

# Correspondences

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Special issue  
**Gurdjieff and Esotericism**



Guest editor  
**Carole M. Cusack**

Journal for the Study of Esotericism

## Correspondences

# 8.2

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## G. I. Gurdjieff and the Work: Transformations of an Esoteric Teaching

Carole M. Cusack

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### Introduction

G. I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866–1949) taught a highly original esoteric “system” which combined a complex cosmology with literary and artistic endeavours (including the Movements or sacred dances, the music composed with Thomas de Hartmann, and Gurdjieff’s spiritual writings).<sup>1</sup> Gurdjieff’s “Work” or “Fourth Way” was lived out in quasi-communal settings where intentional labour and inner exercises were combined with dancing and readings of the master’s texts.<sup>2</sup> In Gurdjieff’s lifetime he was not associated with esotericism or religion; the terms applied to him by outsiders, for example journalists, were “magician” and “charlatan.”<sup>3</sup> When Gurdjieff died he had a relatively small number of followers, and had published only *The Herald of Coming Good* (1933), a short prospectus which he had recalled shortly after distribution.<sup>4</sup> His posthumous Three Series *All and Everything* established him as a major force in twentieth-century esotericism, and one of the three putative sources of the “New Age,” with Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and his near-contemporary Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925).<sup>5</sup>

The academic study of Gurdjieff developed slowly, and his significance for the study of esotericism has emerged only recently. This special issue of

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1. Azize, “Gurdjieff’s Sacred Dances and Movements,” 297–330.

2. Cusack, “Intentional Communities in the Gurdjieff Teaching,” 159–78.

3. Landau, *God is My Adventure*, 233–264. This attitude still persists. See Storr, *Feet of Clay*, 21–44.

4. Gurdjieff, *The Herald of Coming Good* (1933).

5. Sutcliffe, “Gurdjieff as a *Bricoleur*,” 117–18.

*Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* is the second to focus on esoteric, secret, and hidden aspects of the Work.<sup>6</sup> The premier book on the esoteric, or mystical, aspects of the Fourth Way is Joseph Azize's *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises* (2020).<sup>7</sup> Other useful work includes: chapters by Harry T. Hunt in his monograph on Western secular mystics (2003) and Glenn Alexander Magee in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism* (2016); and, entries by Jacob Needleman and James Moore in the Brill *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (2006).<sup>8</sup> The present collection of articles covers a range of topics relevant to esotericism and the Fourth Way, from aspects of Gurdjieff's biography, through references to Christianity in his masterpiece *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950).

### **New Directions in the Study of Gurdjieff and Esotericism**

The first article, Joseph Azize's "Esotericism, Occultism and Magic: The Case of Gurdjieff and Crowley," examines meetings between Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and contextualises the two through a historical examination of three key phenomena: esotericism, occultism, and magic. Azize takes Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society as the starting point for a consideration of the esoteric and the occult in the twentieth century, and he links Blavatsky's theoretical approach to that of Gurdjieff's most influential pupil, Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky (1878–1947). Two scholars, Frances Yates (1899–1981) and James Webb (1946–1980), are located at the head of a sympathetic approach to the occult, one which flowered with the establishment of the academic study of esotericism by Antoine Faivre (b. 1934) and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (b. 1961).

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6. Cusack edited a special issue of *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* that was published in 2020. This featured articles by Azize, Cusack, David Seamon, Christian Giudice, and John Willmet.

7. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises*, passim.

8. See Hunt, "George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: A Near Eastern Inner-Worldly Mysticism in the Modern West"; Magee, "G. I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way"; Needleman, "Gurdjieff Tradition"; and Moore, "Gurdjieff, George Ivanovitch."

In his treatment of Gurdjieff's interactions with Crowley, Azize tackles issues attendant upon scholarly or quasi-scholarly treatments of the "gnostic" or "magical" aspects of Gurdjieff's teachings, including those of Constance Jones and P. T. Mistlberger.<sup>9</sup> The core of his article addresses the possible commonalities between Gurdjieff and Crowley: Were they engaged in the same quest? Were Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man and Crowley's Abbey of Thelema intentional communities in similar ways? Crowley visited the Prieuré des Basses Loges in Fontainebleau-Avon on 10 February 1924 when Gurdjieff was absent, and again in mid-1926. Edith Taylor, Fritz Peters and Ethel Merston recorded the visit of the "Great Beast" to the Prieuré: he attended lunch, and likely stayed a few days at Gurdjieff's Institute, before departing without any "contest" between himself and his host eventuating.<sup>10</sup> Azize's examination of these events provides strong critique of Tobias Churton's recent book on Gurdjieff; the second meeting between the two, noted by Crowley's biographer Gerald Suster, is accepted by Azize. The conclusion reached is that the differences between the two "magi" are much greater than their similarities.

The second contribution is Michael Pittman's "Deliteralizing Christianity: Gurdjieff and Almznoshinoo." Pittman discusses references to Christianity in Gurdjieff's First Series, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, with a focus on a sacred ceremony, Almznoshinoo, which is initially mentioned in the discussion on Tibetan Buddhism (or Lamaism, the doctrine founded by "Saint Lama").<sup>11</sup> Gurdjieff spoke of his teaching as "esoteric Christianity," and interpretations of the Work of some pupils, like Maurice Nicoll (1885-1953), have stressed the Christian elements.<sup>12</sup> Through the figure of Beelzebub, Gurdjieff criticised Christianity and accused it of having been neutralised by splitting into various sects, and presently having strayed far from the teachings of Jesus. The description

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9. Jones, "Gnostic Sensibility in Gurdjieff's 'Work'," and Mistlberger, *Three Dangerous Magi*.

10. Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 314-15.

11. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Chapter 38, "Religion," 694-743.

12. Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts*, 237-38.

of the Almnoshinoo and the enlightened beings who conduct it (who all possess a *kesdjan* or higher-being-body or a soul) is focused on how the celebrants can feed the *kesdjan* body of the deceased for whom the rite is performed.<sup>13</sup> While there are elements of Beelzebub's description that recall the *bardos* of Tibetan Buddhism and the three bodies of the Buddha, Pittman's analysis brings the Almnoshinoo into dialogue with the Christian Last Supper recorded in the New Testament.

Beelzebub assures Hassein his grandson that Jesus Christ had attained a planetary body and that his disciples were prepared for the Almnoshinoo ceremony by Jesus' esoteric teaching in ways that the Tibetans were not. The gospel story of Judas' betrayal is undermined (as Judas is Jesus' most faithful disciple and possessed of elevated reason), and it is asserted that the love and suffering of Jesus were similarly compromised. Gurdjieff critiques the interpretation of scripture throughout Christian history, and the doctrinal/ideological understanding of Jesus. Pittman examines this material via various lenses, including psychologist James Hillman's rejection of the literal mode of interpretation, which Hillman believes is a malady.<sup>14</sup> The moving, feeling, and thinking centres must, in the Fourth Way, become aligned through "conscious labour and intentional suffering," to bring about spiritual advancement.<sup>15</sup>

Vrasidas Karalis, in "Gurdjieff and C. G. Jung: *Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*" and the Question of Individuation," offers an interpretation of Gurdjieff's Third Series, a book of five talks and an additional chapter. For Karalis, the focus of the book is the *psyche*, and the question of whether humans possess such a thing. Gurdjieff's psychology has been studied rarely, and arguably was developed most clearly in Ouspensky's *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*.<sup>16</sup> However, it is likely that Gurdjieff regarded psychology as part of modern culture that impeded people from doing and becoming a "real I"; the conversation

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13. Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts*, 27–29.

14. Hillman, "A Note on Story," 45.

15. Bennett, *Conscious Labour and Intentional Suffering*, passim.

16. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, Lecture 1.

partner that Karalis provides is Gurdjieff's near-contemporary, the Swiss medical doctor and psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), who argued that the fundamental spiritual process that a human must engage in is individuation, which he also characterised as human beings becoming integrated and a true self. This idea has been compared to Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) concept of authenticity.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, Gurdjieff's teaching that humans are born without a soul or immortal part, and must work to integrate their disparate centres in order to achieve a "real I" (which is inextricably connected to the "coating" of their physical bodies in order to develop a higher-being-body, of which there are three: astral, mental, and causal), is very far from that of Jung, Sartre, and most modern psychologists and philosophers.<sup>18</sup> Gurdjieff's esotericism is materialist, not merely psychological or spiritual, and basically not individualist. He envisages the business of "growing a soul" as happening in community, where pupils have access to a teacher, one who "knows."<sup>19</sup>

Carole M. Cusack, in "The Fourth Way and the Internet: Esotericism, Secrecy, and Hiddenness in Plain Sight," considers the history of the Fourth Way since Gurdjieff's death in 1949. His nominated successor Jeanne de Salzmann (1889-1990) created the Gurdjieff Foundation, which from its centres in London, Paris, New York, and Caracas established affiliated branches in many countries.<sup>20</sup> Independent lineages developed, such as that led by the British scientist John Godolphin Bennett (1897-1974), and the publication of works by Gurdjieff and Ouspensky meant that what had been an initiatory teaching became, in certain ways, public. However, the internet, and in particular the World Wide Web interface developed by Tim Berners-Lee, caused far greater

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17. Shelburne, "Existential Perspective in the Thought of Carl Jung," 59.

18. Hunt suggests a range of thinkers that have in common the pursuit of a "this-worldly mysticism." These include: Plotinus and the Gnostics, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernst Troeltsch, Aleister Crowley, Gurdjieff, and A. H. Almaas. See Hunt, *Lives in Spirit: Precursors and Dilemma of a Secular Western Mysticism*.

19. Cusack, "Intentional Communities in the Gurdjieff Teaching," 162-65.

20. Petsche, "A Gurdjieff Genealogy: Tracing the Manifold Ways the Gurdjieff Teaching Has Travelled," 65-67.

exposure than Fourth Way members might have imagined, and had unexpected consequences.<sup>21</sup> Cusack connects the revelation of the content of esotericism to that of religions that have secretive aspects, and the proliferation and commercialisation of the Work online to the broader religious scene of the West in the twenty-first century.

The inner exercises that Gurdjieff taught are examined as a case study of clearly esoteric practices and beliefs that are now discussed openly and featured online in various ways, much of it due to the scholarly research that Joseph Azize has published.<sup>22</sup> These, along with the Movements, are of particular interest to scholars, in that they were originally intended to be transmitted directly from teacher to pupil in a real-world context, and were not to be sullied by written instructions, choreographies, and other means of “fixing” the information outside of the minds and hearts of Fourth Way adherents. The online environment shows signs of becoming as important for the Work in the future as the residential farms and large properties that were used as sites of communal living and intense instruction in the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

This issue of *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* has a linked special feature, an essay by Anthony G. E. Blake, a pupil of John Bennett and an innovative and important Fourth Way teacher himself. “Understanding What is Esoteric” is a reflection on how the concept of a universal and timeless wisdom that is available to a select group of students, who receive it from an enlightened teacher such as Gurdjieff, can be transformative.<sup>24</sup> Blake is concerned with charting the hazards as well as the rewards of taking such a path; in two linked autobiographical articles, he has sketched his life from birth to the present, with the fourteen years that he spent with Bennett as the formative period.<sup>25</sup> Bennett,

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21. Pecotic and Cusack, “The (World Wide) Work 2.0: The Gurdjieff Tradition Online,” 96–100.

22. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises*. Azize published articles on a number of aspects of Gurdjieff’s inner exercises before the Oxford University Press book appeared in 2020.

23. Coates, “How Many Arks Does It Take?”

24. Blake, “Gurdjieff and the Legomonism of ‘Objective Reason,’” 239–40, 252, 263, and 265.

25. Blake, “The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path,” and “The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path (Part 2).”

a scientist and technologist, wanted to relate the Fourth Way to other bodies of knowledge, and developed Systematics in conjunction with young scientists, Blake among them, who were his pupils in the 1960s. The breadth of material that Bennett had mastery of, and the range of influences he acknowledged, still impress.

Blake's essay examines practices of learning, reading, and transmission in the context of the Gurdjieff tradition. He considers writers from the ancient world including Lucian of Samosata and Plato, as well as sacred texts, chiefly the Bible and Sufi works. He is aware of the multitudinous intersections of the sciences and the arts, and of the need to transmit knowledge of all kinds, not only the esoteric. In 1998, Blake and Karen Stefano founded DuVersity, an online institution with real-world seminars; Blake is convinced that DuVersity's model (where participants gather for brief periods of intense work with many teachers, attending workshops and reading groups) is the way of the future for the Work, rather than fixed groups with a permanent leader.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way emerged as a subject of academic study in the 1990s and has in the twenty-first century seen something of a flowering. This collection of articles is intended to extend the range of existing publications, which include works already referred to, such as Hunt's monograph, *Lives in Spirit: Precursors and Dilemmas of a Secular Western Mysticism* (2003), which brought Gurdjieff's life and work into dialogue with figures who generated fruitful comparisons. Johanna J. M. Petsche's notable *Gurdjieff and Music: The Gurdjieff/ de Hartmann Piano Music and its Esoteric Significance* (2015) also merits praise, as it addresses a larger range of topics relevant to Gurdjieff and esotericism than the title might indicate.<sup>27</sup> Reference has also been made to Joseph Azize's *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation,*

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26. Anthony Blake, personal communication; All and Everything Conference, Kendal (UK), 3-7 April 2019.

27. Petsche, *Gurdjieff and Music: The Gurdjieff/ de Hartmann Piano Music and Its Esoteric Significance*, Chapter 8, "Three Purposes of the Piano Music in Light of Gurdjieff's Life Circumstances and Esoteric Teaching."

*and Exercises* (2020), which has especial importance for the study of Gurdjieff as an esoteric spiritual teacher and the Work as an esoteric tradition, and is the major academic study published to date. It is to be hoped that the Fourth Way tradition will continue to receive scholarly attention and become better-integrated into the broader study of modern esoteric spiritual thought.

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## Esotericism, Occultism, and Magic: The Case of Gurdjieff and Crowley

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### Abstract

Is it possible to satisfactorily define the words “esotericism,” “occultism,” and “magic”? Do these terms have any utility? Can “esotericism” be understood without reference to a complement such as “exotericism”? It is suggested that esotericism held a niche place in Western culture even before the rise of Western esotericism in the nineteenth century, although the word was rarely employed. After a study of the terms, and especially of the concepts they reference, the alleged similarity of G. I. Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley is taken as a case study. I compare their methods and teachings, their meetings, and the applicability of these three terms to these figures, asking if Gurdjieff’s and Crowley’s systems were esoteric, occult, both, or neither. This discussion provides the occasion to consider the “argument from silence,” and its validity in historical studies.

Keywords: G. I. Gurdjieff; Aleister Crowley; A. R. Orage; esotericism in the Gospels; Pythagoreanism; H. P. Blavatsky; argument from silence; argument *ad ignorantiam*

It is notorious that the substantives “esoteric” and “occult” are often used interchangeably, and that the derived nouns “esotericism” and “occultism” may carry unexpected nuances. To see how the accidents of history have a large role in the formation of our vocabulary, one need only compare the meanings of the adjective “social” with those of the derived noun “socialism,” or “romantic” with “Romanticism.” The difficulty in precisely defining “esotericism” and “occultism” perhaps also comports with their meanings: can we reasonably expect abundant certainty when speaking of secretive people and secret knowledge? However, there may be value in attempting to describe the parameters of these terms and their nuances, even if formal definition eludes us; and to compare them. I contrast G. I. Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley, two

influential personalities in Western Esotericism, almost exact contemporaries, who met each other on at least two occasions, and examine how our terms (and the complementary word “exoteric”) may be applied to them and their systems. In doing so, we shall have the opportunity to consider the important methodological question of the “argument from silence.”

### 1.1. The Terms and the Concepts

Egil Asprem has noted that often, historically, when articulating terms, “etymology, common understandings and lexical definitions all pointed in different directions.”<sup>1</sup> This is exactly why these must all be analysed, and the results synthesized so far as this may be possible. I commence with some research from the modern linguistic disciplines. Contemporary definitions and etymologies of the word “esoteric” seem to me to be based on that offered by Walter Skeat, whose celebrated *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* appeared in various editions and volumes between 1879 and 1910:

**esoteric**, inner, secret. (Gk.) ‘Exoteric and *esoteric*:’ Warburton, Divine Legation ... Gk. *esōterikós* inner (Lucian); a term expanded from Gk. *esōteros*, inner, a comparative form from *ēsō*, within, an adv. *in es = eis*, into, prep. A term used of those disciples of Pythagoras, &c. who were *scientifically taught*, as opposed to those who had more popular views, the *exoteric*. See **Exoteric**.<sup>2</sup>

The Liddell and Scott 1889 dictionary of Greek to English states that the superlative, *esōtatos*, is the equivalent of the Latin *intimus*, a significant point because we, being more familiar with the terms “intimate” and “more intimate” can thus better appreciate the overtones the word carried in ancient Greece, as appears when we come to the statement of Iamblichus about the *esōterikoi*.<sup>3</sup> Skeat does not date the appearance of “esoteric” in English, but William Warburton’s

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1. Asprem, “Beyond the West,” 9.

2. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, 200.

3. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. *esōtatos*.

*Divine Legation of Moses* was published in two volumes in 1738 and 1741. For the word “exoteric,” he supplies:

**exoteric**, external. (Gk.) First in 1662. Opposed to *esoteric*.—Gk. *exōterikós*, external . . .<sup>4</sup>

The two substantives complement each other. I suspect they entered usage together, beginning to gain currency between the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As we shall come later to the “argument from silence,” Henige’s observation that most of the first attested appearances of a word in English will often not capture the earliest use is pertinent.<sup>5</sup>

The English-language use of the word “occult” is earlier than that of “esoteric”:

**occult**, hidden, secret (L.) . . . first in 1567 . . . L. *occultus*, hidden, pp. of *occulere*, to cover over . . . from √KEL, to cover, hide, whence also . . . E. *hell*. Der. *occult-by*, *-ness*; *occult*, verb . . . from F. *occulter*, ‘to hide’ . . . which from L. *occultare*, frequentative of *occulere* . . .<sup>6</sup>

The esoteric presupposes and thus implies the exoteric, while the occult presupposes and implies the existence of something manifest; as we shall see, the words also imply a hierarchy of truth and value. It is also significant that the first word is associated with the Pythagoreans, and specifically relates to the *disciples*; and that “occult” with the frequentative “t” and all its derived terms should be ancestrally related to the word “hell.” One would not say something was made “occult” for safety, but one could say that it had been “hidden.” The frequentative may have once given the word a sense of habitual concealment, which may have added to an unsavoury nuance.

The contemporary usage of these words is illustrated from the Australian national lexicon, the seventh edition of the *Macquarie Dictionary*, published in 2017. It includes the following entries:

**esoteric** . . . *adj.* 1. understood by or meant for a select few; profound; recondite. 2. belonging to the select few. 3. private; secret; confidential. 4. (of philosophical doctrine, etc.) intended

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4. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, 204.

5. Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument*, 181-82.

6. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, 408.

to be communicated only to the initiated . . . esoterically, adv.—esotericism, esotery

**esoterica** . . . *pl. n.* arcane or abstruse information

**exoteric** . . . *adj.* 1. suitable for or communicated to those outside a select circle. 2. of or relating to the outside; exterior, external

**occult** . . . *adj.* 1. beyond the bounds of ordinary knowledge; mysterious. 2. not disclosed; secret; communicated only to the initiated. 3. (*in early science*) not apparent on mere inspection but discoverable by experimentation . . . 4. of the nature of, or relating to, certain reputed sciences, as magic, astrology, etc., involving the alleged knowledge or employment of secret or mysterious agencies. . . .

**the occult**, a. occult studies or sciences. b. the supernatural

**occultism** . . . *n.* the doctrine or study of the occult.

“Esoteric” and its derivatives then, referred initially to disciples, that is, to people. “Occult” and its derivatives referred first to discovering the real but hidden property of a thing or phenomenon. This seems to have left a trace on modern usage, at least in terms of what might not be said. Thus, in treating Joseph Rodes Buchanan’s psychometry, Wouter Hanegraaff writes: “it did not matter that much to him whether the psychometric power should be explained in physical, occult, or mental terms.”<sup>7</sup> The word “occult” fits here, but the word “esoteric” would not. This leads one to conclude that the word “occult” and its related terms can only sometimes be used as equivalents or subsets of “esoteric” and its related terms. Hanegraaff’s conception of “occultism” as “secularized esotericism” also points in the same direction.<sup>8</sup> However, the “occult” is neither an equivalent nor a true subset of the esoteric, if only because the “occult” is historically associated with “certain reputed sciences, as magic, astrology, etc.” as the dictionary has it. Henrik Bogdan describes magic, alchemy, and astrology as being the three “royal arts” of Western esotericism.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Hanegraaff, “The Theosophical Imagination,” 21.

8. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 409.

9. Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 11.

This raises the question of what is meant by “magic.” Skeat derives the word via Latin from the Greek *magikós*, “magical,” from *mágos*, “one of the Magi, an enchanter.” He notes that the substantive “magic” was originally an abbreviation of the phrase “magic art,” from the Latin *ars magica*.<sup>10</sup> I am not aware that this etymology has ever been challenged. Illustrating modern usage, the *Macquarie Dictionary* has:

**magic** . . . *n.* 1. The art of producing effects claimed to be beyond the natural human power and arrived at by means of supernatural agencies or through command of occult forces in nature. 2. the exercise of this art.<sup>11</sup>

On the basis of these definitions, “magic” cannot be used as a synonym of either “esoteric” or “occult,” and vice versa; but it is a subset of both terms, although it would more naturally and intimately be associated with the “occult” than it would with the “esoteric.” This is, I suggest, related to the etymological roots of the words “esoteric” and “occult,” and the fact that occult intrinsically has to do with being hidden, while esoteric is not so much hidden as inner: what is inner may not be secret, yet be demanding of attainment, like the peak of a mountain. “Magic” is often compared and sometimes contrasted with “religion” and “science,” especially in anthropology and ethnography.<sup>12</sup> That is a global study. I am focussing here on its use in Western Esotericism.

Now we come to the question of the connotations of these words. I shall contend that the concept inherent in the word “esoteric” subsisted in European culture long before the rise of Western Esotericism, even if the word was not employed. Also, the nature of “esotericism” will be quite different depending upon the reason for maintaining some secrecy: whether to avoid sacrilege; or because to reveal the sacred is dangerous (for example, knowledge of a secret name can confer a power which could be abused);<sup>13</sup> or because of the likelihood of misunderstanding and distortion; or because one has to be personally

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10. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, 354-55.

11. *Macquarie Dictionary*, 8th ed., 922.

12. See, for an introduction, Otto and Strausberg, “Introduction,” 1-13.

13. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 188 and 194.

worthy of it; or because the esoteric truth itself should be protected.<sup>14</sup> These considerations are not mutually exclusive.

First, consider the classic example, the Pythagoreans. The anonymous life in Photius states that the disciples of Pythagoras included *sebastikoi*, *politikoi*, *mathematikoi*, *Pythagorikoi*, and *Pythagoristai*, those engaged in contemplation, or business, or geometry and astronomy; and then those who associated with Pythagoras and those who only imitated the teachings.<sup>15</sup> Diverse categories are probably being placed side by side here. Porphyry, in his life of Pythagoras, has a different classification which cannot easily be reconciled with that preceding, for he draws a distinction between *mathematikoi* and *akousmatikoi*, stating that the *mathematikoi* “learned the fuller and more exactly elaborate reasons of science,” but the *akousmatikoi* “heard only the summarized instructions of learning, without more detailed explanations.”<sup>16</sup> Iamblichus, in *On the Pythagorean Life*, has those students who lived together being those who philosophized, contrasted with the *akousmatikoi* who lived family lives, but gathered together for instruction. This passage may be an interpolation.<sup>17</sup> Later, he describes how Pythagoras carefully vetted his pupils, placing them on a probation, and then selecting those who would be the *esōterikoi*:

The candidates themselves, then, if they appeared worthy of sharing in his teachings, having been judged by their way of life and other virtuousness, after the five year silence, became “esoterics” and heard Pythagoras within the curtain, and also saw him. Before this, they shared his discourses through mere hearing.<sup>18</sup>

It is explicitly stated that the disciples had to be adjudged worthy of becoming *esōterikoi*. The esoterics were, then, the intimates of the master, and were allowed beyond the veil. The substance of this practice was known to the author of the

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14. Dimant, “Concealing and Revealing,” 56, concludes from the Dead Sea Scrolls that at Qumran their secret knowledge was kept so, both because those learning it had to be worthy and to protect it from the impure.

15. Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain*, 3.

16. *Ibid.*, 11.

17. Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus*, 52-53 and 55n6; *De Vita Pythagorica*, 6.29-30.

18. *Ibid.*, *Iamblichus*, 96-98; *De Vita Pythagorica*, 17.72.

anonymous life of Pythagoras, if not to Porphyry as well, even though neither uses the word *esōterikoi*. Those who failed their probation were then treated as dead by the Pythagoreans, who even made tombs for them.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, those who were not among the Pythagoreans were referred to as “those outside.” Describing a murderous attack, probably planned by those who had been declared “dead,” Iamblichus stated:

Then knowledge faded out together with those who knew, since it had been guarded closely until then in the hearts, never divulged, and only things hard to understand and unexplained were remembered by those outside (*tois exō*) the school; except for the very little which some Pythagoreans then in foreign lands preserved, some sparks very dim and hard to catch.<sup>20</sup>

It was already clear that the terms “exoteric” and “esoteric” necessarily complemented each other, but the Pythagorean terminology also shows that the institution of an esoteric inner circle can evoke not only one but more outer circles: hence, not all Pythagoreans were *esōterikoi*, but even these were privileged in comparison with those outside. We shall see a similar ramification of the idea in Gurdjieff, where there are three circles of the instructed: the esoteric, mesoteric, and exoteric, and then the rest of the world (“the outer circle”).<sup>21</sup> Esotericism in circles such as Pythagoreanism has the effect of also structuring the group according to a hierarchy of access to the received truth.

This passage also reveals risks inherent in esotericism, that the secret can be so well kept it is eventually lost, and that by setting up a mentality of insiders and outsiders, ire and rivalry can be aroused. So, esotericism might be meant to preserve, but it can also render the transmission of the inner knowledge insecure. Stroumsa states: “esotericism is inherently prone to instability: if the secret is disclosed, it is no longer a secret; if it is not divulged, it loses its

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19. Ibid., *Iamblichus*, 98-99; *De Vita Pythagorica* 17.72.

20. Ibid., *Iamblichus*, 244-45; *De Vita Pythagorica* 35.252.

21. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, 310-11. Whenever I use italics in quoting from Ouspensky, they are always original.

power and impact, and eventually disappears.”<sup>22</sup> He does not explain why what is restricted should necessarily lose any “power.” But this “instability” is an issue for the esotericists; some may readily contemplate that the secrets will be forever lost rather than divulged to any outside the inner circle. Also, the esoteric/exoteric divide practically invites criticism and even ridicule from the excluded side of the fence. In fact, the word “esoteric” is apparently first attested, mockingly, in the work of the satirist Lucian.<sup>23</sup> Since Lucian’s model student was a Peripatetic, Lucian must have presupposed that the division into esoteric and exoteric students was current as referring to students of philosophy, and not restricted to the Pythagoreans.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the word pair must have entered popular knowledge from the philosophy schools, although its first attested instance is not from those schools, but from scornful outsiders.

## 1.2. Esotericism in the New Testament

The phenomenon of a secret reserved for the initiated has associations not only with the Pythagoreans, but also with the plan of the Jerusalem Temple with its courts of concentric holiness,<sup>25</sup> and veils, leading to the most important veil, which shielded the Holy of Holies. Meyers states that the veil was

the fabric that served to divide the inner sanctum (“holy of holies”) of the Tabernacle from the outer sanctum. It guarded the most holy object, the ark, from the profanity of contact with humans. Thus, no one could pass through this veil, not even Levitical priests. . . . Only the high priest could go past it, and only after special cleansing, for the annual atonement ceremonies.<sup>26</sup>

In the instance of the Temple veils, it was death to any unauthorised person to even approach, let alone pass them (Numbers 18:7). It is not remarkable that a veil should represent darkness shielding a dangerous secret and thus

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22. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 6.

23. Hanegraaff, “Esoteric,” 336.

24. Lucian, “Sale of Creeds.”

25. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 33.

26. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Veil of the Temple.”

exclusiveness and safeguarding. The curtaining off of the Holy of Holies also draws attention to the fact that what is marked off is *holy*. The sacred is exalted in the eyes of the faithful precisely by being removed from their gaze and is made accessible only to a trained hierarchic minority.

Stroumsa remarks that: “the existence of esoteric doctrines in early Christianity has often been played down.”<sup>27</sup> This is perhaps especially true for the Gospels. In Matthew 7:6, Jesus is reported to have said: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” This exemplifies four features of esotericism, namely: the sacred is inherently worthy of respect (sacrilege is an evil which discretion can prevent); the secret teaching cannot be understood without preparation; one must be worthy to receive what is holy; and it is dangerous to reveal the sacred to the profane.<sup>28</sup>

These principles are exemplified in the apostolic teaching.<sup>29</sup> Hence in Mark 4:10-11, Jesus says to the twelve apostles, when they are alone: “The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside [*ekeinois de tois exō*] everything comes in parables” (see also Matthew 13:11 and Luke 8:10). Only Mark uses the adverb *exō*, from which the word “exoteric” is derived, but the others preserve the meaning of a favoured inner group admitted to the mysteries in contradistinction to those who are not. This is even clearer in Luke, which refers to *tois de loipois*, “those left behind, the remainder.” Marcus points to the similarity of Daniel 2:27-30 (a dream is vouchsafed to Nebuchadnezzar, but the interpretation is reserved for Daniel); and to some Qumran scrolls where “God forgives the sins of the members of the elect community ... while at the

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27. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 3.

28. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 675-77.

29. They were at one time more prominent in Christianity, but this did change, so that Christianity lost the esoteric principle in its daily life: Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 6-7, 32 and 44-45. I will not pursue that; I am only contending here that the esoteric principle was preserved in the Gospels, and was thus a potential influence on Christian culture and cultures descended from it.

same time allowing, and even causing, outsiders to be led astray.”<sup>30</sup> This dimension of the Gospels was understood and continued in early Christianity, where parts of the cult and also of the doctrine were reserved for baptised Christians.<sup>31</sup>

The preposition “inside” can function both as a necessary part of the narrative, indicating location, and as a symbol pointing to those “outside the community of disciples, the circle of the saved.”<sup>32</sup> Marcus goes on to note that in the Pauline letters “those outside” has become “a term for non-Christians,” as it does in the rabbinic text he references, and to Iamblichus’s *Life of Pythagoras* 35.252 (see above).<sup>33</sup> This is shown in the Pauline epistles, notably in 1 Corinthians 5:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; and Colossians 4:5). Of these, the fullest expression of a dichotomy between insider and outsider is in 1 Corinthians 5:12: “For why should I be judging outsiders [*tous exō*, ‘the ones outside’]? Is it not your business to judge those within [*tous esō*, ‘the ones inside’]?” I would add that those who are consigned to the “outer darkness” in three verses of Matthew, are literally banished to *to skotos to exōteron*.<sup>34</sup>

While Mark 4:11 speaks of those outside, Luke 12:3 speaks of those inside: *en tois temeiois*, in the hidden or secret rooms.<sup>35</sup> Luke writes, “There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops.” This seems to mean that the esoteric and the exoteric are in a dynamic relationship for the enlightening of the exoteric. This explains why hiding is condemned; immediately after the pertinent parable in Mark, Jesus is reported as adding: “Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not

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30. Marcus (2000), 288.

31. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 3–4.

32. Marcus (2000), 299.

33. *Ibid.*, 299.

34. The passages are Matthew 8:12; 22:13; and 25:30; see Danker et al., *Greek English Lexicon* (BDAG), s.v. *exōteros*, *a*, *ov*, 355.

35. BDAG s.v. *tameion*, 988.

to be placed on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light. . . . To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”<sup>36</sup>

In Mark and Luke, the hiding and the manifestation are connected; however, in Mark alone it is unmistakable that the very purpose of hiding is *in order* that something may be revealed (hence the use of the preposition *hina*, twice in 4:22 to indicate purpose), but both Mark and Luke include the following mixed promise and warning: that those who know the secret will receive more, and those who do not be yet more deficient. The presence of the esoteric principle is clear in the Gospel of John (e.g. John 16:24–30 where Jesus says that he has spoken obliquely, but now he will not, and the disciples hail his clearer speech). The word used is *paroimia*, which has two meanings: a pithy saying, and “a brief communication containing truths designed for initiates,” in illustration of which the *Bible Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (BDAG) cites, *inter alia*, John 16:25, and adds that tenth century Byzantine encyclopedia, *The Suda*, defined a *paroimia* as being a *logos apokruphos*, a “hidden word/saying.”<sup>37</sup> Also instructive is the exchange in John 10:24–26 where the critics say that Jesus should speak plainly, and he replies that their lack of understanding is due to their lack of belief. Esoteric truth can stand in open sight yet remain invisible because the outer circle lacks the quality required to see it.

The Gospel teaching was meant to be widely and vigorously disseminated. Thus, Jesus is reported as saying: “What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops” (Matthew 10:27). Inherent in this principle is that the esoteric elite are obliged to share their learning, despite persecution (the context in both Matthew 10:27 and Luke 12:2–3). Esotericism, for all its privileges, also imports responsibilities. Furthermore, the direction of the revelation is necessarily from the esoteric

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36. Mark 4:21–22 and 25; so too Luke 8:16–18; Matthew 5:15 shortens this considerably.

37. BDAG, 779–80.

to the exoteric: from inside to outside, never in the opposite direction. So, does the very promulgation of the Gospel supersede the principle? The dynamic relationship between the esoteric and the exoteric is shown in the fact that a reader or hearer knows of this esoteric principle through the Gospels. This principle, with the combined privilege and burden of esoteric students, was available to every culture which read the New Testament. Religious authority could appropriate the principle to itself, but if that authority was challenged, recourse could be had to the Gospels. The New Testament is innocent of the connection with astrology, magic, and alchemy which “occultism” readily connotes, but the passages we have reviewed were explicitly picked up by H.P. Blavatsky, and she was not too shy to claim that she possessed a higher and esoteric truth.

## 2.1. Esotericism and Occultism in the Twentieth Century

As the nuances of a word are determined by context, we will now consider some examples of how these key terms have been used in modern times. However, first it may help to bear in mind Bogdan’s comment, summarising and finessing previous research:

Western esotericism, as a form of thought, is an abstract construction that only exists as a methodology. There is no such thing as an esoteric tradition *per se*, in which the esoteric form of thought can be traced historically. What we can study . . . are the various currents through which the esoteric form of thought manifests itself.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1.1. H. P. Blavatsky

It is not possible to fully explore the treatment of esotericism by H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), so extensive a use did she make of the exoteric/esoteric word pair, and so complex is the vexed and intertwined question of “the Masters.”<sup>39</sup> The archaeology of her opinions would require a monograph, so complex was her procedure. For example, in this field she relied upon the work of S.F.

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38. Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 21.

39. See for example, Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*.

Dunlap (1825-1905), who specialised in stringing together quotations;<sup>40</sup> and she matched the principle that contemporary religions declined from a once universal esoteric “Wisdom-Religion” with a sort of Indian priority.<sup>41</sup> However, in *The Key to Theosophy*, published in 1889, we have a succinct summary of her teachings. There she uses the Marcan passage we have considered as one support for her view of the necessity of esotericism in any true wisdom teaching

that every ancient religious, or rather philosophical, cult consisted of an esoteric or secret teaching, and an exoteric (outward public) worship. ... Not one of the ancient nations ever imparted through its priests its real philosophical secrets to the masses, but allotted to the latter only the husks. ... Finally, do we not find the same even in early Christianity, among the Gnostics, and even in the teachings of Christ? Did he not speak to the multitudes in parables which had a two-fold meaning, and explain his reasons only to his disciples? “To you,” he says, “it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.” ... Examples might be brought from every country to this effect.<sup>42</sup>

This identification of the esoteric with “the inner side of universal Truth” only means anything because it stands in relation to an exoteric “worldly face of a tradition consisting of various dogmas and rituals created by man.”<sup>43</sup> Later, in *The Key to Theosophy*, she observed that the Theosophical section was divided into exoteric and esoteric sections:

Every lay member is entitled to general instruction if he only wants it; but few are willing to become what is called “working members,” and most prefer to remain the “drones” of Theosophy. Let it be understood that private research is encouraged in the T. S., provided it does not infringe the limit which separates the exoteric from the esoteric, the blind from the conscious magic.<sup>44</sup>

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40. Hanegraaff, “The Theosophical Imagination,” 10–11.

41. Rudbøg, “Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s Esoteric Tradition,” 166–67 and 173. This idea has a lengthy history, and Blavatsky assumes it rather than treats of it systematically, e.g. consider the discussion tucked away in a chapter on “Symbolism and Ideographs” in Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 1.2.1, especially 306–7.

42. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 6–7.

43. Cited in Rudbøg, “Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s Esoteric Tradition,” 166.

44. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 17–18, see also 14.

In fact, she not only instituted an “Esoteric Section,” but also an “Inner Group” of six men and six women for face-to-face instruction.<sup>45</sup> Blavatsky also linked the transmission of esoteric doctrine to the agency of initiates,<sup>46</sup> and distinguished Theosophy from “occultism,” as overlapping sets. Thus, not all Theosophists are occultists, and those occultists with a penchant for black magic can never be Theosophists. However, she allowed that “true” occultists could be Theosophists.<sup>47</sup> This incorporates the features we have been discussing, namely the superiority of the esoteric to the exoteric and the need for the initiated to enlighten those in darkness. In Blavatsky we find an idea that the esoteric centre, so to speak, stands behind historically known religions, philosophies, and teachings. That is, there are layers of esotericism, within each teaching, and then beyond them. This does not seem to have been the case with the Greek schools, or in the New Testament, where the esoteric is understood by reference to a teacher and his selection of an inner group of disciples.

### 2.1.2. P. D. Ouspensky

The same passages from the Gospels were used by P. D. Ouspensky (1878–1947) in his essay “Christianity and the New Testament,” written between 1911 and 1929, and published as a chapter in *A New Model of the Universe* in 1933. In his interpretation these verses show that Jesus taught that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs only to the few, the disciples, and this—as Ouspensky states—is the idea of the “inner circle of humanity or the idea of esotericism.”<sup>48</sup> In Ouspensky’s opinion, esotericism occupies an important position in Christianity, and the chief place in the Gospels.<sup>49</sup> In the preface to the second edition of 1934, Ouspensky acknowledged that an American reviewer had not been alone in

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45. Boag, “The ‘Lost Word’ Key and Esoteric Eschatology,” 490.

46. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 2, 3, 9, 169–70, and 222.

47. *Ibid.*, 15–19.

48. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, 163–64, citing 164.

49. *Ibid.*, 148.

being unable to grasp the idea of esotericism.<sup>50</sup> It is no surprise that Ouspensky wrote that he had learned the idea of esotericism from the Theosophical Society, and it had provided him with a promising perspective for the study of religion and mysticism.<sup>51</sup> Ouspensky developed the idea of esotericism, by linking it to what G.I. Gurdjieff called “higher mind” and different ways of thinking.<sup>52</sup> Some interesting elements appear in his interpretation of occultism (a word that he rarely used):

Magic or occult knowledge is knowledge based upon senses which surpass our five senses and upon a capacity for thinking which surpasses ordinary thinking, *but it is knowledge translated into ordinary logical language, if that is possible or in so far as it is possible.*<sup>53</sup>

This explains why, in the dynamic relationship between the esoteric and the exoteric, the direction of movement is from the inner to the outer: the esoteric receives the higher wisdom and undertakes the delicate task of interpreting it. Ouspensky followed Gurdjieff in considering that a new language was needed for esotericism, albeit a language using the same words, but filling them with more precise meaning, from an objective starting point.<sup>54</sup> Even then, said Ouspensky, certain esoteric insights could be learnt, yet could not be expressed or taught in words at all, requiring us to think with a higher mind and in different categories.<sup>55</sup>

Ouspensky may have been responsible for the formulation attributed to Orage that the “Hidden Learning” is not called the “Hidden Teaching” because the greatest efforts must be made by the pupil to learn the principles. Therefore, “they cannot be taught. But they can be learned.”<sup>56</sup> Certainly, many of the ideas

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50. *Ibid.*, vii.

51. *Ibid.*, 301.

52. The main outlines are to be found in Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, in the chapter “Esotericism and Modern Thought.”

53. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, 16.

54. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 22, 68-71, and 311.

55. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, vii-xiii, 324 and 541.

56. King, *The Oragean Version*, 14. *Ibid.*, 20, states that all the ideas in the book were as taught by Orage unless specially indicated otherwise.

relating to the “public history” as the “history of crime” hail from Ouspensky.<sup>57</sup> This raises the possibility of a perspective on esotericism whereby the esoteric is hidden chiefly by the blindness of the outer circle.

