

DECEPTION AND ROLE-PLAYING¹

George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was an enigma, impossible to define or fully understand. No two people who met Gurdjieff came away with the same impression of the man or his teaching. Robert de Ropp, a student of P.D. Ouspensky, met Gurdjieff in 1948 and was immediately struck by Gurdjieff's otherworldly nature: "He was, without doubt, the most extraordinary human being I have ever met . . . Gurdjieff, like his own creation Mr. Beelzebub, seemed not only a being from a different planet but also from a different solar system." (1)

Biographer James Webb observed that Gurdjieff seemed to play a variety of roles at any given moment, including "the big role of the Teacher, the small immediate role which is designed to produce a particular effect on a particular pupil, and a generalized role to ensure a relationship of *meaning* with the whole milieu in which he chances to be operating." (2) Never sure if he was behaving genuinely or playing a role, Gurdjieff's students noticed that Gurdjieff often seemed to be "acting" when he was working with them:

Our feeling of this 'acting' in G. was exceptionally strong. Among ourselves we often said we never saw him and never would. In any other man so much 'acting' would have produced an impression of falsity. In him 'acting' produced an impression of strength, although, not always; sometimes there was too much of it. (3)

The various roles that he played allowed Gurdjieff a certain advantageous fluidity of movement and even invisibility. While most people act or play roles with little awareness that they are doing so, Gurdjieff role-played with the conscious intent to fulfill his mission to transmit esoteric teachings to the West. Unfortunately, Gurdjieff's method frequently involved deceptive or deliberately manipulative behaviour. This made it difficult for his students to assess his true intentions and for his critics to judge the value of his work and effectiveness of his teachings. Student John Bennett: "We have to take Gurdjieff's 'acting' or role-playing into account when we try to interpret the many diverse impressions recorded in books by people connected with him." (4)

Secrecy and Deception

Much of Gurdjieff's life was shrouded in mystery and secrecy. Gurdjieff rarely revealed details of his early life and background, which has led biographers to debate the date of his birth and details concerning his upbringing, education, friends, fellow seekers and the chronology of his travels. In fact, there is no independent corroboration of any of the events of his life before 1912 when he began teaching publicly in Moscow. His extensive search for esoteric knowledge preceding that date remains largely a mystery. When students questioned Gurdjieff about his travels and the sources of his esoteric knowledge, his answers were always vague and superficial.

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In the early 1930s, Gurdjieff mysteriously burned almost all of his official documents and passports, which created an aura of suspicion, not to mention a huge evidentiary void for Gurdjieff scholars and biographers. Gurdjieff's writings, especially *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, provides the only details of his early life. *Meetings* is clearly semi-autobiographical, though much of its narrative could be considered allegorical rather than entirely factual. (5) Biographer James Webb believes that most of the characters in the book did not actually exist historically and were merely composite portraits created by Gurdjieff to serve as illustrations of various human types and seekers of wisdom.

Beyond concealing the facts of his life, Gurdjieff promulgated misinformation about himself. Gurdjieff, whom some critics even considered to be a megalomaniac, was notorious for spinning wild, unbelievable stories and making patently absurd statements. Gurdjieff mixed truth and invention to such a degree that it was impossible to tell what was fact and what was fiction: "He invented and reinvented himself so many times, left so many false trails, and encouraged so many myths and mistakes about exactly who he was that uncovering the truth about his past would take a lifetime." (6)

Gurdjieff was said to excel at devising schemes to deceive others in order to extract money from them. In his critical portrait of Gurdjieff, psychiatrist Anthony Storr condemns Gurdjieff's penchant for playing the confidence trickster:

His own account of how he survived his early wanderings reveals how expert he was at deception . . . When people brought him sewing machines and other mechanical objects for repair, he was often able to see that the mere shift of a lever would cure the problem. However, he was careful to pretend that such repairs were time-consuming and difficult, and charged accordingly. He also wrote that he found out in advance which villages and towns the new railway would pass through, and then informed the local authorities that he had the power to arrange the course of the railway. He boasted that he obtained large sums for his pretended services, and said that he had no pangs of conscience about doing so. (7)

