ancient knowledges of hypnosis. His merging of religion and science in favor of a “technical specialization” found its ultimate expression in his knowledge, skills, and professional self-identity as a hypnotist.

Using self-hypnosis, and the vast sources of knowledge gathered from various mystical traditions, he reformed his inner life in new and perhaps extraordinary ways. But professionally, he sought to use this know-how not only to expand his theory and practice in the field, but also perhaps to bring some order and resolution to his own inner conflicts and also “material questions.” His career was allegedly subordinate to his “scientific” goals, but as the later experience showed, the early oaths he had taken not to base his teaching on pupils’ resources proved not to be practical—especially exacerbated by the events of war and revolution taking over Russia, Europe, and the world. His Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man soon became also a source of livelihood for him, though to this only he never limited his entrepreneurship.

The pursuit of his personal and scientific interest and experiments, the “love of kind” interest of his teaching, and his efforts in earning a livelihood could not but be merged into a singular channel of Institute activities. What had proven to be personally to him a liberating and self-mastering experience in self-hypnosis, however, now became a source for realization of goals in all the three channels of his river of life.

The unexpected (or perhaps arranged) auto accident changed all that. Gurdjieff was forced, by the

pressure of circumstances, to find a new way of meeting the requirements of all the three tasks. And he found this through writing. He found in his new “literary” career an opportunity not only to finally put to rest the still unsettled questions of his personal and scientific and cosmological curiosities, not only a new way of furthering his Institute goals across borders and generations, but also a way of raising financial resources and support for his life, teaching, and movement.

But Gurdjieff’s pursuit of his scientific interest in hypnosis was bound to come into conflict with the interest of his teaching practice. While he was learning more and more about the science of hypnosis through all kinds of human types and a vast amount of living psychological material as his disposal through his pupils, he began to notice the pale-faces and bound-for-the-lunatic-asylum gestures in the pupils. He had to somehow renew his original “Institute” efforts, and in the meantime reveal to his students, in as diplomatic a language as possible, the real nature and intentions of his previous “twenty-one year artificial life.” As he finished his first series, and prepared the drafts of his second and third series (original version), he decided to publish them, and for his posterity, the most important “herald” of the good to come to humanity through his writings. It backfired. The hypnotized could not accept the reality of their trance. They forced him to withdraw the booklet. But his intention of establishing for his posterity, and independent of his contemporary pupils, the Legominism of *Herald* had already been achieved.

But given the reaction he received from pupils, he had to completely change his further writing plans. The original, almost finished, drafts for his third series were all destroyed, and he embarked on writing a new third series that now he decided to keep “incomplete.” Given the experience of *Herald*, and the convergence of his scientific, teaching, and material interests, the crystallization of his hypnotic influence in the form of personal magnetism, writing materials, and movement network across continents was not meant to come to end towards his life. It was actually spread. But the contrasting results of his own liberating self-hypnotic experience on one hand, and that of a movement of followers who to this day are overwhelmed and infatuated by the “extraordinary” and incomprehensible, yet seemingly meaningful and useful, nature of his teaching and life, speak of both the strength and the shortcomings of Gurdjieff’s legacy. Gurdjieff’s alleged utterance on his deathbed that he has left his pupils in a fine mess, spoken literally or in figurative terms, must therefore not be taken lightly.²

Beyond all his scientific, instructive, and material goals and pursuits in life, Gurdjieff had developed, since perhaps the very early years of his youth spent in his father’s carpentry workshop and listening to his legends, the most important goal of his life: not to die like a dog. So he was intent on making sure the future generations keep on searching for the “dog” and resurrect him again, and again. It is the Gilgameshian epic, coupled with his cosmological theory and practice of “coating higher being bodies,” therefore, that explain why Gurdjieff insisted on immortalizing—“on the devil’s back if necessary”—his life, teaching, writings, and movement.

Gurdjieff was an Ashokh, still dancing—through his pupils—to his father’s ancient epic story of Gilgamesh.

