A Kind Of Volcano
An Interview with Jerzy Grotowski

An Interview with Jerzy Grotowski, based on three meetings with Michel de Salzmann in Paris in 1991, published in French in Switzerland (1992), and in English in USA in 1996.

Questioner: One thing interests us keenly in your work: the corporal aspect. In the Movements of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff we also notice this insistence on the contact with the body. I don't know your relationship with the teaching of Gurdjieff and how you know about it, but I feel in your work something of the same order: a very fine research supported by a foundation of great force through the body.

Jerzy Grotowski: Do you know the book The Harmonious Circle by James Webb? It is at times fanciful, but interesting. Much presumption and gossip can be found there. At the end, in the large bibliography, he mentions my book Towards a Poor Theater as an example of “how Gurdjieff's ideas on theater have either influenced or run mysteriously parallel to those of the avant-garde.” The paradox is that at the time when I was preparing this book I didn't even know Gurdjieff's name. Later I heard about the Ouspensky book [In Search of the Miraculous], and only after that did I begin to read about Gurdjieff. When I came across certain material, I noticed in fact a similar usage of certain terms, for example, “mechanicalness,” “associations.” Elsewhere, the terms are different, but even so: “the social mask,” “personality”—one could continue, continue! What is probably more important to mention is the complexity of human nature, which encompasses both the body and “innerness”—with perhaps something more to realise or to do in the direction of what I name today “verticality.”

At present my work is very much linked to ancient song, to “vibratory” song. In a period of my “Laboratory Theater,” for example in The Constant Prince, the research was focused less on song, though in a certain way it was already a sung action. I have always considered it very strange to want to work on voice or song, or even pronounced words, while cutting them off from corporal reactions. The two aspects are very much linked; they pass through each other. However, we still have to go back to ask ourselves the question: “What is it that precedes a small physical action?” Before a small physical action there is an impulse. Therein lies the secret of something very difficult to grasp, because the impulse is a reaction that begins under the skin and which is visible only when it has already become a small action. The impulse is so complex that one cannot say that it is only of the corporal domain. At my Workcenter in Pontedera, in Italy, as far as technical elements are concerned, everything is as it is in the performing arts; we work on song, on the vibratory qualities of song, on impulses and physical actions, on forms of movement; and even narrative motifs may appear. All this is filtered and structured up to the point of creating an accomplished structure, an Action, as precise and repeatable as a stage production. Nevertheless it is not a production. One can call it art as a vehicle or even the objectivity of the ritual. But when I mention ritual, I refer neither to a ceremony nor to a celebration; even less to an improvisation with the participation of people from outside. Nor is it a synthesis of different ritual forms that come from different places in the world. When I refer to ritual, I speak of its objectivity: that is to say that the elements of the Action are, through their direct impact, the instruments of the work on the body, the heart, and the head of the “doers.”

Q.: In this threefold division—body, heart, head—do you find a reference to Gurdjieff?

J.G.: This formula came to me from another source. I am convinced that Gurdjieff was right to emphasize the ternary composition of man and to try to establish a right balance between these three parts. He saw it in a clear way, but to see things in a clear way doesn't necessarily lead to doing. It seems to me that Gurdjieff viewed things in a clear way precisely in order to “do.”

Q.: You have evoked an aim that goes beyond the theater.1 I imagine that in your present work it is a matter of something of the order of a permanent education and that this concerns the artist himself, the person that is doing, the doer, as you call him. Something that is a technique and a mise en situation, and that should lead him to touch this verticality you spoke of?