James Webb rationalizes Gurdjieff's slippery dealings by claiming that he never took money from the poor but deceived only those who engaged in dishonest practices themselves. Student Fritz Peters argues that on many occasions Gurdjieff was merely being mischievous, toying with people for his own diversion and amusement. Perhaps the most likely explanation is that Gurdjieff's deceptive behaviour was calculated to test potential seekers:

Gurdjieff himself wore a very evident 'disguise' which, as it seems, automatically excluded those people who could not see through it. It was just the disguise of the 'charlatan' which kept the largest numbers away . . . Such a faint aura of distrust (around the one man in all the world who could perhaps, when it came down to it, be most surely trusted!) served its purpose. Only the real searchers could see through it. (8)

In a person as complex as Gurdjieff, it is almost impossible to separate actions which are deliberately deceptive from those based on higher motives. It is clear that in many situations playing a role facilitated the transmission of his teachings. To teach others effectively, he often felt it necessary to mask his real intentions and disguise his methods. This enabled him to test the resolve of his pupils to discover and assimilate the essential knowledge of human spiritual transformation that he possessed.

Manipulating Atmosphere and Environment

There is an ancient tradition in many Eastern spiritual teachings of modifying atmosphere or environment to produce particular effects on human consciousness and perception. This science employs special objects and artifacts, design, colour and texture in specific patterns or combinations to communicate knowledge of spiritual importance.

Gurdjieff was well aware of the impact of environment on human consciousness, and altered his surroundings accordingly. In *Views From the Real World*, there is a vivid description of Gurdjieff's living quarters in a country house outside of Moscow:

There was no area not covered, either by carpets or hangings of some sort. A single enormous rug covered the floor of this spacious room. Even its walls were hung with carpets which also draped the doors and windows; the ceiling was covered with ancient silk shawls of resplendent colours, astonishingly beautiful in their combination. These were drawn together in a strange pattern toward the center of the ceiling. The light was concealed behind a dull glass shade of peculiar form resembling a huge lotus flower, which produced a white diffused glow. (9)

Ouspensky described the unusual effect that the special atmosphere of Gurdjieff's Moscow apartment had on the students who visited:

First of all the people who came there – who were all G.'s pupils – *were not afraid to keep silent*. This alone was something unusual. They came, sat down, smoked, they often did not speak a single word for hours. And there was nothing oppressive or unpleasant in this silence; on the contrary, there was a feeling of assurance and freedom from the necessity of playing a forced and invented role. (10)

Gurdjieff continued to create and use environmental effects for teaching purposes throughout his long stay in the West. At the Château du Prieuré in France he supervised the construction of a Study House from the materials of a used aircraft hangar and decorated it with great effect. The windows were stained in a harmony of colours and the floors and walls were covered with carpets from Eastern countries whose designs were believed to contain ancient wisdom. (11) Stanley Nott, a student at the Prieuré, describes the impact of the Study House on visitors:

The atmosphere was that of a holy place, partly due to the effect of the combination of colours on the senses and feelings (for Gurdjieff understood how to produce definite effects by means of colours, as well as by sound and movements) and partly due to the vibrations of the pupils who practised the sacred dances and movements there. (12)

In the 1930s and 1940s, Gurdjieff resided in a Paris flat where he used drawn curtains and other decorations to shut out the external world. Here, day and night no longer existed. James Webb believes that Gurdjieff deliberately established this atmosphere to isolate his students from the outside world and create a sanctum where all ordinary norms and rules of behaviour were suspended.

Each phase of Gurdjieff's teaching was associated with a particular environmental atmosphere. The Eastern patterns and motifs of the Russian period, the majesty of the Study House at the Prieuré and the otherworldly ambience of his Paris apartment, were all consciously designed to create a particular spiritual impact by influencing the perceptions and feelings of his students.

Playing Roles

Gurdjieff's whole life seemed to consist of a series of roles in a great drama: seeker of esoteric knowledge, hypnotist, healer, professional occultist, rare carpet dealer, explorer, traveller, businessman, teacher. He was able to play a different role with every-one he met, and was very adept at concealing his genuine self under many guises. A 1952 article in *Time* magazine described Gurdjieff as "a remarkable blend of P.T. Barnum, Rasputin, Freud, Groucho Marx and everybody's grandfather." (13) To some he was the archetypal Fool or Trickster.