²It is important to realize that Gurdjieff intended to “preserve” the contents of *Herald* for future generations of his followers, and those interested in his ideas. It was important for him, therefore, to find ways to guarantee such transmission/preservation *despite* the conscious awareness of those responsible for transmitting his views, i.e., his most senior students and followers. The “fine mess” he left for his posterity, in other words, could have provided an obstacle for transmission of such truths to his “grandsons,” especially given the self-critical nature of the contents of the third series about the realities underlying the illusive surface manifestations of his teaching.

Chapter II: Section G.

CONCLUSION: THE ORIGINS OF GURDJIEFF'S MYSTICISM

About schools and where he had found the knowledge he undoubtedly possessed he spoke very little and always superficially. He mentioned Tibetan monasteries, the Chitral, Mount Athos, Sufi schools in Persia, in Bokhara, and eastern Turkestan; he mentioned dervishes of various orders; but all of them in a very indefinite way. (Ouspensky 1949:36)

"It was divided up in that way long ago; in India there was 'philosophy,' in Egypt 'theory,' and in present-day Persia, Mesopotamia, and Turkestan—'practice.'...

"But speaking of schools, there are only *special schools*; there are no general schools. (Ouspensky 1949:15)

What were the sources of Gurdjieff's teaching in the world's mystical traditions?

Gurdjieff certainly sought to collect his information from all the three sources identified in the quotation above. In many ways the three sources represent the ways of the Yogi, of the Monk, and the Fakir, as identified by Gurdjieff as being the three ways in contrast to whom he found, or forged, his "fourth way" teaching.

Among the roster of eastern mystical traditions which Gurdjieff cites as preceding his modern "fourth way" teaching, one tradition seems to have been most influential on Gurdjieff's teaching: Sufism. Gurdjieff here and there, as sources of his dances and movement exercises, or with respect to the "remarkable men" he met during his searches, refers to personalities or movements that are clearly of Sufi origin. In one place in his autobiographical narrative, disappointed at searching for the esoteric sources of Islam in Mecca and Arabia, Gurdjieff points to Central Asia, specifically the city of Bukhara—the region and city from which many Sufi orders historically emerged—as the site of the true esoteric branch of the Islamic tradition. The Sarmoung Brotherhood appears to be a Sufi order from Gurdjieff's account, and the two monasteries he retreated to carry out his self explorations about hypnotism were clearly Islamic in nature. In all likelihood, his two-year meditation retreat during which the basic contours of his "system" were crafted were spent in a Sufi monastery.

It is true that the Sarmoung Brotherhood was not the only mystical school mentioned in Gurdjieff's autobiographical narrative. The Judeo-Christian Essene Brotherhood, and the nondenominational "World Brotherhood" were also mentioned in his second series. However, it remains the case that the story of the mythical Sarmoung occupies a central space in Gurdjieff's commentaries on the sources of his teaching.³ The mysterious "monastery in the heart of Asia" with which Gurdjieff himself admits (in *Herald*) to have established long-term relationships for exchange of information and pupils may have after all been the Sarmoung as well, or at least one of its affiliated schools.

³This interpretation is also reflected in the feature film produced by Peter Brook in association with Jeanne de Salzmann, Gurdjieff's designated successor and leader of the Gurdjieff work until her death. In the film, the discovery of the Sarmoung sounds the highest note and is the climactic episode of the story of the young Gurdjieff's life.

Gurdjieff's pupils have generally dismissed the reality of existence of such a "school," partly to offset claims made by Sufis, particularly that associated with Idris Shah, that Gurdjieff had basically copied from their brand of Naqshbandi Sufi beliefs and traditions. It certainly seems to be true that Idris Shah and his Sufi cohorts, like many other mystical schools interested in the fame and following of Gurdjieff in the west, have tried with noted opportunism and questionable tactics to take advantage of the shared elements between their own schools and that of Gurdjieff to recruit pupils and material resources into their own ranks. Idris Shah's maneuvers to lure John G. Bennett, a prominent Gurdjieff follower, into believing that he was representing Gurdjieff's parent school of mysticism in order to seize significant material resources from him, has been used by Gurdjieff's followers to dismiss any linkage between their teacher's mysticism and that of Sufism.

