GURDJIEFF AND HYPNOSIS
“Tamdgidi sets a benchmark for Gurdjieff Studies in relation to two recognized but insufficiently explored areas, his writings as a unified field and his exploitation of hypnosis in its broadest sense. His compact interpretation of Gurdjieff emphasizes—for the first time—a search for meaning based on recognizable keys within about 1,800 pages of Gurdjieff’s four texts as a single body of work, with particular focus on subliminal and subconscious dimensions of impact and interpretation, an approach which might be termed the ‘Hermeneutics of Gurdjieff.’ Thus, Tamdgidi’s work is an important original contribution to the constructive, independent, and critical study of Gurdjieff’s four books. Anyone who has seriously attempted to read Beelzebub’s Tales or Meetings with Remarkable Men can vouch for their intentionally beguiling or ‘hypnotic’ effect. These readers will appreciate Tamdgidi’s interpretive virtuosity and focus—he keeps each tree and the entire forest in sight throughout.”


“A wondrous odyssey and extraordinary argumentation! Nothing in the corpus of writings on Gurdjieff’s works goes near to matching this masterful reading. Each time one looks back into the text, one finds more gold, no dross.”

—Paul Beekman Taylor, Professor Emeritus at the University of Geneva, and author of G. I. Gurdjieff: A New Life; Gurdjieff’s Invention of America; The Philosophy of G. I. Gurdjieff; Gurdjieff & Orage: Brothers in Elysium; and Shadows of Heaven: Gurdjieff and Toomer

“In the ocean of literature on Gurdjieff, the brilliant book of Mohammad Tamdgidi has a very special place. It is the first serious academic attempt at a hermeneutics of Gurdjieff’s texts, taking as key the core of Gurdjieff’s teaching—the enneagram. Of course, Gurdjieff’s teaching cannot be understood apart from its practice. But it is also true that this teaching cannot be understood without a rigorous study of the writings of Gurdjieff himself.”

—Basarab Nicolescu, author of Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity
GURDJIEFF AND HYPNOSIS
A Hermeneutic Study

MOHAMMAD H. TAMDGIDI

Foreword by J. Walter Driscoll
for my beloved
father Mohammed (Ahad) Tamjidi (1930–2007)
and mother Tayyebeh Tamjidi
It all ended thus, that I decided to take an oath before my own essence, in a state of mind known to me, never again to make use of this property of mine.

I must also mention that, when I took the oath not to apply in life this inherency of mine, I made a reservation that my oath should not concern the application of it for scientific purposes. (L:26)

—Gurdjieff, Life is Real Only Then, When “I Am”

“And in doing this, they criticize exactly that humble and honest learned being of their planet [Mesmer], who, if he had not been pecked to death would have revived that science, which alone is absolutely necessary to them and by means of which alone, perhaps, they might be saved from the consequences of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer.” (B:562)

—Gurdjieff, Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson

At the close of this [film titled “Two Brothers”], what I should call, “general hypnotic-process” in order to fix firmly some formerly suggested ideas, I, “hobbling” and supported by my companions, returned to the Café de la Paix, which later became my Paris “office”, and regaining my calm, began to form in my mind the outline of the scenario which I have called “The Three Brothers.” (H:43–4)

—Gurdjieff, The Herald of Coming Good

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. …

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. (M:38)

—Gurdjieff, Meetings with Remarkable Men
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**Abbreviations**

- **B** (or Beelzebub) *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson: An Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man* (All and Everything, First Series)
- **M** (or Meetings) *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (All and Everything, Second Series)
- **L** (or Life) *Life Is Real Only Then, When “I Am”* (All and Everything, Third Series)
- **H** (or Herald) *The Herald of Coming Good*
G. I. Gurdjieff (circa 1870 to 1949) remains as enigmatic as the inscriptionless and inscrutable pair of dolmans which have guarded his family plot in Fontainebleau for sixty years. A polyglot and privately tutored autodidact from obscure Greek-Armenian parentage in the Russian occupied southern slopes of the Caucasus of the late nineteenth century, he emerged as a self-vaunting and unorthodox yet remarkably able choreographer, composer, hypnotherapist, memoirist, mythologist, novelist, philosopher, and psychologist.

Gurdjieff tells us that by the mid 1890s his expeditionary band called ‘Seekers of Truth’ was engaged in scientific missions and monastic pilgrimages in remote regions of Central Asia, that his practical knowledge of hypnotism was deepening and that he had begun to give himself out “to be a ‘healer’ of all kinds of vices” (H:20). After more than a decade spent honing his discoveries in Europe, Africa, Russia and Central Asia, he adopted—as he characterized it—the “artificial life” of a hypnotist-magus around 1911–1912 (H:11–13, 63, 68). His avowed purpose in the twenty-one year undertaking that followed was to understand “the aim of human life” (H:1), to attract sufficient followers of every human type as subjects for observation and experiment and
upon whom he hoped to depend for their services as musicians, dancers, artists and writers to verify and promote his auspicious system (H:22–24).