Ouspensky formed his first impression of Gurdjieff when they met at a small café in Moscow in 1915. Ouspensky was astonished by the strange and unexpected character of Gurdjieff, who appeared to be in disguise and utterly at odds with his surroundings. In time, Ouspensky and his friends noticed that Gurdjieff often seemed to be acting, whether selling carpets or entertaining over large dinners. This acting created perplexity and confusion among his students, who found his image and behaviour so unpredictable that they didn't know what conclusions to draw. (14)

A sense of Gurdjieff's 'play' during the Russian phase of his teaching is captured in the "Ouspensky Papers" held in the Sterling Library, Yale University: "The most unexpected was his eternal and continual playing. He was never simple or natural; one always felt in him some secret hidden intent. Some people were attracted to him by this playing as one would be attracted by anything incomprehensible, strange and dangerous." (15)

In ordinary life most people play roles unconsciously, but Gurdjieff played them consciously. He believed that the capacity to consciously play the roles demanded by daily life was a key to inner freedom, and he himself was a first-class exemplar with the

fluency of a consummate actor. In *Paris Meetings 1943*, he elaborated: “He who works becomes an actor, a real actor in life. To be an actor is to play a role. Life is theatre where every man plays a role. Every day they change it. Today one role, tomorrow another role. He only is a good actor who is able to remember himself and consciously play his role, no matter what it may be.” (16)

The role Gurdjieff played varied with the circumstances. With people who might donate money or help him in his work he would be friendly and solicitous. But with those who were arrogant or pretentious he could be insulting and rude, not caring what impression he made. Gurdjieff enjoyed deceiving visitors to the Château du Prieuré, especially public officials, by playing the role of a simpleton. His role-playing gave him the ability to become almost invisible:

When visitors were being shown round the grounds they would sometimes pass him with only a glance, like an American who was talking to me about what a wonderful man Mr. Gurdjieff must be, and that he would like to meet him . . . Just then Gurdjieff passed by and went into the house. ‘That is Mr. Gurdjieff,’ I said. ‘Well,’ he replied, ‘isn’t that queer! I spoke to him in the grounds and thought he was the gardener.’ (17)

John G. Bennett recounts a story of Gurdjieff’s arrest by the French police following World War II for keeping foreign currency in his flat. When he appeared before the magistrate he “played to perfection the part of a poor old man who understood nothing about foreign money and could scarcely speak French.” (18)

At times he would play the role of a confused, dim-witted leader of his institute in order to discourage the attention of journalists, intellectuals and scholars who were seeking his opinions on sundry metaphysical matters of no consequence. C.S. Nott witnessed some of these exchanges:

Gurdjieff spoke about learning to play roles, but one should begin with something quite small and simple. He himself was a master of the technique. He could play the role of a simple man, almost devoid of intelligence. Once, two psychologists from England came to the Prieuré on their way to a conference in Geneva; presumably to get Gurdjieff’s views on the various schools. Gurdjieff gave them a wonderful lunch, but every time they asked him a question he turned it aside with a joke. After lunch he took them for a walk around the grounds and back to the Study House, cracking jokes and behaving like an eccentric . . . The men were bewildered. When they left his attitude changed. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘they will leave me in peace to pursue my aim.’ (19)

James Webb argues that Gurdjieff’s acting can only be understood in the context of his whole life. Webb likens the various events of Gurdjieff’s life to a series of disconnected snapshots which represent roles through which occasionally the man behind the roles can be glimpsed. He points out that outside observers are incapable of judging Gurdjieff’s actions because they do not understand that role-playing was merely a technique to help him maintain his detachment and to expand his emotional range.