Clues linking Gurdjieff to Sufism through the mysterious Sarmoung Brotherhood can hardly be dismissed, however. It has been suggested that the word "Sarmoung" as spelled by Gurdjieff, or its variation "Sarmoun" by others, is an ancient Persian (Pahlavi) word meaning "The Bees." This interpretation has been supported by several, apparently independent accounts, of individuals who have actually visited this school, or have met those closely associated with it. That such stories were themselves anonymously fabricated by Idris Shah to lure Gurdjieff's students into his own circle may have not been far from truth. But it remains the case that Gurdjieff's own account and the very name of this school carries an undeniable sense of authenticity.

An important indication of the linkage of the Sarmoung Brotherhood with the Sufi tradition can be observed in the name itself, when its secret code is deciphered using the sufi system of alphabetical numerology. In order to hide the meaning and intentions of their thoughts in literary works, Sufi mystics (following perhaps their Jewish counterparts) have often used a system of numeric values associated with each Arabic/Persian alphabet or their transliterated equivalents in other languages. The deciphering of both the word "Sarmoun" (as used in the Sufi literature) and the "Sarmoung" as its variation used by Gurdjieff provides interesting clues regarding the Sufic origin of the Sarmoung, and by extension, as one (though, not certainly the only) of the sources of Gurdjieff's teaching.

The system of decodification of the word can be performed as follows. The word "Sarmoun," in its Arabic/Persian spelling is constructed of the letters "S," "R," "M," "U," and "N." The numeric values of these letters according to a table widely used among the Sufis are, respectively, 60, 200, 40, 6, and 50. These total 356. 356 expanded in multiples of 100, 10, and 1 produces the three numbers, 300, 50, and 6. These three numbers translated, using the same numerical table, back to their associated alphabets yield the letters Sh, N, and U. The meanings of varied combinations of these letters in Persian/Arabic provide significant clues as to the meaning and purpose concealed in the original word "Sarmoun." These new words and meanings constructed using the three resultant letters are as follows:

NUSH: This word in Persian has a variety of meanings. The primary one is that of being sweet as honey. Nush is also the material secreted by bees from the plant and transformed in their body into honey. This is a significant finding that indeed links the term Sarmoun with the Bees. Nush is often used with its dialectical and rhyming pair "Nish" which means the sting, especially of the bee. This associates the meanings of the sting of the teacher which also carries the sweetness of his wisdom, well-suited to Gurdjieff's "stepping on corns" method of awakening others. Nush also means drinking, associated with the Sufic symbology of drinking wine, of awakening to the world while putting oneself in the intoxicated mystical state of a drunkard. Gurdjieff's drinking ceremony of "idiots" for identification of human types, and his own often repeated references to his habit of drinking the Armanac carries particularly

interesting associations here. Nush is also associated with the meaning of immortality,⁴ of course also undeniably a central element in Gurdjieff's life and teaching. It also carries the meaning of opium, of antidote to bitter poison, a reference to what saves human life through intoxicative healing, an allusion to sleep and awakening. Nush is the equivalent expression of "to your health" in Persian, in fact, and is uttered when drinking wine or the like, while "Nush'e Jan" is the expression uttered to friends in Persian upon taking their "first being food." "Nushab" is the water of everlasting life, a reference again to immortality. "Nush" also carries the meaning of happiness and of goodness. "Nushineh" derived from the same, refers to an ancient musical melody.

SHENU (or SHENO): Means to hear sounds of music, dialogue, and conversation.