J.G.: Verticality: this is a phenomenon of energy. It is like a kind of elevator, but an elevator as in very ancient times, in the so-called primitive societies: a big basket with a rope by means of which the person who is inside, by his own effort, has to move himself from one level to another. The question of verticality means to pass from a so-called coarse level—in a certain sense one could say an “everyday” level—to a level of energy much more subtle or even toward the higher connection. At this point to say more about it wouldn't be right. I simply indicate the passage, the direction. There, there is another passage as well: if one approaches the higher connection—that means, if we are speaking in terms of energy, if one approaches much more subtle energy—then there is also the question of descending, while at the same time bringing this subtle something toward the more common reality, which is linked to the “density” of the body.
Q.: To bring it toward action?
J.G.: Toward action but also toward all that is linked to the “density” of the body. It seems to me that it is an approach that has something in common with what one can read about Gurdjieff. I wouldn't really dare to assert it, because, as I have said, my knowledge of Gurdjieff is far too bookish. On the contrary, there is an important area for me where I use directly a Gurdjieffian term; it is when I speak of essence. Here, for certain, is something where, at the very least, I have penetrated the definition of the word.
Q.: In what you've just said, do you consider that you have reached the third level, the intellectual one, or that you have not touched it?
J.G.: Oh, yes, you know, the intellectual level is extremely dangerous, because it is with this level that we fall the easiest. We fall into the illusion of discovering things, while in fact we are only making “computer buzz.” This is the problem of the mind level. The mind level requires two things: on the one hand, a very good computer, and, on the other, freedom vis-a-vis this computer. In the West, for example, we have people who possess a mind of the quality of a perfect computer but who are eaten by this computer.
Q.: A well-made head, but one which would obey, would this be the point?
J.G.: Yes, that's it.
Q.: So it's a question of passing toward a level of perception, higher or more subtle. It can be said that this is very close to Gurdjieff's teaching: it is the matter of the transformation of ones state.
J.G.: It is the work on oneself. This expression—this formula, “work on oneself”—is one that Stanislavski always repeated and it is from him that I take it. In fact, even the title of his fundamental work is The Work of the Actor on Himself. Unfortunately, this title has not been kept in the French and English translations. During my period of theatrical work in the proper sense of the term, thus my first period, the actor's Act was at the same time a challenge vis-a-vis the spectator. But in my present work, in art as vehicle, in principle, the spectator doesn't exist.
Q.: That point of view is a little difficult to concede!
J.G.: It is simply a direct practice not intended for spectators. I would say that when a Gurdjieffian group does Movements, these Movements are not intended for spectators. This is what can clarify this attitude for you. It doesn't mean that there are no witnesses to our work. After several years, they appeared. These were groups of so-called young theater or of theater of research, who watched what we did. We, for our part, watched their performances and their exercises. Each of these meetings was concluded with a detailed analysis, focused on the technical elements of the craft. All “spiritual discourse” was avoided, because “spiritual discourse” very easily degenerates. We had almost sixty working meetings of this type, some of which lasted for several days. I want to repeat here, because it should be strongly emphasized, that all the elements of our own work are almost the same as in the arts of the stage and that these elements are rigorously worked on. When I say “elements,” I am thinking of physical actions, of temporo-rhythms, of composed movement, of contact, of the word. and, above all, of the ancient songs with their vibratory qualities. But between this work and the stage arts there is a difference in what is attempted.
Q.: What is attempted?
J.G.: To describe it, the best word would be awareness, that is, a consciousness which is not linked to language, to the functioning of the computer, but to presence. Certainly, one could also say that awareness is linked to the mind, but in such a case, surely, this refers to another mind. In it, there is a meeting with the heart, with the domain of the soul, of the emotions, but in this case distinct from our soup of projections, repulsions, and attachments. It is of the same domain, but much higher and, at this point, there no longer exists a perceptible difference between this higher “psyche” and this higher “mind.” The two aspects are very linked and perhaps identical.
Q.: Could one say therefore that it is easier to speak about awareness in technical terms than with emotional words of ordinary language?
J.G.: Such is also my preference: if possible, let's always speak technically. But it is clear that it's not sufficient; this is where the difficulty lies. Technique indicates: it is like road signs that signal the direction to take. But there are many things that come before technique and which require a kind of involvement, and there are many things after technique which are, in a certain way, impossible to formulate.
Q.: Let us speak, then, about organic elements and the structure of your present work.
J.G.: In speaking this way, implicitly you affirm that a structure is necessary. This is fundamental. If one takes art as a vehicle, one cannot work on oneself outside of the structure, outside of the score of what one does, of Action (comparable to a performance or a rite), and which contains a beginning, a development, and an end, where each element has its place: logical, technically necessary. From the point of view of verticality rising toward the subtle and of the descent of this subtle to the level of more ordinary reality, there exists the need of a “logical” structure: in relation to the other songs, a particular song cannot find itself a bit earlier or a bit later—its place must be obvious. I am speaking of very ancient songs which are linked to the ritual approach, because that is the material of our work. There, the vibratory qualities of one song or another are not the same in energy-impact. On the other hand, if one just speaks technically, I would say that if—after a hymn of highly subtle quality—continuing the line of action it
Organicity. There you have touched on a subject, it is also a term of Stanislavski. What is organicity? It is to live in agreement with natural laws, but on a primary level. One mustn't forget: the body is an animal. I am not saying we are animals; I say our body is an animal. Organicity is linked to a child-aspect. The child is almost always organic. Organicity is something which one has more of when one is young, less of as one gets older. Obviously, it is possible to prolong the life of organicity by fighting against acquired habits, against the training of the common life, breaking, eliminating the clichés of behavior. And, before the complex reaction, returning to what is primary. The fundamental thing, it seems to me, is always to precede the form by what should precede it, by a process which leads to the form. In my text which I edited not long ago, I give an example of the notion of the warrior, in the traditional sense of the word. I said that in the warrior, if he reaches full organicity, the body and the essence can enter into an osmosis in which it appears impossible to dissociate them. But even if it appears, this is not a permanent state. It appears, as Zeami would say, as the flower of youth. So if this osmosis exists in someone, this body-and-essence, then it is necessary to find the way of catching essence, of touching it. At a certain period one potentially has body-and-essence, and afterwards, maybe (maybe) one is going to have the body of essence. This follows a difficult evolution, a personal labor which is in a certain way the task of everyone, but which is very rarely obtained. In this text I spoke about a photograph of Gurdjieff. This irritated some readers. I said in a strongly elliptical way that in this picture one could see—from the manner in which Gurdjieff is present—a certain image of the “body of essence”. . . Perhaps it was too provocative? It is the old Gurdjieff, sitting on a bench, very old . . .

Q.: With the coat and black hat?

J.G.: With an overcoat and a fur cap. The last years of his life. The passage of body-and-essence into body of essence is a very difficult thing to formulate. One tries through metaphor, but the metaphor lacks precision: that is the problem. In the beginning of the work and also in the period when one is young, the level of organicity is fundamental. But to stay only at the corporal level is to disintegrate with the body, or, to put it brutally, like Meister Eckhart, it is to rot with the body. So there is something else to discover. And what does it mean to discover? It means that one has to do. Always the question of doing appears.

