

Gurdjieff & Work

This essay is an attempt to survey Gurdjieff's central ideas, locate his sources and to delineate the main reasons for his "Work", chief methods, as well as to evaluate its place in history and in the present.

Gurdjieff's vision of human machine

We will completely omit Gurdjieff's cosmology (a strictly personal combination of Neopythagorean "vibratory" cosmogony and quasignostic scheme of ever constricting "worlds"), and focus on the most important parts of Gurdjieff's (in short, we'll use popular acronym GIG from now on) psychology. This is necessary because only this will give *raison d'être* for his specific psychospiritual exercises.

GIG can best be described as a blend of operating Theosophist and the protagonist of Neopythagorean/Rosicrucian-Hermetic doctrines in vogue these times (turn of the 19/20th century.)

What the Theosophical movement had been teaching in last two decades of the 19th century, GIG, armed with his vitalist temper and adventurous spirit tried to achieve in practice. For all the nice talk about India and "Masters", Theosophists remained an influential, but rather impotent debate club. GIG yearned for "the right stuff" of superhuman mastery and actualization of the "miraculous", a pervasive theme during the *fin de siècle*.

Bodies

GIG's Theosophical "roots" can be traced in his analysis of a human being: he divides man (I'll use Biblical chauvinist Yahwespeak) into four "bodies":

1. Carnal or Physical Body
2. Astral/Kesdjan Body (feelings, desires)
3. Mental or Spiritual Body (mind, mental faculty)
4. Divine or Causal Body ("I" consciousness, will, *soul*)

From this survey, one can easily extract a few observations:

- a) GIG didn't use the bodiless terminology, both East and West (Atman, Buddha Nature, Spirit, Inner Christ, Ar-Ruh al-Qudsi (Supreme Spirit), Hsing/Original Nature). For him, (potentially) transtemporal and indestructible "spiritual" element in human being remains equal to (not encased within) a "higher" body.

b) GIG's vision of human composition is in many respects strangely similar to Assagioli's Psychosynthesis (*IO, II*; for both of them, the central attribute of the innermost self is will). Although, some dubieties remain: looks like Assagioli has been subtler re the indestructible self: in shallower and lower levels of disidentification it is a pure witnessing "I". In deeper and more potent dimensions of its "life" it is Transpersonal or Higher Self- virtually bodiless Atman or Spirit.

c) like most Theosophists, GIG calls the 4th body *soul*. It is the *soul* Gurdjieff's "Work" is all about. But, equally ironic, in his version of thanatology Gurdjieff (not unequivocally) radically departs both from traditional wisdom doctrines and Theosophy: if not worked upon sufficiently and not awakened, even *soul* is mortal. It is "eaten by the Moon"- probably the weirdest destiny that has ever befallen the spiritual element in man. So, in his rather incongruous blend of Theosophy, Neopythagoreanism Rosicrucianism and Alchemy, even (in a few interpretations, 4) the inborn spiritual self is doomed to post-mortem extinction in ordinary human beings.

In order to understand GIG's exercises, we'll address only three more concepts, leaving the intricate web of other Gurdjieffian speculations untouched.

Essence and Personality

These two crucial concepts can be taken as the central human polarity: essence is, so to speak (in astrological parlance), the sum total of individual incarnational/behavioral tendencies one is usually not aware of, but lives their mechanical life according to the essence promptings. Essence grows, decays,..but a person is generally not aware of its processes. It's innate, the mould of one's personality and the matrix of a human being's conscious life. With a bit of stretch, the essence could be compared either to temperament, or to Freudian Id, or at least to a host of rudimentary subconscious quasientities emerging out of it. We can equate it to the psychoanalytic subconscious (A short remark: essence is nothing "spiritual"; this term has completely different connotations in other wisdom doctrines).

Personality is something inauthentic, a sort of fluctuating mask a human being adopts in dealing with the world (inner and outer). Essentially, it can be compared to ancient "persona", false series of "I"s or "acting" spurious self one uncsciously adopts as optimal (from their viewpoint) in dealings with the life's challenges.