Gurdjieff brashly stormed the stages of Europe and America between the early 1920s and the mid 1930s, cloaked in his adopted Svengali mystique of “tricks, half-tricks, and real supernatural phenomena” (Nott 1961:15)—including perhaps a sound psycho-spiritual teaching for posterity. The dramatic performances with his dance troupe and brassy orchestra made headlines in Paris, London, New York and Chicago. By the early 1940s Gurdjieff had garnered sufficient financial credit among his Paris admirers to quietly operate a neighborhood soup-kitchen from his “back staircase” (Tchekhovitch 2006:198–99) and survive the Nazi occupation of Paris. Immediately following World War II his American and British flocks gathered in Gurdjieff’s small Paris apartment to endure plate-in-hand standing-room-only dinners and rounds of “Idiot” toasts. Then they sat or squatted in the living room past the wee hours for interminable oral readings of his then unpublished space odyssey Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson. These festive pedagogical occasions with Gurdjieff ended at his death on October 29, 1949 (Moore 1991:316).

Gurdjieff should have been forgotten by now, or perhaps recalled only in occasional footnotes such as the following typical gossip about him, recorded in the joint 1920s memoir of Robert McAlmon and Kay Boyle—two expatriate American writers in Paris when Eliot, Hemingway, Joyce, Mansfield, Pound, Williams, and a host of major English-language authors frequented café tables. Boyle recounts that one afternoon in 1923 at the Café de la Paix, while Gurdjieff sat at an adjacent table, she, McAlmon, and their host Harold Loeb heard an anonymous young American (who had visited a friend at Gurdjieff’s Institute at the Prieuré) say:

[Gurdjieff’s] cult has been spreading among people I thought were more or less sensible … Jane Heap, Margaret Anderson and Georgette Leblanc got involved … (I [Kay Boyle] remembered then that it was there that Katherine Mansfield died.). It’s a mass hypnotism of some kind. Gurdjieff started years back in the East as a hypnotist … In their state of half starvation and overwork, they don’t care to think or feel on their own. They live on their hallucinations.

The sinister, manipulative and exploiting hypnotist Svengali was a character invented by George du Maurier (1834–1896) in his 1894 melodrama, Trilby. A retiring amateur hypnotist and not particularly notable British writer, Du Maurier was overwhelmed by unwelcome public attention when the book created an international sensation and became

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perhaps the best-selling English-language novel of the nineteenth century. It portrays the sweet hapless Trilby as an innocent, warm-hearted artist’s model who, hypnotically seduced into marriage with the spectral conductor Svengali, becomes his zombie song-bird. Representing the quintessence of mesmeric entrapment and hypnosis run-amuck—then dominant topics of salon debate—the characters of Svengali and Trilby were, by the turn of the century, galvanized into iconic archetypes for Victorian-Edwardian preoccupations with the dark forces of the unconscious, repressed sexuality, and occultist esotericism.²

Trajectories of both Gurdjieff and the stereotype of Svengali dovetailed during the decades between 1890–1910. By the time Gurdjieff had established his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau in France and sufficiently trained his troupe of talented and disciplined performers (1919–1922), the image of Svengali was a firm fixture in the minds of their European and American audiences. Did Gurdjieff simply exploit the stereotype or fall prey to it? Both? Neither? In any case, Gurdjieff was no ‘one-trick-pony’ to be dismissed by history as simply another sordid Svengali. The timeliness and inherent power of his music, dances, writings, practices and ideas sustained small groups of dedicated disciples who systematically, and often behind the scenes, promoted the study of Gurdjieff. This, despite the fact that many of these followers were irrevocably alienated from ‘the master’ by his ruthlessly compassionate—and sometimes dramatically staged—dismissals and uncompromising demands; is it naïve oversimplification to think these confrontations were simply hard lessons in deprogramming to wean them from his charismatic presence?