Q.: In your present work, what do you use as terminology? J.G.: In principle our work language is similar to that of the stage arts, with references to Stanislavski's method of physical actions. However, for the work on ancient songs and their vibratory qualities, we've had to develop a new terminology. In our work, the aspect of "impulses" is very accentuated. In general, one can say that we try not to freeze language. An "intentional" language is used, i.e., one which functions only between the people who are working. There, where one approaches the more complex issues, the so-called inner work, I avoid as much as possible any verbalization. I avoid, for example, verbalizing the question of the centers of energy which we can locate in the body. I mean it when I say "which we can locate in the body," because it is not so clean-cut. Do they belong to the biological domain or to one that is more complex? The best known are the centers according to the yoga tradition, those called chakras. It is clear that one can in a precise way discover the presence of centers of energy in the body: from those that are most closely linked to biological survival, then sexual impulses, and so forth, to centers that are more and more complex (or, should one say, more subtle?). And if this is felt as a corporal topography, one can clearly draw up a map. But here there is a new danger: if one starts to manipulate the centers (centers in the sense close to the Hindu chakras), one begins to transform a natural process into a kind of engineering, which is a catastrophe. It becomes a form, a cliché. Why do I say "like" the chakras? Because the tradition of the centers exists in different cultures. Let's say that in the Chinese culture it is more or less linked to the same tradition as in India. But it existed also in Europe. In the text of Gichtel from the seventeenth century, one can find for example drawings that are very instructive from this point of view. If all of this is verbalized, there is also a danger of manipulating the sensations which one can artificially create in different places of the body. So I prefer a less fixed terminology, even if in precise work one can discover here something very precise and fixed. In any case it is like a ladder—just like Jacob's ladder—and I find here again the notion of verticality. In Jacob's ladder there are forces that go up and forces that descend. One should never forget the two directions. It is perfectly O.K. to think that one has to leave the corporal presence and stay in something different, but here it is not the case. “To leave” is acceptable here only if the body doesn't deprive itself, in this moment, of its capacities, if it preserves a way of keeping at doing its duties. But there is still the manner of descending: if one approaches something more subtle, there is the problem of bringing back this subtlety toward the less subtle.

Q.: When you saw the film of the Movements for the first time, what impressions did you have?

J.G.: The impression of having to do with something extremely competent. What struck me the most was Mme de Salzmann's remark about
the movement of the hands, a very simple remark, something like: “In the beginning of a movement up, energy is put consciously, but when, for example, one lowers the hand, often there is no longer consciousness during the movement. The movement itself causes the loss of consciousness.” It is crucial. Another thing that struck me is that in some composed elements—which can be compared with liturgical gestures—what has been avoided is the danger of aestheticization. In this form, the danger is to look for so-called beauty. It is a mortal danger. This didn't happen and it impressed me. It is a very, very important technique. Before seeing the film I had read certain descriptions, certain things related to Gurdjieff's Movements, so I saw this as an exemplification. The Movements: they are something fundamental. Gurdjieff is rooted in a very ancient tradition, and at the same time he is contemporary. He knew, with a true competence, how to act in agreement with the modern world. It is a very rare case. In our times, all around these problems, there are so many attempts—easy, superficial, or simply sentimental. There, all at once appeared a person who brought a rigorous practice and a rigorous research. I mean it when I say research. For me, there is a very strong element of research. It is not like implanting a branch of the ancient tradition; it is also, on the same level, a deepened research which starts out from ancient elements, but which is, at the same time, contemporary. After all, the traditions are only founded in this way.

Q.: Through the books that you've read, for example Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson, these ideas sometimes appear like very ancient information, and then they call in some way to be verified, to be put to the test. Some of these ideas, of these readings which have seemed to you fruitful, have they pushed you to experiment with something definite?

J.G.: It was, for me, at the same time the possibility of a real corroboration—and also a trap. Because if one starts to corroborate, it goes in two directions. But first I would like to say the following: a book like In Search of the Miraculous by Ouspensky is really instructive but at the same time destructive. It is a dangerous book because everything in it seems perhaps too simple. One can understand it in terms of ideas, and one can begin then to juggle with the ideas. The very strong impression that I received from Beelzebub is that Gurdjieff had done Beelzebub as a conclusion to the previous periods, and especially to the Institute at Fontainbleau, and that he wanted to block all possibility of juggling with the ideas, of “formatory thinking.” His book, Beelzebub, was conceived in such a manner that it practically excludes all possibilities of juggling with the terminology. In comparison with Fontainbleau, it is a totally different passage to instructing. The so-called order of ideas is often highly dangerous, because it can also be “formatory thinking.” To answer your question: from the moment I began to read about Gurdjieff's work, the practical comparisons not only had to corroborate but also to touch me, it is obvious. It would be difficult to analyze: which details, which elements? Because there is also a danger of asking oneself: “From where comes this element, and from where another?” What is important is not that they come from somewhere, but that they work. This criterion, is it clear? This means: There is an element which works, and it is corroborated here and there. In the case of Gurdjieff, the impact is of something both very ancient and contemporary. Both the tradition and the research are strong. And at the same time there is there a manner of posing some ultimate questions. Here we are no longer in the technical data, but in the depths of ideas, with all the dangers that this brings. But Gurdjieff has come up with certain expressions that are the key, such as “to die like a dirty dog” or “an honorable death,” which cannot be gotten around. These expressions throw a very special light on the thing because they do not refer to somewhat vague categories like “life after death”; they directly attack the possibilities. This means that they pose the question in practical terms.