Succinctly: GIG's insistence on the dichotomy between essence and personality is just another weapon more in his arsenal stored for attack on "ordinary man's" hypnotized, sleepy and inauthentic existence. Both building blocks of human being are just raw, mechanical matrices of human bondage. Polarity between "carnal" and "spiritual" is alien to Gurdjieff "Work". There is no "struggle for one's soul" (conventionally speaking) one encounters in all monotheistic traditions. True, he frequently plays with these concepts, but, evidently, his "God" is more akin to the deistic Enlightenment Deity not interested in human affairs; it's some weird and concocted mechanical laws (not more convincing than one can encounter in the Jain cosmology, bending under inflationary numbers gone berserk) operate on both inner and outer worlds (something like the Newtonian paradigm pushed to the extreme and utterly improbable conclusions.)

Both concepts are fundamental to Gurdjieff "Work" and integrated with the rest of his psychology: for instance, crucial GIG's elements of human transformation, centres, are frequently described as "being contained in essence".

Three "stories" and respective centres

GIG has divided a human into three "stories"/compartments (metaphorically, "brains", although this has nothing to do with the anatomical organ). Roughly, the division goes as follows:

1. Upper story (Intellectual center plus Higher Intellectual center)
2. Middle story (Emotional center and Higher Emotional center)
3. Lower story (Sexual center plus Instinctive center plus Moving center)

"Higher" centers in upper two stories are only potential; existing, yet dormant. They are accessible and (hopefully) operating in men and women who have passed through strenuous exercises of Gurdjieffian "Work".

What virtually all Gurdjieffians ignore (or simply haven't deigned to ask) is: where these centers reside ? Conventionally, the answer is that they are located in physical body (lower story in abdomen, middle story in chest and upper story in head). But- anatomy is sufficiently advanced to discover anything resembling these "centres" if they exist in this mortal coil. Yet- nothing so far of it. We are left with a host of possible choices:

a) as a Theosophist, GIG includes "etheric", or, in modern parlance, bioplasmatic or bioenergy ("Kirlian photography") body into the physical body framework. Essentially, this corresponds to the Yogic "vital sheath". The question which naturally arises is how these centres, located in such a "low" body, could give rise to supramundane consciousness, especially considering the fact that Gurdjieff, in his cosmology, adheres to quasimaterialist

explanations ? If a center is constrained to a specific "vibratory level"- how can it skip other levels and whizz across the emanationist ladder which is deterministically structured ? In normal physics language, it would be as absurd as expect a hydrogen atom to contain *all* uranium energy levels.

b) centres are positioned in respective bodies: the "lower" ones in physical, "emotional" in astral and "intellectual" in mental. Fine. Just- there is not a hint of such a classification in Gurdjieff's or Ouspensky's works; more, we're left with *soul* "uncentred" and again nothing (the "lowest" centres) visible/detectable in the physical body. Even more embarrassing-how "Work" on these lower centres could produce anything on the *soul*, since there is no energy connection between divine body and lower centres ?

Realistically- the centres concept is most vulnerable to the banal question: why accept their existence at all ? They seem to combine in an awkward manner Platonic and Thomist psychology (where centres are psychological functions located in a body-soul compound: vegetative soul, passionate/animal and rational soul- this triple division corresponds exactly to Gurdjieff's three stories or "brains") and Theosophical/Hindu idea of energy wheels or chakras located in subtle supraphysical bodies. The confusion arises because these two approaches are not harmonized: for, chakras don't have any psychological functions (save in New Age interpretations). The majority of them are dormant (like Ajna in the head), while Plato's psyche/logistike/rational soul is perfectly functional in an ordinary human. Also, in Oriental traditions some say spiritual pole is dormant, and physiological active -with the exception of "lower" centers which don't have even dormant spiritual function.

c) expanding on the Platonic metaphor, one could ponder something like this: Plato speaks of immortal soul. Evidently, his "centers" are located not in physical, but in supraphysical "soul body", which is not further dissected. Such a view is endorsed in chief dialogues, "Apologia", "Phaedo" and "The Republic". Socrates, as the story goes, will (probably) lead an immortal life, conversing with Homer, Orpheus and comp., with all his mental and emotional functions/centres operating. As a simple paradigm, it would fit nicely with Gurdjieff's views, save for a few irreconcilable points: GIG's "theory" contains more than one body. More, he has elaborated an intricate web of interrelated connections between centres leading to aberrant or functional behavior, all set in a materialist lingo (sex center steals energy/substance for its gratification etc.). Multiplicity of bodies in Gurdjieff's system and unity of one, soul body with various functions/centres in Plato's psychology are mutually exclusive. A subvariant of "protoplatonic" interpretation (although a bit stretchy) is that a center in a "lower" body acts as a focus or radiating "centre" for higher body, which is termed a centre, but in actuality is a whole "higher" body. But, as I said: this is, to say the least, not very probable interpretation.