Gurdjieff revealed that in 1911 he vowed to lead what some would consider an artificial life in order to fulfill his task as a teacher. In his unpublished *A Letter to a Dervish*, Gurdjieff explains that playing a role or part can lead to inner freedom: “The mark of the perfected man is his ability to play to perfection any desired role in his external life while inwardly remaining free and not allowing himself to ‘blend’ with anything proceeding outside of him.” (20)

John G. Bennett believes that around 1935 Gurdjieff largely ceased his habitual role-playing as he began a new stage of work preparing a select group of students to carry on his legacy after his death.

Effect on Students

Gurdjieff’s role-playing with his students was designed to reveal aspects of their psyche that were unrecognized and below conscious awareness. He was able to select a role best suited to the developmental needs of a particular student and then play that role consciously to create the conditions that would expose a certain side of their personality. French student Michel Conge:

What people have not always grasped is that he never sought to scandalize, but to make someone understand something by provoking a moment of sincerity which, quite often, could only be brought about through the reactions he aroused. He acted, played a role designed to bring people face to face with themselves, their weaknesses, their slavery, and to help them inwardly to separate their automatic reactions from what was real in their being. Do not jump to conclusions when you hear tales about him, do not judge by appearances; try to put yourself in the shoes of the person for whom the shock was intended. (21)

The roles Gurdjieff chose to play were often calibrated to reveal to students their ‘chief feature,’ whether it was unbridled self-importance, fixation on material possessions and money, or an inordinate desire to please others. Kathryn Hulme: “He could play any role with consummate artistry. He would play the one that would shock you most – to test you of course. To test the depth of your desire to learn more.” (22)

Students have attested to Gurdjieff’s uncanny ability to so convincingly enter a ‘role’ that it seemed completely real without any artifice. Annie Lou Staveley describes the experience: “You were so convinced of the validity, the authenticity of the role as he played it that it required a real effort to notice what was taking place and not to get caught up in whatever reactions and associations one had with the roles.” (23)

With prospective new students Gurdjieff’s behaviour often bordered on the bizarre. One new student was prevented from approaching Gurdjieff during his first day, as each time the eager prospect came near him, Gurdjieff would shout at him. Other neophytes

were given seemingly pointless tasks such as digging ditches that were later filled in or memorizing long lists of Tibetan words which were never referred to again.

Fritz Peters, when just a young boy, witnessed an unforgettable scene involving Gurdjieff and A.R. Orage, the English literary critic and a student at the Priuré:

Gurdjieff was standing by his bed in a state of what seemed to me to be completely uncontrolled fury. He was raging at Orage, who stood impassively, and very pale, framed in one of the windows . . . Suddenly, in the space of an instant, Gurdjieff's voice stopped, his whole personality changed, he gave me a broad smile – looking incredibly peaceful and inwardly quiet – motioned me to leave, and then resumed his tirade with undiminished force. This happened so quickly that I do not believe that Mr. Orage even noticed the break in the rhythm. (24)

What struck Peters was the realization that Gurdjieff's "rage" was in fact firmly controlled and consciously projected.

It seems likely that Gurdjieff employed role-playing and acting as a means of teaching his students by manifesting behaviour that did not appear at all "spiritual." One of Gurdjieff's earliest students, Thomas de Hartmann, was able to perceive the underlying purpose of his teacher's apparently contradictory behaviour: "The outer behavior of Mr. Gurdjieff was so different on different occasions – depending on the person concerned, the level on which this person stood, and which side of him Mr. Gurdjieff wished to approach at a given moment – that it seemed as if Mr. Gurdjieff was very changeable. But it was not so. He was always the same – only the impression he deliberately created was different." (25) But the challenge for the students was great. The natural reaction of most people to someone "pushing their buttons" or, in Gurdjieff's apt phrase, "stepping on their corns" is an emotional defensive or aggressive posture based on type, habit and individual conditioning:

Mr. Gurdjieff felt that a man should not have to depend only on life to bring him all kinds of impressions of happiness and unhappiness, sorrow and joy. Mr. Gurdjieff wished to create special places where he could consciously provide them. Work would help, so to speak, the growth of the 'Kingdom of Heaven' within us, the growth of the divine quality that distinguishes men from animals. But as the basis of Mr. Gurdjieff's Work was to create every kind of impression in a pupil for this transformation, he could accomplish it only through playing roles. For instance, if he wished to make someone experience injustice, he had to play the part of an unjust man – and he knew how to do it superbly! Then one had to hold back from reacting badly and not be resentful. Mr. Gurdjieff told me once that it caused him pain when I was resentful. In other words, a man had to accept intentional suffering. Mr. Gurdjieff could not say: 'Don't you see that it is done on purpose?' The whole sense of his Work would then have been lost. There is a constant temptation for the teacher to show his true self, the way he is in reality. But Mr. Gurdjieff knew full well that then everyone would run after him and become his adoring slave. He did not wish to create slaves but, on the contrary, conscious, voluntary, individuals, the seeds of which he sought to plant in his pupils. (26)

In *Our life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, Thomas de Hartmann recalls one of Gurdjieff's guiding precepts – 'what is good for personality is bad for essence.' With his students Gurdjieff often adopted a very disagreeable and unpleasant role, as if testing their resolve to work with him under any conditions:

He never sought to destroy anything real in a man, only to put everything in its place. Under the mask of a bad personality, Mr. Gurdjieff became our tempter. As tempter he provoked in us a strong inner experience of feeling and sensation, which in life expresses itself as what some call 'negative emotion,' and then he strove to enable us to transform it by seeing it and reasoning about it. With some he aroused insult, anger, rage and so on, until the person could not help knowing this in himself. Others he loaded with praises, until all their pride, ambition and self-esteem were loosened to the point where they could not help seeing their own worthlessness. Through seeing himself a man can awaken to his authentic mental centre and begin to acquire genuine responsibility . . . All this is extremely difficult, but man has a kind of deep sense that what is sent to him is always within his capacity to bear. For those who really wish to work, the attitude must be one of acceptance. With Mr. Gurdjieff we had always to be able to respond in the right way to his demands. This becomes possible if a man is 'present.' If he has a conscious feeling of his self, of I AM . . ." (27)

Gurdjieff's unpredictable and sometimes irrational behaviour bothered many of his pupils. Ouspensky concluded that Gurdjieff had two sides to his personality, one genuine and the other false. (28) Ouspensky felt that Gurdjieff's acting was not always practical and was often counterproductive, driving away many potentially valuable people: "What often amazed us in his 'play' was that sometimes it was perfectly clear that he made no effort to hide the white thread and that sometimes also he could not stop himself, 'played' by habit automatically, even in circumstances where there was neither use nor meaning in it." (29)

After "demands" the most difficult point was G.'s "acting." He confused and muddled people so much that they finally lost all sense of the right and the left side. This was the system. And sometimes G. even explained it. He said that a man ought to be so sure of his right and his left sides that it should be quite impossible to confuse him. And so long as he could be confused, he must be confused. But it was strange that in many cases he evidently could not stop himself and continued to "act" even when his "acting" had become too obvious and produced results directly opposed to the ones he expected. It was still more strange when his "acting" extended to people who had nothing to do with our work who crossed our path by accident or who joined us for a short time and, having left, protested loudly and unequivocally against this "acting" which they called by quite a different name. Altogether, G.'s "acting" was the most difficult point. Many people remained with him so long as they believed in "acting" and left when they ceased to see "acting" and began to see the "genuine thing" and many things that passed as "acting." On the whole people around G. fell into two categories – those who saw "acting" in all G.'s strange actions and those who did not see it. I do not propose to decide which of them was right. (30)

The 'Path of Blame'

Much of Gurdjieff's outrageous behaviour and acting might seem strange to Westerners conditioned to believe that a spiritual teacher must always act in a truthful and pious manner. However, there is a long history in many Eastern esoteric traditions of teachers deliberately behaving in unexpected or bewildering ways in order to facilitate the learning and growth of their students:

The behaviour of the teacher may appear at times bizarre, unpredictable or meaningless; he may act in ways that are flippant, domineering, cold, manic or tyrannical, he may scream as though gripped by fury, sit in disapproving silence or set the disciple a flurry of apparently inconsequential tasks. Any outsider might well conclude from his behaviour that he is mad; even the novice himself may realize only long afterwards what the teacher's true intentions were. (31)