I have had the good fortune and privilege to become a welcome spectator and commentator as Dr. Tamdgidi expanded on and transformed the study of Gurdjieff in his 2002 Ph.D. dissertation, “Mysticism and Utopia.” The original, elucidating book that has emerged and which you hold in hand sets a benchmark for Gurdjieff Studies in relation to two recognized but insufficiently explored areas, his writings as a unified field and his exploitation of hypnosis in its broadest sense. Tamdgidi applies a hermeneutic approach to Gurdjieff’s writings, with a particular focus on Gurdjieff’s pervasive exploitation of hypnotic technique which was figurative and literal as well as literary. Tamdgidi’s study is primarily

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² For a thorough account of the trans-Atlantic Svengali phenomena generated by du Maurier’s 1894 Trilby, see Daniel Pick’s Svengali’s Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). By an odd quirk of history, in November 1934 the remains of A. R. Orage, then recently retired as Gurdjieff’s foremost English disciple and editor, were interred in the same cemetery as those of George du Murier, at St. John’s-at-Hampstead Churchyard.
Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, the avenues by which we arrive at an understanding of or derive meaning from the object of our attention and examination. Traditionally, hermeneutics developed around the study of scripture as each of the major religions emerged; later it was more generally applied to the study of both classical and modern literature. The term is derived from Aristotle’s *Peri Hermeneias* (On Interpretation) and evokes obvious associations with the Olympian Greek god Hermes, the winged-sandaled, caduceus brandishing messenger of the gods. Hermes sometimes escorts the dead and thus is one of only four gods—the others being Hecate, Hades, and Persephone—who have unhindered right-of-passage in-and-out of the Underworld. At folkloric levels, Hermes is patron of interpreters, translators, travellers, and the boundaries they cross in order to communicate with aliens. On his darker side, Hermes is associated with the watcher-at-night and whatever can go amiss on the travellers’ road, such as cunning thieves-at-the-gate.

Hermeneutic studies vary widely in attributing primacy of meaning to either the author’s or artist’s intent, the subjects covered or media employed, and each reader’s or viewer’s right to interpretation via whatever school of thought they favour—historical, etymological, textual, psychological, symbolic, etc. At its highest levels, hermeneutics involves the search for meaning via numinous interpretation, be it of poetry, scripture, philosophy, literature, music, art, law or architecture. It is both fitting and timely that Tamdgidi draws for inspiration on all his relevant hermeneutic options in search of meaning in Gurdjieff’s ideas and writings. Gurdjieff’s four distinct books are the product of a self-styled message-bearer of the ‘messengers of the gods,’ a twentieth-century spinner of tales about His ENDLESSNESS, Beelzebub, life on Earth, and ‘all and everything’ between these, including a singular cosmology and psychology. Tamdgidi’s compact interpretation of Gurdjieff emphasizes—for the first time—a search for meaning based on recognizable keys within about 1,800 pages of Gurdjieff’s four texts as a single body of work, with particular focus on subliminal and subconscious dimensions of impact and interpretation, an approach that might be termed the ‘Hermeneutics of Gurdjieff.’

During the past sixty years, an enormous and ever-expanding literature has emerged about Gurdjieff, a good deal of it anecdotal, expository or apologetic—and too much of it biased, fictitious and/or ideological. Too little of the literature is independent or (dare one add) intelligently critical. And, despite the amount published about Gurdjieff or expositions of his ideas based on secondary sources, few writers offer significant or systematic analyses of Gurdjieff’s own writings. Thus, Tamdgidi’s work is an important
original contribution to the constructive, independent, and critical study of Gurdjieff’s four books. He presents abundant evidence for his arguments via a thorough, thoughtful examination of *The Herald of Coming Good* (1933), *All and Everything: Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950), *Meetings With Remarkable Men* (1963), and *Life Is Real Only Then, When “I Am”* (1978). Drawing on copious citations from these books, Tamdgidi assembles a chronology of Gurdjieff’s life, simultaneously providing a detailed examination of Gurdjieff’s cosmology, psychology, and an examination of the nine-pointed “enneagram,” a unique symbol Gurdjieff developed to encapsulate the ‘universal laws’ that frame his mytho-cosmology, his epistemology and his psychology.

Anyone who has seriously attempted to read *Beelzebub’s Tales* or *Meetings with Remarkable Men* can vouch for their intentionally beguiling or ‘hypnotic’ effect. These readers will appreciate Tamdgidi’s interpretive virtuosity and focus—he keeps each tree *and* the entire forest in sight throughout. Tamdgidi’s study will prove challenging for those who have not read Gurdjieff but it will also encourage them to seek their own verification and follow Gurdjieff’s seemingly pompous but truly “Friendly Advice” about trying to “fathom the gist” of his writings. His counsel is posted facing the Contents page of *Beelzebub’s Tales*, and concludes:

Read each of my written expositions thrice … Only then will you be able to count upon forming your own impartial judgement, proper to yourself alone, on my writings. And only then can my hope be actualized that according to your understanding you will obtain the specific benefit for yourself which I anticipate, and which I wish for you with all my being.