d) in his posthumous work (5) Gurdjieff casually gave the most plausible (to the modern mind) and at the same time cursory and offhand brief review of the centers: he equated them with various plexuses and sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous systems combined

with parts of brain (a rather fuzzy description). Needless to say- this is completely at variance with virtually everything he had been talking on the subject for more than 30 years.

The final question: why all the fuss about this ? Well- because entire Gurdjieffian "Work" and the "Fourth Way" rest on harmonious development of a human being (2,3,4,5,6,7,8), which, in his system, means work on all centers through a structured network of very elaborate exercises aiming at empowerment, harmonization and coordination of various centres that would (at least, that's the theory) facilitate crystallization of permanent "I" or *soul*.

If there are no centres (for instance, one can dismiss the Gurdjieff system completely by pointing to achievements of neurophysiology, brain research or cognitive sciences, and "attack" his esoteric edifice from the standpoint of modern materialist/physicalist paradigm where consciousness is an epiphenomenon of brain & CNS)- then, apart from a few exercises good for health and strengthening of perception, his central goal is null and void-just another specimen in a procession of human self-deceptions.

A hackney carriage metaphor

Here, Gurdjieff retells an analogy already present in Upanishads, which gives ancient Hindu insight into human condition. Just- GIG consciously misread Upanishadic (at least in Advaitin interpretation) metaphor: a carriage (human/physical body) is drawn by a horse (emotions/astral body), A shabby coachman, with meagre powers and understanding (intellect/mental body) tries his best, but the central problem is that a passenger in a box (whatever "I" turns out at the moment, a false self or subpersonality instead of true self or *soul*) is asleep (probably snoozing). The central aim of GIG's "Work" is that the passenger become Divine body/*soul*, fully operating and possessing authentic will.

Needless to say, the majority of monist doctrines speak of the passenger in completely different terms: "He is the unseen seer, the unheard hearer,...Other than he there is no seer, other than he there is no hearer,...He is your Self, the Inner Controller, the Immortal" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad).

Before explaining chief GIG's exercises, in order to put them in proper perspective, let's give brief overview of Gurdjieff's sources and phases.

Gurdjieff's sources and phases

I'll omit here interesting adventure story of Gurdjieff's pre-teacher life (one can

find it in (1)) and concentrate on sources of his doctrine.

Gurdjieff in his early phase can be best described as a blend of operating Theosophical guru, drawing the majority of his ideas from Neopythagorean/Rosicrucian-Hermetic doctrines in vogue these times, and combining them with Tantric awareness practice he became acquainted with in the Theosophists's Holy land, Tibet, into an "original eclectic" Gnosis.

Theosophy

What the Theosophical movement had been teaching in last two decades of the 19th century, GIG, armed with his vitalist temper and adventurous spirit tried to achieve in practice. For all the nice talk about India and "Masters", Theosophists remained an influential, but rather impotent debate club. GIG yearned for "the right stuff" of superhuman mastery and actualization of the "miraculous", a pervasive theme during the fin de siecle. One can detect Theosophical influence in his "bodies" doctrine, "inner circle of humanity" concept which corresponds to the Theosophical "Masters", plus the central concept of evolution.

Rosicrucianism

Another strand, far less visible, is the Rosicrucian one. It had been "in the air" for years (14), and became most prominent in Gurdjieff's Moscow and St.Petersburg teachings, where he expounded an elaborate (albeit contradictory) cosmology and "psychochemistry". Rosicrucian movement of the age was saturated with ideas of "scientific spirituality" (they still possess many labs), and a multitude of their crucial concepts (food diagram, octaves, world as a vibratory universe, strange chemistry based on Dalton's works on atomic structure, but "intrepreted" beyond recognition) form the basis of Gurdjieff-Ouspensky school (Nicoll, as well as Bennet, are effectively Ouspenskians). Plato Ouspensky was kicked out by Socrates Gurdjieff in early 20ies, but, since he was able to express esoteric ideas in a more readable manner (and with a touch of "academic" rigor)- the majority of contemporary Gurdjieff's "schools" are in essence Ouspensky's spiritual progeny. Two remarks have to be added:

a) Gurdjieff's ideas from Russian and early French/Prieure period (and best articulated in Ouspensky's two magna opera (12, 13)) are an occult thrill. One gets the whole stuff: cosmology, psychology, centres, secret schools, mysteries,...On the other hand, works written by GIG himself are not nearly as captivating. Bizarrely enough- Gurdjieff's own five or six books almost consciously ignore all the "hot esoteric stuff" that is Ouspensky's main attraction. No ray of creation, no hydrogens from the Absolute, no spectacular reports on telepathy..... In his magnum opus (4) Gurdjieff tackled a massive esoteric and exoteric tour de force interspersed with personal indulgences: essentially, this is exposition of GIG's ideas, tastes and distastes- all cloaked in a form of a science fiction novel with little or no action. Gurdjieff rambles through

more than 1000 pages on German national "character", "higher beings" (sorts of Archangels or Demiurge), masturbation, various drugs, humorous treatment of various religions and their supposed origin, vibratory levels of the Universe etc etc. The most conspicuous trait of the book is a host of bizarre neologisms, derived from many languages (Greek, Armenian, Russian, Turkish,..) and which only dogmatically pronounce "Great Laws" of the Universe: "Triamazikamno" or the "Law of Threefoldedness", and "Heptaparaparshinokh" or the "Law of Sevenfoldedness". Evidently- these are not "laws" as contemporary sciences understand them. Also-other important concepts (like vibratory levels which acquired equally creepy names and are conveniently arranged into musical octaves) betray ancient, probably Pythagorean mindset: "laws" and musical "explanation" of the Universe can be traced to Neopythagorean and Hermetic schools in Alexandria and beyond. One gets an inescapable feeling: for all the science fiction scenery, this is an exposition of principles having originated in the Bronze Age and refined in the early period of Western civilization. No doubt that Ouspensky, with his quasischolarly and didactic approach (and esoterica galore) is a much more visible influence.

b) although GIG was evidently heavily influenced by Rosicrucian ideas, he behaved towards them as an "original eclectic". He introduced many novel concepts (shock points, a confusing quasimaterialist emanationist cosmology, food diagram adapted for centres, man-as-a-machine crucial paradigm); also, he rejected reincarnation and Neoplatonist emanationism of Rosicrucians. His bent was on "tough materialism", and he made sure his disciples would be well aware of that. And, the author's last word on this subject: in my opinion, for anyone acquainted with ideas of the 20th century physics *and* "perennial philosophy", Gurdjieff- Ouspensky "esoteric" cosmology, chemistry, physiology and "natural philosophy" are, to say the least, a monumental nonsense and exercise in futile jabberwock. Probably those contaminated by Gurdjieffian myth would furiously disagree, but, as Luther said: "Hier stehe Ich. Ich kann nicht anders."

Sufism and Ismaili Gnosis

The most important "mystic" or "occult" symbol Gurdjieff's "Work" has introduced to the West is enneagram, an occult glyph resembling in some respects Rosicrucian geometrical constructs or Kabbalistic Tree of life. As the story goes (1,7,8), it is prominent among Islamic mystics, Sufis. But- there is a little problem. Not one known Sufi order (and there are more than hundred of them, most notable being Naqshbandis, Mevlevis, Chistis, Qadiris at al.) knows of and uses this symbol.

So, probably, enneagram represents a modified remnant of Neopythagorean and Hermetic tradition that has percolated and survived in Islamic "esoteric" circles; most likely candidates being Ismaili Shiites, spiritual descendants of famous Ihwan-al-Safa (men of learning, an encyclopedic group flourishing around 8/9 century C.E.) and dreaded and slandered (French scholar Henry Corbin has done much to rehabilitate them) Assassins, a secret society on its acme at 11/12 century C.E., until their mountain strongholds in the Caucasus had been destroyed during Mongol invasion in the 13th century.