J.G.: I will not answer you directly. Gurdjieff the man: first of all, it seems to me that there were at least two. There is a younger Gurdjieff and an old Gurdjieff. It makes a big difference. It can be said about every human being, but in his case it was a difference of approach. I will say few words about it. Another thing that seems to me important: if I read the kind of explanations like those in Ouspensky’s In Search of the Miraculous, it seems to me fundamental to remember that Gurdjieff was a passionate being. He was a kind of volcano. So it is very different if an intellectual, very special, very intelligent, loyal person, like Ouspensky, uses Gurdjieff’s terms while not being a volcano. He uses them while being an exceptional person, but deep inside very timid. The ego behind this exceptional person is a timid child and, in its place, there is a small voice that argues. And I don't want to say anything against him, because he is of a very high level, an honest man of great value. But I want to say that there is a difference. The same formula coming out of a being like a volcano, deeply passionate, becomes of another voice when it comes out of a sophisticated intellectual. And right away there is a practical problem. It means that the so-called cold sides of Gurdjieff, for example, in the order of ideas—what his opponents called “a lack of love”—this side would really be a danger, a sort of a cold manipulation of ideas, if behind them there were not, as ground, the ground of a volcano, of a temperament both very strong and very passionate. So one can see how the elements of Gurdjieff's techniques served as a bridle for his own nature, but regarding this, what to bridle in Ouspensky? If I take the example of a very high intellectual, he should not be briddled, but rather stimulated. I see there a
practical consequence: it seems to me that one of the reasons Gurdjieff moved on to the late way of instructing, as through Beelzebub, was to avoid any possibility of verbal manipulation. But there is something else as well—a simple impression from some testimonies—that there is a great difference between the old Gurdjieff and the younger Gurdjieff: not when he was conquering knowledge—although there was still an aspect of it in Fontainebleau and later—but when he was conquering his mission, if I could put it this way. Paradoxically, the younger Gurdjieff—it seems to me—expected so much from others that he finally realized that there were no real people around him, because he demanded everything. Afterwards there is another Gurdjieff, the old one. Does he demand less? No, he does not demand less, but the way of demanding has changed. In his very particular French he said to an already older woman: “You not know your I, not one second in all your life. Now I say, and you try. But very difficult. You try to remember to say ‘I am’ every hour. You not succeed, not important, you try.” He gives an apparently very simple task and he says: “Very difficult.” The younger Gurdjieff would give a much more complex task and he would demand: “You have to do it, absolutely!” Perhaps I am wrong, but I see there an extraordinary change of attitude consisting of a greater skepticism about human beings and, at the same time, a very special, very exacting tolerance. And I don't think it is just a question of age. It is also the aspect of the grandfather . . .

Q.: Patience?
J.G.: Grandfather, the figures of a grandfather appeared, very distinct. But there also appeared in Gurdjieff something like a reversal of tactics, which seems to me very organic, very rooted in him. In this last period, he had a way of teaching through meals, for example, using more ordinary circumstances. Because at Fontainebleau the circumstances were created, complex. Toward the end, even if he proposed activities that were specific, like Movements, with very precise personal instructions, there was also this use of more ordinary situations like readings, meals. There, in these circumstances, everything becomes visible. Even if, there as well, there is the pressure of circumstances: shutters closed, people squeezed together because they are too many. All this is there, but as though one found oneself in a simple, everyday situation. It seems to me that it is a thing of great value and, I must say, very difficult to realize. It is much easier to create conditions than to use the conditions of life.

Q.: One of his pupils, Michel Conge, spoke about this with great sensitivity: “At the time of the Prieuré there was Gurdjieff as the master one couldn't get around, truly the figure of a master, terrifying, terrorizing. Afterwards, he was his pupils' servant. In these conditions, life was extraordinary.” It's a completely different image; you see that he also felt how Gurdjieff made use of the circumstances of life in order to serve those who were there. He honored them. First of all, he served them at table, but also, every day, he was the one who prepared the meals, the food. Nobody else. The others helped, but it was he who fed everyone.

Q.: Not in the order of ideas.
J.G.: That's it! In the order of a koan, but in this case a koan through the body.

Q.: According to you, what is particularly valid today in Gurdjieff's message that was not necessarily noticeable when he was alive but that answers today's questions?
J.G.: Several efforts have been made to reinterpret Gurdjieff. For example, the ecological orientation—Bennett tried it—but I don't see anything particularly for today. Traditions die, they are reborn in other circumstances, it is always like this. In a certain way, Gurdjieff succeeded in something very rare: he created a contemporary tradition.

Q.: It seems to me that what you've just said speaks to that. It's old, an ancient tradition, and at the same time its a current research. Modernity, for you, is that it is a research, right?
J.G.: Yes, and that it is work on oneself. If, from everything, I had to take only one vector, it would be “work on oneself.” But I would like to say something about Gurdjieff playing the Russian harmonium—garmoshka; it was the old Gurdjieff who played, because, of the recordings that I have known, the earliest date from the forties. So there are these late recordings (before, tape recorders didn't exist). What strikes me is the way in which he played his improvisations, which comes, on one side, from a detachment, and on the other, from a great sadness, if I may put it like this—in an emotional way? But here it is not a matter of something negative. The “emotional way” is a little bit confused, confusing; but here this sadness seems to be a sign of detachment. Attempts were made to interpret these improvisations as examples of objective art and even Gurdjieff said: “This one, it is an old prayer for crying. . . .” Moreover, I have recognized some Polish themes, such as a Christmas canticle.

Q.: The liturgical aspects?
J.G.: Yes, but also popular. Perhaps it happened through his wife, through Mme Ostrovsky; I don't know . . . But one sees how misleading it is to say:
fulfillment is a joy. It is not so simple. Fulfillment is much more complex; it is also something related to detachment. Anyway, the look on the world-as-it-is conditions this fulfillment and that's the way it must be! And it is in Gurdjieff's third book that I find these fragments, so important, where one does not see the image of a master who is happy and who knows everything, but that of a man in the center of the battle, at the point of even asking himself the question: hasn't he lost everything? The question of suicide. After, toward the end, the fact of ...

**Q.:** Having stopped writing?

**J.G.:** Having stopped writing. But also the question of aging. I think that if certain great teachers had directly written their memoirs, we would have more examples of this. Because the popular myth is that someone has reached a certain high level and that he is definitely happy. He knows everything, there is no more dramatic tension. But the old Gurdjieff lived an enormous tension, and this is the testimony given by his third book. For me, the third book and *garmoshka* are linked, even if the period is not the same, because the third book is from the thirties and *garmoshka* from the forties.

**Q.:** How, in a more detailed way, do you perceive the work of Gurdjieff? It is interesting to know that at first you have had a long-standing and practical relation with Hinduism, and that afterwards you were confronted with other traditions. What, for you, is the specific aspect of what Gurdjieff brings?