J. Walter Driscoll
Vancouver Island on the Pacific
June 29, 2009
**PROLOGUE**

I learned that the boy in the middle was a Yezidi, that the circle had been drawn round him and that he could not get out of it until it was rubbed away. The child was indeed trying with all his might to leave this magic circle, but he struggled in vain. I ran up to him and quickly rubbed out part of the circle, and immediately he dashed out and ran away as fast as he could. … This so dumbfounded me that I stood rooted to the spot for a long time as if bewitched, until my usual ability to think returned. Although I had already heard something about these Yezidis, I had never given them any thought; but this astonishing incident, which I had seen with my own eyes, now compelled me to think seriously about them. … The Yezidis are a sect living in Transcaucasia, mainly in the regions near Mount Arafat. They are sometimes called devil-worshippers.

—M:65–66

George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1872?–1949) was an enigmatic Transcaucasian mystic philosopher and teacher who has been widely acknowledged for having introduced to the West during the early twentieth century a new teaching that significantly influenced contemporary spirituality.

Gurdjieff is known—through the famous work of his senior early pupil P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (1949), detailing an absorbing account of his conversations with Gurdjieff—for having introduced a rational interpretation and synthesis of Eastern mysticism more accessible to the Western mind.
Paradoxically, however, Gurdjieff made every effort in his own writings to build a seemingly impenetrable and mystifying edifice for it.

Consequently, much of the knowledge about Gurdjieff’s teaching, and even about his life, needs to be untangled and defragmented by deciphering the meanings concealed beneath the symbolic architecture of all his texts. This furnishes the rationale for conducting fresh and independent explorations of his life and teaching by adopting a hermeneutic approach to the study of his writings. The hermeneutic approach encompasses the intentions both to conduct an indepth textual analysis and to interpret the text using its own symbolic and meaning structures.

My aim in this study is to shed new light on Gurdjieff’s life and teaching in general and his lifelong interest in and practice of hypnosis in particular, through a hermeneutic study of all four of his published writings. I especially explore his “objective art”1 of literary hypnotism intended as a major conduit for the transmission of his teachings on the philosophy, theory, and practice of personal self-knowledge and harmonious human development. In the process I explain the nature and function of the mystical shell hiding the rational kernel of his teaching—thus clarifying why his mysticism is “mystical,” and Gurdjieff so “enigmatic,” in the first place. I also argue that, from his own point of view, Gurdjieff’s lifelong preoccupation with hypnosis was not an end in itself or merely aimed at advancing his personal fame and fortune, but mainly served his efforts to develop and spread his teaching in favor of human spiritual awakening and harmonious development.

The study raises and examines various issues related to Gurdjieff’s teaching and life that can also provide substantial material of interest for cross-fertilization of other studies of Gurdjieff as well as those in literature, psychology, hypnotism, mysticism, and religion in general in both academic and non-academic settings. It can be used to further explore the dynamics of mystical schools and teachings, especially in regard to spiritual conditioning, cult behavior, and dynamics of teacher-pupil relations in

1. By “real, objective art” (Ouspensky 1949:27) Gurdjieff means a kind of art whose effect on its target audience is precise, predictable, and reproducible with scientific accuracy; it consciously and intentionally affects not only the intellectual but especially the emotional (feeling) sides of its target audience. This is in contrast to “subjective art” where the art may not produce any of its predicted and intended results and impressions on its target audience. “Ancient” objective art—many examples of which Gurdjieff cites, such as the great Sphinx of Egypt, a strange figure on the foot of the Hindu Kush, etc. (Ibid.)—may also contain “inexactitudes,” in terms of intentional deviations from what were regarded as lawful patterns; deciphering such inexactitudes by later generations could render insights about the messages consciously and intentionally hidden by the ancients for their posterity. Gurdjieff’s clearly explicated aim in affecting not only the mind but also the emotions of his readers (B:4, 24–25), along with his purposeful hiding of various meanings in his writings (M:6, 38), are certainly characteristics that he associates with objective art. But how his “objective art” of literary hypnotism is devised and works are what this study aims to illuminate.
small group settings. As such, it aims to mark a critical and appreciative note in Gurdjieff Studies and constructively contribute to the enrichment of spiritual work among those independently attracted to Gurdjieff’s teaching and perhaps also those associated with its official institutions.

It is important to note here that this study is not concerned with evaluating the effectiveness of Gurdjieff’s hypnotic techniques and powers per se, but with substantiating the proposition that he indeed was consciously, intentionally, and systematically preoccupied with and practiced hypnotism throughout his life, including, and especially so, during his career as a writer and through his writings. I believe the study of Gurdjieff from this vantage point can shed important light not only on his life and teaching, but also on the hypnotic nature of other religious and literary texts.