Finally, a word on the glyph: it is an archaic cosmologico-spiritual symbol, originating in Sumero-Chaldean milieu and concisely summarizing their conception of the Universe & descent and ascent of the "soul". Having undergone further modifications in Neopythagorean and Neoplatonist schools, probably in Alexandria, it has been, as some stories indicate, transmitted via the Ismailis's sixth Imam, Jafar-as-Sadiq, to some of their "occult" branches. Essentially, enneagram represents Hermetic, spherical Ptolemaic and geocentric cosmos as preserved in the traditions of Mandeans and Sabians, later enriched and restructured by the Neoplatonist influences. So, enneagram which makes some sense (at least when interpreted through scholarly works by S.H.Nasr, Burckhardt, Berthelot) is a summary of ideas and processes ancient proto-scientists imagined cosmos and psyche (they didn't make much distinction) to be governed by. It is the veritable irony of history that a fossil of palaeontological spiritual cognition has become a New Age icon.

GIG's use of the enneagram symbol is most visible in his Russian (post -1915) and European years, when he gathered a cluster of disciplined devotees and made stage appearances with them, both in Europe and the US (mainly in the 1920ies). Usually, his disciples danced along enneagram points and lines, self-observing themselves, until under Gurdjieff's command "Stop !" they would freeze up in an act of (supposedly) self-remembering, when, at least in theory, Gurdjieff would transmit spiritual (or, more likely, bioenergy equivalent to Taoist ch'i) to their susceptible psyches with the aim to elevate and expand their consciousness and being- an exercise in some points resembling the transfer of Sufi barrakah (blessing, spiritual energy) or Tantric shaktipat. Also, the profile of dances, devised by Gurdjieff himself, betray influences of Sufi and Vajrayana/Tibetan traditions.

Enneagram doesn't play a prominent role in his own writings, and, apart from his early and middle periods (1915- 1920ies, with the significant pause in 1925., when he barely survived a car-crash), it is mainly preserved in Ouspensky's books. Later "enneagrammatoros", from Idries Shah to Arica's Oscar Ichazo and Claudio Naranjo are not part of this essay.

Tantric tradition

Probably the most enduring legacy Gurdjieff has bequeathed to the West (and going far beyond the adherents of his "Work") is a set of exercises which he picked up in Central and East Asia, and which are prominent in Buddhist and Hindu Tantric traditions. (Although the most important exercise, vipassana/vipasyana or "insight" meditation is central also in non-Tantric, southern Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Burma and Indochina Gurdjieff, by all accounts, didn't have physical contacts with). Essentially, the most widespread "non-energetic" Tibetan Yoga, Mahamudra, consists of two parts: shamatha (or concentration/absorption) and vipas(h)yana ("insight" or mindfulness- variously termed). Gurdjieffian self-remembering (and to a lesser degree, self-observation) is an

example of vipasyana reshaped to suit his system. For, being an integral practice of unitary monism of Cittamatra/Yogachara school, vipasyana has only one goal: to recognize, in a flash of insight, the identity between one's essential nature (variously termed: Buddha Nature, Original Nature, True Nature-in Sanskrit, Buddhata) with the Dharmakaya (literally, the "Doctrine's body", which is equivalent to the Western Absolute/Abyss of Godhead.)

In the most famous version, this is the grand Upanishadic equation: Atman (essential human soul) and Brahman (Ground of the Cosmos) are one and the same.

The Tantric exercise reaps the harvest of insight only after practice of mindfulness has dissolved all the skandhas/constitutive elements which have created an illusory sense of ego/mano-vijnana. We won't delve into intricacies of Cittamatra psychology, but will only point out to the central aim of non-dual doctrine that is perfectly expounded in Mahamudra (9) (and its part, vipasyana/mindfulness) or Ch'an/Zen, which is essentially identical in theory and similar in practice: for non-dual doctrines, the sense of selfhood or "ego", at whichever level/layer is nothing but a vortex in Illusion of mundane consciousness/perception. For them, the only Reality is supracosmic Void/Shunya.

Vipasyana/mindfulness exercise gradually dissolves illusory layers of "normal" waking consciousness until ignorance (avidya) bursts out into the insight into the identity of one's essential self/Buddhata and the Ground of All/Dharmakaya/Shunya. (True, there are less radical interpretations within different schools of Vajrayana Buddhism, but it is uncertain whether Gurdjieff contacted Nyingma order or even heterodox Bonpo, that practice (among other things) a powerful Dzogchen exercise, in many respects similar to Vipasyana, but subtler in emphasizing state of "unity in multiplicity" (I'll use their terminology) of the Nature/Buddhata and Essence/Shunya. In their own words: "While the essence is like the vast expanse of a clear, sunlit sky, the nature is like the light itself, the sky's luminosity.")