The teacher hides his or her real self behind a mask of behaviour to deliberately shock or challenge students. John Bennett believes that to advance his teaching mission, Gurdjieff consciously used this technique, sometimes called the 'Way of the Trickster' or the 'Path of Crazy Wisdom.' (32) In the Sufi tradition, it is known as the 'Path of Blame' or 'Malamati' behaviour. Idries Shah describes the purpose of such behaviour:

The Path of Blame is known in Persian as the *Rahimalamat*. Although called a 'Path' it is in fact a phase of activity, and has many applications. The teacher incurs 'blame.' He may, for instance, attribute a bad action to himself, in order to teach a disciple without directly criticizing him Many people follow Malamati (blameworthy) behaviour, even making themselves out to be wrongdoers, in order to highlight these characteristics in others. The reason for this is that when a person sees someone saying or doing something, he will tend to judge him by himself. This is what Rumi and others call 'Holding up a mirror to oneself and calling the image the other person.' . . . Malamati behavior can only be used with great care. (33)

It seems reasonable, from accounts by his students and others, to conclude that at times Gurdjieff adopted a deliberate disguise by putting himself in a bad light. Such a 'mask' repulsed people rather than drawing them towards him. John Bennett felt that this explained much of his inexplicable outward behaviour: "Gurdjieff's self-imposed task was to act at all times in such a way as to make it hard for people to accept him without reservation. His strange behavior was dictated by the decision to prevent people from becoming too dependent on him." (34)

Some of his 'Malamati' role-playing was deliberately calculated to offend others and challenge them to see beyond the surface behaviour in order to receive the teachings he offered. One of the ways that Gurdjieff seemed to be using Path of Blame behaviour was with his appearance and personal habits, including his table manners and eating habits, use of alcohol, foul language and hygiene.

Paul Beekman Taylor provides a sample of Gurdjieff's ability to create a truly negative impression in *Real Worlds of G.I. Gurdjieff*:

He appeared often slovenly in habit, dressed in disordered fashion, smoking and drinking in excess without display of refined manners. He swore, ranted and insulted. He had not a whit of patience, cutting off the speech of others. He ate, drank, argued, joked, loved and scorned with seeming complete mastery over physical and emotional appetite . . . His displays of loss of control was, in effect, sublime control! He manifested anger at trifles and treated disasters amusing trifles. He displayed negative emotions as playthings of an unshakable authority. (35)

Gurdjieff began gaining weight in the late 1920s and by the end of 1932 he was obese and, according to some students, looked "terrible." Rather than being concerned about his looks and image, Gurdjieff drew attention to his appearance in his later years by passing out unflattering photographs of himself in profile. Although at times Gurdjieff could dress with great taste and elegance, on many occasions he appeared seedy and unkempt, dressed in cheap, food-stained suits, or dressed inappropriately in public, such as the time he attended a posh restaurant in pyjamas, dressing gown and slippers. His table manners were atrocious by Western standards and his personal hygienic habits were considered disgusting by some of his personal assistants. (36)

It appears likely that these personal habits, together with Gurdjieff's difficult and provocative behavior, were part of his role as a teacher following the Path of Blame. Gurdjieff recognized that his powerful, magnetic personality, if allowed its full force of expression, could be an impediment to his students' spiritual potential and independent development. To prevent his students from forming too close an attachment to him or developing a dependency on him, he would repel or shock them with these unusual habits and behaviour. Even when newcomers approached him, rather than trying to create a good first impression, Gurdjieff often did everything possible to rebuff or frighten them. The evidence suggests that Gurdjieff used the Path of Blame throughout much of his teaching career in the West.

Commentary

Many students were baffled or discouraged by Gurdjieff's role-playing and deceptive methods. Gurdjieff did not make it easy to study with him or assimilate his ideas; on the contrary, he presented a series of obstacles which the serious seeker had to overcome. He believed that one does not value anything, including esoteric knowledge, which can be acquired too easily.

However, many pupils felt that Gurdjieff's true self was hidden behind the masks of the various roles he played. Some believed that the contradictory sides of Gurdjieff forced them to focus on the teachings themselves and not on the persona of the teacher.