Another limitation of this study has to do with its focus on Gurdjieff’s published writings. Of the four major works of Gurdjieff published to date, only The Herald of Coming Good was published and soon withdrawn (by Gurdjieff) from circulation in 1933 during his lifetime. The galley proofs of the First Series, Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson, were inspected and approved by Gurdjieff before his passing in 1949, but the book was formally published in 1950 after his death and reprinted several times since, with a revision appearing in 1992 and 2006. Given the controversy surrounding the unaccountable revisions made to the original 1950 edition of the First

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In 1992, after four decades of in-house debate, the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York (under their imprint, Triangle Editions, Inc.), issued an adaptation of the First Series, with no indication of its purpose, methods or sources—only the statement, “This revision of the English translation first published in 1950 has been revised by a group of translators under the direction of Jeanne de Salzmann.”

The adapted translation is in late twentieth-century colloquial American English. At approximately 1135 pages (circa 335400 words), it is about 6.5% (circa 23200 words, about 65 pages) shorter than the early twentieth-century British prose original finalized by Gurdjieff and published in 1950 with 1238 pages (circa 358600 words). In places, the revision departs radically from the original English edition; it apparently draws on the Russian manuscript and on Jeanne de Salzmann’s French translation of 1956. In 2006, a “second edition” appeared, containing unspecified “further revisions” and a four-page “Editors’ Note” which avoids well-documented accounts of Gurdjieff’s attentive philological supervision of his English edition, particularly with Olga de Hartmann. Fluent in Russian and English, de Hartmann “was certain that Orage’s translation was very exact. Finally, after many attempts, Mr. Gurdjieff was satisfied” (Hartmann and Hartmann 1992:240–41).

Triangle Editions’ anonymous editorial team dismisses the original 1950 English edition as “awkward … unwieldy … needlessly complex and, for many readers, extremely difficult to read and understand.” They assure readers that Gurdjieff “could not have judged, much less approved the English text” for its 1950 publication, and rush to promote the stylistic and linguistic changes which “Mme de Salzmann … left them to complete.”
Series in the 1992 (and the latter's 2006 reprint) adaptation, the present study will use the first, 1950, edition of the First Series for its textual analysis. The Second Series (*Meetings with Remarkable Men*) of Gurdjieff's writings was published posthumously by Gurdjieff's pupils in 1960 in French and in 1963 in English while his Third Series (*Life Is Real Only Then, When “I Am”*) was first published privately in English in 1975 and then publicly in 1978 and reprinted in 1991. The extent to which the published material of all of Gurdjieff's writings correspond to or diverge from the manuscripts left by Gurdjieff, and whether there are other pieces of unpublished writings by Gurdjieff, are important questions to explore. However, such a task is beyond the scope and purpose of this study, which is limited to the hermeneutic study of Gurdjieff's published writings.

Other limitations of this study in regard to its focus (besides the page limit set by the publisher for the book) have to do with engagements with the literature on hypnotism in general and with the secondary literature in Gurdjieff Studies in particular. The present study is not concerned with how Gurdjieff's views on and practice of hypnotism compare to those contained in the past or present literature on and practices of hypnosis and hypnotism. I am mainly concerned here with the in-and-of-itself enormous task of hermeneutic deciphering of Gurdjieff's own interpretation and practice of hypnotism as reflected in and transmitted through his writings. I believe that the integral study of all of Gurdjieff's own writings with a

3. I must further add here that limitations of space and focus do not also allow me to elaborate in this study on the sociological and social psychological significance of Gurdjieff's ideas and their relevance to liberatory social theorizing and practice. Some efforts in this regard may be found in my other writings, including: "The Simultaneity of Self and Global Transformations: Bridging with Anzaldúa's Liberating Vision" (forthcoming); "Utopystics and the Asiatic Modes of Liberation: Gurdjieffian Contributions to the Sociological Imaginations of Inner and Global World-Systems" (2009); "From Uopistics to Utopystics: Integrative Reflections on Potential Contributions of Mysticism to World-Systems Analyses and Praxes of Historical Alternatives" (2008a); *Advancing Uopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism* (2007a); "Abu Ghraib as a Microcosm: The Strange Face of Empire as a Lived Prison" (2007b); "Anzaldúa's Sociological Imagination: Comparative Applied Insights into Utopystic and Quantal Sociology" (2006) revised and published as "I Change Myself, I Change the World": Gloria Anzaldúa's Sociological Imagination in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*" (2008b); "Orientalist and Liberating Discourses of East-West Difference: Revisiting Edward Said and the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" (2005b); "Freire Meets Gurdjieff and Rumi: Toward the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Oppressive Selves" (2004a); "Rethinking Sociology: Self, Knowledge, Practice, and Dialectics in Transitions to Quantum Social Science" (2004b); "Mysticism and Utopia: Towards the Sociology of Self-Knowledge and Human Architecture (A Study in Marx, Gurdjieff, and Mannheim)" (2002); and "I in the World-System: Stories from an Odd Sociology Class" (Selected Student Writings, Soc. 280Z: Sociology of Knowledge: Mysticism, Utopia, Science) ([1997] 2005a). *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* (2002–), founded in and published since 2002, has provided an annual forum that was inspired by my appreciative critique of Gurdjieff's work in my doctoral dissertation.
specific focus on the question of hypnosis not only has substantive merits and been long absent in Gurdjieff Studies, but also is consistent with Gurdjieff’s own explicit injunctions to systematically read his writings as a whole to fathom the gist of his teaching.