Anyway- in both variants, it is a far cry from Gurdjieff's *soul* awakening and empowering project. Gurdjieff's intention was entirely different: the accent is on the awakening of evolving "essential *soul*", perpetually growing yet indestructible inner self, the true protagonist and "privileged" agent of cosmic evolution. Gurdjieff's world is a too real and dynamic place to afford its inhabitants a luxury of escapist quietism and the "river into ocean" loss of selfhood.

Pieces of the "Work"

Self-observation

Self-observation is, in short, a process whereby individual is perpetually engaged in attentive "monitoring" of their actions, sensations, impressions, thoughts, reactions,...and assigning every isolated perceived event to a specific centre. This exercise is essentially dis-identification from one's

body/emotions/thoughts compound and intensification of it by dispassionately cataloging everything experienced. Having roots in ancient and modern exercises of "witnessing" (as various as Raja Yoga and Husserl's Phenomenology) of imagined "pure I", it nevertheless makes sense only in Gurdjieff's system. If we put aside all objections re his "centres" (practically, it doesn't matter where some sensation is assigned to but only that it is recorded and categorized), we can immediately see positive as well as negative effects of this exercise.

On the positive level: a person, in due time, achieves certain level of "inner freedom", of still assuredness she/he is a self different from the vortex of bodily sensations, emotions and thoughts they used to consider their being. Categorization, as it were, "externalizes" one's psychophysical functions and frees oneself from clutches of previous habitual, frequently mechanical behavior. Gurdjieff and his disciples tried (sometimes) to "explain" these effects in their "chemical substances" lingo (harmonization of centres, redistribution of bodily (al)chemical energies in a desirable manner), but this is of minor importance. The crucial positive effect remains growing freedom from the claws of bodypsyche domination (which is, by the way, natural condition of an ordinary human).

But- here lies a danger of disintegration: a sane human person is unity of this "compound". If exercised radically and isolatedly, without other "unifying" or humanizing practices, self-observation could at best lead to devaluation of one's experience of total life, which is preferably to be lived than analyzed, or, at worst, to schizophrenia-like symptoms of alienation from one's own body and psyche.

The battle against mechanical behavior can assume mechanical characteristics: a "self-observation addict" is a sort of robot-like creature focused primarily on apperception and categorization of their inner and outer world.

Not a desirable way of life, I'd say.

Also, from a practical standpoint- a person easily gets bored with such a not instantly rewarding discipline and generally not spectacular at all: futile witnessing one's sensations -mostly trivial stream of consciousness. Even worse: witnessing and cataloging may sometimes block genuinely creative impulses. Finally- I would say that "unnaturalness" of self-observation exercise makes it simply unattractive to the majority of even "selected" introverts.

Self-remembering

The central Gurdjieffian practice is dis-identification intensified and "compressed". Accounts of self-remembering go something like this: one "sees" one's bodypsyche in a flash of insight ("takes a mental photo"), with sensations, feelings and thoughts not sequentially categorized, but apperceived in a timeless "instant". Evidently, self-remembering is (at least in its form) a variant of Tantric

vipasyana or Theravada vipassana/mindfulness meditation: while walking, sitting, eating, defecating, speaking (and, if possible, sleeping and dreaming) continually dispassionately witnessing one's perceptual world.

Gurdjieffian self-remembering adds a Gnostic urgency to the act: Tibetan Tantric vipasyana, assured in the ever-abiding presence of enlightened Buddha Nature within, patiently goes on, without hurry (at least in theory), practicing mindfulness meditation which will, eventually, have dissolved all the defilements that keep the Mind/Citta in delusional state of normal consciousness. *Festina lente* would be their motto. With the perpetual practice of vipasyana/mindfulness, the immanent Bodhi/Enlightenment will manifest of itself, following the gradual weakening of the hypnotic attraction the Samsara (inner and outer) holds on a person's consciousness.

Not so in GIG's self-remembering. One is expected, literally, to "fight" one's natural "sleepy human condition". An effort, something unnatural, is needed to activate human attention to full and intense apperception of one's bodypsyche complex and its intrer-relation with the "world". Self-remembering means going against the current of ordinary slumber called human life.