## 2.2. Academic Studies of Western Esotericism

If Blavatsky and Ouspensky were theoreticians of the esoteric, then historian Frances Yates (1899-1981) was a sympathetic observer of the occult. Yates related magic to the occult and to theology of a certain kind; hence she spoke of Apuleius’s turning to the “occult,” especially to an Egyptian-themed occultism in his disillusion with the philosophical schools of the ancient Roman world, and stated that this earned him the ire of Augustine, who viewed his philosophy as demonic in the sense of devilish.<sup>58</sup> Moving forward, Yates distinguished two Renaissance types of magic: one was the old magic, evil, black, and forbidden by the Church. The other was respectable and learned, sanctified by its connection with the philosophical Greek-language Neoplatonic texts and “tinged with occultism.”<sup>59</sup> She concludes that the sixteenth-century monk and hermeticist Giordano Bruno was responsible for the

transformation of the art of memory from a fairly rational technique using images, theorists on which—amongst them Thomas Aquinas himself—had used the Aristotelian dictum (sc. on images from sense impressions), into a magical and religious technique for training the imagination as the instrument for reaching the divine and obtaining divine powers, linking through the imagination with angels, demons, the effigies of stars and inner “statues” of gods and goddesses in contact with celestial things.<sup>60</sup>

Yates does not, so far as I can ascertain, define these terms; but she does describe some important trajectories and, as we shall see, illumines the background to Aleister Crowley’s “magick.” Yates again touched on some of these themes, introducing some

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57. Compare King, *Oragean Version*, 1, with Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, 40 and 344-45.

58. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 10.

59. *Ibid.*, 18.

60. *Ibid.*, 370.

nuances which need not detain us, and offering the following as her understanding of the Renaissance “occult philosophy” with which she was dealing:

This philosophy, or outlook, was compounded of Hermeticism as revived by Marsilio Ficino, to which Pico della Mirandola added a Christianised version of Jewish Cabala. These two trends, associated together, form what I call ‘the occult philosophy’.<sup>61</sup>

Like Yates, historian James Webb (1946–1980) was an observer of the occult. In 1974, when he published *The Occult Underground* (first released as *The Flight from Reason* in 1971), he stated that: “The ‘occult’ has not formed part of the overt concerns of members of the academic fraternity.”<sup>62</sup> He made the point that “it is the very nature of the occult that it cannot exist except in opposition to and interrelation with that critical Establishment.”<sup>63</sup> Webb then made reference to the association of trends which Yates had averred to:

Under this widely misunderstood heading (sc. the occult) are grouped an astonishing collection of subjects: hypnotism, magic, astrology, water-diving, ‘secret’ societies, and a multitude of similar topics of doubtful intellectual respectability.<sup>64</sup>

The Theosophical Society furnished Webb with an example of a “prototype occult society,” illustrating his view of occultism as a “flight from Reason” (i.e., a reaction against the Enlightenment). For Webb, the Theosophical Society

is the epitome of the pseudo-intellectual... the disseminator and distorter of countless non-rational theories of the universe—for as it combined Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and diverse manufactured notions into one eccentric whole, none of these doctrines was ever binding on a single member.<sup>65</sup>

By the time he wrote *The Occult Establishment*, published in 1976, Webb had realised that “no one had bothered to discover *what ‘the occult’ in fact is.*”<sup>66</sup> His

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61. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 1, see also 83–84.

62. Webb, *The Occult Underground*, 1.

63. *Ibid.*, 2.

64. *Ibid.*, 11.

65. *Ibid.*, 104–5.

66. *Ibid.*, 1.

own view had expanded, but was still fundamentally the same; seeing historical occultism in Europe and the USA as an “underground of rejected knowledge, comprising heretical religious positions, defeated social schemes, abandoned sciences, and neglected modes of speculation . . .”<sup>67</sup> In the same volume, he even links “mysticism and the religious impulse” with occultism, on the basis that in the 1930s (especially in Germany and England) these three qualities characterised what he called “the illuminated attitude,” which was anti-Establishment in being “anti-individualist, antimaterialist, and antirationalist.”<sup>68</sup> Many ideas of lofty lineage were included in this mix, namely Hasidic and Catholic mysticism.<sup>69</sup> Webb also observed that historically many of these theories, including even Blavatsky’s Theosophy, had a significant racial component.<sup>70</sup> I rather imagine that racist ideas are now emphatically the property of fringe movements. However clearly Webb may weave his presentation, the words “occult,” “mysticism,” and “religious impulse” are simply not understood as equivalents. Further, “rejected knowledge” is not a workable definition: it begs the question of whether we are speaking of knowledge at all. “Rejected knowledge” would appear to cover the ridicule heaped on Ignaz Semmelweis when he discovered the true cause of puerperal fever, but he was not an occultist. The question is really which ideas were rejected, by whom, and why.

Also, one might wonder whether the “occult” is so much rejected as *rejecting*. For example, Jean-Pierre Laurant sees both esotericism and occultism as desiring to find an autonomous outlook independent of all other disciplines, which would also recover the ancient knowledge, whether understood as “a *prisca theologia* or *philosophia perennis*,” with “esotericism” referring more to religious and philosophic systems which supported the techniques and practices of

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67. *Ibid.*, 10.

68. *Ibid.*, 276.

69. *Ibid.*, 277 and 290.

70. *Ibid.*, 278.

occultism.<sup>71</sup> The idea of an ancient theology and a perennial philosophy alludes to a perspective which Blavatsky adopted. The Latin word *perennis* suggests a continuing tradition. This tradition can be identified with the idea of an esoteric circle, which stands apart from the “history of crime,” and the Masters from whom comes the right to teach with authority.

### 2.2.1. Faivre and Hanegraaff

Antoine Faivre proposed “a system of criteria . . . [which] bears on these esoteric ‘currents.’ It does not pretend to be more than a methodological tool, subject to refinement and correction.”<sup>72</sup> He went on to aver that esotericism is not: “a specific genre, (rather) it is a form of thought.”<sup>73</sup> At this point there is already significant obscurity: what does he mean by a “specific genre” and a “form of thought,” and what is the difference between them? Uninstructed, I would have imagined that a “specific genre” was a parade-ground example of a “form of thought.” Faivre then makes a series of assertions about the use of the term “esotericism.” They are not supported by citation or illustration; one has to trust or not that his sample is representative, and that the discussion will rather hover above the concrete.

Faivre alleges that: “The lexical content of the word ‘esotericism’ is slight. (‘Eso’ means ‘inside’ and ‘ter’ implies an opposition.)”<sup>74</sup> First, of all, this etymology is not quite correct, as we saw above; in particular, “ter” is a part of the comparative suffix, it does not imply “opposition.” Then, how is the “lexical content” of the word “slight”? What would render the “lexical content” more substantial? If Faivre’s treatment has been vague and based on assertion, it becomes baffling when he writes the following:

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71. Laurant, “The Primitive Characteristics of Nineteenth-Century Esotericism,” 277.

72. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 3.

73. *Ibid.*, 4.

74. *Ibid.*

In the modern West what we may call “esotericism” is a form of thought identifiable by the presence of six fundamental characteristics or components, distributed in varying proportions inside its vast, concrete, historical context. Four are “intrinsic,” meaning that they must all be present for a given material to be classified under the rubric of esotericism. . . . To them two more components are added that we shall call secondary, i.e., not fundamental, but frequently found in conjunction with the others.<sup>75</sup>

If we are to speak of between four and six characteristics found within a historical context, then we are not speaking of a “form of thought” but a philosophy or outlook which can be identified by an objective analysis of its tenets. I would have imagined that then, once those characteristics are identified, one’s approach to them exemplifies a “form of thought.” Faivre’s characteristics are 1. “correspondences,” or relations between and within microcosm and macrocosm; 2. a “living nature” which can be “saved,” and wherein the correspondences can be traced; 3. imagination and mediation (and mediation to reality through imagination); 4. belief in transmutation; and then 5. the practice of concordance (for example, teaching a universal “ancient wisdom”); and 6. transmission, which often includes initiation.<sup>76</sup> It is striking that the one element here which is intrinsic to the idea of the esoteric, as defined in dictionaries, is the sixth—one of Faivre’s “secondary” characteristics. Although “esoteric” is an adjective, and “esotericism” a noun, the two are yet intimately related, and I would not be confident that such a description can be satisfactory. I will not critique his treatment of “occultism.” His handling of historical matters is, of course, erudite, but his distinction of occultism from esotericism is merely asserted and has been concisely critiqued.<sup>77</sup>

There is an important treatment of these terms in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, published in 2006. Hanegraaff there states the following:

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75. *Ibid.*, 10.

76. Faivre, “Introduction I,” xv-xx.

77. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 33-35. For a concise critique, see Hanegraaff, “Occult/Occultism,” 887.

a. According to typological constructs as commonly used in the context of religious studies, “esoteric” and “esotericism” refers to certain types of religious activity, characterized by specific structural features. Thus the term is commonly associated with the notion of “secrecy,” and then stands for the practice in various religious contexts of reserving certain kinds of salvific knowledge for a selected elite of initiated disciples . . . another, related typological understanding of the term . . . associates it with the deeper, “inner mysteries of religion” as opposed to its merely external or “exoteric” dimensions. . . . Such approaches tend to promote the esoteric or “inner” dimension of religion as its true core, and oppose it to more “superficial,” merely “exoteric” dimensions, such as social institutions and official dogmas . . .

b. According to historical constructs, “esotericism” is understood not as a type of religion or a structural dimension of it, but as a general label for certain specific currents in Western culture that display certain similarities and are historically related. For this reason, and in order to avoid confusion with typological usage, most scholars now prefer to speak of “Western esotericism.”<sup>78</sup>

Hanegraaff states that, in the present dictionary, “esotericism” will be employed not in its typological but in its historical meaning, “as a general label for a series of specific currents in Western culture that display certain similarities and are historically related.”<sup>79</sup> He then adds the following:

[A]s in the study of “religion” generally—scholars in this domain often strongly disagree about abstract theoretical definitions although they in fact share a broad consensus about the historical phenomena covered by the term. Specialists may quibble about boundary issues, disagreeing about whether this or that specific current or personality should or should not be included under the broad labels “Gnosis” and “Western Esotericism,” but experience shows that by and large they think of the same domain and the same currents when they are using these terms.<sup>80</sup>

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78. Hanegraaff, “Esotericism,” 337. I am aware of the academic discussion of “secrecy,” but shall not pursue it here. See: Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 32–33; Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 40–48; Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 241–44.

79. Hanegraaff, “Introduction,” xi.

80. *Ibid.*

In effect, Hanegraaff recognises “Western esotericism” as a proper noun, while “esotericism” alone remains an adjective. Yet, one might query how one distinguishes which currents and personalities should be included as “Western esotericism” unless there is a typological basis. I am not sure of the soundness of a distinction between “typological” and “historical” senses of a word. I would have thought that the historical must be related to the typological and the typological only comes into view through an examination of historical usage.<sup>81</sup> Can the category of “Western esotericism” change over time, then? For example, I have not yet encountered glossolalia, or a form of the sacrament of confession, as elements in Western esotericism, but could they come to be? And if so, I would suggest, this must be because they typologically corresponded to something essential about Western esotericism. So, I would suggest that the history of the term, especially its original association with the Pythagorean disciples, serves as a touchstone for recognising modern esotericism.

Hanegraaff provides a clear and thorough account of “occultism,” concluding that as used today, it is basically a subset of “esotericism”:

In current scholarly usage ... the term occultism tends to be used as referring specifically to 19th-century developments within the general history of Western esotericism, as well as their derivations through the 20th century. In a first, purely descriptive sense, it is used as referring to the specifically French currents in the wake of Éliphas Lévi, flourishing in the “neo-martinist” context of Papus and related manifestations of fin-de-siècle esotericism. In a second, analytic and typological sense, it can be seen as referring not only to these currents as such, but to the type of esotericism that they represent, and that is also characteristic of most other esoteric currents from ca. the mid-19th century on (such as e.g. spiritualism, modern Theosophy, or new magical currents in the lineage of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, up to and including such recent developments as the New Age movement). From such a perspective, occultism has been defined as comprising ‘all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted

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81. This is a different point from the following important observation: “historicist and typological programmes are not divided over the comparative method *as such*, but rather over how, when, and why it should be applied.” Asprem, “Beyond the West,” 20. However, it is another way of showing that the differences between these two approaches are perhaps illusory.

world or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted world'.<sup>82</sup>

Writing in 2007, David S. Katz could find no clear distinction between our terms:

You say esoteric; I say occult. . . . Let us keep our options open, and accept for the time being [that] . . . 'An occult quality is one which is hidden from the senses, as opposed to a manifest quality which is readily apprehended . . . it would come to include the more supernatural elements of normative religion, such as providence, prophecy and millenarianism'.<sup>83</sup>

Not surprisingly, perhaps, he goes on to describe the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as composed of esotericists, and Gurdjieff as an occultist, whose movement made the transition to a New Age religion,<sup>84</sup> the opposite of my conclusion (but if the terms are interchangeable, then of course there is no real opposition). The chief weakness of Katz's definition is its broadness, e.g. including providence. On his terms, atoms and magnetic fields pertain to the occult, which would be nonsensical in contemporary usage. Then, if occultism has come to include "the more supernatural elements of normative religion," does it now *necessarily* imply them? The danger is that the "occult" starts to mean whatever one chooses to make it mean: a point Hanegraaff made of one popular 1971 effort.<sup>85</sup> A misleading word can send scholars off after a will-o-the-wisp; the fate of those who pursued study of the "Christian mysteries," according to Stroumsa.<sup>86</sup>

This illustrates, I suggest, the need to look for a differential diagnosis. Two conditions can appear the same, but there may be a point which distinguishes them. I suggest that as between "esotericism" and "occultism," the differential standard is an openness to alchemy, astrology, and magic. For this reason, I have selected the influential figures G.I. Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley as real-life subjects for study.

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82. Hanegraaff, "Occult/Occultism," 888.

83. Katz, *The Occult Tradition*, 16.

84. *Ibid.*, 172-73.

85. Hanegraaff, "Occult/Occultism," 888.

86. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, 29.

### 3.1. Gurdjieff and Crowley

I have three related aims in this section: most importantly, to apply the above research to Gurdjieff and Crowley, asking whether their systems could be considered as esoteric, occult, both, or neither? The next purpose is to study the alleged similarities between the two; and third, to set out Gurdjieff's rather distinctive take on esotericism and occultism. However, it may be more methodical to commence in reverse order. Gurdjieff and Crowley are fine examples for comparison; being contemporaries active in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, they allow for synchronic comparison.<sup>87</sup>

#### 3.1.1. Gurdjieff on Esotericism and Occultism

My main task in this section is to treat of the topic of Gurdjieff and his relationship to esotericism and occultism with some accuracy and with methodological soundness. In what follows, it would be easy to single out egregious errors in writers who speak authoritatively, and even as former pupils of a Gurdjieff-lineage group. For example, P. T. Mistlberger studied in such a group, and does present some sound insights, such as the importance of Ouspensky, Orage, and Bennett to Gurdjieff, and the possibility that Gurdjieff himself devised the ritual idiots toast without recourse to supposed Sufi rites.<sup>88</sup> However, he states that Ouspensky first met Gurdjieff when he attended a performance of Gurdjieff's ballet, the *Struggle of the Magicians*.<sup>89</sup> Of course, Ouspensky attended no such ballet, because it was never staged. In fact, Ouspensky's account of his first meeting Gurdjieff, and his mentions of how the ballet was never presented, are so prominent in *In Search of the Miraculous* that one could legitimately ask whether Mistlberger had actually read the whole of the book or only mined

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87. A fuller study would take into account the four broad modes of comparison outlined in Asprem, "Beyond the West"; see 22 for a helpful diagram.

88. Mistlberger, *Three Dangerous Magi*, 228, and 430 on his pupils, and 366 on the toasts.

89. *Ibid.*, 1 and 44 for Mistlberger as a pupil; and 43 and 54 for his remarks about Ouspensky.

it for quotations.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, Mistlberger's errors about the "higher centres" are such that he manages to miss the fact that the higher emotional centre has nothing to do with true love or some "higher aspect of the Heart"<sup>91</sup> but with self-consciousness, and from a practical perspective, the most important difference with regard to the higher centres is the substance with which they work.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, an article by Constance A. Jones titled "Gnostic Sensibility in Gurdjieff's 'Work'," states that: "Consistent with Western esoteric, alchemical, and Hermetic traditions, the (Gurdjieff) practice follows the principle that the human birthright includes vast possibilities for development of consciousness, beyond conceptions of ordinary consciousness. In these characteristics, the Gurdjieff Work is properly considered an esoteric school, with gnostic sensibilities."<sup>93</sup> However, the pages referred to do not support a single one of these assertions, and neither does Jones define any of the critical terms, especially not "Gnostic sensibilities," nor indicate to which aspect of the traditions named she refers.

The word "sensibilities" is the plural of "sensibility." Considering usages of the English language in the United States, the online Merriam-Webster has the plural "sensibilities" under "sensibility (3)" as meaning "peculiar susceptibility to a pleasurable or painful impression (as from praise or a slight)—often used in plural."<sup>94</sup> Its first meaning is "ability to receive sensations" its second is "peculiar susceptibility to a pleasurable or painful impression;" and the fourth is "refined or excessive sensitiveness in emotion and taste with especial responsiveness to the pathetic."<sup>95</sup> I cannot readily discern which of these meanings Jones may have had in mind. Employing a word

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90. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 7-8, 16-17, 382-86, where he notes that dances and music from the ballet were presented much later, in the 1920s, long after their first meeting.

91. Mistlberger, *Three Dangerous Magi*, 130.

92. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 142, and 194-95. To set out and correct all Mistlberger's errors on the higher centres would require another article.

93. Jones, "Gnostic Sensibility in Gurdjieff's 'Work'," 518, referring to Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 222-31.

94. Merriam-Webster, "Sensibility."

95. *Ibid.*

like “sensibilities” allows her to intimate that there is a connection without having to establish it. The term itself being rather cloudy, any misty line of argument suffices.

I have recently treated of the argument that Gurdjieff’s system bore some resemblance to Gnostic systems.<sup>96</sup> I shall not repeat here my critique of that contention. Suffice to say, I find the material offered as evidence points rather in the opposite direction. Further, it is not wrong to speak of Gurdjieff saying that human consciousness has possibilities beyond those exhibited in ordinary consciousness; but it is misleading. Gurdjieff’s starting point was that as we are we do not remember ourselves, we are effectively machines, and our “consciousness” is at best temporary, partial, and generally hallucinatory, being in fact, a form of hypnotic sleep.<sup>97</sup> He offered these blunt observations: “It is necessary to distinguish *consciousness* from the *possibility of consciousness*. We have only the possibility of consciousness and rare flashes of it” and “as we have no consciousness we have no conscience.”<sup>98</sup> To not state Gurdjieff’s position in his bleak phrases or their equivalents conceals the real differences between Gurdjieff and the Gnostics or anything “gnostic.” The entire article in fact assimilates Gurdjieff to a paradigm he does not share, even when quoting him.

Gurdjieff’s most important and sustained treatment of the topic of esotericism, then, exactly what Jones purports to write of, is missing from the article. This quotation is lengthy, but it is central to understanding Gurdjieff’s system. Ouspensky reports Gurdjieff to have said the following:

The humanity to which we belong namely, the whole of historic and prehistoric humanity known to science and civilization, in reality constitutes only the *outer circle of humanity*, within which there are several other circles . . . we can imagine the whole of humanity, known as well as unknown to us, as consisting so to speak of several concentric circles.

The inner circle is called the ‘esoteric’; this circle consists of people who have attained the highest development possible for man, each one of whom possesses individuality in

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96. Azize, “Assessing Borrowing,” 21–27.

97. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 116–17, 141–45, 155.

98. *Ibid.*, 117 and 155.

the fullest degree, that is to say, an indivisible 'I,' all forms of consciousness possible for man, full control over these states of consciousness, the whole of knowledge possible for man, and a free and independent will. They cannot perform actions opposed to their understanding or have an understanding which is not expressed by actions. At the same time there can be no discords among them, no differences of understanding. . . .

The next circle is called the 'mesoteric', that is to say, the middle. People who belong to this circle possess all the qualities possessed by the members of the esoteric circle with the sole difference that their knowledge is of a more theoretical character . . . They know and understand many things which have not yet found expression in their actions. They know more than they do. But their understanding is precisely as exact as, and therefore precisely identical with, the understanding of the people of the esoteric circle.