Therefore, as much as I would like to explore the correlations of the findings of this study with scientific research and the vast body of literature on hypnotism, these unfortunately remain outside the scope of this book. Among such important literature, one can mention the work of noted American psychiatrist and hypnotherapist, Milton H. Erickson (2006; see also Havens 2005, and Rosen 2005) whose exploitation of indirect suggestions and confusion techniques, storytelling using metaphors, resistance, shocks, and ordeals, clearly parallel Gurdjieff’s. Serious and highly creative and fascinating are also the works of Adam Crabtree (1985, 1993, 1997) whose studies of the history of Mesmerism, hypnosis, and psychological healing also include specific references to Gurdjieff’s ideas on human multiplicity (though not in regard to Gurdjieff’s writings as means for inducing hypnosis). Crabtree’s writings provide an important historical context for understanding the rising interests of spiritual seekers such as Gurdjieff in hypnotism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe (including Russia and its environs). Also of note are the writings of prominent transpersonal psychologist Charles Tart on meditation, hypnosis, and “waking up” (1986); Tart’s work has developed in intimate conversation with Gurdjieff’s ideas and teaching amid those of other traditions. The works of Arthur J. Deikman (1982, 1990, 2003) on the “observing self” and of cult behavior in mystical schools and society at large are also relevant to the implications of the present study, while Robin Waterfield’s Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis (2002) provides a detailed yet accessible and wide historical coverage of its theme while recognizing the relevance of the ideas of Gurdjieff and Tart’s work on the subject.

These important avenues of research will certainly enhance my study, an earlier version of which was originally advanced in 2002. I am also pleased to see the American clinical neuropsychologist and hypnotherapist Joseph A. Sandford has recently (2005) recognized the relationship between Gurdjieff, hypnosis and Erickson’s techniques—see, for instance, Sandford’s “Gnosis Through Hypnosis: The Role of Trance in Personal Transformation” published in the proceedings of The International Humanities Conference: All & Everything 2005 (59–67). Therein, Sandford acknowledges that “In reflecting on these Ericksonian techniques of hypnosis it seems to me that Gurdjieff used hypnosis more than most of us have ever realized. Gurdjieff’s book, All and Everything, uses all of these [Ericksonian] methods …” (59); however, Sandford’s essay is not devoted to the explication of this theme, but to an exploration of Gurdjieff’s thoughts on hypnosis and the hypnotic process as presented in his writings.
Systematic studies of all of Gurdjieff’s writings in relation to one another with a specific focus on the place of hypnosis in his work have therefore been basically absent in the secondary literature in Gurdjieff Studies. And this is more puzzling given the central significance accorded by Gurdjieff himself to hypnosis. Most writings on Gurdjieff have been by those affiliated with his teaching, going back to the widely published book on Gurdjieff written by P. D. Ouspensky (1949). I have not been a part of any Gurdjieff-affiliated organization, and became interested in Gurdjieff’s life and writings as part of my academic research and personal interest. My personal interest began from ‘repeated’ viewings of the film “Meetings with Remarkable Men”—based on Gurdjieff’s Second Series and directed by Peter Brook in collaboration with Gurdjieff’s senior pupil, the late Jean de Salzmann. This was followed by my ‘repeated’ readings of Gurdjieff’s four books, the volume of his talks as reported by his pupils (Views from the Real World, [1973] 1984), as well as various writings about him, his teaching, and his pupils. I subsequently became increasingly ‘preoccupied’ with his life and ideas, and contemplated ‘joining’ one or another Gurdjieff-affiliated group, each time postponing such efforts until ‘I was ready.’