NASHV: (It is important to realize that the letter U in Persian/Arabic can sound both as "oo" and "v" or "o") means to develop, to grow, to ascend, to fly. It also means to attract to oneself, of absorbing into oneself, as in a sponge absorbing water to itself. It means to move smoothly, softly, and in a slippery way. "Nashvan" means an intoxicating drink. "Nashvat" means to become drunk or, to hear the news, to become aware and conscious. "Nashur" means to revive from death, to resurrect. "Nashuz" means marital conflict, especially of the wife not obeying the husband. "Nashveh" means to take in opium, and become "high" from it.

VASHN (from the original root, VASN): means the heaviness of sleep, the beginning of sleep, of taking daily naps.

It is obvious that all the meanings above of the words constructed with the three root letters Sh, N, and U, can be directly associated with one or another aspect of Gurdjieff's teaching and life. But what is at first puzzling, but soon quite revealing, is the modification of the word "Sarmoun" to "Sarmoung" in Gurdjieff's artful hands. What was Gurdjieff's reason from introducing such an "inexactitude" at the end of the original word composed of "seven" letters? Did "G" represent Gurdjieff's own signature initials attached to the name "Sarmoun"?

Referring back to the numerical table of Sufi codes, we notice, first, that the letter G is not present in the alphabet as existing in the Arabic. This points to the apparent redundancy of this particular letter, an "inexactitude" of sorts. But the letter *is* present in Persian. This may point to the Persian, and not Arabic, sources of the teaching and the school as concentrated in the Bukhara region. If the close phonetic approximate of this letter in the table, that is the letter pronounced as "Qaf" is used in the numerical calculation an interesting result is achieved. S, R, M, U, N, and Qaf (which carries the value of 100), numerically yield the total of 456. 400, 50, and 6, now yield the three letters T, N, and U (or O, OO, OU, ...). The combinations of these three letters yield the following meanings.

NUT: is the Persian rendition of what in English (and perhaps almost all other languages) is "note," i.e. the notes of the musical scale. Note, also imported into Persian, also connotes money. It also associates with the meaning of taking notes, of writing.

TUN: is of course a rendition of the term for melody and music. But in Persian, it is also a technical term, referring to the parallel threads used in carpet weaving (that is, warp as opposed to woof). Gurdjieff is widely acknowledged to have been an expert in carpet weaving, repairing, and business.⁵ "Tun" is also associated with the fireplace in the bathhouse, and the heat generated for "cleansing"

⁴All the associations referred to here are taken from the multi-volume Farhang-e Farsi (Persian Dictionary) compiled by Dr. Mohammad Mo'in in 1447/1968, and published by Amir Kabir Publishing Company, Tehran, Iran.

⁵The cover arts used in recent editions of all the three series of Gurdjieff's writings are of carpets.

oneself. “Tuntab” in Persian is he who manages the fireplace in such a bathhouse.

TANUR:⁶ is the bread-making kiln, where fire makes the combination of water and dough into bread. This symbolism was used numerous times by Gurdjieff for the alchemical art of developing and blending, in precise proportions, the three inner centers of human psyche into higher being bodies. In sufism and sufi poetry, water is often the symbol of wisdom and mind, dough is that of the body and earth, and fire is that of the emotions, passions, and love. The art of bread-making is also known to be a central symbol used by a particular branch of Naqshbandi order of sufis. Obviously, tanur also associates with the meaning of cooking, both in its alchemical (as in Rumi) and common usages. An important pastime hobby of Gurdjieff, related to his teaching, was cooking delicious eastern dishes.

Gurdjieff was familiar and spoke in numerous languages. It is not surprising that by his artful addition of the letter “G” to the name “Sarmoun” he meant to purposefully add his own new meanings understandable both in Persian and English/foreign languages.