The third circle is called the 'exoteric', that is, the outer, because it is the outer circle of the inner part of humanity. The people who belong to this circle possess much of that which belongs to people of the esoteric and mesoteric circles but their cosmic knowledge is of a more philosophical character, that is to say, it is more abstract than the knowledge of the mesoteric circle. A member of the *mesoteric* circle *calculates*, a member of the exoteric circle *contemplates*. Their understanding may not be expressed in actions. But there cannot be differences in understanding between them. What one understands all the others understand. In literature which acknowledges the existence of esotericism, humanity is usually divided into two circles only and the 'exoteric circle' as opposed to the 'esoteric,' is called ordinary life. In reality, as we see, the 'exoteric circle' is something very far from us and very high. For ordinary man this is already 'esotericism.'

The 'outer circle' is the circle of mechanical humanity to which we belong and which alone we know. The first sign of this circle is that among people who belong to it there is not and there cannot be a common understanding. . . . This circle is sometimes called the circle of the 'confusion of tongues.' . . . In this circle mutual understanding between people is impossible excepting in rare exceptional moments or in matters having no great significance, and which are confined to the limits of the given *being*.<sup>99</sup>

On this definition, Gurdjieff did not and could never have considered his own to be an esoteric group; each member would have had to have completed the fullness of conscious evolution possible for a human.<sup>100</sup> However, his statement

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99. *Ibid.*, 310-11.

100. King, *The Oragean Version*, 7 states that in 1930-1931, Gurdjieff "constituted separate

that we belong to and only know the outer circle need not be taken literally: on 9 December 1930, he said in answer to a question about magnetism that in a mesoteric group a real answer could be given to the question.<sup>101</sup> This suggests that he considered he was speaking to an exoteric group. He had, after all, stated that such a group would be “esoteric” in comparison with the balance of humanity.

When Gurdjieff first met Ouspensky, and the question of secrecy was raised, Gurdjieff asked: “But what are your own ideas on the subject? . . . One must not talk too much. There are things said only for disciples.”<sup>102</sup> Gurdjieff does not there state the reason for any reservation, but Ouspensky’s comeback deals with this:

[I]f, in principle, you do not wish to make a secret of your ideas and care only that they should not be transmitted in a distorted form, then I could accept such a condition and wait until I had a better understanding of your teaching. I came once across a group of people who were engaged in various scientific experiments. . . . They made no secret of their work. But they made it a condition that no one would have the right to speak of or describe any experiment unless he was able to carry it out himself. Until he was able to repeat the experiment himself he had to keep silent.<sup>103</sup>

Gurdjieff replied, “There could be no better formulation . . . and if you will keep such a rule this question will never arise between us.”<sup>104</sup> He went on to say that he would not, in any event, trust even pupils with secrets in early stages, as “to be able to keep a secret a man must *know himself* and he must *be*. And a man such as all men are is very far from this. Sometimes we make temporary conditions

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groups to which he gave the titles of ‘esoteric,’ ‘mesoteric,’ and ‘exoteric’ but as between which I was never able to distinguish any difference at all.” The titles of these groups cannot follow the definitions Gurdjieff gave to Ouspensky.

101. Gurdjieff, *Early Talks*, 403.

102. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 13-14.

103. *Ibid.*, 14. Incidentally, it seems that Gurdjieff and Ouspensky had, even at this early stage, already agreed that Ouspensky would write the book which was to be published as *In Search of the Miraculous*; Gurdjieff, the teacher, asks Ouspensky, the pupil, for his views, and implicit in Ouspensky’s response is that he will eventually write.

104. *Ibid.*, 14. And this, incidentally, shows how much Ouspensky did understand: Gurdjieff’s dismay that Ouspensky did not publish, noted in Azize, *Gurdjieff*, 29-33, means that Gurdjieff considered Ouspensky was “able to repeat the experiment himself,” that is, to pass on the teaching.

with people *as a test*. Usually they are broken very soon but we never give any serious secret to a man we do not trust, so it does not matter much.”<sup>105</sup> This was amplified much later, when Gurdjieff said that he had no desire either to keep secret what was not “essentially a secret” or to deprive students of the right to speak to their circle; rather, the rules against disclosure were necessary because, as students should soon see that (a) they could not transmit what they had learned without distortion; (b) if they tried they would be misunderstood, and (c) thereby prevent their friends from ever being able to understand the ideas themselves, or approach the work; and (d) lose the benefit of the rule of silence because the inevitable internal resistance to that rule helps people to remember themselves, for “Only a man who can keep silent when it is necessary can be master of himself.”<sup>106</sup>

Gurdjieff also states that one who improperly discloses secrets will be expelled from the group, and that “all the members of a group are friends and brothers, but if one of them leaves, and especially if he is sent away by the teacher, he ceases to be a friend and a brother and at once becomes a stranger, as one who is cut off.”<sup>107</sup> He immediately modifies this by saying that those who leave are strangers as regards the work of the group, yet, to avoid the inevitable frictions, where there are relations in a group, if one leaves the other must too.<sup>108</sup> These rules are reminiscent of the Pythagorean norms.

Gurdjieff also then spoke of “professional occultism” as being equivalent to “professional charlatanism,” among whom he numbered “spiritualists, healers, clairvoyants, and so on” as people who were not suitable for his work, a consideration he reinforced by warning Ouspensky that they would come to learn solely to later promote themselves.<sup>109</sup> Yet Gurdjieff distinguished these occultists from others, and of those his opinion was not so scathing. Telling

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105. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 15.

106. *Ibid.*, 223-24.

107. *Ibid.*, 231.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*, 243-44, see also 222 for more criticism of occultists who had a little knowledge, but not enough to obtain an accurate picture.

Ouspensky that there were at least four principle lines of knowledge, the Hebrew, Egyptian, Persian, and Hindu, Gurdjieff added the following:

[T]he theoretical statements which form the basis of one line can sometimes be explained from the point of view of statements of another line and vice versa. For this reason it is sometimes possible to form a certain intermediate line between two adjacent lines. But in the absence of a complete knowledge and understanding of the fundamental lines, such intermediate ways may easily lead to a mixing of lines, to confusion and error.

In addition to these there are two lines known in Europe, namely *theosophy* and so-called *Western occultism*, which have resulted from a mixture of the fundamental lines. Both lines bear in themselves grains of truth, but neither of them possesses full knowledge and therefore attempts to bring them to practical realization give only negative results.<sup>110</sup>

Gurdjieff's idea of a line of Western occultism, bearing some truth taken from more venerable traditions, may make Gurdjieff the ancestor of the idea of "Western Esotericism." In other respects, his ideas are redolent of Blavatsky's in seeing an esoteric centre apart from the current of ordinary life, and also of the Pythagorean dispensation, e.g. in the probation of students and in the restriction of relations with those who leave the group. Now we come to Gurdjieff's ideas on magic as follows:

There is mechanics, that is, what 'happens,' and there is 'doing.' 'Doing' is magic. . . . But there can be a falsification, an imitation of the outward appearance of 'doing,' which cannot give any objective results but which can deceive naïve people and produce in them faith, infatuation, enthusiasm, and even fanaticism.

That is why in true work, in true 'doing,' the producing of infatuation in people is not allowed. What you call black magic is based on infatuation and on playing upon human weakness. Black magic does not in any way mean magic of evil. I have already said earlier that no one ever does anything for the sake of evil, in the interests of evil. Everyone always does everything in the interests of good *as he understands it*. . . . Black magic may be quite altruistic, may strive after the good of humanity. . . . But what can be called black magic has always one definite characteristic. This characteristic is the tendency to use people for some, even the best of aims, *without their knowledge and understanding*, either by producing in them faith and infatuation or by acting upon them through fear.<sup>111</sup>

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110. *Ibid.*, 285-86.

111. *Ibid.*, 227.

Gurdjieff went on to say that a “black magician” had learned something, but was only half-educated, perhaps having left a school prematurely, convinced he knew all he had to and could now direct the work of others. Yet at least something could be learned from these magicians. Even worse, said Gurdjieff, were “occult” and Theosophical societies which had no contact at all with a genuine school: “Their work simply consists in aping. . . . One man feels himself to be a ‘teacher,’ others feel that they are ‘pupils,’ and everyone is satisfied.”<sup>112</sup> However, while Gurdjieff did say in response to questions about magic that “doing” is “magic,” he never himself introduced this idea, and he never spoke of magic. That is, he never purported to be a magician or to teach magic. Rather, he basically said that the concept of magic was variable and dispensable. What was important, Gurdjieff said, was “doing.”

Most extraordinary, however, is Gurdjieff’s rider about how *the esoteric inner circle exerts a cultural influence even upon the outer circle of humanity*:

Man lives in life *under the law of accident* and under two kinds of influences again governed by accident.

The first kind are influences created *in life itself* or by life itself. Influences of race, nation, country, climate, family, education, society, profession, manners and customs, wealth, poverty, current ideas, and so on. The second kind are influences created *outside this life*, influences of the inner circle, or esoteric influences—influences, that is, created under different laws, although also on the earth. These influences differ from the former, first of all in being *conscious* in their origin. This means that they have been created consciously by conscious men for a definite purpose. Influences of this kind are usually embodied in the form of religious systems and teachings, philosophical doctrines, works of art, and so on.

They are let out into life for a definite purpose, and become mixed with influences of the first kind. But it must be borne in mind that these influences are conscious only in their origin. Coming into the general vortex of life they fall under the general law of accident and begin to act *mechanically*, that is, they may act on a certain definite man or may not act; they may reach him or they may not. In undergoing change and distortion in life through transmission and interpretation, influences of the second kind

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112. Ibid.

are transformed into influences of the first kind, that is, they become, as it were, merged into influences of the first kind.

... [I]f a man in receiving these influences begins to discriminate between them and put on one side those which are not created in life itself, then gradually discrimination becomes easier and after a certain time a man can no longer confuse them with the ordinary influences of life.

The results of the influences whose source lies outside life collect together within him, he *remembers* them together, *feels* them together ... and after a certain time they form within him a kind of *magnetic centre*, which begins to attract to itself kindred influences and in this manner it grows. If the magnetic centre receives sufficient nourishment, and if there is no strong resistance on the part of the other sides of a man's personality which are the result of influences created in life, the magnetic centre begins to influence a man's orientation, obliging him to turn round and even to move in a certain direction. ...

If the magnetic centre works rightly and if a man really searches, or even if he does not search actively yet feels rightly, he may meet *another man* who knows the way and who is connected directly or through other people with a centre existing outside the law of accident, from which proceed the ideas which created the magnetic centre.<sup>113</sup>

Gurdjieff then states that the possibilities for the seeker depend upon “the teacher's situation in relation to the esoteric centre.”<sup>114</sup> Further:

The results of the work of a man who takes on himself the role of teacher does not depend on whether or not he knows exactly the origin of what he teaches, but very much depends on whether his ideas come *in actual fact* from the esoteric centre and whether he himself understands and can distinguish *esoteric ideas*, that is, ideas of objective knowledge, from subjective, scientific, and philosophical ideas.<sup>115</sup>

Gurdjieff paints a picture of an esoteric centre producing influences which enter into the course of general life and affect different people differently. This dovetails with the suggestion made here that we can miss the full meaning of “esoteric” and “esotericism” if we focus too narrowly on the appearance of the

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113. *Ibid.*, 199–201.

114. *Ibid.*, 202.

115. *Ibid.*

words. Whether or not one accepts that there is such a thing as the esoteric centre, or considers “esoterica” to be productions of the same nature as all others, the point is that the idea of esotericism can be circulated through religion and culture generally, as I have suggested we find with the esoteric dimension of the Gospels. Gurdjieff developed the concept of “esotericism” further and more fruitfully than any of the writers we have mentioned, allowing a place for the “outer circle of humanity,” the exoteric circle within, the introduction of the concept of a mesoteric centre, and pointing to the relationship between the esoteric centre and outer culture. This adds another dimension to the dynamic between exoteric and esoteric.

I have elsewhere contended, at some length, that Gurdjieff can be seen as a mystic.<sup>116</sup> On the basis of the above, I would suggest that Gurdjieff could also be seen as an esotericist, and perhaps even, on his own definition, as a magician, except that he subordinated that concept within his own system, and it did not mean much to him. On his understanding of esotericism, any mystic could be thought of as an esotericist. The term that does not sit well on him is “occultist.”

### 3.2. Aleister Crowley

Although I have not made a detailed study of it, I have often conjectured that, in the English-speaking world at least, conceptions of magic took on darker hues as a result of the career of Aleister Crowley. A striking aspect of Crowley’s career is that he managed to accomplish and write what he did in the face of a particularly imposing obstacle, a foe bleaker and more forbidding than Kangchenjunga; his own self-destructive impulses. At his funeral, Louis Wilkinson spoke of “the variety and the contradictoriness of the elements in his composition.”<sup>117</sup> Even sympathetic commentators describe his “inner duality”

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116. Azize, *Gurdjieff*, passim.

117. Campbell, *Thelema*, 57.

and contradictions.<sup>118</sup> When speaking of Crowley, “contradictions” seems mild: something like “antagonisms” seems called for. Having read all the available literature by Crowley, much of the academic output, and some of the rest, the salient fact is his self-centredness. We could begin with his seeing himself as the bearer of a new religion which would define the following epoch, the “Aeon of Horus.” The term “Messiah” does not do justice to his ambitions,<sup>119</sup> so personal was his obsession with Jesus. He was, in effect, working with the right hand to set himself up as the new Jesus,<sup>120</sup> but all the while, with his left hand, he set out, quite as deliberately, to engrave himself in the public consciousness as the destructive demon of the Apocalypse.<sup>121</sup> He gave his new religion and his abbey in Sicily the name “Thelema,” which is thought by a member of the contemporaneous Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O) to derive not from Rabelais but from the New Testament.<sup>122</sup> The “three forms of the Thelemic movement” include the A.:A., the O.T.O., and the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica.<sup>123</sup>

Although Crowley made comments which would indicate a respect for Christ but not for Christians, there are many passages which make this seem disingenuous (for example, “With my hawk’s head I peck at the eyes of Jesus as he hangs upon the cross”).<sup>124</sup> The invocation of “Lord Christ” and references to him in *White Stains* (1898) and *Bagh i Muattar* (1910) are simply inconsistent with any respect for Jesus, however considered, from whatever angle. He spoke,

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118. Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 41-42, 66-68, 421; Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 2, 8-9, 24, 44-46, speaks of “inconsistency.” Indeed.

119. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 17-18, uses it in speaking of Crowley’s attempt to discredit Krishnamurti “whom he saw as a false messiah.” The two men mixed in rather different worlds.

120. Crowley’s rather grand ideas of the significance of his publication of *The Book of the Law* are collected in Bogdan, “Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon,” 89, 98 and 98n32.

121. Bogdan, “Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon,” 95-96.

122. Readdy, *One Truth and One Spirit*, 17-19. Readdy, 353, regards the organisations the A.:A., the O.T.O., and the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica as the “three forms of the Thelemic movement.”

123. Readdy, *One Truth and One Spirit*, 353.

124. Crowley, *Book of the Law*, III.34.

on several occasions, on Jesus as a figure of legend.<sup>125</sup> Crowley's more measured comments about Jesus only serve to elevate Crowley, as when in the preliminary remarks to *Book 4*, Crowley writes: "Jesus Christ was brought up on the fables of the 'Old Testament', and so was compelled to ascribe his experiences to 'Jehovah', although his gentle spirit could have nothing in common with the monster."<sup>126</sup> That is, Jesus was a kind man, but limited by his formation. Overall, the impression is that he wished to project an image of respecting Jesus but not Christians, when in fact he despised both.

Of course, as others have remarked, in all of this there are unceasing signs of a rebellion against his Christian upbringing, but also as a strange fidelity to it, for his new religion was an "ape" of Christianity. Bogdan has shown how Crowley adapted the religious evolutionary schemes which were then current, especially that of Frazer, as set out in his *The Golden Bough*,<sup>127</sup> and adopted two key elements from his family's faith:

Although Crowley rebelled against the religious views of his parents when still in his teens—and continued this revolt throughout his life—it is striking that two characteristic aspects of the religious worldview of the Plymouth Brethren, the importance placed on the study of Holy Scripture and the notion of dispensationalism, are echoed in the religious system of Thelema. In Crowley's new religion the Holy Scripture of the Bible was replaced by *The Holy Books of Thelema*. . . . The new dispensation was not that of the imminent period before the return of Christ, but rather the Aeon of Horus, formally inaugurated at the vernal equinox in 1904.<sup>128</sup>

Even a sympathetic scholar like Marco Pasi writes of Crowley that "it is certainly legitimate to speak of a flight from Christianity."<sup>129</sup> *Pax* Pasi, the idea of "flight" is not correct: his obsession with Christianity tethered him to it. Crowley orbited around Christianity all his life. I would select but ten signs of his fixation with Jesus and Christianity:

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125. Crowley, "Letter C."

126. Crowley, *Book 4*, 14.

127. *Ibid.*, 90-94.

128. Bogdan, "Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon," 99.

129. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 2.

1. He took the title “the Great Beast 666,” and often had a female consort whom he called “the Scarlet Woman,” both from the Book of Revelation.<sup>130</sup> His self-identification was therefore drawn from the Christian scripture.
2. His close pupil, Israel Regardie, considered that Crowley’s “magical name” *Perdurabo* (I will endure), was probably an “intrusion—however unconscious—of his early religious training among the Plymouth Brethren. For in Mark 13:3–37 there appears: ‘... But he who endures to the end will be saved’.”<sup>131</sup>
3. His signature motto, “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law... Love is the law, love under will,”<sup>132</sup> subverts Matthew 22:37–40, where Love of God, then of one’s neighbour as oneself, is taught as what the “whole of the law and the prophets” depends on.
4. He stated that “my Will is to be the Logos of the Aeon,”<sup>133</sup> and while “astral travelling” (invariably if not always on drugs),<sup>134</sup> he saw Jesus the Logos, scenes from Jesus’ life, and “behold I also was crucified!”<sup>135</sup> He saw parallels between some of his own work and Christ’s curing of the sick.<sup>136</sup> To a significant extent, then, his self-identification was actually with Jesus.
5. He founded a “Church” with a “Gnostic Mass.”<sup>137</sup> The text is called, in terms which indicate a preoccupation with the Catholic Church: *Liber XV Ecclesiae Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae*, while its “Cakes of Light” are “an equivalent of the Eucharist.”<sup>138</sup> The Greek words over the elements slightly

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130. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 28–29.

131. Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle*, 112.

132. Crowley, *Book of the Law*, I.40 and I.57, see also III.60: “There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt.”

133. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 285.

134. Pasi, “Varieties of Magical Experience,” 55 notes Crowley’s use of “psychoactive substances during all his life, often in a ritualized, magical context.” See also Djurdjevic “The Great Beast as a Tantric Hero,” 122 and 123. For Blavatsky’s use of narcotics, see Hanegraaff, “The Theosophical Imagination,” 13–14.

135. Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 56.

136. *Ibid.*, 256.

137. *Ibid.*, 401, 405, 457; Campbell, *Thelema*, 147; Readdy, *One Truth and One Spirit*, 305–333.

138. Djurdjevic, “The Great Beast as a Tantric Hero,” 113–15.

- adapt the formulas in the liturgies of St Basil and of St John Chrysostom.<sup>139</sup>
6. His first book was titled *Aceldama*, from Matthew 27:3-9 and Acts 1:19. He later wrote a play *Why Jesus Wept*,<sup>140</sup> and books with titles featuring *Ahab*, *Jephthah*, and *Jezebel*. In apparent gratitude for a Buddhist enlightenment, he wrote poems titled “Ascension Day” and “Pentecost.”<sup>141</sup> He penned a book of pornographic poetry entitled *Snowdrops from a Curate’s Garden*.
  7. Central to his philosophy was the Holy Guardian Angel.<sup>142</sup> He “identified” his own angel with both Jesus and Satan (and Lucifer).<sup>143</sup>
  8. In 1916, when he was about 41, he baptised, worshipped and put on trial a frog (sic), then ate its legs, crucified, “resurrected” it, and “caused it to ascend” (sic), saying “Lo, Jesus of Nazareth, how thou art taken in my snare.”<sup>144</sup>
  9. Crowley, “fascinated” that Cecil Maitland was the son of an Anglican clergyman who had converted to Catholicism, devised a ceremony whereby Maitland baptized a young cock named *Peter Paul* into the Catholic Church. His “Scarlet Woman” demanded its head on a disk (Mark 6:25 and parallels), Crowley beheaded it, and charged the spirit of Peter Paul to aid the “cakes of light” with which he would found his Church (sic).<sup>145</sup>

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139. The text is in Campbell, *Thelema*, 147-72. Kazcynski, “Continuing Knowledge from Generation unto Generation,” 165-66 asserts that Crowley’s “Mass” “is based largely upon the Roman Missal,” and that it was written “under the inspiration of the Liturgy of St Basil.” Kazcynski offers only vague similarities. I can see in the “Gnostic Mass” only a parody, generally conceived, of the Catholic Liturgy as it then was. Other than the words over the elements, I cannot even see this for the Liturgy of St Basil. More plausibly, Introvigne, “The Beast and the Prophet,” 263, states that Crowley’s Mass is a rewriting of a “Gnostic Mass” produced within the 25 years preceding his own.

140. Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 92.

141. *Ibid.*, 79.

142. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 195.

143. Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 221-23, 225 and 280; Mistlberger, *Three Dangerous Magi*, 114-17 treats this concept in Crowley well, although the alleged analogue in Gurdjieff strikes me as far-fetched.

144. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 260-61.

145. *Ibid.*, 292.

10. Later, he staged a “Seth ceremony” in which a virgin goat was to be sacrificed and its blood drunk after it had copulated with his Scarlet Woman, so that it was a “drinking thereof from the Cup of Our Lady of Whoredom,”<sup>146</sup> an immature gibe at the Virgin Mary,<sup>147</sup> as when he had lesbian-inspired poems originally written to Isis published by a Catholic printing press which mistook them for Marian poems.<sup>148</sup>

Crowley’s career naturally suggests a rebellion against his upbringing, with a desire to justify himself in the terms of the tradition he was ostensibly rejecting by becoming Jesus for a new age of humanity. The “rebellion” therefore re-establishes the old order, but with new proprietors and stock. There is still church, and it is even called “church,” but instead of a male preacher at a lectern there is a naked woman upon an altar;<sup>149</sup> and their Scriptures are no longer the Bible, but the Book of the Law. Given the nature of some of his published works (for example, *Snowdrops from a Curate’s Garden* [1904]), Crowley’s search for proper English respectability seems perverse:

The elusiveness of respectability was something that haunted Crowley throughout his adult life, and it appears that one of the reasons he sought to be admitted by “regular” Freemasonry was that it would allow him to become part of the respected establishment of British society.<sup>150</sup>

One essential issue is invariably underplayed in treatments of Crowley: the not merely sexual aspect but the pornographic aspect of his programme. Under the

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146. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 295; Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 418.

147. Similar childish blasphemies against Mary adorn *White Stains* (1898), and *The World’s Tragedy* (1910) is abundant in anti-Christian sentiment. See Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 136.

148. Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 136.

149. A reviewer noted that there is also a naked male. I accept that this may be so in some performances, but my main point is that despite the differences, Crowley instituted a Mass. An examination of the published texts discloses some divergences. Hence, Ligan, *Theatre of the Occult Revival*, 121 states that the priestess does not have to be naked before the congregation, only behind the veil. But she is clearly naked before all according to Campbell, *Thelema*, compare 158 and 161. Neither mention a naked male. I have seen two performances on Youtube; one has a naked woman only, the other no nudity at all.

150. Bogdan and Starr, “Introduction,” 10.

old dispensation, the only licit sexual relations were between married adults, one male and one female. Under Crowley's, what were illicit sexual relations are strongly urged if not compulsory; after all, his "Mass" featured a nude woman.<sup>151</sup> The evidence for Crowley's sexual obsessions is as abundant as it is understated by his interpreters. There is no sound reason why his early pornographic literature should be missing when scholars present overviews of Crowley's career. Considering this material, it is not unreasonable to think that there is a continuity through Crowley's career; not only a line of rebellion, against sexual mores, and against Christianity, but an obsession with sex. I wonder if Crowley's Thelemic Law is not best explained as a license for sexual activity. Lust was a consistent aspect of Crowley's mind, all the way from *Aceldama* through to the diary notes of his yearning to force the attentions of the resolutely heterosexual Cecil Russell.<sup>152</sup>

This is not an essay on Crowley, however, but on esotericism. My point here is that no good purpose is served by studies of Crowley which underplay if not ignore his sexual obsessions and his writing of some fairly elaborate pornography. Having presented my understanding of the nature of Crowley's achievement, we must consider Crowley on esotericism, and then contrast him with Gurdjieff.

### 3.2.1. Crowley on Esotericism

Crowley was both literate and capable, and wrote much on magic (in his spelling, "magick"), which to him may have been the equivalent of both we have termed "esotericism" and "occultism." However, I suspect he was not too concerned about relating magic to those words. Above all, his approach to magic was personal:

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151. Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle* (1970), 16-17, noting how Gerald Yorke and he counted themselves fortunate for evading his attentions.

152. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 288. *Aceldama* expresses his fixation on sex of a particular sort, as but one example: "No prostitution may be shunned by him / Who would achieve this Heaven." Canto XIII.

In my third year at Cambridge, I devoted myself consciously to the Great Work, understanding thereby the Work of becoming a Spiritual Being, free from the constraints, accidents, and deceptions of material existence.

I found myself at a loss for a name to designate my work, just as H.P. Blavatsky some years earlier. “Theosophy,” “Spiritualism,” “Occultism,” “Mysticism,” all involved undesirable connotations. I chose therefore the name “MAGICK” as essentially the most sublime, and actually the most discredited, of all the available terms. I swore to rehabilitate MAGICK to identify it with my own career; and to compel mankind to respect, love, and trust that which they scorned, hated and feared. I have kept my Word.<sup>153</sup>

Note that he states his intention was not to identify himself with magic or with his pursuit, but the reverse: to identify magic with himself. On my reading of Crowley, this exemplifies the main currents in Crowley’s life: the desire to make all love and respect him (he who had been despised); and the fact that in so far as he was a serious thinker, he stands in the same tradition as Theosophists and Occultists, and even to some extent with the other traditions he mentions, but is obsessed with stamping his own character upon them. Through Mathers, he adopted the Theosophist idea of “secret masters” as “secret chiefs,” and the authority they bestowed.<sup>154</sup>

Crowley sometimes gives evidence of what might be a deep understanding of the paradoxes of occultism; for example, at the end of *The Book of the Law* he wrote: “The Book of the Law is Written and Concealed.” That is, an occult text can be written or revealed, and yet remain “hidden” because the reader lacks penetration (as we saw in mentioning John 10:24–26). He restates the same idea in *Bagh-i-Muattar*, where he writes, “I do not believe in either the advisability or the efficacy of this secrecy business. The Apocalypse has been published for some years now, and I have yet to meet anyone who really knows how to extract the gold.”<sup>155</sup> There is insight, but it is not developed.

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153. Crowley, “Magick in Theory and Practice.” I have simplified the layout.

154. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 60, 118–19 and 182n220, n221 and n223. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 60–61 on the Golden Dawn’s idea of secret chiefs.

155. Crowley, *Bagh-i-Muattar*.

My research could not find an instance where Crowley used the word “esotericism”; searches of *Magick in Theory and Practice* and *Magick without Tears* were fruitless, but did locate numerous instances of “occult” and its derivatives. He did, however, most emphatically have the concept, so he speaks in *An Account of A.:A.:* of the “sanctuary” and of “inner” and “exterior,” albeit in terms which add nothing to Blavatsky’s view of the matter.<sup>156</sup> Typical of its style and content is the opening:

It is necessary, my dear brothers, to give you a clear idea of the interior Order; of that illuminated community which is scattered throughout the world, but which is governed by one truth and united in one spirit. The community possesses a School, in which all who thirst for knowledge are instructed by the Spirit of Wisdom itself; and all the mysteries of nature are preserved in this school for the children of light.<sup>157</sup>

This document purports to be a revision of Karl von Eckartshausen’s *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, a book which Sutin avers was “the single most influential text—after the Bible and *The Book of the Law*—in the whole of Crowley’s life.”<sup>158</sup> While the influence of *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* is evident in *An Account of A.:A.:*, that document lacks the Christ-centred perspective of von Eckartshausen. *Liber LII*, a sort of companion to *Liber XXXIII*, speaks of “exoteric organization,” “initiates,” and “occult bodies,” while declaring that the O.T.O. “teaches Hermetic Science or Occult Knowledge, the Pure and Holy Magick of Light.”<sup>159</sup>

All of this amounts to Crowley’s declaration that he is in possession of secret knowledge. Again, we encounter the paradox of occultism, that once the hidden teaching is imparted, it is not hidden, or at least is not hidden in the way it had once been. At a deeper level, Crowley’s understanding of “magick” is without horizon: “the Science and Art of causing Change to occur

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156. Crowley, *An Account of A.:A.*, for example speaks of “external worship,” an “interior Order,” and vigilant “Masters.” My text lacks pagination and numbering.

157. Crowley, *An Account of A.:A.*.

158. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 41.

159. Crowley, *Liber LII*, 2 and 4.

in conformity with Will,”<sup>160</sup> and “Every man must do Magick each time that he acts or even thinks, since a thought is an internal act whose influence ultimately affects action, though it may not do so at the time.”<sup>161</sup> This is so broad as to blur the distinction between magic and anything else, but then that would accord with Crowley’s world-remaking ambitions. Even his celebrated definition lacks helpful limitation by reference to spiritual agencies or not needing to employ physical means. Pasi realises that the “definition” is no definition at all, but asserts that Crowley “usually had in mind a rather precise set of practices and ideas, based mostly on traditional ceremonial magic.”<sup>162</sup> This is merely circular; in that case, Crowley would be saying, “Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will by magic.”

Pasi then goes on to state that when he discovered sexual magic, Crowley found “most of the material apparatus of ceremonial magic superfluous.”<sup>163</sup> This is not to say that Crowley ever disowned magic or even ceremonial magic, just as he never disowned the extreme measures of controlling speech, action, and thought enjoined in the approximately eight hundred words of his *Liber III vel Jugorum*.<sup>164</sup> But the practical emphasis shifted quite decisively, as Pasi notes, and this seems to support my contentions, first that Crowley’s obsession with sex has actually been understated, and that his formulation of “magick” was vague to the point of futility. This effacing of boundaries between magic and any other department of life effectively *assimilates* the exoteric to the esoteric. Thus, Crowley says the following of learning magic:

In the course of this Training, he will learn to explore the Hidden Mysteries of Nature, and to develop new senses and faculties in himself, whereby he may communicate with, and control, Beings and Forces pertaining to orders of existence which have been hitherto inaccessible

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160. Crowley, “Magick in Theory and Practice.”

161. *Ibid.*

162. Pasi, “Varieties of Magical Experience,” 66.

163. *Ibid.*

164. Hall, *Beelzebub and the Beast*, 218.

to profane research, and available only to that unscientific and empirical MAGICK (of tradition) which I came to destroy in order that I might fulfil. I send this book into the world that every man and woman may take hold of life in the proper manner.<sup>165</sup>

In *Book 4* he describes magick as being “a Science of Life complete and perfect.”<sup>166</sup> Later he states that “all phenomena are sacraments.”<sup>167</sup> That is, “magick” in Crowley’s world is a lake which overflows its banks and covers all the land. Perhaps this attitude, “occultist imperialist,” to coin a phrase, is part of the reason he took the step of breaking his oath of secrecy to publish Golden Dawn rituals in *The Equinox* (as well as providing a means of stripping the Golden Dawn of its claim to guard secrets).<sup>168</sup> Pasi’s interpretation of a “democratization of magic” could also be related to his naturalization of “magick,” or “Scientific Illuminism.”<sup>169</sup> The man who spoke of “the whole discarded humbug of the supernatural” will be inclined to assimilate “magick” to “the panoply of the positive natural philosophy of modern science.”<sup>170</sup>

To conclude, Crowley’s view of the occult was superficially similar to Blavatsky’s but, more fundamentally, he tacitly held that true knowledge and wisdom were the province of magicians or adepts who would convert the world to a new religion where “magick” would inform all. Finally, the fact that Crowley favoured the terms “occult” and “magick,” and seems to have eschewed the “esoteric” and “esotericism” supports my contention that there is a real difference in nuance between these words, and that “occult” is a better word for those who use, whether exclusively or not, magic, astrology, or alchemy.

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165. Crowley, “Magick in Theory and Practice.”

166. Crowley, *Book 4*, 54.

167. *Ibid.*, 99. This is the equivalent of there being no sacraments at all, for the concept only has meaning when it can be contrasted with the profane.

168. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 59; Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 193.

169. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 60–61; Aspren, “Magic Naturalized?” *passim*.

170. Both quotations are from Aspren, “Magic Naturalized?” 147.

### 3.3 Were Gurdjieff and Crowley Engaged on the same Quest?

To anticipate, I suggest that the differences between Gurdjieff and Crowley were greater than their similarities; Gurdjieff was fundamentally a mystic, who taught an entire intellectual, emotional, and physical discipline, with a thought-out esoteric cosmology and practical psychology, requiring a three-centred awareness based on simultaneously experiencing feeling, sensation, and intellect to make possible a new stable form of being, comprising both consciousness and conscience.<sup>171</sup> In so far as Crowley's mysticism was ever realized in practice, it seems to have mainly depended upon drugs and "sex magic," and was only ever one element in a career which depended on ritual and standard occult pursuits such as the Kabbalah, Tarot, and astrology. Sometimes attempts are made to find a relationship based on such vague matters as an "interest in modernizing," or following an "integrative path," or even a concern for "wholeness" and "healing inner fragmentation."<sup>172</sup> On such a basis, we may as well compare them with Peter the Great, or with Freud.

Tobias Churton contends that Gurdjieff and Crowley

with respect to their teaching, had far more in common than emphases that differentiated them. Many of Gurdjieff's cherished attitudes were expressed succinctly by Crowley: love as the uniting of opposites, for example; the importance of will, and the idea that the cosmos falls into line with the correctly orbiting will; this wisdom they shared. Gurdjieff's real "I am" is analogous psychologically to Crowley's "True Will" and "Holy Guardian Angel."<sup>173</sup>

Churton concedes that Gurdjieff and Crowley had different views on sex and gender roles.<sup>174</sup> His attempt to connect the two teachings commences

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171. This is the thesis of Azize, *Gurdjieff*. I am aware that the posthumously published book by David Hall, *Beelzebub and the Beast*, makes an argument that Gurdjieff and Crowley had much of their substance in common. I have chosen to examine Churton's more recent effort, Hall having written in about 1975, and therefore before Webb's book and many other works mentioning Gurdjieff.

172. Mistlberger, *Three Dangerous Magi*, 6-9, 198, and 207.

173. Churton, *Deconstructing Gurdjieff*, 292.

174. *Ibid.*, 294.

with Crowley's visit to Gurdjieff's base, the Prieuré near Fontainebleau, on 10 February 1924, when Gurdjieff happened to be in the United States. On the basis of reports, Crowley nonetheless adjudged Gurdjieff to be: "a tip-top man ... clearly a very advanced adept."<sup>175</sup> According to Pasi, this visit is corroborated from Crowley's diary.<sup>176</sup>

Churton notes that, in March 1924, Crowley had confided to his diary that he proposed to take on and "complete" Gurdjieff's pupils, and that this was needed as some "will not fit into his very artificial scheme." Not until mid-1926 did he meet Gurdjieff. I might note that, in a note which seems to refer to 1926, Edith Taylor recorded Crowley being present at a lunch with Gurdjieff and others.<sup>177</sup> Also, Fritz Peters, who turned thirteen years of age in 1926, states that:

Crowley was apparently convinced that Gurdjieff was a "black magician" and the ostensible purpose of his visit (to the Prieuré) was to challenge Gurdjieff to some sort of duel in magic. The visit turned out to be anti-climactical as Gurdjieff, although he would not deny his knowledge of certain powers that might be called "magic" refused to demonstrate any of them. In his turn, Mr Crowley also refused to "reveal" any of his powers so, to the great disappointment of the onlookers, we did not witness any supernatural feats. Also, Mr Crowley departed with the impression that Gurdjieff was either (a) a fake, or (b) an inferior magician.<sup>178</sup>

Apparently referring to the same visit as Taylor and Peters, Webb reports Gurdjieff's in-person denunciation of Crowley, with a warning never to return. Crowley had spent a weekend at the Prieuré and been shown around like any guest. Webb states:

Apart from some circumspection, Gurdjieff treated him like any other guest until the evening of his departure ... Crowley made his way toward the door and turned to take his leave of Gurdjieff. ... "Mister, you go?" Gurdjieff inquired. Crowley assented. "You have been guest?" ... "Now you go, you are no longer guest?" Crowley ... humoured his mood by indicating that he was on his way back to Paris. But Gurdjieff having made the point that he was not violating the canons of hospitality, changed on the instant into

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175. *Ibid.*, 293.

176. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 168-69.

177. Taylor, *Shadows of Heaven*, 90.

178. Peters, *My Journey with a Mystic*, 240-41.

the embodiment of righteous anger. “You filthy,” he stormed, “you dirty inside! Never again you set foot in my house!” ... he worked himself up into a rage which quite transfixed his watching pupils. Crowley was stigmatized as the sewer of creation was taken apart and trodden into the mire. Finally he was banished ... by a Gurdjieff in fine histrionic form.<sup>179</sup>

Churton aims to prove that the incident never occurred, as reported by Webb, from the following considerations:

1. Webb places the expulsion in July 1926, but Crowley was not in France until 7 August 1926.<sup>180</sup>
2. Webb furnishes no sources, and there is no contemporary confirmation from anyone who had been at the Prieuré.<sup>181</sup>
3. Stanley Nott, who was at the Prieuré when Crowley visited, does not mention it, but that he “would have done, had he known it,” while another account of Crowley’s visit mentions a placid lunch at which both Gurdjieff and Crowley were present.<sup>182</sup>
4. Gurdjieff and Crowley had another meeting, probably in 1928 or 1929, and Crowley is not known to have criticised Gurdjieff or held a grudge, and this is unlikely had Webb’s story been true.<sup>183</sup>
5. Crowley did tell an unfavourable story about Gurdjieff to Nancy Cunard, who said “He (Crowley) was indignant at Gurdjieff.”<sup>184</sup> Churton surmises that Crowley probably did not tell Cunard a story of his expulsion from the Prieuré, but rather, Gurdjieff perhaps tried his “extreme psychological methods and exposure of weakness ... on Crowley. Perhaps Crowley saw through it.”<sup>185</sup>
6. Churton states that “Beekman Taylor recorded that someone invited the Beast “in anticipation of a combat of magical powers, but apparently both

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179. Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 315,

180. Churton, *Deconstructing Gurdjieff*, 298.

181. *Ibid.*, 298–299.

182. *Ibid.*, 299.

183. *Ibid.*, 294.

184. *Ibid.*, 300.

185. *Ibid.*, 300–301.

he and Gurdjieff behaved well.” This is a very different slant again on Crowley’s summer 1926 visit.”<sup>186</sup>

I am not sure that, even on his evidence, Churton has established a plausible case that there was a philosophical similarity between Gurdjieff and Crowley. First, the alleged similarities inspire no confidence; I doubt that Gurdjieff ever said that love is “the uniting of opposites,” although it is trite that love can unite opposites. Gurdjieff’s emphasis was on the idea that such as we are, we cannot love, and that, until we have being, to speak of it is futile.<sup>187</sup> Likewise, Gurdjieff did not vaguely speak of “the importance of will,” but of how we have no will to speak of.<sup>188</sup> To attribute to Gurdjieff the notion that the “cosmos falls into line with the correctly orbiting will” is utterly fanciful, and is not supported by any reference. For Gurdjieff, real “I” (not real “I am”) would imply “true will,” but any likeness to Crowley’s ideas of “True Will” and “Holy Guardian Angel” is the merest assertion. On his own showing, Churton says that Crowley’s idea was not to be confused with “self,” while for Gurdjieff “I” would represent a true self.<sup>189</sup>

Then, although Churton states, “nor is there any contemporary evidence from any member of the institute to support the account,”<sup>190</sup> he observes in a footnote, that Ethel Merston, who was at the Prieuré, did say that Gurdjieff expelled Crowley. However, Churton did not read the manuscript himself, relying rather, on a report, and states the following: “In the context of all else contained in this chapter, the snippet may be fairly regarded as inconclusive.”<sup>191</sup> Stating that evidence is “inconclusive” does not make it so; Ethel Merston, a resident of the Prieuré, states the following in her memoirs:

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186. *Ibid.*, 300.

187. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 21, 102-3.

188. *Ibid.*, 100-101 and 161.