Perceptive pupils, such as Thomas de Hartmann, were able to see beyond the outer behaviour of Gurdjieff's role-playing and sense his inner purpose of awakening 'real I.' They perceived that his 'acting' was intended to awaken a higher developmental impulse in his pupils: "Mr. Gurdjieff wished – perhaps it was his higher task – to bring to life in ordinary man 'something' of which man has hitherto been unaware. In his 'divine acting' with people, Mr. Gurdjieff consistently followed the same line of Work from the time we met him in 1917, although he always, so to speak, dressed it differently." (37)

By observing their own reactions to his often outlandish behaviour, Gurdjieff's pupils were forced to see aspects of themselves that they did not wish to acknowledge, which helped them develop their essence and diminish their conditioned mechanical personality. For instance, for those requiring the experience of injustice, Gurdjieff would play the role of an unjust man. The creation of intentional suffering was necessary to make the 'false personality' resentful and angry, thereby exposing its hold on the pupil and providing an opportunity to feed the true self – 'what is unpleasant for personality is good for essence.'

Gurdjieff's role-playing and acting suggest a teacher consciously masking a higher, more genuine self. Some of Gurdjieff's closest students recalled rare occasions during which he abandoned his role-playing and revealed his authentic self. John Bennett recounts that following a serious automobile accident in 1948, he and his wife observed that Gurdjieff was no longer hiding behind a mask:

My wife and I both observed an extraordinary change. Before the accident, he had been the enigmatic Gurdjieff that we had known, and of whom so many stories are told. For four or five days after the accident, it seemed that he either could not or did not feel the need to play a role, to hide himself behind a mask. We then felt his extraordinary goodness and love for humanity . . . I believe that, for a few days, we caught a glimpse of the real Gurdjieff, and that all his strange and often repellent behaviour was a screen to hide from people who would otherwise have idolized his person instead of working for themselves. (38)

Georgette Leblanc, a member of the French study group 'The Rope,' records a profound meeting with Gurdjieff shortly before her death where she witnessed the true man revealed:

When I arrived at his apartment, he opened the door himself . . . The light coming from the little salon shone on him brightly. Instead of concealing himself, he abruptly stepped back and leaned against the wall. For the first time, he allowed me to see what he really was . . . as if he had suddenly stripped away the masks behind which it is his duty to hide. His face was imprinted with a charity that embraced the entire world. Standing rigidly before him, I saw him with all my strength and I experienced a gratitude so deep, so painful, that he felt the need to quiet me. With an unforgettable look, he uttered: 'God helps me.' (39)

NOTES

- (1) Robert de Ropp *Warrior's Way* (Nevada City, California: Gateways, 2002), p. 174.
- (2) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 190.
- (3) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 33.
- (4) J.G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 113.
- (5) Gary Lachman argues in *In Search of P.D. Ouspensky* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 2004, p. 88) that what Gurdjieff reveals about himself in his writing is open to multiple interpretations: "Gurdjieff's account of his formative years can be read on a variety of levels: metaphor, allegory, pure tall tale, metaphysical fiction, autobiography, or simply invention."
- (6) Gary Lachman *In Search of P.D. Ouspensky* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 2004), p. 82.
- (7) Anthony Storr *Feet of Clay* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 33-34.
- (8) Henry Leroy Finch "The Sacred Cosmos: Teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 23.
- (9) G. I. Gurdjieff *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 11.
- (10) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 271.
- (11) Paul Beekman Taylor writes in *Gurdjieff's America* (United Kingdom: Lighthouse Editions, 2004, p. 206) that Gurdjieff regarded the art of carpet design as a means of transmitting traditional wisdom:

Few have said much about Gurdjieff's rugs as a form of encoded texts, but more than once in my hearing he indicated that the rugs on his floors and walls were to be read. They were scripts containing a definite piece of knowledge. When someone asked him why he identified himself as a rug merchant he laughed: "Why dealer in rugs? Answer simple. I sell knowledge. All is in rugs around you. Read! All life is hidden in design." I learned to appreciate that rug or carpet design, like folk stories, transmit traditional cultural lore from one generation to another.