True, in deeper levels of vipasyana, similar effects occur, but they are classified according to their *Weltanschauung*. The main difference is that the everpresent Bodhi/Enlightenment only waits to manifest itself, while no such state or being exists in Gurdjieff's mythology. For Gurdjieffians, *soul* is asleep, and only concentrated effort of self-remembering can lead to its transient awakening. Otherwise, when a man dies, his *soul* will remain immortal within the confines of the Solar system (or, in "loonier" versions of the "system", will be eaten by the Moon), but equally snoozy and impotent. As is the case with all true Gnostics- it's now or never.

Interpretations of successful Gurdjieffian self-remembering will vary according to one's worldview: non-physicalists will probably consider it an example of consciousness expansion and recentering one's being/"I" closer to the Higher Self; physicalists/materialists will describe it as an altered mental state produced by biochemical/physiological changes induced by extraordinary stress or effort.

Conscious labor and intentional suffering

I shall consider only this exercise among many others Gurdjieff's followers practice in the "Work" (various Gurdjieff-designed dances, a multitude of psychological exercises, suppressing anger and "negative" emotions, conscience development, etc.). Although various authors differ in their reports, conscious labor and intentional suffering could be described briefly as development of one's strength of will and patience. On an "esoteric" level, conscious labor can be considered a distant progeny of ancient *askesis* (ascetic practice), thought to generate willpower necessary to subdue "lower" or "passionate" nature. This exercise is done in succession of meaningless, boring and unpleasant acts- which is supposed to crystallize one's will and help harmonize human centres. Also, it can take on the form of strenuous mental and physical exercises, exhausting manual labor or prolonged self-imposed restrictions -an echo of Christian *vita purgativa*.

Intentional suffering is essentially patience, ranging from self-control to almost Christian ideal of humility. Both these practices are considered the prerequisite for harmoniously developed human being (usually defined in terms of optimally functioning centres) who will be able to sustain ever more prolonged states of *soul* consciousness generated by self-remembering with the ultimate goal of being more or less permanently (or at will) centered in *soul*.

Recapitulation

An afterthought

We have briefly addressed pillars of Gurdjieffian psychology that range from Western-type alchemical Hermetism (enneagram, his bizarre "chemistry" and the rest one can find best described in Ouspensky's works (*12,13*)) to the more "Eastern" exercises of creating/awakening a "witness", a disidentified permanent "I", different from psyche perceived as a spatio-temporally restricted flux of thoughts, emotions and sensations (such practices can be found in various branches of Tantricism, both Hindu and Buddhist, as well as in some types of alchemical Taoism).

Be as it may, Gurdjieff remained throughout his entire opus equivocal re the nature of this "I". Sometimes, he stubbornly denied its existence, insisting that a person can only through various psychophysical strategies (conscious labor, self-observation, self-remembering) "create" or "develop" such an entity, which would, in due course, enable an individual to survive physical death. The parallels with early alchemical Taoism, where a human being is sentenced to mortality, and the only chance of escape of the inexorable fatum is to create immortal "spiritual essence"/Shen, are striking (never mind that later Northern Taoism insisted on the given and already indestructible self).

However, in the majority of instances Gurdjieff admitted that the subject of witnessing is always here, but asleep/deluded-therefore no need for some pseudochemical "effort" that would "extract" permanent "I" out of the body in claws of mortality and decay; "only" a set of strenuous exercises with the aim to re-awake the benumbed and unconscious *soul*.

And, as the last observation: Gurdjieff's exercises and, I would say, "the Gurdjieffian myth" are mesmerizing for a particular type of personality: someone not "at home" in this world, not satisfied with the common human lot as circumscribed in "Ecclesiastes", and being possessed of something one might term as the "Ur-Gnostic" temperament, whose *cri de coeur* can be summarized thusly : maybe "Ye shall be like Gods" is an overstatement, but "More than human" is, hopefully, a reachable goal that makes life worth living.