189. *Ibid.*, 117-21.

190. Churton, *Deconstructing Gurdjieff*, 298-99.

191. *Ibid.*, 298.

We had J.G. Bennett for a couple of weeks, who later started an Institute of his own near London; Bishop Wedgewood the head of the theosophical Liberal Catholic Church, in his long purple robes; Algernon Blackwood, the author, a friend of Orage, and a very charming man; Alastair [sic] Crowley, the reverse, and the only person I ever knew Mr Gurdjieff to turn out after only a couple of days' stay.<sup>192</sup>

This directly confirms Webb's account, although it is less detailed. There were hardly two expulsions of Crowley. It is a failure of methodology to think that direct evidence can be rebutted by indirect circumstances. Taylor's account of Crowley's visit is unclear, and in parts inaccurate: he does not say what his authority for the anticipated duel or their behaviour was. His footnote completely misstates Peters' testimony, and even the book in which Peters wrote it.<sup>193</sup>

Contrary to Churton's assertion, Webb does not place the expulsion in July 1926. He states variously "that year" and "the summer of 1926."<sup>194</sup> Since Churton makes Crowley's August arrival in France an obstacle to Webb's account, this is an extraordinary misstatement of the evidence. Next, while Webb does not disclose his sources, he explains in some detail both why he does not, and asseverates that "the reader will have to accept my word . . . and my judgment of each as a reliable source of information."<sup>195</sup> Granted Webb's record of scholarship, those guarantees are not without weight. It is puzzling that Churton did not mention them.

I should note that Pasi was also sceptical of the meeting as retold by Webb; however, he was not so dismissive of the possibility that Webb had a reliable source. Further, Pasi did not know of Merston's memoirs.<sup>196</sup> In his foreword to Hall's posthumously published *Beelzebub and the Beast*, Alistair Coombs

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192. Ethel Merston, undated memoirs (see bibliography for details).

193. Taylor, *Shadows of Heaven*, 90 and note 54. I regret to say that Taylor is quite wrong in his reading of James Moore—Moore's endnote attributes his information to Webb. It is not "another version."

194. Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 314–15.

195. *Ibid.*, 12.

196. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 168–69. I find Pasi's view that the meeting as recounted by Nott is the same as that told to Suster hard to fathom; Nott has Crowley speaking to children at the Priuré, in Gurdjieff's presence, which is clearly not the meeting of which Yorke spoke.

finds Webb's account plausible, noting that the reported swings in Gurdjieff's behaviour accord with his well-attested "spontaneous ferocity."<sup>197</sup> Mistlberger offers a similar observation, and likewise entertains the possibility that Webb's report is accurate.<sup>198</sup> The evidence is unequivocal: Webb states that he had information that Gurdjieff banished him, and it is corroborated.

### 3.4. The Argument from Silence

Examining Churton's argument raises some important methodological questions. I have recently offered some suggestions for assessing whether there has been borrowing from one source or culture into another.<sup>199</sup> This section continues that study. Churton supports his thesis that Gurdjieff and Crowley were similar in many respects in part from a later meeting between Gurdjieff and Crowley, which, he says, was arranged by Gerald Yorke, although he here provides no reference.<sup>200</sup> In his 2017 book on Gurdjieff, Churton wrote, "Yorke was sole witness to a half-hour encounter Yorke said he organised between Crowley and Gurdjieff at a Paris café."<sup>201</sup> This time he does provide a reference.<sup>202</sup> The argument boils down to this: Gurdjieff and Crowley were observed peaceably together. People who have once had a row can never again be peaceable—this proposition is implied but unstated: Even assuming that Gurdjieff knew Yorke (for which I have not yet found any evidence), and that there was such a meeting, the gratuity of Churton's argument is evident. Therefore, Gurdjieff and Crowley never had a row.

However, when one reads Gerald Suster's book, the account is significantly different from what Churton led us to expect:

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197. Hall, *Beelzebub and the Beast*, xxiv.

198. Mistlberger, *Three Dangerous Magi*, 391-96.

199. Azize, "Assessing Borrowing," *passim*.

200. "Gerald Yorke claimed to have introduced the competitors . . ." Churton, *Deconstructing Gurdjieff*, 281.

201. Churton, *Deconstructing Gurdjieff*, 300.

202. *Ibid.*, 300 and 331n9. The footnote takes us to 92-93 of Suster's *The Legacy of the Beast*.

It was Yorke who gave me an accurate account of the meeting between Crowley and another celebrated magus, G. I. Gurdjieff, for he was the only other person present. . . . According to Yorke, Crowley and Gurdjieff met in Paris for about half an hour and nothing much happened other than a display of mutual male respect: "They sniffed around one another like dogs, y'know. They sniffed around one another like dogs."<sup>203</sup>

To suggest that Yorke arranged the meeting is to suggest that Gurdjieff wished or was at least content to meet Crowley. But that is not the evidence. The evidence is simply that they met. Other than that it was in Paris, we know nothing of it. It could have been a chance meeting. As with the misstatement of Webb's dating, the error is remarkable. What is more, Churton himself states that Cunard states Crowley was "indignant" with Gurdjieff; explaining it away as Crowley having "seen through" Gurdjieff.<sup>204</sup> He makes no attempt to explain how a sentiment which is clearly consistent with the Webb and Merston account could be explained by Crowley's being fly to Gurdjieff's tricks.

Then, we have an argument from silence: to argue that Stanley Nott would have mentioned the expulsion "had he known it" is the merest assertion. It is notorious that there are strange and apparently inexplicable omissions from written histories, e.g., Marco Polo did not refer to the Great Wall of China and other matters which it has been supposed he would have.<sup>205</sup> One striking example of an omission made in apparently unthinkable circumstances is that in 1979, G. A. Flick published *Natural Justice: Principles and Practical Application*. It was "originally written as a thesis which was submitted in 1977 for the degree of PhD at the University of Cambridge."<sup>206</sup> In a class at the University of Sydney in 1979, he mentioned to us that after the book was published, he had often been asked why he had not mentioned *Ridge v. Baldwin*, the most important case of all on the topic. The reason, he declared, was that he had forgotten to.

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203. Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast*, 92-93.

204. Churton, *Deconstructing Gurdjieff*, 301.

205. The controversy is set out in Hans Ulrich Vogel, *Marco Polo Was in China*. Specifically relating it to the argument from silence, and noting its weakness, see Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument*, 176.

206. Flick, *Natural Justice*, vii.

When the second edition appeared in 1984, the new foreword by a Supreme Court judge eloquently referred to the significance of that case, which appeared no less than seven times in the index.<sup>207</sup> Not only had the doctoral candidate omitted the most important single case on his topic, but his supervisors and the examiners at one of the world's leading law schools, also overlooked it, although other readers did not, and when the book was revised, it featured prominently. To argue, then, that if someone had known of something they would have mentioned it, one needs better grounds than its importance to their discussion: one needs to explain the lacuna, especially by countering the possibility of an egregious oversight.

David Fischer refers to “the fallacy of the negative proof...an attempt to sustain a factual proposition merely by negative evidence.”<sup>208</sup> However, Churton's argument presents a variation, because he is also attributing an intention to Nott to cover certain material relevant to Gurdjieff and Crowley, and also assuming that Nott has the requisite knowledge of the incident being studied, and had not forgotten or decided for other reasons not to publish it. That is, Churton's argument is actually weaker than even the fallacy of the negative proof.

Douglas Walton refers to Fischer's work, and takes it further.<sup>209</sup> He states that the *ad ignorantiam* argument is a knowledge-based argument, arising from the observation that a proposition is not included in a knowledge-base, and then has a third characteristic. That third characteristic assumes either a closed or an open world. This presents us with two types of *ad ignorantiam* argument; the first is conclusive, the second is non-conclusive, respectively.<sup>210</sup> Walton's survey is lengthy, and considers many examples not pertinent to our enquiry; but he seems to take the argument as an inherently fragile means of *proof*, yet

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207. *Ibid.*, xxx.

208. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 47.

209. Walton, *Arguments from Ignorance*, 64-68.

210. *Ibid.*, 76-78. These are also what Walton refers to as “monotonic” and “nonmonotonic” forms of reasoning.

valuable when used as a *consideration*, especially where there is little evidence available, or it is employed in a closed world.<sup>211</sup> Timothy McGrew adds that “[e]ven in cases where the probability of the conditional is quite high, the argument may be weak because rival explanations account for the absence of evidence even better than the desired conclusion does.”<sup>212</sup> Later in the article, he provides some striking examples of an unexplained omission by someone who did in fact know the matter omitted, although we might have expected it to be mentioned.<sup>213</sup> To this we can add our example of Flick’s *Natural Justice*, all the more potent because the University of Cambridge accepted it for a doctorate.

So, in the instance of Gurdjieff and Crowley, the assertion is that X would have said Y were the evidence true, when all the time we do not know that X in fact knew Y, and if he did, what reasons he might have had for maintaining a silence. A consideration of what is known of Nott and Crowley suggests a very simple reason for Nott’s omitting to retail the event, even if he had known of it: Nott idolised Orage, Orage had been a friend of Crowley from the first decade of the twentieth century through to at least 1932, and to depict Gurdjieff attacking Crowley could be read as an indirect criticism of Orage. Nott states that a mutual friend had him meet Crowley who sought two things: money and an introduction to the Prieuré. Nott declined to help with either, but Crowley nonetheless shortly thereafter appeared at the Prieuré. Nott sums up his impression of seeing Gurdjieff and Crowley together:

I got a strong impression of two magicians, the white and the black, the one strong, powerful, full of light; the other also powerful but heavy, dull, and ignorant. Though “black” is too strong a word for Crowley; he never understood the meaning of real black magic, yet hundreds of people came under his “spell.” He was clever. But, as Gurdjieff says: “He is stupid who is clever.”

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211. I am summarising my reading of Walton, *Arguments from Ignorance*, 64-167, see especially 101, 140, 146, 162, and 285-87.

212. McGrew, “The Argument from Silence,” 220.

213. *Ibid.*, 225-26.

Orage said about this: “Alas, poor Crowley, I knew him well. We used to meet at the Society for Psychical Research when I was acting secretary. Once, when we were talking, he asked: ‘By the way, what number are you?’ Not knowing in the least what he meant, I said on the spur of the moment, ‘Twelve’. ‘Good God, are you really?’ he replied, ‘I’m only seven’.”<sup>214</sup>

However, Orage’s relationship with Crowley appears to have been closer than this. Beatrice Hastings, who met Orage in 1906, said that she was surprised to discover that Orage’s best friend was not Holbrook Jackson, but Crowley. She took it upon herself to throw out Orage’s offending documents: “I consigned all the books and ‘Equinoxes’ and sorcery designs to the dustbin.”<sup>215</sup> Further, Pasi reveals that Orage wrote a reference for Crowley in March 1908 when the latter wished to be admitted to the Reading Room of the British Museum and, on 7 July 1932, Orage wrote to Crowley with respect to a future meeting.<sup>216</sup>

Having set out the pertinent material, it strikes me Crowley arranged his visit to the Prieuré in order to further his own desire for money and pupils. This would have been the purpose of the proposed duel. Gurdjieff took a deep dislike to the man and ordered him never to return to him. Crowley was afterwards indignant at Gurdjieff, and Gurdjieff is not recorded as ever having mentioned him. That is what the testimonies relate. I can accept Yorke’s account that Gurdjieff later met Crowley, although I wonder how they came to meet. I do question that it is evidence of mutual respect. Gurdjieff had been guarded but hospitable to Crowley at the Prieuré, but a meeting elsewhere was a different matter. If nothing else, the fox would not be near the poultry yard, and that, after all, was what Crowley had been after.

Then, we should also consider the differentials. I suggest that the differences between Gurdjieff’s system and Crowley’s were vast and outweigh any similarity.

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214. Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff*, 122.

215. Webb, *The Harmonious Circle*, 210. *The Equinox* was a journal Crowley had published beginning from 1909. See Aspren, “Magic Naturalized?” 140.

216. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 176.

Gurdjieff taught a doctrine of unity and diversity, exemplified at the cosmic and the individual dimensions, where movement is from the One to the many with a possibility in the case of humans of conscious return to the One. To this end he brought a distinctive and coherent system theory which included cosmology, anthropology, and psychology. He taught many practical disciplines, and from the 1930s taught contemplative exercises. From early in his career he taught Sacred Dances or “Movements.” He composed a significant body of music and wrote a substantial book and two more modest efforts, with collaborators. He died after a period of three years (1946–1949) surrounded by pupils. He had only one wife, but he fathered children with other women. He employed neither ceremonial nor sex magic, Crowley’s two chief techniques.<sup>217</sup> Gurdjieff had no interest in politics, let alone international politics, as Crowley did.<sup>218</sup> The differences from Crowley are unmistakable. Even Crowley’s more serious writing comes across as the work of a bower bird, relating concepts and practices from diverse cultures to his own central “magickal” ideas, as in *Liber 777*. Crowley regularly used drugs both personally and in his “magick,” while Gurdjieff never did except for one occasion, in Russia, as part of a demonstration.<sup>219</sup>

Speaking of esotericism, there were significant differences beyond Crowley’s speaking of “magic” rather than “esotericism.” Gurdjieff’s view of esotericism and exotericism, which he saw were conceptually linked together, is developed and precise, siting the question within a large cultural and social context. I have not discovered, on the material available to me, that Crowley had a deep

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217. This hardly needs comment, but Readdy, *One Truth and One Spirit*, 87, states the following: “The O.T.O. would develop into an initiatory society that placed an emphasis on sexual magic.”

218. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*. For Crowley’s unsolicited advice to the nations of the world, unaccountably unheeding, and his high hopes, see Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 11, 17, 30–31, 33, 35–36, 57, 78–82. He believed that adopting Thelema could save Nazi Germany from the Church and made attempts to promote it to them; see Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*, 53–54.

219. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 251–53. The late George Adie said that Ouspensky had told him that Gurdjieff had used a narcotic on this instance, a report which is supported by Gurdjieff’s comment at Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 162.

understanding of esotericism, beyond the belief in “secret chiefs” which has been referred to. His view of magic was nothing if not expansive, seeing in his teaching of Thelema the solution to all problems. The discussion this far would indicate that the term “esotericism” could properly be applied to Gurdjieff’s system, although he was just as much a mystic. Neither would he have accepted the idea of being a “magician,” although as Peters stated, “he would not deny knowledge of certain powers that might be called ‘magic’.”<sup>220</sup> Crowley succeeded, to some extent, in associating “magic” with himself (unless of course the magician wears a silk top hat from which he extracts specimens of *Oryctolagus cuniculus domesticus*).

#### 4. Conclusion

The “esoteric” is a coherent concept. The dictionary’s witness to contemporary usage is quite satisfactory. The word’s etymology is clear, and the historical trajectory from the Pythagoreans and early Greek philosophy, as one half of the word pair “esoteric / exoteric” accounts for the kernel of its meaning. The concept of “the esoteric” operates to point to a hierarchy of knowledge and can serve to distinguish and elevate the sacred. Especially in religion, the concept of the esoteric identifies a localisation of the holy, and brings it into relation with the exoteric, as higher relates to lower. The esoteric demands personal merit of those who approach it, and by virtue of regulated access, manages the dangers inherent in any premature or blasphemous approach to it. The esoteric and the exoteric thus stand in a necessary complementary relationship.

The “esoteric” does not share the association of “occultism” with astrology, magic, and alchemy, although “Western Esotericism” does, as that is now a proper noun. I have queried the rigidity of Hanegraaff’s distinction between historical and typological meanings for “Western Esotericism,” as one cannot be established in isolation from the other. Further, painting the esoteric with too broad a brush may obscure the reasons for which a teaching is reserved for

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220. Peters, *My Journey with a Mystic*, 241.

an inner circle. We also saw that the existence of such an elite can endanger the transmission of the esoteric secret, since the conduit is so narrow, and also can arouse opposition from those kept beyond the veil.

This distinction between esoteric and exoteric was embodied in the New Testament, and so was always accessible whenever and wherever the New Testament is read. The New Testament also brings out how the very purpose of the esoteric teaching may be to prepare for its revelation to the world: a movement which places a responsibility upon the shoulders of the initiates who make it known. The Gospel of John adds an interesting detail, which is that the secret may be preserved not because it was let undisclosed, but because the hearers could not comprehend it.

I took Gurdjieff and Crowley as case studies and tried to apply these words to them. I concluded that while both could be described as in the tradition of Western Esotericism, Gurdjieff could not be described as an occultist, but Crowley could. We spent a good deal of time debunking the contention that Gurdjieff and Crowley had similar philosophies and methods. In the course of this we examined the argument from silence. We saw that this “argument” is more a “consideration” than a proof, and that while it can be useful in the absence of evidence, it is rarely more than a slender support.

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## Deliteralizing Christianity: Gurdjieff and Almznoshinoo

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### Abstract

This essay addresses some of the references to Christianity presented in G.I. Gurdjieff's magnum opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. Keeping in view the overarching themes of the conscious labor and intentional suffering (being-Partkdolg-duty) and the development of higher-being bodies, the article will present and analyze references to the sacred ceremony "Almznoshinoo," which is first presented in the chapter on Tibetan Buddhism. By next introducing The Last Supper through the lens of the ceremony Almznoshinoo, Gurdjieff's text undermines and unhinges literalizing readings of the sacred texts and practices of Christianity. In the process, Gurdjieff seeks to deliteralize the awareness and consciousness of the reader. The article will also consider the role of feelings in restoring "podobnisirnian," or allegorical thinking, which Beelzebub proposes has been all but lost in contemporary thought. Gurdjieff points out the complete failure of contemporary people to understand and employ allegorical thinking, and its essential role in understanding teachings and stories (legominisms) from the past.

Keywords: G.I. Gurdjieff; esoteric Christianity; legominism; deliteralization; Almznoshinoo; *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*

### Introduction: Gurdjieff and his Reception

*Beelzebub's Tales* is a book that destroys existing values; it compels the serious reader to re-value all values, and, to a sincere person, it is devastating. As Gurdjieff says, it may destroy your relish for your favorite dish—your pet theories, for example or that form of art you happen to follow. It will be like red pepper—disturbing to your mental and emotional associations, your inertia.

— Alfred R. Orage<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on references in his recorded talks, and his own writings, the consideration of Gurdjieff's teaching as a form of Christianity has been a generative area of study. In a frequently referenced exchange in P.D. Ouspensky's

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1. *Commentaries on G. I. Gurdjieff's All and Everything*, 4.

*In Search of the Miraculous*, Gurdjieff responds to a question about the origins of his teaching: “I do not know what you know about Christianity but for the benefit of those who know already, I will say that, if you like, this is *esoteric Christianity*.”<sup>2</sup> This conditional statement points us in a certain direction, and offers the qualification that this description applies to “those who know already.” Taking the point of view that Gurdjieff reflects the zeitgeist of his own period, he seems to have been responding, at least in part, to the war-torn world of the early twentieth century, especially in Europe, and a Christianity that was in a state of decay. No overarching narrative had superseded Christianity at the time, and many people had lost faith in the efficacy and value of the teachings, and in the institutions that supported them.<sup>3</sup> And the same evaluation might be still be offered about our present time.

Several works have addressed Gurdjieff’s ideas in Christian terms or attempted to connect his work to Christianity. A brief review of those influenced by Gurdjieff who made explicit connections to Christianity includes Maurice Nicoll (1884–1953), a British psychologist who worked with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (as well as Carl Jung), and wrote an interpretation of Christian ideas in several works, including *The New Man*. Rodney Collin, a student of Ouspensky, also wrote about the work of Gurdjieff in Christian terms. Boris Mouravieff (1890–1966) claimed that Gurdjieff’s work was an incomplete form of esoteric Christianity connected to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. J.G. Bennett (1897–1974), a British mathematician and scientist, taught and wrote extensively about Gurdjieff. After Gurdjieff’s death, Bennett also explored a

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2. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 102.