However, an unusual experience during a ten-day meditation retreat in January 1995 that was unrelated to Gurdjieff groups—though was made possible by my growing interest in mysticism following my exposure to Gurdjieff’s writings—brought to my attention in a practical sense the possibility and the extent of conditioning one may subconsciously endure in

4. My basic thesis on and detailed exposition of the place of hypnosis in Gurdjieff’s life and teaching was defended in 2001 and deposited with UMI as part of my doctoral dissertation in 2002. In her Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts (2003) Sophia Wellbeloved acknowledged that Gurdjieff’s teaching as a whole may be considered as an “alternative form of hypnotism” and that for Gurdjieff “hypnotism was both the cause and the cure” (101). She also briefly recognized that Gurdjieff’s use of “kindness, threats and hypnotism” as means for influencing his pupils was also echoed in Gurdjieff’s text itself, “having encouraging, threatening, and spellbinding stories” (106). For anyone acquainted with all of Gurdjieff’s writings it can be self-evident that Gurdjieff himself acknowledged having been deeply interested in hypnosis and hypnotism; that he was a “professional hypnotist” for some years; that he “scientifically” and “experimentally” practiced it for a while on his pupils; that he continued to practice it for the purpose of healing addiction or other ailments throughout his life; that he regarded hypnosis as both a cause and a means of healing human spiritual sleep and mechanicalness; or even that his writings contain much information about the above varieties of interests in and practices of hypnotism. What remains marginal, or absent—as evident, for instance, in Wellbeloved’s excerpt on Gurdjieff’s “Writings” (2003:226–228)—is a consideration for the proposition that Gurdjieff’s writings themselves were conscious, intentional, and systematic efforts in literary hypnotism on the part of Gurdjieff, a thesis central to the present study and advanced in its earlier 2002 version. Wellbeloved’s study, Gurdjieff, Astrology & Beelzebub’s Tales (2002), based on her earlier doctoral dissertation and mainly focused on Gurdjieff’s First Series (as evident in the book’s title and noted elsewhere, e.g., p. 234), was devoted to discovering an astrological logic to Gurdjieff’s First Series and did not advance a thesis in specific regard to Gurdjieff’s writings as hypnotic devices.
organized spiritual practices. Three days into the meditation retreat, I not only experienced a state of mind, concentration, and attention I did not consider possible before, but also realized, using the heightened awareness achieved while drawing on my sociological training, that I was caught amid a highly sophisticated yet quite subtle mode of hypnotic conditioning being delivered, consciously or not, by the organizers of the retreat. This prompted me to try and understand during the rest of the retreat the nature of the ongoing hypnotic process at hand on the one hand, and, on the other, to devise and implement certain efforts and strategies to counter the hypnotic influence at the intellectual as well as emotional and sensual levels while I was still at the retreat. The nature of my experience there requires much more time and space to reflect and report on and could perhaps be the subject of another book; however, for the purpose of this study, it should suffice to note here that the experience awakened me to the possibility and the extent that I may have already been subjected to similar conditioning not only in relation to other cultural, including academic, traditions, but also and especially to Gurdjieff’s teaching itself. It is one thing to “know” that one may be subjected to cultural conditionings of various kinds; it is another to awaken to it in a deeply shocking way.

Paradoxically, while my awareness of such conditionings in life had been heightened by reading Gurdjieff’s books, at the same time I increasingly felt that I may have as well fallen asleep to his own ideas. In other words, I confronted the precarious state of noticing my spiritual confinements not only in life in general, but also in relation to the very teaching that had heightened my awareness to the possibility of such conditioning. In his semi-autobiographical Second Series, Gurdjieff tells of a strange incident in his childhood when he confronted a Yezidi boy, belonging to the so-called “devil-worshiping” religious sect in the region, who could not get out of a circle drawn around him unless it was partly rubbed away by others (see the epigraph to this Prologue). Now, I found myself as if inside a “Yezidi circle” that Gurdjieff, the author of Beelzebub’s Tales, and the alleged inventor of that strange “circular” enneagram, had drawn around me and his readers through his writings, teaching, and spiritual symbol. Yet, I was also reminded of another of Gurdjieff’s aphorisms—that to escape, one must first realize that one is in prison. Gurdjieff had drawn a circle, but had also rubbed away a part of it so that “the boy” could escape. Why?

My decision at that time to incorporate into my doctoral research the study of Gurdjieff along with those of Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim (respectively representing mystical, utopian, and academic traditions that had also variously shaped my thinking and life) was thus significantly fueled by a need for understanding the nature and causes of my own ‘attraction’ to Gurdjieff’s ‘enigmatic’ life and teaching. In light of, and in many ways due to, these threefold personal, social, and academic interests, I soon realized
that maintenance of organizational distance from Gurdjieff-affiliated groups was substantively and methodologically significant during the conduct of the study. I will further elaborate on this issue in the Introduction.