**J.G.:** The question has often been asked: What was Gurdjieff's source, in the sense of receiving a direct and practical transmission? It seems to me that the supposition that it is very much anchored in Buddhism, especially Tibetan, is false. What is clear to me is that it has a strong relation with a very old Christian tradition, then with elements that are mostly technical, of a tradition which we can largely define as Sufi. It is difficult to say that it is only this, because in the Sufi tradition we also have Hindu elements that have been interpreted. This should not be forgotten: certain branches of Hinduism—for example Sahaja—penetrated very deeply Sufi technique and Sufi ways of thinking. So the traditional source of Gurdjieff, certain people—very serious, like Ouspensky, or a bit fanciful, like Bennett—tried to find it. This was Ouspensky's famous expectation (since Gurdjieff "had gone mad" or since he "failed in his task" or since "something was missing") to find Gurdjieff's source. Perhaps—Ouspensky asked himself—this "source of Gurdjieff" was going to make contact with the people who had taken up the work in the West. Completely naive. Why? Because, as I see it, Gurdjieff was not an emissary. He was above all an investigator who penetrated deeply into the practical and technical areas of the traditions that he was able to meet. It seems to me that his personal experience in this domain was fundamental, but he also used different types of documentation, of things coded, as he said, in certain types of objects or liturgies or certain types of dances, and he even used ancient written sources. His experience, personal and practical, established a foundation in which there were still many holes, things not resolved, things to uncover, to understand on many levels. One should not forget, for example, that one of his important sources was research (occidental as well) on hypnotism and suggestibility. So it can be said that inasmuch as it was the Sufi tradition it was also Doctor Charcot! On the other hand, he himself often quoted *Tabula Smaragdina*. He was searching in several ways and in several directions. He found answers, but he also found a lack of answers, things forgotten or lost or unresolved. During a long period of his activities he was teaching, but at the same time he continued his investigations. He said somewhere, in a very brutal way, that people with whom he had worked during certain periods were also his guinea pigs. He was trying to understand, in human beings, the logic of objective laws. For these reasons it is erroneous, at the least naive, to want to find one place, one source of Gurdjieff. He was a searcher who had investigated several domains and several traditions, even if he was very much concentrated on the cultural cradle, which is the Mediterranean basin, but not only there, also a little bit farther to the east. In a certain way, he was doing a scientific work in order to understand. To understand not in order to formulate verbally, to understand so as to be able to do. This is always a fundamental difference. There is also the question of Gurdjieff's language: all the questions—traditional, ancient—that he reformulated. The more we go back in time, the more clearly these questions have been asked. All these questions—he reformulated them in an extremely cool language. He brought a terminology, not abstract or religious, but, I want to say, a language that was cool, practical, technical, and even quasi-linked to the level of the sciences of his times. For example, the mechanical sciences: he uses several elements of the terminology of his times, like "buffers." In every domain one observes his effort to unglue the terminology not only from sentimentality but also from a theological content.

**Q.:** What would be this theological content?

**J.G.:** Not the level of "doing" but the level of dogmas about the interpretation of the world. So there, it was—for our period and perhaps beyond—completely exceptional. As far as I know, nobody made this kind of effort: to unstick the things, to dissociate them from theological content in order to bring them back to their pragmatic qualities. Gurdjieff's attitude is not "religious." There is something religious there, but not for display: then one does not indulge in the content. It is like Gurdjieff's famous answer to a lady or a man who asked: "But what about God?" and the answer: "You go too high!" He answered in his very particular English. I find that his English and his French were excellent for his purposes. This also breaks intellectual
habits of listening and interpretation. Then there is his way of handling language. There exist things which are in appearance theoretical; in reality they are practical and fundamental, as, for example, the difference between feeling and sensing, so fundamental and at the same time so difficult to grasp for our contemporaries, so difficult to catch. There is this very special, very exceptional orientation in Gurdjieff, which can be called the acceptance of the conditions of a person's life, and that they are the best point of departure for work on oneself. Not to abandon one's place in everyday life, among people, in order to go to a hermitage. Not to withdraw from life but to remain in the very circumstances in which the situation—or destiny, if you wish—has placed us, and then to manage. This doesn't mean that I think that this is the only possibility. I am, for example, very interested in the possibility of keeping a certain isolation and I think that the monastic system—the Tibetan, for example, or even certain Christian hermitic ones—might have created useful conditions. In Fontainebleau, in a certain way, it was a temporary isolation, special conditions.

Q: Gurdjieff always insisted on the necessity of conditions that were special and particular to each person, but there is also something specific, that corresponds to a profound modern necessity, in the refusal and even demolition of all conventional morality, the sense of good and evil, of the two poles, whatever form they take. He was demolishing them in order to replace them with a sole criterion: What is really favorable for inner work? Not to abandon one's place in everyday life, among people, in order to go to a hermitage. Not to withdraw from life but to remain in the very circumstances in which the situation—or destiny, if you wish—has placed us, and then to manage. This doesn't mean that I think that this is the only possibility. I am, for example, very interested in the possibility of keeping a certain isolation and I think that the monastic system—the Tibetan, for example, or even certain Christian hermitic ones—might have created useful conditions. In Fontainebleau, in a certain way, it was a temporary isolation, special conditions.

Q: Not to be absorbed by it, but to go with, to accompany it.

J.G.: In the descending movement of the world?

Q.: Not to be absorbed, even if one is going with, this is, in a certain way, a very old gnostic attitude. To go with in order to stay free in front of it is an accent, I think, proper to Gurdjieff. Detachment from conventional morality carries several dangers. Even so, if one wants to keep things operative, this could be a necessity. The special quality of Gurdjieff lies, maybe, in this incredible challenge. Behind all of this, he nevertheless put the accent on the base of conscience. If one neglects conscience as a base, one is quickly drawn into confusing “right hand” with “left hand,” which is very comfortable and which for this very reason becomes a corruption from within. For Gurdjieff, the root of conscience is fundamental. Of course, it is important to rid oneself of the lies of conventional morality. With Gurdjieff, this is the most modern and the most traditional.