3. Certainly, one can consider Gurdjieff’s own background—in Armenia, and the Caucasus—and especially the influence of Eastern Orthodox Church, through the Greek, Armenian, Russian, and even the Georgian branches. Gurdjieff grew up, first in Alexandropol (now Gyumri), not far from Etchmiadzin, the seat of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In *Meetings with Remarkable Men* he also refers to Christianity as a part of his culture and background, including Sev Jiam church in Alexandropol, as well as other monasteries in the region, including Sanahin Monastery. Gurdjieff also fondly refers to his time in Kars where he served as choir boy in the church. Undoubtedly, these early influences were certainly foundational and provided an orientation to his life’s work and understanding of the importance of tradition and ritual.

number of traditions, but always returned to Gurdjieff's teachings as foundational for an understanding of spiritual transformation. The anonymous author of talks collected in *A Point in the Work* interprets the Gospels and Christian teachings with references to Gurdjieff's ideas. More recently, a selection of academic works attests to the continuing influence of Gurdjieff's work in terms of esoteric Christianity, including Jacob Needleman's *Lost Christianity* and Richard Smoley's broader work, *Inner Christianity*, which includes Gurdjieff and Mouravieff in the frame of esoteric Christianity. Even more recently, Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopalian priest by training, has interpreted the Trinity through the lens of Gurdjieff's law of three.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Azize, in *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises* has provided a thoroughgoing discussion of Gurdjieff's practices and inner exercises in the frame of contemplation and contemplative exercises, and connects them to the practices of the Orthodox monastic tradition of Mount Athos in Greece.

### **The Present Work**

While much of the work above addresses the influence of Gurdjieff's ideas and relates his work to aspects of Christianity, the main thrust of the present study will be to explicate the way that Christianity is presented in Gurdjieff's magnum opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*, also published as *All and Everything: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*.<sup>5</sup> Here I focus on the chapter "Religion," and the means by which Gurdjieff dismantles the effects of a kind of literalism in the presentation and interpretation of Christianity that has been passed down through the centuries. In this chapter, Gurdjieff, through the words of his narrator Beelzebub, introduces Jesus as an authentic messenger "sent from Above," and then provides an extended discussion of a Tibetan ceremony called Almznoshinoo. All of this sets the stage for a critique and

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4. Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*.

5. I have discussed other aspects of this text in detail elsewhere. See, for example, Pittman, "Orality and Refractions of Early Literary Textualizations in Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*."

revision of the hierarchizing and literal interpretation of “The Lord’s Supper,” and the role of Judas Iscariot. In these passages, Gurdjieff indicts the loss of “Podobnisirnian,” or allegorical thinking, and the lack of participation by the emotions, or feelings, in the process. According to Gurdjieff, both the constellated and divergent traditions purporting to be “Christian” are viewed as mere shells of the original teachings and examples from Christ. Without an emphasis on a more radical spiritual transformation, or conscious labor and intentional suffering—that, he suggests, is powered by the engagement of the emotional center—Christianity is seen to have devolved into a set of empty rituals, shallow beliefs in externals, such as the teaching on paradise and hell and the whole superstructure of institutions and organizations which operate in the name of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> In effect, this restricted thinking leads to a narrow and damaging literalism in the interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, such as those found in the Gospels. Consequently, humanity in general, and Christians in particular, are unable to fulfill their appropriate destiny, to live in the image of and be of service to the “Common Father.”

In an early talk from Essentuki in 1918, recorded in *Views from the Real World*, Gurdjieff states, “A soul—this is the aim of all religions, of all schools,” and bluntly adds: “It is only an aim, a possibility; it is not a fact.”<sup>7</sup> This perhaps uncomfortable idea that humans are not born with a completed soul is at the root of much of Gurdjieff’s critique found in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, including the view of Christianity. As I have proposed elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> and briefly reiterate here, Gurdjieff sought to create a new type of discourse on the soul, one built on the notion of spiritual transformation and the creation of a soul. In *Beelzebub’s Tales*, this process of spiritual transformation is described as “conscious labor and

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6. In Chapter 33, King Konuzion is portrayed as inventing a new “religious doctrine” on the reward of paradise and/or punishment of hell in the afterlife. Throughout the *Tales*, this is repeatedly identified as one of the ideologies that diminish the potency of religions at large.

7. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 214.

8. Cf. Pittman, *Classical Spirituality in Contemporary America*.

intentional suffering.” This phrase is used to denote the authentic and effective means by which human consciousness is transformed and, importantly, the soul is created, no matter the tradition or religion. At the risk of oversimplifying such a complex work, the notion of esotericism that Gurdjieff adhered to might be described as a specialized teaching on conscious labor and intentional suffering, and how to acquire a soul.<sup>9</sup> Gurdjieff assails the current state of religions around the globe, chiefly because the means and methods meant to support “conscious labor and intentional suffering” are absent. What unfolds in Gurdjieff’s revised view of Christianity in *Beelzebub’s Tales* is a renewed focus on spiritual transformation, including the reinstatement of the role of feelings, or the emotional center, and the means by which Christianity might be understood anew.

### **The Introduction of Christianity in Beelzebub’s Tales**

From Beelzebub’s “objectively impartial” and millennial-level view, the religions of earth are unable, in practice, to support the originally lofty aims and aspirations for human existence. The chapter “Religion,” which appears nearly two-thirds of the way through Gurdjieff’s 1200+ page tome, addresses the overwhelmingly destructive role of religion in human life in general. Here, in addition to Buddhism, the discussion is extended to give more specific references to Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Beelzebub, in his tales to his grandson Hassein, portrays religion as a set of institutional practices and histories that are now hollow, ineffective, and even damaging. He begins the prosecutorial task in the introduction of “Religion” at the beginning of the chapter by describing religion as an “obstruction,” and “one of the

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9. In a talk from 1922, Gurdjieff provided a brief explanation of esotericism: “The theory of esotericism is that mankind consists of two circles: a large, outer circle, embracing all human beings, and a small circle of instructed and understanding people at the center. Real instruction, which alone can change us, can only come from this center, and the aim of this teaching is to help us to prepare ourselves to receive such instruction.” And, he adds, “In every sacred book knowledge is there, but people do not wish to know it.” See Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 78.

chief causes for the gradual dilution of the psyche” of the beings of earth.<sup>10</sup> Religions, as Beelzebub relates, are comprised of a variety of fictionalized tales which, consequently, dilute the force of the human mind and heart. These stories highlight the overwhelming tendency of people to focus on external and, thus, secondary or tertiary realities, and, as a result, their feeling of religiousness has become diluted. At the same time, Gurdjieff leaves a space for more positive qualities concerning religion to be retained. While much of the chapter deals with a critique of the distortion of religions over time, there are many important instances wherein Gurdjieff revises and renews the concept of religion in the process. Along the way, he gives further clues and instructions for the process of developing and actualizing the soul. In this way Gurdjieff attempts to reinvigorate the understanding of these traditions with—in Mikhail Bakhtin’s language—a view “of a world permeated with an internal and authentic necessity.”<sup>11</sup> One of the major themes of the chapter is the critique of the distortion and manipulation of the teachings of authentic teachers, and the often-fanciful form that the teachings have taken in the present day. In this regard, the potency, or “internal and authentic necessity” has been drained from these once potent teachings.

Following the section on Saint Moses, Beelzebub introduces the figure of Jesus, who laid the foundations of Christianity. Beelzebub identifies Jesus as following in the tradition of Saint Moses (or Judaism), and as chosen “by command from Above,” signifying his importance and position as an authentic teacher. He continues to explain how this third religion—among the five introduced—spread, and how almost one-third of the beings on Earth became followers.<sup>12</sup> As with the other religions found on earth, he notes how the humans began to distort Jesus’s teaching based on “resplendent Love,” and

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10. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 694.

11. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 169. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), in his incisive analysis of the late Renaissance author Rabelais (d. 1553), employs a language that is remarkably applicable to the work of Gurdjieff.

12. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 701.

that they have become turned into mere fairy tales.<sup>13</sup> Thus, they are without their former potency as a genuine teaching able to assist humans in breaking down the effects of the organ Kundabuffer.<sup>14</sup> He adds that this religion in particular has separated into many different sects, “on account of some unimportant details.”<sup>15</sup> Rhyming with an earlier critique of the tendency for humans to “peck-like-crows-at-a-jackal’s-carcass” at authentic teachings, Gurdjieff highlights the ways that Christianity has become neutralized, by dividing into a variety of sects that no longer have anything to do with one another nor the original teachings.<sup>16</sup>

Mirroring the critique of religion in the book in general, Beelzebub adds some critical remarks about how the teachings of Jesus were distorted:

They mixed into it [Jesus’s teachings] a great deal from the teaching of Saint Moses, which by that time had been thoroughly distorted, and much later, during the period that contemporary beings there call the “Middle Ages,” the so-called “Fathers of the Church” inserted into this Christian religion nearly the whole of that fantastic doctrine invented long ago in the city of Babylon by those learned beings belonging to the school of the dualists, about which I have already told you.

The “elders of the church” in the Middle Ages probably inserted this last doctrine for the convenience of their own “shops” and for the “shops” of their assistants, because of the famous “paradise” and “hell” contained in it.<sup>17</sup>

The eventual authorities of Christianity, Beelzebub remarks, have mixed in parts from other religions, which had nothing to do with what Jesus taught, and often even contradicted his teachings. The first culprits are those that included elements of the teachings that had been previously added to Judaism.

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13. Ibid., 702.

14. The story of the introduction of the organ Kundabuffer, and its subsequent removal, plays a central role in *Beelzebub’s Tales* as an explanation of one of the chief obstacles to humans manifesting their ultimate destiny. The properties of Kundabuffer consist of unbecoming inclinations as cunning, contempt, hate, slavishness, suggestibility, lying, self-deceit, self-love, and others.

15. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 702.

16. Ibid., 698.

17. Ibid., 702–3.

The mention of the “dualists” of the Middle Ages, or the “Fathers of the Church,” is a reference to the teaching of paradise and hell and its maleficent influence.<sup>18</sup> Similar to the way King Konuzion subjugated his communities through the teaching of paradise and hell, the elders of the Middle Ages were, it is surmised, able to control those in their “shops” or congregations to adhere obediently to their doctrines and beliefs.

In these passages, while emphasizing the dissolution of the teaching, he also affirms some of the central teachings of Jesus:

And therefore at the present time, in place of the teaching of the Divine Teacher Jesus Christ, in which among other things was revealed the power of the All-lovingness and All-forgivingness of our CREATOR, suffering for beings—it is now already taught there that our CREATOR mocks the souls of those who follow this teaching.<sup>19</sup>

The indications here are noteworthy for the significant critique of the state of Christian theology, and even the view of Christianity that the Creator holds. The teaching of Jesus, it is noted, affirmed that the Creator is all-loving and all-forgiving, and even all-suffering, in relation to the beings he has created. Even “CREATOR” is written in all capitalized letters, suggesting the importance given to a divine figure, or God. However, the insertion of the story of paradise and hell is a kind of mockery of the Creator, who would not have created these beings to suffer. The theological emphasis of the suffering that Jesus went through, and which human beings must undergo, is undermined. And, a shift of focus is made to the significance of the suffering that the Creator experiences as a result of the creation of the expanding universe. While buried in the dense prose and details of the elucidation, these points contribute to the view Gurdjieff provides of some of the errors associated with Christianity, as well as the potentials that remain.

Gurdjieff briskly concludes the section by making a brief reference to the Essenes, the Jewish ascetic group living in the region of Palestine, and to the fact

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18. Cf. Bart Ehrman’s work, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife*.

19. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 703.

that they maintained the teaching of Jesus unchanged. Though he tells Hasein that he will return to the topic, it is not mentioned again in *Beelzebub's Tales*, apart from a mention of the practice of fasting by the Essenes in “America.” Whether by design or not, this follows Gurdjieff’s general tactic wherein he makes allusions and suggestions that, rather than providing definitive answers, force the reader to search for the clues for themselves. After a brief discussion of Islam, Gurdjieff turns in the next section to address Tibetan Buddhism, and the sacred ceremony Almznoshinoo.

### **Tibetan Buddhism and Almznoshinoo**

For a careful reader, one of the revelations and challenges of *Beelzebub's Tales* is the introduction of many motifs, references, and words that appear and are then echoed or connected at different points throughout the book. Some of these are such that even a committed reader may notice only after multiple readings. Consequently, the reader is left to make sense of the connections and their significance on their own. While some of these are positioned far apart, making it harder to connect, others are close together, even in the same chapter, such as the term Almznoshinoo. One set of critical connections to Christianity is first set up in the chapter on religion through a detailed description of the sacred ceremony Almznoshinoo in the context of the Buddhism of Tibet, or, as it is described, “Lamaism.”<sup>20</sup> Beelzebub—who claims to have been present at the time of the events—relates a long story about Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism, and an attempt that was made to preserve their teaching through a sacred process called “Almznoshinoo.” Though I will mainly focus on the resonances found in this section that connect to the subsequent section on Christianity, it is worth noting the similarities found in the Tibetan Buddhist teaching on the *bardos*, or intermediate states which come after death and before reincarnation, found in

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20. Jose Tirado observes that “Saint Lama” is based on the legendary eighth century CE adept Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, credited with introducing Vajrayana Buddhism to Tibet. See: Tirado, “Beelzebub’s Buddhas.”

particular in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Likewise, the teaching on the “Three Bodies” of the Buddha also has resonance, principally in the presentation of the “Dharmakaya,” the second, or “teaching body” of the Buddha, which exists after his death. At the minimum, the gist of Gurdjieff’s references point to the existence of more than one genuine legominism addressing the nature of life after death.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, much of this story is arguably a preparation for the discussion of Christianity and the reinterpretation of the meaning and significance of The Lord’s Supper that follows. With this frame in mind, it is worth presenting in some of the key passages of this section in detail.

Living in Tibet at the time of the British invasion (the Younghusband Expedition, 1903–1904), Beelzebub recounts, was a group of seven figures responsible for guarding “the most secret instructions and last counsels of Saint Lama.”<sup>22</sup> Upon hearing about the impending invasion, they agreed to send their chief to join the other chiefs of the country in order to persuade the “uninvited visitors,” the British, to return to where they had come from. While some proposed they retaliate, the chief of the group proposed that they do nothing that causes any harm. He effectively made the argument that bringing harm to them would also bring sorrow to their “Common Creator God.”<sup>23</sup> However, before he was able to pass on to his disciples the essential, inner teachings which he had been given to preserve, the chief of seven was shot and killed. Thus, the remaining six were compelled to find a way to receive the remaining teachings from their former guide and teacher. The sole way left to them to receive the

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21. Legominism is described as “one of the means existing there of transmitting from generation to generation information about certain events of long-past ages, through just those three-brained beings who are thought worthy to be and who are called initiates,” Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 349. For more on legominism see Pittman, “Gurdjieff, Art, and the Legominism of Ashiata Shiemash.”

22. In *Beelzebub’s Tales*, Saint Lama was originally sent to the beings of Tibet to help them free themselves of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer. Saint Lama’s teachings were based on the teachings of Saint Buddha whose teachings, in turn, had been refinements of the teaching of Saint Krishnatkharna. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 715.

23. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 723. It is also worth noting the reference to the “Common Creator God,” which would be out of sync with Tibetan teachings.

instructions was through the sacred Almznoshinoo, “for the existence of which they not only knew the possibilities, but they also had in themselves all the data required for such an actualization.”<sup>24</sup>

In an extended segment, Beelzebub next presents the details of the ceremony of “Almznoshinoo” to Hassein. In short, this sacred ceremony involves a group of attained beings—who are in possession of a second body, or Kesdjan body—and the means by which they may communicate with someone who has died.<sup>25</sup> In the description, Beelzebub introduces some initial specifics about the second, or “Kesdjan” body:

That process is called the sacred Almznoshinoo by means of which three-centered beings who have themselves already had time to coat and to bring their own body Kesdjan up to completed functioning and to a definite degree of Reason, intentionally produce the coating or, as it is otherwise said, the “materialization” of the body Kesdjan of any being already entirely destroyed, to such a density that this body acquires again for a certain time the possibility of manifesting in certain of its functions proper to its former planetary body.

This sacred process can be produced upon the body Kesdjan of that being who also during his existence had brought his higher being-body up to the completed functioning, and in whom, in addition, the Reason of this body had been brought up to the degree called the sacred “being-Mirozinoo.”<sup>26</sup>

As presented here, the beings performing this ceremony, through contact with the Kesdjan, or second body, are able to bring about, though for a limited time, some of the functions of the first, or planetary body, of the person who has deceased.<sup>27</sup> One requirement is that the individual upon whom the ceremony

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24. *Ibid.*, 726.

25. In an earlier story, Beelzebub connects the Kesdjan body with the astral body: “...they themselves later began to name this being-part of theirs—of which, by the way, contemporary beings known only by hearsay—the ‘Astral-body.’” *Ibid.*, 131.

26. *Ibid.*, 726.

27. Gurdjieff employs the term “Kesdjan” to refer to the first of the two higher being-bodies in humans. Kesdjan is a compound word likely borrowed from Persian: *كاس* is a cup, goblet, or vessel and *جان* refers in different instances to soul, vital spirit, mind, or self. Hence, Gurdjieff’s usage of Kesdjan, the second body, as the “vessel of the soul” and the carrier or seat of Reason.

is performed must first have a “higher-being body,” and likewise brought their reason up to a high degree called “being-Mirozinoo.” Though the term is not explained further, the formulation accords with Gurdjieff’s general sense that there are levels or gradations in the development of reason.

The process is described in even more complex terms, reflecting some of the mechanics of soul-making, an overarching leitmotif of *Beelzebub’s Tales*. In addition to the possibility for Almznoshinoo, there is a related process wherein the coating or materialization of the highest being-body, or soul, can be made:

In our Great Universe, besides the process of the intentional coating of the being-body Kesdjan of an already destroyed being, another process exists called the most sacred “Djerymetly.”

And this most sacred process consists in this, that when there is intentionally first produced the coating of the highest being-body, namely, the “body of the soul,” only afterwards, as in the first case, is the sacred Almznoshinoo produced.

It is possible of course to produce both these processes only in that case, if such higher being-bodies are still in those spheres contactable by the sphere of that planet on which these “sacred sacraments” are produced.<sup>28</sup>

After attaining a second-being body, the aim of the process is described as the coating of the highest being-body, or soul. In the process, the participants may maintain a connection by “consciously feeding the body Kesdjan” of the person who has died “with their own sacred ‘Aiesakhaldan.’”<sup>29</sup> The passage provides an outline of the process, and a picture of the tripartite structure of the soul: the body, Kesdjan body (higher being-body), and soul (highest-being body).<sup>30</sup> Gurdjieff employs two more neologisms, “Djerymetly” and “Aiesakhaldan,” as key terms, though neither appear again in *Beelzebub’s Tales*. In Gurdjieff’s text, the density of the language, and the unusual neologisms, contribute to the process of distinguishing and “disuniting,” in the language of Bakhtin, the process of soul creation from the entanglements of ordinary language.

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28. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 726–27.

29. *Ibid.*, *All and Everything*, 727.

30. In the traditional Christian frame, this tripartite structure is identified as body, soul, and spirit.

Beelzebub continues to relate that, in order to accurately understand this process, some understanding of two properties of the “being-Hanbledzoin,” or the “‘blood’ of the being-body Kesdjan” is required:

The first of these properties of the being-Hanbledzoin consists in this, that, if any part of it be separated and removed, then wherever and however far it may be taken, a “threadlike connection” is formed between this part and the fundamental concentration of all this cosmic substance, in such a way that this connection is formed of this same substance, and its density and thickness increase and diminish proportionally with the distance between the fundamental concentration of this substance and its separated part.

And the second particular property of this Hanbledzoin consist in this, that, when it is introduced into the fundamental concentration of this substance and has mixed with this primordial concentration, it is distributed in it everywhere in uniform densities and in uniform quantities, wherever the given concentration may be and in whatever quantity this same Hanbledzoin may accidentally or intentionally be introduced.<sup>31</sup>

In this thick language a formula for the ceremony Almnoshinoo is introduced, as well as an image of an intermediate world. First, Handbledzoin, if separated, remains connected to the part from which it originated through a “threadlike connection.”<sup>32</sup> And, second, wherever the Handbledzoin is introduced into a substance, and mixed within it, it is distributed equally throughout the substance with which it is mixed. In these passages, we are provided with the basics of second and third-body formation. From Beelzebub’s universally-oriented perspective, the physical body is given with birth, but the second and third bodies must be developed. In a passage that appears later in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, Handbledzoin is described more straightforwardly as the “substance which arises in the common presence of a man from all intentionally made being-efforts.”<sup>33</sup> Following the above description, we can connect the process of conscious labor and intentional suffering and the creation of Handbledzoin

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31. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 726-27.

32. *Ibid.*, 727.