The above can hardly be pure coincidences. Gurdjieff had, in his own cryptic ways, concealed some of the more significant sources of his teaching. But as an Armenian and orthodox Christian, it is understandable that Gurdjieff had particular affinity with the Sarmoun Brotherhood whom he associates with Aisors, that is with a people whose religion is also Christian, but of the Nestorian sect. There are many Assyrians, or Aisors, in Iran, who speak also Persian. But the possibility that the Sarmoun, like the “World Brotherhood,” is also of a non-denominational nature, and unattached to any particular religion, as most older school of mysticism claim themselves to be, lends credence to the fact that the association of Gurdjieff’s teaching with the Sarmoun, or with Sufism, does not have to necessarily be interpreted as an association with Islam. Gurdjieff was critically sympathetic to all major world religions, including Islam, and even favorably spoke in his first series of the threat Islam may present to the undermining of western culture and politics. Beelzebub’s grandson, Haseein, of course has an Islamic (particularly Shi’ite) name. Gurdjieff speaks highly of the esoteric core of Islam as preserved in Central Asia, especially centered around the Bukhara region. It is true that he himself identified his teaching as “esoteric Christianity,” but this may have been a gesture to make his teaching more acceptable to his western audiences. The fact is, according to esoteric mysticism, that there is no difference between religions. Esoteric Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., are all the same for one associated with the “World Brotherhood.” As an Armenian, of course Gurdjieff had more affinity with Christianity, and he must have also felt affinity with Aisors because they also adhere to the Christianity of the Nestorian sect.

Despite above considerations, however, one should not ignore the original contributions that Gurdjieff himself made to the sources he assimilated into his teaching. To associate Gurdjieff’s teaching with any particular religion or mystical teaching is to miss the point of his whole enterprise.

Gurdjieff was since childhood possessed with an obsessive desire to understand the meaning and aim of human life, and an unquenchable thirst for search for answers among all eastern mystical traditions. Gurdjieff used his role playing skills and “end justifies the means” attitude to his searches, to penetrate all conceivable religious, political, and mystical organizations without becoming attached to this or other source of his teaching. His teaching demonstrates a systematic effort in syncretic creation of a new way in mysticism.

Gurdjieff was not simply a “copy cat.” He did not simply take his sources as they were, but

⁶TANUR is not directly related to the T/N/U root, but nevertheless the connotations are interesting.

reinterpreted them in his own way. For all the mystical schools he visited, he was a “devil” in disguise.⁷ He was, after all, possessed since childhood, ever since his grandmother's alleged deathbed advice, with the desire to do things differently from all others. And this explains why we should seek Gurdjieff's “sources” as much in the history of preceding eastern mystical tradition as *in his own ingenuity and creativity*.

This explains why many researchers, trying to trace Gurdjieff's sources, have been rather unsuccessful. They see fragments of his teaching in all and every eastern religious tradition they study, but never find them in one place. It is true that Gurdjieff deliberately, for reasons that we have already identified in this chapter, tried to wipe out traces of his sources. But the key to finding the origins of Gurdjieff's mysticism lies in the realization that he was himself the originator and the founder of a new mystical movement. That is why with such assurance Gurdjieff claims, through the oft-repeated words of Ouspensky, that “The teaching whose theory is here being set out is completely self-supporting and independent of other lines and it has been completely unknown up to the present time.” The reason for this is simply that Gurdjieff created it, though based on elements drawn from all the three major sources of eastern mysticism—and perhaps with an intuitive sense that such an original teaching could or may have actually existed in ancient past prior to its splitting into the three paths as identified by Gurdjieff.

One of the important indicators of how unique Gurdjieff's teaching is can be observed in the “impromptu” and completely spontaneous manner in which much of its mythological texture was artfully constructed by him. Confronted with the elaborate and fantastically detailed legends contained in Gurdjieff's three series (pertaining both to his teaching, life, and even organization building pursuits), the reader often receives an impression of a perfectly logical, though obviously absurd, non-verifiable, and fantastic argument at work. But from Gurdjieff's point of view, all that mattered was to build an often completely meaningless but still logical landscape where he could “conceal” the hypnotic messages of his teaching.