J.G.: In the descending movement of the world, and use it for one's freedom, lets say one's “deconditioning”—I don't know of another case where it has been so rigorously kept.

Q.: And above all in voluntarily breaking any image of God. Behind this there is not only a profound sense of the sacred, but, in Beelzebul, with the metaphoric structure “His Endlessness,” there one comes back to the Lord's Prayer, to the “Our Father.”

J.G.: Because finally, what Gurdjieff attacked in the conventional God is “your Mister God”!

Q.: Gurdjieff says that for twenty-one years of his life he played a not very natural role, in order to study people's psychology. How do you understand the importance of this program and, in your opinion, how did he stick to this “unnatural” bet through the years, even with those close to him?

J.G.: We are all continuously playing a character, a role; it is what Jung defined as persona. The first question that arises about this “acting” of Gurdjieff in front of others is: Did he play one or several characters? My impression is that he played several, but within a certain spectrum, so that he would still be recognized. What one should see is that Gurdjieff did all this with a great mastery.

At certain moments, might he have been a victim of this attitude? Theoretically, there is the danger that he might have been, through this game, justifying something uncontrollable in himself. He said it himself, in the booklet that he pulled out of circulation. This booklet, I find it very important, because, despite all the strange things that appear there, like the descriptions and plans for laboratories that are completely fanciful—which were in fact a way of hiding the undertaking, of surrounding it with the necessary ambiguity—he has fulfilled his obligation in front of the others, he has confessed certain things. I esteem that highly. I should underline that his “acting” was not, as is often thought, something heterodox. He “acted” like a master in certain traditions, who, in order to challenge the disciple, transforms himself; but he also “acted” as a searcher, as an investigator, and it is precisely about this that he said he had to “step on the corn,” on the most painful spot of everyone he met. In this case, it is a different matter, because he clearly said that this was in order to learn about certain unknown elements of the psychological apparatus. So there are two functions and the first one is nonheterodox. If we accept the principle that love—let's say the positive attitude toward someone—objectively aims at the good of this someone, at his evolution, then it is clear that if I show myself to this someone as likable, I am not aiming at the good of the other person, I am aiming at the good of myself in the eyes of this person. If one wants to apply this principle one hundred percent, it may be necessary for one not to show one's positive attitude. In Fritz Peters' second book one sees how, having become a
teenager, the author began to look for a way of detaching himself from Gurdjieff as a father figure. At the same time, on this subject, Gurdjieff often provoked him in an unbearable manner. But then, suddenly, at the end of the book, Peters makes a change, a reversal and he says: “What I knew as a child, I am beginning to understand as an adult. Gurdjieff practice d love in a form that is unknown to almost everyone: without limits.”

Q.: Many people couldn't tolerate direct contact with Gurdjieff. Do you think that today, in order to avoid the full power of his teaching, a kind of dilution is necessary to assure a link with the level of everyday life?

J.G.: If the program were formulated in this way, I would violently oppose it. One has to fight against dilution. On one hand, one has to accept it as an inevitable process—like entropy in physics; on the other, one should persistently create a countervector. Because the dilution, this procedure which can be called “homeopathic,” is what causes things to degrade. There is no question of being revolted or shocked—it happens like this, it is a natural law— but it remains necessary to go against this tendency, always menacing; because with every new generation of successors it is going to increase.

Q.: But given the variety of levels of understanding, can one not say that this dilution already exists?

J.G.: Yes, it already exists! What I wanted to underline is that in the immediate proximity of the real work one has to maintain a great rigor against dilution.

Q.: In the heart of the Work, absolutely!

J.G.: If one thinks about the problem of dilution and rigor, I think that Gurdjieff's successors have come up against an enormous difficulty. It's a terrible business, because there is, on the one hand, the danger of freezing the thing, of putting it in a refrigerator in order to keep it impeccable; and, on the other hand, if one does not freeze it, there is the danger of dilution caused by facility. Usually adaptations intended to make work more comprehensible for contemporaries consist in making it easier. How to struggle against dilution and at the same time, in this rigorous fight, make possible the step toward an ongoing investigation? In the case of Gurdjieff one finds these two aspects: tradition and research. The burning question is: Who, today, is going to assure the continuity of the research? Very subtle, very delicate and very difficult.

Q.: What would make it possible to proceed farther along this course? Perhaps an exchange like the one we are attempting?

J.G.: First of all, the solution can be only practical. If not, there is the danger of deceiving oneself with the illusion that we are making an investigation, when we are making fat books about the ideas. It is like Bennett in his *Dramatic Universe*: a useless effort to construct a new system. After “the system,” the new system. Only through doing can the thing be researched. But before we were speaking about the differences between persons. It is very important, for example, in what manner Ouspensky passed the last months of his life. Something in him had deeply changed. Think about his last famous formula: “There is no system!”

Q.: A formula that was not always understood by his entourage.

J.G.: No, not understood at all! But in him, this was something extraordinary. It means that at a certain moment, at the end of his life, he arrived at something. He spoke very little, but what he said was of an extraordinary quality. For the first time in his life, I think, the quality of being appeared in him.

Q.: Starting from this sense of being—untranslatable in words, in any language—all that we talk about, the true nature of this teaching, seems to me related to dynamic terms. Whether one speaks about circulation, relation, right action, or about “doing,” it is always a matter of searching for a thing that can be called the meaning of movement, a fundamental dynamism.

J.G.: Yes, there you have probably pointed out one of the qualities of Gurdjieff's work that is rare, even in the heart of the traditions. Often, in the traditions, at least when they continue to touch us after having passed through several intermediaries, we find that the values are static. In Gurdjieff's work, it is the kinetic manner that is always present.