Summary

After having briefly delineated sources and phases of Gurdjieffian "Work", I would like to summarize the main points of this doctrine- its characteristics and differentia specifica from other "perennial wisdoms":

Gurdjieff was, to put it succinctly, a vitalist Gnostic. His central worldview is a Gnostic one, but having passed through various phases and mutations, fragments of his "system" (never fully articulated) gave rise to conflicting interpretations: deism (12) vs diluted Gnostic theism (4), materialism vs spirituality, ...More: since accents during various phases shifted from one concept to another (and since he "invented" a new vocabulary along the way (for instance, "handbledzoin" for something akin to "bioplasmatic field" or "magnetic (in Mesmer's parlance) force")), it is impossible to gather his opus in corpus of a coherent "teaching". One can only detect various twists and turns and their inconsistencies. His "vitalism" is evident not only in his tumultuous life trajectory, but even more in essential "toughness" and energetic quest for realization of one's *soul*, which is given in terms of incessant strife for acquisition of *soul's* will and power- certainly not an escapist Gnosis of a Buddhist or Gnostic Christian variety. This "power mad" characteristics combined with "scientific occultism" was something new in his era and Gurdjieff can be righteously termed the spiritual progenitor of Castaneda, Arica's Oscar Ichazo, clownish E.J.Gold and, to a lesser degree, of Scientology and all "Ye shall be like Gods" ideologies available on modern spiritual supermarket. Permanent loathing of such human traits like melancholy, morbid introspection, imagination and self-pity are trademarks of Gurdjieffian mythos. Hamlet would certainly not fare well in this worldview.

For all his emphasis on "investigation" and "repeatability", Gurdjieff was, no doubt, a charismatic occultist, something of a Western Guru or Renaissance Magus like Flood reincarnated (no traces of Faustian hybris). Hence- any idea of impartial or "scientific" investigation of the "Work" is out of question. This is essentially an initiatory cult, and such secret societies shun the "outsiders". What I find more intriguing is the following: his writings (and his conversations with pupils, as well as their works) show his lack of interest for stormy ideas that had transformed Western culture from, say, 1900 to 1940. There is no indication (apart for casual and shallow remarks) that he was acquainted (or even paid attention to) with anything scientific above the purely technical level: relativity or quantum physics or radiation physics hadn't made way into his work. Also, speculative ideas and artistic movements that changed his era passed him by: psychoanalysis, existentialism, phenomenology, expressionism, cubism,...Curiously enough, phenomenology's insistence on "inauthenticity" of ordinary human life didn't sit well with Gurdjieff. Once formed, his *Weltanschauung* remained essentially fixed and impenetrable (shifting accents only emphasized incongruity of his primary sources). All the talk about an all-encompassing "teaching", spanning the spectrum from cosmology, psychology, theology ...to chemistry, ethics, art and "evolution" evaporated in thin air. This is even more striking considering the fact that he harped on "objective art" and similar concepts. One can only ask whether he had ever heard of poor "subjectives" like Titian or Rembrandt.

My final verdict (GIG would certainly explode in a riotous laughter could he read these sentences): Gurdjieff "Work", once important, even inspiring force, has spent itself. Ancient wisdom doctrines, transplanted and adapted to the West, do it better. Contemporary Consciousness studies, groping and hoping to discover, analyze and synthesize, to use Gurdjieff's title, "All and Everything", in inquisitive nondogmatic efforts, ranging from non-Copenhagen interpretations of Quantum theory to Cognitive science and Complexity-are on a completely different track where newly emerging paradigmata may have not achieved a universally accepted corpus of knowledge yet-but, in these fields (if they intend to grow) Gurdjieff is destined to remain something of a curiosity.

In St.Paul's words:

When I was a child,
I spake as a child,
I understood as a child,
I thought as a child:
but when I became a man,
I put away childish things.

- 1.*Kathleen Riordan Speeth: The Gurdjieff Work, Pocket Books, 1978*
- 2.*Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff*
- 3.*G.Gurdjieff: The Herald of Coming Good*
- 4.*G.I.Gurdjieff: Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*
- 5.*Gurdjieff: Life is real only then, when "I am"*
- 6.*C.S.Nott: Teachings of Gurdjieff*
- 7.*C.S.Nott: Further Teachings of Gurdjieff*
- 8.*J.G.Bennett: Gurdjieff: Making a New World*
- 9.*L. A. Govinda: Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*
10. *Roberto Assagioli: Psychosynthesis*
- 11.*Roberto Assagioli: The Act of Will*
- 12.*Ouspensky: In Search of the Miraculous*
- 13.*Ouspensky: The Fourth Way*
- 14.*H.Spencer Lewis: Rosicrucian Manual, AMORC; 1st edition 1918*