This obviously odd literary strategy may seem to the reader to be an impossible endeavor, but it was for Gurdjieff a long-established style of dialogue and conversation he learned in his childhood in a very practical way from his father. Gurdjieff's father called this procedure of conversation and dialogue “Kastousilia.” In *Meetings*, having mentioned certain legends told by his father about an ancient “Imastun Brotherhood” and their wonder works, Gurdjieff immediately finds it necessary to elaborate on a certain procedure of dialogue established between his father and his first tutor, Dean Borsh. Let us hear from Gurdjieff himself about this odd childhood tale, a tale which despite its fantastic nature, in many ways “indispensably” points to the true “origins” of much of his mythological and perhaps cosmological tales:

As I have happened, in the logical course of the exposition of this chapter devoted to the memory of my father, to mention his friend, my first tutor, Dean Borsh, I consider it indispensable to describe a certain procedure established between these two men who had lived normally to old age, and who had taken upon themselves the obligation of preparing me, an unconscious boy, for responsible life and deserve now, by their conscientious and impartial attitude towards me, to represent

⁷In Persian, other than the religious meaning of “devil” or “Shaitan,” there is another everyday meaning attached associated with being “naughty,” “mischievous,” “sly,” etc.

for my essence 'two aspects of the divinity of my inner God.'

This procedure, as was evident when I later understood it, was an extremely original means for development of the mind and for self-perfecting.

They called it *kastousilia*, a term derived, it seems to me, from the ancient Assyrian, and which my father evidently took from some legend.

This procedure was as follows:

One of them would unexpectedly ask the other a question, apparently quite out of place, and the other, without haste, would calmly and seriously reply with logical plausibility.

For instance, one evening when I was in the workshop, my future tutor entered unexpectedly and, as he walked in, asked my father: 'Where is God just now?'

My father answered most seriously, 'God is just now in Sari Kamish.'

Sari Kamish is a forest region on the former frontier between Russia and Turkey, where unusually tall pine-trees grow, renowned everywhere in Transcaucasia and Asia Minor.

Receiving this reply from my father, the dean asked, 'What is God doing there?'

My father answered that God was making double ladders there and on the tops of them he was fastening happiness, so that individual people and whole nations might ascend and descend.

These questions and answers were carried on in a serious and quiet tone—as though one of them were asking the price of potatoes today and the other replying that the potato crop was very poor this year. Only later did I understand what rich thoughts were concealed beneath such questions and answers.

They very often carried on conversations in this same spirit, so that to a stranger it would have seemed that here were two old men out of their senses, who were at large only by mistake instead of being in a mad-house.

Many of these conversations which then seemed to me meaningless grew to have a deep meaning for me later when I came across questions of the same kind, and it was only then that I understood what a tremendous significance these questions and answers had for these two old men. (M, 37-9)

The particular emphasis Gurdjieff lays on the significance of this procedure of hiding serious thoughts under apparently absurd, spontaneous, but logically plausible thoughts points to the similar methods used by him in constructing the apparently absurd, but seriously intended, mythological and biographical tales of his series.

Despite its differences, Gurdjieff's teaching shares many features with the world's other mystical traditions. Gurdjieff's three series may be considered to represent the three stages of purification, illumination, and union present in mystical teachings as suggested by Bishop (1995).⁸ The effort to synthesize an extremely personal God with an impersonal, mathematically precise, law governed universe, is an effort to bring together the monotheistic and naturalist, introversive and extroversive forms of mysticism.