Q.: Its a perpetual movement. But it is very difficult to write about or transmit without betraying. If one is aware of this betrayal, there is nevertheless something acute that passes, like a precaution, a sensibility.

J.G.: Around every person who follows a true investigation, who fights against the tendency of this investigation to freeze, who resists the establishing of a wrong orthodoxy which dilutes—which makes the task easy—there is a surrounding atmosphere, which is wrongly called “charismatic.” The danger, the double danger between the person and his entourage, is like an exchange of gifts: “You treat me like a big manitou and, in exchange, I accept you as my apostles.” When this kind of thing happens, it creates an unhealthy climate, because the entourage has a natural interest in freezing the research at an established level. See the case of Stanislavski: why was there so much fear about his “method of physical actions”? There was panic in his institution. Everyone was perturbed by the situation of having to relearn everything. So it became, in a way, in their common interest to freeze the system that they knew. And if, around the key person, the other people are really important, not just little people but the ones who are really doing something, then the danger is all the greater. What I understand is that Gurdjieff had always fought against this situation. Many strategies are possible: an expeditious one is to dismiss people. But I notice that for Gurdjieff the strategy was not to turn a person out, but to make his
life so difficult that he would go away by himself.

Q.: That he would go away in order to preserve his autonomy; otherwise he would remain dependent.

J.G.: For this or that case, the manner might be arguable, but anyway something needs to be done. Otherwise, it is a false peace, the peace of “we agree for the interests of both parties” and not for the thing itself.

Q.: From all that you have read, from all that you think that you have forgotten, in the books “around,” not the books of Gurdjieff himself or of Ouspensky, what brought you the most?

J.G.: In the past I came across an extremely naive book of a certain Mrs. Popoff. I don't know who she is.

Q.: Popoff?

J.G.: Irmis Popoff. Then yes, to demolish Mrs. Popoff is a simple task. Even the title, of course, everything, even the image on the cover, everything, everything, yes. And, in this naivete, a little voice that says: “Myself, I am only a little mouse who...” Easy to demolish. But this was for me a capital testimony, because she caught specific things—like, for example, the manner of Gurdjieff’s last visit to the United States. How he behaved in front of people or during a session of Movements. By the way, it is often a capacity of women, much less of men; men capture mainly that which is of the order of “ideas”; they make the synthesis. Women capture images of reactions, of behavior. And that is crucial. For example. Georgette Leblanc, all these women, the one who wrote about that good Sister—what was her name?

Q.: Kathryn Hulme.

J.G.: There one sees the person of Gurdjieff. So the book of Irmis Popoff, I laughed a little when I was reading it, because it is both ridiculous and funny, but it captures many things.

Q.: There are words like “anecdotal” that, too easily, close the door to an evocation of an impression. The life, the real life of the testimony is very important. To come back to other fields, this is also theater, this manner of making something human live through small gestures, small actions.

J.G.: Yes, and moreover I must once again give honors to Mrs. Popoff who says that, for her, Gurdjieff was always “doing.” But he was doing according to the “Law of Otherwise,” that is, he was never doing as the others do. It is not true, for example, that he did not complete The Struggle of the Magicians; he simply brought it to life in different periods, in different countries, with different people—while working on the Movements. This passage of her book is very touching. For her, he did his Struggle of the Magicians. And when she describes her own experience of doing successively, along with other people, the “dance of the black magicians” and the “dance of the white magicians,” through the naïvete of her description, she touches something very important. However, it is said that she was censored, I don't know by whom. She was probably asked to stick to a limited framework so that she would not add her own ideas; this was legitimate. I think that if her text was censored by someone, this someone did a good job; it is a passage between indicated limits.

The other example about which I would like to speak also concerns a woman, a woman of a remarkable intellectual capacity; but I find it interesting for reasons other than those which I have just told about women. It is Conversations with Madame Ouspensky, a small book of fifteen pages, edited by de Ropp. One finds there two short fragments, where she speaks about self-remembering, that are truly revealing. The one is: two directions of looking—toward the object and as though from the object toward oneself. The other is: sitting in a room, one perceives oneself simply as an object among other objects in this room. Obviously, I haven’t really given a good account. I only point out to you these two fragments.

Q.: In short, you make the masculine synthesis?

J.G.: Yes, that's it: I make the masculine “synthesis,” but this little book is extraordinary. It is a whole different way of bearing witness. She speaks about the ideas, but the manner in which she speaks is an indication of “doing.”

Q.: It's true; it's a shock. She brings idea-shocks. During their life together, Ouspensky furnished the ideas, but it was she who made people work...

J.G.: Yes. What a difference!

Q.: She had to work everywhere, even from her bed. At the end of her life, when she was ill, bedridden, she saw everyone, she was giving them exercises. Even without physically seeing them, every day. This was incredible!

In the Third Series, it is the question of “God-remembering”; that's the whole meaning of Beelzebub: how could “Our ALL-LOVING and ALL-EMBRACING FATHER” chase one of his nearest sons to the extremity of the universe? The answer is: “remembering factor.” Even God would need a remembering factor.

J.G.: “God-remembering.” This exists in traditions. For example in the Philokalia—and in several branches of Sufism. But that Cod remembers himself, remembers even through the friction (that Gurdjieff evokes) by way of “banishing one of his nearest sons,” I have never come across that anywhere else.

Q.: Before we finish, that famous little phrase: “against God”?

J.G.: It was reported by several witnesses. So it must have been pronounced, this little phrase. In very ancient traditions, the creation was regarded as an “entropy of God,” and the role of men would be to allow the return and thus, in a certain way, to save God. This is against the entropy. If
it is not done, one can say that it is God himself who gets lost in the creation.