- (12) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1962), p. 46.
- (13) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 328.
- (14) For instance, Ouspensky grew to believe that Gurdjieff had two distinct personalities which contradicted one another, which are discussed in William Patrick Patterson's *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), p. 42:
- Gurdjieff's unpredictable actions, some seemingly so irrational, continues to bother Uspenski. Rather than suffer his reactions and identifications, the idea gradually forms in him that there are two sides, or two personalities, to Gurdjieff. One is a serious or positive side; the other "plays." People around Gurdjieff are 'sorted out' by these two sides. Some see his serious side that displays his knowledge, his disinterestedness, his Work. In them, Gurdjieff's "play" produces a struggle of "yes" and "no." Others, seeing the negative or play side, view the positive side as a pretense for getting influence and power over people. Still others are attracted by the negative side. Uspenski believes it keeps them close to Gurdjieff because it corresponds to their own desires and predilections.
- (15) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), pp. 38
- (16) G.I. Gurdjieff *Paris Meetings 1943* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions, 2017), p. 64.
- (17) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1962), p. 111.
- (18) J.G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 249.
- (19) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1962), p. ???
- (20) J.G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 113.
- (21) Michel Conge "Facing Mr. Gurdjieff" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 356.
- (22) Kathryn Hulme *Undiscovered Country* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966) p. 52

- (23) A. I. Staveley *Themes II* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 2008), p. 106.
- (24) Fritz Peters *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 31.
- (25) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 1.
- (26) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 69-70.
- (27) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 55.
- (28) Gurdjieff's unpredictable behaviour caused suspicion and doubt in some pupils like Ouspensky, who sensed a secret intent behind the constant role-playing. William Patterson discusses this quandary in *Struggle of the Magicians* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1996, p. 31):

The most unexpected was his eternal and continual playing. He was never simple and natural; one always felt in him some secret, hidden intent. Some people were attracted to him by this playing as one would be attracted by anything incomprehensible, strange and dangerous . . . In connection with this play we saw perfectly clearly in him two men, and those who the one attracted did not doubt that the other was surely a mask or part adapted for some definite aim.

- (29) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), pp. 38-39.
- (30) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), pp. 499-500.
- (31) Peter Brent "Learning and Teaching" in Idries Shah, ed. *The World of the Sufi* (London: Octagon Press, 1979), p. 216.
- (32) Ernest Scott summarizes the qualities of teachers following the Path of Crazy Wisdom in *The People of the Secret* (London: Octagon, 1983, pp. 229-230). They bear an uncanny resemblance to many of Gurdjieff's characteristics, including:

- Supernatural powers
- Ability to heal others
- Physical indulgences
- Takes money from others
- Redistributes money and gifts
- Never refrains from action because of lack of money
- Rejects the norms of the society in which he lives and works

- Is misunderstood because his "excesses" are considered as quirks and not as an essential part of his operations to illustrate the weaknesses of others
- Is opposed by the orthodox authorities, civil and religious
- Attracts many people who follow only the lure of the strange, creating an incorrect impression of his activities and associates
- Has dance, music, or other physical movements
- Has spent a great deal of time in mortification and also in indulgence, creating through this polarity a strange power
- Usually only a small ("acceptable") part of what he says and does is reported, and this becomes respectable and admired by his followers. He may even come to be considered, after his death, as a saint by the orthodox authorities.

(33) Idries Shah *The Commanding Self* (London: Octagon Press, 1994), p. 323.

(34) J.G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 125.

(35) Paul Beekman Taylor *Real Worlds of G.I. Gurdjieff* (Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2012), pp. 17-18.

(36) Fritz Peters, who was assigned as a youth to clean Gurdjieff's quarters at the Château de Priuré, described the shocking state in which he found the rooms in *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964, pp. 29-30):

What he could do to his dressing-room and bathroom is something that cannot be described without invading his privacy. I will only say that physically, Mr. Gurdjieff, at least so I gathered, lived like an animal . . . the disorder was frequently so great that I had visions of great, hygienic dramas transpiring nightly in the dressing room and bathroom.

(37) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 1-2.

(38) John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 243.

(39) Margaret Anderson *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 149.