From what is known of Gurdjieff's teaching and the accounts of his pupils, Gurdjieff can be credited with establishing a new branch of mysticism characterized by the following aspects:

- 1- Philosophically, borrowing from the impersonal far eastern mystical and western scientific traditions, he reconstituted the idealist philosophies informing theistic mysticism on a quasi-materialist spiritualist basis, seeking to reconcile religious categories of divinity and cosmic purpose with western rational categories of science and materialism—still retaining a concept of and faith in a singular divinity.
- 2- Theoretically, Gurdjieff emphasized both the relevance of individuality in mysticism, and identified the intellectual and rational side of the “harmonious development” as being more important in relation to the physical and emotional aspects, in contradistinction to the traditions such as Sufism and Christian monasticism in which emotional experience of divine love, and the annihilation of the individual in the divine, are most prominently emphasized;
- 3- Practically, reformulating and presenting fragments of eastern teachings in a language and conceptual framework that is more easily accessible to the contemporary world in general, and to the western mind in particular—despite the continuation of tradition of secrecy and concealment for doctrinal self-protection.

Gurdjieff's legacy and posterity, therefore, can be best evaluated in light of his materialistically reinterpreted, theoretically rationalized, and practically modernized mystical teaching focusing on individual self-knowledge and change—made suitable for absorption by the modern world dominated by western scientific culture. It is notable that almost all of Gurdjieff's main followers during his lifetime, and later, have been westerners. This not only points to the singular influence of Gurdjieff's mysticism in the west, but also highlights the limits of the teaching itself in tracing its roots back to the east.

Being the original founder of a new branch of mysticism, Gurdjieff had the double task of establishing the foundations of the new teaching and its practical implementation in the west. The idiosyncratic dynamics of Gurdjieff's discoveries and methodology, partly influenced by eastern mystical traditions' propensity to secretiveness and impenetrability, was both a source of strength and weakness for his teaching. It made him one of the most enigmatic religious thinkers of the past century, but provided unsurmountable obstacles against effective transmission of his teaching to his posterity.

Through his hypnotic teaching, Gurdjieff hoped to install a new organ, like the organ Kundabuffer, but this time of an opposite nature, that would make human beings perpetually mindful and present to the reality of their inevitable death. If the organ Kundabuffer had caused human beings to forget the

⁸See this chapter, section 1.

reality of their evolutionary purposes in death and spiritual ascent and thereby to become identified with the transitory possessions and pleasures of this-worldly life, Gurdjieff sought to hypnotize humanity back to a “real” cosmic awareness of the transiency of this-worldly life, and awaken them to the evolutionary path back to God. The problem is that in both these pursuits, the externally induced hypnotic influence still prevails, and “maleficent consequences” resulting from this will continue to enslave the followers of his teaching to the “abnormal conditions of life they themselves have established on Earth”—both outside, and inside the “school.”

The presence of hypnotism is not unique to Gurdjieff’s mysticism, and may be considered to be present in most mystical traditions and religions. Only different languages and methods are used there. Instead, we have notions of “devotion,” “intoxication,” “losing” oneself in the teacher, etc. A classical case of the hypnotic process in fact is that of the devotion of Rumi to his mysterious teacher Shams-e Tabrizi. The latter in fact strongly evokes the “enigma” found in Gurdjieff himself. Like Gurdjieff, Shams also apparently eschewed the devotion of the pupil, but nevertheless practiced it. A comparative study of Gurdjieff and Shams may perhaps even lead to their common sources of learning and training among schools of Central Asian mysticism. What is unique about Gurdjieff’s teaching is not that he practiced hypnotism, but that he openly talked about it (and in fact raised its paradigmatic status and significance) while claiming that he did and did not practice it. The study of Gurdjieff’s teaching in this regard may then be quite illustrative for the exploration of practices of hypnosis in student-teacher relationships in all mystical traditions, and in fact in all religions. Likewise, the critique of such a practice may be considered to be instructive in terms of developing more critical approaches to the taken for granted teacher-pupil relation modalities dominating the practice of mysticism and religion in general.

The recognition of the hypnotic agenda built into Gurdjieff’s life and teaching does not necessarily diminish the value of the philosophical, theoretical, and practical aspects of his findings. On the contrary, it helps us pull away the mystical veil from his life’s work in order to grasp the rational kernel of his contributions to world mysticism and to utopistics.

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