Q.: This is the theme of degradation. You employ the term “entropy.” The idea of an entropy of God, after all, in the twentieth century!

J.G.: The entropy of God is a very ancient idea that always presents itself anew. It is, if one may say, an idee-moteur. I begin with a kind of anecdote or, if you wish, a parable. This is a story often told in Hinduism and it is told as a key story. Someone asks Narayana or one of Gods forms: “How many incarnations would I still need, if I deeply loved you?” God answers: “Seven.” “And if I hated you?” God says: “Only three, because if you hated me you would think about me all the time.” In the European culture, it is blasphemy which can indicate the same tendency . . . because, who can commit a true blasphemy? A tepid attitude toward the Godhead, it is a mere nothing. A nonbeliever, . . . no, it is not the right word—someone who doesn’t have a relation with God is incapable of a real blasphemy. At the most, he is capable of a profanation. But if you are pushing me toward the language of religions then . . . O.K. . . . I let myself go. In the ancient tradition, the question of Gods lowering in creation incessantly emerges. Several images are given of it. It is the play of the Godhead: to be lost and to conceal itself behind a multitude of forms. For example, Kali—the divine Mother—she has a terrible side, but she is also loving and amused: she makes sport of all of this. And finally there is the question of the Return, which is the key, and this possible Return passes only through persons. It is the inertia of forces—those called divine—that brings the suffering. In the Jewish tradition a strong example of all of this is Shekinah, the feminine aspect of God, appearing in the image of an old woman, suffering, in exile on the roads of Earth. She seeks the Return, but cannot have it if people don’t follow her. Other examples are found in the tradition of Nisargadatta, which goes something like: “The Absolute is like a physician, he is brilliant, everything goes well. All of a sudden, one day, he wakes up with swollen eyes, he cannot do anything.” The swollen eyes, it is to-be-in-creation. This little story is just a coined version—of Nisargadatta—but it gives the images of the thing and is striking at the same time. In the traditions, there exist several versions about the two currents of the world: the descending and the ascending. This can take quasi-gnostic forms of explanation in Teilhard de Chardin’s kind of style, but it also exists in the sciences. The appearance of life and consciousness would be like a small countercurrent because, in the scientific sense, the world has been created through entropy and in entropy. A land of an opposite process is the appearance of life, of complex forms of life and forms of consciousness in the simple sense of the word: just a countercurrent.

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EDITOR’S NOTES


2. The lower part—the most automatic—of the thinking function, this is what Gurdjieff calls the “formatory apparatus” or “formatory thinking.” See P. D. Ouspensky, The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 109.


4. “I began to observe and study various manifestations in the waking state of the psyche of these trained and freely moving ‘Guinea-Pigs,’ allotted to me by Destiny for my experiments.” G. I. Gurdjieff, The Herald of Coming Good (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), 22.

5. “Buffers,” an expression used by Gurdjieff in order to denote a tendency—a kind of appliance, “a shock absorber”—deeply rooted in man: “Buffers” lull a man to sleep, give him the agreeable and peaceful sensation that all will be well, that no contradictions exist and that he can sleep in peace. “Buffers” are appliances by means of which a man can always be in the right. “Buffers” help a man not to feel his conscience.” Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching (New York; Harcourt Brace & World, 1949), 155.

6. The “transfiguration” of Gurdjieff. See Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous, 324-25. Also Georgette Leblanc, La machine a courage (Paris: J. B. Janin, 1947), 207: “as though he had suddenly torn off the masks behind which it is his duty to hide himself.”

7. Original English text: “Persona is what you want to impress people with and what they force us to assume as a role. Therefore it is called a mask.”

8. The Herald of Coming Good [see above, n. 4] was published in New York and Paris in 1933; this booklet, printed in a small number of copies and in a private edition, was very quickly pulled out of circulation by its author.


11. See Prologue of Gurdjieff, Life Is Real, 19-25; and Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950): “HIS ENDLESSNESS, notwithstanding his ALL-LOVINGNESS and ALL-FORGIVENESS, was constrained to banish Beelzebub with his comrades to one of the remote corners of the Universe,” 52.

12. See Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous: “The way of the development of hidden possibilities is a way against nature, against Cod.” 47.
This kind of eruption can be caused by natural events such as typhoons, which decrease rock density, and glacial melting on the top of the volcano which alters the molten rock composition. Glacial melting is believed to be one cause behind the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption in Iceland. 2. A cloud of ash rises over Kilauea volcano in Hawaii as it erupted in May 2018 Credit: AFP or licensors. How are volcanoes formed? There are three different types of volcano and each produces and releases a different type of lava: Shield volcano These volcanoes have a flat dome-like appearance and release lava in a gentle manner that is generally slow and easy for humans and animals to out run. They produce Basaltic lava, which is the most common type found on earth. A volcano is an opening in Earth's crust where magma breaks through, raining down molten rock, ash and gases. There are several types of volcanoes. Researchers are currently striving to find ways to predict when volcanic eruptions might happen on Earth by analyzing clues such as crystals and gases linked with volcanoes. Let's take a look at how volcanoes form on Earth: Earth's crust is 3 to 37 miles (5 to 60 kilometers) thick, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. It is broken up into seven major and 152 smaller pieces called tectonic plates, according to a 2016 paper by Christopher Harrison at the University of Miami. These plates float on a layer of magma — semi-liquid rock and dissolved gases. A volcano is an opening in the Earth's crust where magma from the mantle reaches the surface, sometimes in a slow, dribbling fashion, called an effusive eruption, and sometimes in a violent event called an explosive eruption. Volcanoes usually occur in divergent boundaries between tectonic plates, places where the crust is weak and magma can rise to the surface due to the immense pressure of the mantle below. When magma reaches the surface, it is called lava. Thousands of volcanoes have been recognized on Earth, and they are found on every continent and scattered across the ocean floor.