Most studies of Gurdjieff, often carried out by those at one time or another associated with organizations following Gurdjieff’s teaching, take for granted his coded words regarding his decision not to pursue his hypnotic powers following a vow he made to himself to that effect at a certain point in his life. The present study, based on a detailed analysis of Gurdjieff’s own writings, challenges such (mis)interpretations of Gurdjieff’s words. Rather, I argue that an appreciation of Gurdjieff’s life and teaching can best be possible in consideration of (1) the extent to which he regarded the human condition of living in sleep, as a machine or a prisoner, to be a by-product of human suggestibility and propensity to habituation and hypnosis arising from the disharmonious and separate workings of the physical, intellectual, and emotional centers of the human organism, and (2) the extent to which he consciously, intentionally, and systematically continued to pursue his career as a “professional hypnotist” through his writings. Gurdjieff’s lifelong interest in and practice of hypnosis are thereby not marginal but at the heart of his teaching, and worthy of substantial and substantive studies of which the present work is a first systematic beginning.

There is a continuing tension in this study between an effort in trying to understand a text based on Gurdjieff’s indigenous meanings and an implicit and unexpressed (though real) effort on my part in not letting judgments in secondary literature on Gurdjieff interfere with a hermeneutic understanding of his work and life. I think in this sense Gurdjieff’s writings are different from many “ultra esoteric” texts whose meanings remain forever hidden. According to the sociologist Ralph Slotten’s “Exoteric and Esoteric Modes of Apprehension” (1977), there is not a dualism but a spectrum lying in-between esoteric-exoteric textual elements in spiritual writings. He terms such mid-range variants of hermeneutic writing as “eso-exoteric” or “exo-esoteric” in style, and in fact identifies even further, sevenfold, gradations of exotericity and esotericity in spiritual texts (202). In Gurdjieff’s case, similarly, while he hides important elements of his thought in one fragment, he also offers the hidden message—often quite explicitly, candidly, even shockingly to his reader’s face, in a straightforward and at times humor-laden way—in another fragment of his writings. So, there is good reason to rely on Gurdjieff’s own writings and the “hermeneutic circle” of moving back and forth between the puzzling meanings of his part and whole literary symbols in order to decipher the gist of his writings. What one does with the gist discovered, however, is a different matter; certainly, one has to always maintain distance to avoid becoming trapped in the Yezidi circle of Gurdjieff’s hypnotic hermeneutics, woven in the guise of his father’s “kastousilian” (M:38) style of conversation and storytelling.
The dialectical mode of hermeneutic analysis focusing on the inner landscape and contradictions of a *weltanschauung* is in my view reasonably effective and helpful in yielding an empathetic understanding of a thinker's mind (cf. Tamdgidi 2007a). Similarly, I should note that my purpose in studying Gurdjieff’s text (and biography through his text) here is to engage with Gurdjieff’s life and teaching in *his own terms*, and limit the exploration to the subject of the place of hypnosis in his “scientific” and literary pursuits, rather than to delve into his personal virtues or vices—which, provided one was interested in doing so, would require much more substantial uses of secondary biographical and historical sources.

I see Gurdjieff as a multitude of selves, some Svengali-type, black magician and “devilish” perhaps, others “Ashiata Shiemashian” (as how he idealized his white magician selves), and yet others of all hues and degrees of virtuosity in between. I see all characters in Gurdjieff’s literary dramaturgy as representing one way or another his own selves in a world-historical, contemporary, and utopystic dialogue with one another—his writings being, ultimately, a vast cosmological and psychological effort on his part to understand and perhaps heal his low and high selves self-confessedly caught in the Purgatory of much remorse of conscience; yet, he was hopeful in finding a way to help liberate his soul and those of his fellow “three-brained beings.” It is therefore difficult (and in fact counter-Gurdjieffian) to consider whether Gurdjieff was wholly this or that, since, as his writings reveal, he himself seemed to be also much like—or perhaps unlike, that is, even more sharply polarized and self-conscious than—us all, a legion of I’s.

According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination “enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals” (1959:5). Gurdjieff’s writings as a whole—especially the dialogical style and structure of all his writings in their various forms where significant public issues and meanings are intricately interwoven, as in a delicate Persian carpet, into the fabric of everyday personal conversations within and across all the “three brains” of his invented personages—present an ingenious and creative way of exploring and advancing the sociological imagination in comparative and transdisciplinary trajectories.

Gurdjieff was an ashokh. His text is not confined to the printed word, nor even to the oral tradition he left behind, but is also written in the physical movements, mental exercises, emotional dances, and the music of a legacy that radically challenges the narrow and dualistic Western notions of the self and society, and thereby sociology. His mystical tales—linking the most intimate personal troubles with ever larger, world-historical, and even cosmically-conscious, public issues concerning humanity as a whole—are highly innovative and colorful exercises in alternative Eastern sociological imaginations meeting their ultimate micro and macro horizons.
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