33. *Ibid.*, 1200.

to the food or nourishment for the second body. The second or Kesdjan body is the intermediate component of the tripartite construction of the body/soul combination. Once the second body is formed, it can serve as the seat or carrier of the “highest-being body,” or soul. Thus, the description is presented as an almost technical guide on how to begin to create a soul. In portraying and identifying the elements or substances of this intermediate, but accessible world, one can begin to picture how they operate.<sup>34</sup>

Beelzebub offers that one of the requirements for the sacred Almznoshinoo is a “preliminary preparation.” Before the being dies—or their planetary body dies—some particle of their Handbledzoin is taken and either kept in some type of “surplanetary formation” or it is ingested by specially prepared people. Here, according to the qualities of Handbledzoin, it is blended with the Handbledzoin of their own developed Kesdjan body:

In this way, when the three-brained perfected being foredesigned for this sacrament Almznoshinoo ceases his planetary existence, and his body Kesdjan is separated from his planetary body, then thanks to the first particular property of this being-Hanbledzoin that connection begins to be established about which I have just told you, between the given body Kesdjan and that place where the particle of his Hanbledzoin was preserved beforehand or those beings who intentionally coated this particle in their own bodies Kesdjan.<sup>35</sup>

The preparation is critical and this is the component that is essential if one is to perform the post-death ceremony correctly, as will be explored further in the discussion of The Last Supper to come. One of the prerequisites, as noted—even for the preparatory part—is that the Kesdjan, or “second body,” must have been formed by the chief, as well as those who participate in the ceremony. Consequently, the reason and being of each individual involved must previously have been developed to a very high level.

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34. This may also be connected fruitfully to the discussion of the “barzakh” in Islamic and Sufi discussions. Ibn al-Arabi and others describe *barzakh* as an intermediate world, or passage, between the physical and spiritual worlds. This can also be connected to the world of Imagination (khayal), or “the imaginal.” Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*.

35. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 728.

Beelzebub provides a relatively complex description of this process, made even more difficult by using certain neologisms. Nonetheless, noting some of the highlights sets the stage for making some of the deeper connections to the story of Jesus to come. The core of this sacred process is the establishment of a connection and the passing of a substance from the second body of the person who has died to the second body of those remaining alive on the planet. The formation or materialization of the Kesdjan body can persist only as long as the beings who produce these formations, make this sacred process, and “consciously feed the body Kesdjan with their own sacred ‘Aiesakhaldan’.”<sup>36</sup> The preliminary preparations consist of taking a particle of the Handbledzoin of the person to be communicated with and kept in a corresponding planetary formation, or blended in the beings who intend to perform the ritual. Upon the demise of the body, the Kesdjan body separates, but according to the first property, a connection can be made at the place where the Handbledzoin was initially preserved. However, due to the limits of the “trogoautoegocratic process” and the laws of the planet, including gravity, the link made through the Handbledzoin can last only for a limited period of time, that is for the duration of one revolution around the planet’s sun.<sup>37</sup>

At the conclusion of this section, Beelzebub adds that the ceremony, which enables specially prepared people to establish relations with the Reason of an already formed “independent cosmic unit,” had been produced before and in different periods.<sup>38</sup> And, he adds—perhaps in an allusion to the legominism from Christianity—that there existed several legominisms, or authentic teachings, about this process. Though there are resonances with certain teachings found in

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36. *Ibid.*, 727.

37. There is much more to say about Gurdjieff’s text presentation of “the common-cosmic Trogoautoegocratic-process,” especially in relation to the “laws of world creation and world maintenance.” For the present, it will have to suffice to note that the “Trogoautoegocratic Process,” is the principle by which, as Bennett sums up, “the permanent harmony of the Universe is assured by the reciprocal feeding of everything that exists.” See Bennett, “Gurdjieff’s *All and Everything*.”

38. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 730.

Buddhism concerning the bardos, as well as the “three bodies” of the Buddha, the discussion and summary of *Almznoshinoo* becomes a potent precursor to the discussion of *Almznoshinoo* in Christianity. In these passages, Gurdjieff begins the disruption and subversion of the reading of the Last Supper to follow. In the mode of the formalists, the extended discussion defamiliarizes *The Last Supper* by describing the process in a different context, and in completely unfamiliar terms, that is, unencumbered by the terms that would be overfamiliar to even a nominally Christian reader.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, even on the level of what might be described as the literal, the description of *Almznoshinoo* presents a rationale for a communication and exchange that can take place after death, and provides some details concerning the creation of the soul. Gurdjieff aims to purge and then restore, in Bakhtin’s words, “an authentic world and an authentic man,” one that is based on a wider vision of “conscious labor and intentional suffering,” and spiritual transformation. The effort, then, in Bakhtin’s words, can be described as the attempt to disunite the delimiting interpretations of Jesus’s actions and deeds from all that had previously divided and distorted them.

### **Christianity and *Almznoshinoo***

After the long story about the cause of the corruption and demise of Lamaism, Beelzebub introduces an extended discussion of Christianity which concludes the chapter. In these passages, Gurdjieff overhauls the view of religion by giving alternate explanations about the life of Jesus that go against the doctrinal and institutionalized beliefs as held in the matrix of Christian institutions and thought. He intentionally provokes the reader through the critique of doctrinal views and, at the same time, affirms the authenticity of the original teachings and the possibility of the development of the soul. In these final pages, Beelzebub discusses the teaching of Jesus, the relationship with his disciples, as well as

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39. In the work of the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), defamiliarization means to “make strange.” Defamiliarization in literature refers to the ability of poetic language to “make strange” what is typically familiar, or overfamiliar to a reader. See Shklovsky, “Art as Technique.”

the meaning of his crucifixion and resurrection. In this treatment, he—again using Bakhtin’s phrasing—infiltrates the matrix of habitual thought about the doctrinal tradition of, in particular, the Last Supper and the significance of the role of Judas Iscariot. In Beelzebub’s recounting of the life of Jesus and story of the Last Supper, we readily see Gurdjieff’s characteristic method in which he simultaneously decimates a worldview while retaining and reinvigorating the most important particulars of that worldview.

Beelzebub next offers that it may be edifying for Hasein to hear how this sacrament Almznoshinoo was performed with another of the sacred individuals sent “from Above,” Jesus Christ. Beelzebub begins by stating that Jesus Christ, in the last gathering with his disciples, was attempting to transmit “certain cosmic Truths” by means of the sacred Almznoshinoo.<sup>40</sup> Here all the foregoing discussion of Almznoshinoo impinges upon this explanation, its interpretation, and its reevaluation. Beelzebub begins,

The point is, that when this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ was actualized in the planetary body of a terrestrial three-brained being, and when afterwards he had to be separated from his exterior planetary coating, then just this same sacred process “Almznoshinoo” was also produced on his body Kesdjan by certain terrestrial three-brained beings in order to have the possibility – in view of the violent interruption of his planetary existence – of continuing to communicate with his Divine Reason and of obtaining in this way the information about certain cosmic Truths and certain instructions for the future which he did not finish giving them.

The information concerning this great event was accurately noted by certain participants in the performance of this sacred process and was intentionally related, for a definite purpose, to the ordinary beings around them.<sup>41</sup>

Here the significance and meaning of the Almznoshinoo is transferred to the understanding of the Last Supper. However, unlike the Tibetan lamas, this group of twelve disciples had sufficient time before the death of their teacher to

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40. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 735.

41. *Ibid.*

prepare for the ceremony Almznoshinoo. Since Jesus had not finished providing his teaching, the aim was to continue to communicate with his “Divine Reason” and obtain critical information from him after the death of his physical body. In this sense, the story about the sacred process of Almznoshinoo was accurately related to others and for a definite purpose: to transmit certain cosmic realities about the possibility of human transformation to future generations.

In a destructive mode, Gurdjieff critiques the common version of the story of Judas and the general folly of the inheritors of the traditions concerning Jesus. Beelzebub continues with a derisive summation of the “absurdities” told about the figure of Jesus. He also mocks the “fairy tales” spread by the learned beings of new format and adds that they were motivated by a particular ailment called “Ekbarzerbazia,” and the inherent need “to-lead-into-error-beings-around-them-similar-to-themselves.” Beelzebub then describes how the story of Jesus which circulated among the three-brained beings of the unfortunate planet by “learned beings” was distorted:

then they “inserted” for transmission to subsequent generations, in most of the notes and expressions of those stories of the witnesses about this sacred process, such “absurdities” that in addition to this indubitable information, that Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross, and that after the crucifixion he was buried, they also proved just as convincingly that after His crucifixion and burial, Jesus Christ was resurrected and continued to exist among them and to teach this and that, and only afterwards did He raise Himself with His planetary body to Heaven.<sup>42</sup>

Here, Gurdjieff presents one of the first of several challenges to the received view of Christ. Beelzebub first condemns the insertion of fairy tales by so-called learned beings into the records of the witnesses about this process of Almznoshinoo. He then affirms that Jesus was crucified on a cross and was buried. Where he diverges with the conventional story about Jesus is on the resurrection of the physical body. Beelzebub notes that “the learned beings”

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42. *Ibid.*, *All and Everything*, 735–36.

also proved, “just as convincingly,” and added to these stories, that Jesus was resurrected among them, taught, and later returned with his physical body to Heaven. Here he characterizes the familiar summation of the life of Jesus—at least with regard to the physical resurrection—as the result of the type of creative fantasy or “criminal wisecracking” typical to humans under the influence of Kundabuffer.

One of the results of the wisecracking about the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ by later interpreters is that the impulse of doubt was engendered in the subsequent generations of those who heard these teachings:

The result of this kind of, in the objective sense, “criminal wisecracking” of theirs, was that in the beings of subsequent generations, genuine faith in all this Divine and uniquely accomplished teaching of salvation of the All-Loving Jesus Christ was totally destroyed.

These absurdities which were written down, began gradually to engender in the presences of certain of the beings of subsequent generations the impulse of doubt, not only concerning what I have just said, but also doubt relating in general to all the real information and accurate instructions and explanations of this Sacred Individual intentionally actualized among them from Above.<sup>43</sup>

In this passage, Beelzebub offers a dual-edged critique. On the one hand, he condemns the “wisecracking” of those who received and distorted these once-beneficent teachings. On the other, he affirms the “Divine” and unique nature of the teaching of Christ and affirms the “all-loving” character of Jesus as a sacred individual.

Beelzebub next reminds Hassein that the doubt engendered in subsequent generations was “crystallized” and became an “inalienable part of their common presences,” resulting in the loss of faith. However, he adds that they nonetheless retained, though muted, an “instinctive sensing of cosmic truths”:

they gradually acquired from this automatic crystallizing, data for a more or less correct instinctive sensing of certain cosmic truths, as for instance, concerning the indubitable truth, that if the process of the sacred Rascoorno occurs to any being, or as they say “if someone dies” and is moreover buried, then this being will never exist again, nor furthermore will he ever speak or teach again.

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43. *Ibid.*, 736.

And so, those of these unfortunates, in whom in short there still continued to proceed, very slightly, the functioning of being-mentation according to the law of sane logic, and who had not at all accepted such illogical and unusual incoherencies, ultimately lost all faith in any Truth whatsoever, really given and explained by this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup>

Here Beelzebub reasserts his critique of the theological assertion that the physical body is resurrected from another angle. Beelzebub remarks that through “sane logical mentation,” the following generations began to doubt that after the “sacred Rascooarno,” or physical death, a person would be able to speak or teach again. Nonetheless, Gurdjieff also affirms that it is perfectly rational to believe that, once someone has died, it is impossible to speak or teach again. Gurdjieff, while affirming the existence of Christ, simultaneously criticizes the most basic formulation of the life of Christ that is still generally accepted: the death and resurrection of Christ in his physical, bodily form. Interestingly, this so-called “indubitable truth” about speaking or teaching is at odds with the thread of the discussion about Handbledzoin and the Almznoshinoo ceremony. Here it is interesting to reflect on the significance in Buddhism of the view of the *dharmakaya*, the second of Buddha’s three bodies. This second body, which lives after death, is specifically called the “teaching body.”<sup>45</sup> Despite the indication that one cannot teach or speak after death, Beelzebub, generally affirms that one of the purposes of Almznoshinoo is that communication can take place after death, though that communication does not, or need not, take place through the physical body. Rather, the focus shifts to the communication that takes place through the second, or Kesdjan-bodies of the individuals involved. In order to explain this further, Beelzebub continues the discussion of Almznoshinoo in relation to the story of the “death and resurrection of Christ.”

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44. Ibid.

45. “The Dharma body is the Buddha that is everlasting. Mahayana Buddhists later began to call the Dharmakaya *Vairochana*, the ontological Buddha, the soul of the Buddha, the spirit of the Buddha, the true Buddha, the ground of all being, the ground of enlightenment. Finally, Dharmakaya became equivalent to suchness, nirvana, and Tathagatagarbha (‘the womb of the tathagata’).” Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, 158.

### Literal and Allegorical Modes of Interpretation

Next, Beelzebub attempts to explain to Hassein the real meaning of the “Lord’s Supper.” He explains that, though there have been many distortions of the story of the life of Jesus, a record of his words and actions remain. The purpose of this sacred event, mirroring much of what was said regarding Almznoshinoo in Tibet, was for the disciples of Jesus to prepare to communicate with the Kesdjan, or higher being-body, of Jesus after his physical death. As Beelzebub notes, because of his impending death, Jesus was unable to complete the teaching for his twelve specially trained disciples. As a result, Jesus resolved to perform the special sacred ceremony of Almznoshinoo in order to communicate the remainder of his teaching after his death. As we learned in the description of Almznoshinoo, those who perform the ceremony must have developed their own Kesdjan bodies. After this necessary preparation, they would then be able to communicate with their teacher through the blood, or Handbledzoin, of his Kesdjan body.

As is repeatedly made clear in Beelzebub’s explanations, the critique is directed toward a literal understanding and interpretation of “The Last Supper.” Gurdjieff here does not seem to be concerned with traditional Christian exegesis, though he may have been familiar with it.<sup>46</sup> Rather, his focus seems to be the more conventional habit of mind that interprets simplistically, and passively, the meaning and significance of genuine legominisms. Beelzebub remarks that humans, “accept blindly, literally, and word for word, entirely without any being-logical mentation, all these ‘fantastic absurdities’ which reached them.”<sup>47</sup> Especially damaging is the propensity to take only at face value the sacred teachings and stories originally written in a special way meant to preserve their

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46. Origen of Alexandria (c. 184–c. 253) proposed three modes of interpretation: literal, moral, and allegorical—with the allegorical, or spiritual, regarded as the highest. Interestingly, some of his writings were believed to have been compiled by Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen in Origen’s *Philokalia*. The continuing Christian hermeneutic tradition expanded this to four modes, including the mystical (or anagogical).

47. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 737.

potency and meaning. Even though the basic story about the Almnoshinoo ceremony has been retained, it has been interpreted without reference to the context, or the way that words or ideas were understood and used at that specific time, and in that circumstance. As a result, no significance is given to the possibility of any inner or metaphorical meaning of the story. Consequently, the unfortunate humans retain “a kind of special peculiar ‘faith’,” out of alignment from the original teaching or its intent.<sup>48</sup>

Distortions notwithstanding, Beelzebub adds that the Gospels retain some accurate statements and indications:

It is interesting to notice that even in this totality noted “from-bits-here-and-there,” which your favorites call the Holy Writ, there are many precise words and even whole phrases, uttered at that “Lord’s Supper” by the Saint Jesus Christ Himself, as well as by those directly initiated by Him who in this same Holy Script are called “disciples” or “apostles,” and which words and phrases your favorites, particularly the contemporary ones, also understand, as always and everything, only “literally,” without any awareness of the inner meaning put into them.<sup>49</sup>

It is striking that though the “Holy Writ,” or Gospels, include teachings drawn from different sources, they are said to retain an accurate transcription of some of the words and phrases uttered by Jesus and his apostles.<sup>50</sup> Yet what remains is understood in an external, or literal form, without an awareness of their “inner meaning.” Beelzebub next provides a reason for the promulgation of the literal understanding of The Last Supper:

And such a nonsensical “literal” understanding proceeds in them, of course, always owing to the fact that they have entirely ceased to produce in their common presences Partkdolg-duty, which should be crystallized by being-efforts, which in their turn, alone crystallize in the three-brained beings data for the capacity of genuine being-pondering.<sup>51</sup>

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48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. In a talk on the “astral body,” Gurdjieff also remarks that the second body is, in relation to the physical body, what is called the soul. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 215.

51. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 738.

Beelzebub here adds an important point to the discussion of being-Partkdolg-duty:<sup>52</sup> the ability to ponder *with being* is the result of conscious labor and intentional suffering. If a three-brained being is engaged and able to manifest genuine being-pondering, then, according to Beelzebub, they would have the capability to understand the story of Jesus and the process of Almnoshinoo correctly.

In the next paragraphs, Beelzebub elaborates further upon the reason and results of automatic and literal thinking, and the special mode of the transmission of sacred texts:

That is why, my boy, in the given case also they could not ponder at least only about the fact that, when this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ was actualized among them and when this same existing Holy Writ of theirs was compiled, so many definite words were not used by beings similar to these compilers as are used at the present time.

They do not consider that at that period “being-mentation” among the beings of this planet was still nearer to that normal mentation, which in general is proper to be present among three-brained beings, and that at that time the transmission of ideas and thoughts was in consequence still what is called “Podobnisirnian,” or, as it is still otherwise said “allegorical.”<sup>53</sup>

Here we are given a view that there were many specially defined words used by the compilers of these sacred texts concerning the life of Jesus that are no longer used. Moreover, the “being-mentation,” which might be understood as thought functioning in conjunction with feeling, or being, of the people of that time was very different from the current time. And, finally, a special mode of transmission of ideas and thoughts was used that is called Podobnisirnian, or allegorical.<sup>54</sup>

In the preceding passages, Gurdjieff provides a critique along two trajectories: the first is a critique of those who followed in the centuries after Jesus’s death and interpreted the scriptures literally, and according to their own views, or added to

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52. “Being-Partkdolg-duty” can be literally translated as “being-duty-duty-duty”: *Partk* means duty in Armenian; *Dolg* means duty in Russian. The repetition serves to reinforce the sense of duty, or obligation, in relation to being.

53. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 738.

54. *Podobni*, in Russian [подобный] means “like/similar.”

them teachings from other sources. The other, is a critique of the formalized, doctrinal view of Jesus that became instituted as a form of ideology, and which reinforces a particular view of Jesus, his life, death, and teachings. These early interpretations became dominant in official discourse, as articulated by the early Church councils, and were transmitted and further diluted in the popularized view of Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

The remedy for this situation, at least preliminarily, is offered in the critique. Gurdjieff's text first works to disunite and destroy the things falsely brought into proximity, chiefly through theological and legal forms and formulations.<sup>56</sup> He then attempts, in a reconstructive mode, to rejoin ideas and things to their authentic origin and intent. One of the remedies in this process is the renewal of conscious labor and intentional suffering. In this chapter, and in other instances, we see that conscious labor and intentional suffering is a prerequisite to "being-logical confrontation," and the capacity for "being-pondering."<sup>57</sup> We can also add to this series the capacity for contemplation, which, in another passage in the book, is described as "the state in which alone the truths indicated in the detailedly genuine religious teachings can be understood."<sup>58</sup> The ability to consider and interpret events and teachings correctly is dependent upon one's state. Without conscious labor and intentional suffering, human mentation operates automatically and interprets stories or events only through their external, or surface, meaning. When there is a balance and communication among the three centers—body, thought, and feeling—proper being-mentation<sup>59</sup> is possible, as is the understanding of stories and events transmitted in an

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55. This is perhaps most notably found in the Nicene Creed, established in 325 CE, which is shared and repeated in most Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican), and provides the doctrinal statements of belief about the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

56. This method reflects the aim of the "First Series," of Gurdjieff's writings: "To destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world." Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, v.

57. *Ibid.*, 737, 738.

58. *Ibid.*, 1010.

59. In a later passage, Beelzebub suggests that "active mentation" is: "actualized exclusively only with the equal-degree functionings of all his three localizations of the results spiritualized in his presence, called 'thinking-center,' 'feeling-center,' and 'moving-motor-center.'" *Ibid.*, 1172.

allegorical mode (Podobnisirnian). In Beelzebub’s universal frame, the ability to understand the meaning of stories and events transmitted in an allegorical mode should be proper to all three-centered beings, no matter where they arise.

### **Deliteralizing Consciousness and the Role of the Emotions**

Following the destructive aim in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, Gurdjieff critiques the excessive literalism imposed by centripetal, homogenizing, and hierarchical modes of speaking and reading. In the process, Gurdjieff provides a renewed view of the soul and soul-making. Psychoanalyst James Hillman, in writing about myth and story, provides a perspective on this process in psychological terms, arguing that “Soul-making goes hand in hand with deliteralizing consciousness and restoring its connection to mythic and metaphorical thought patterns.”<sup>60</sup> Hillman calls literalism a sickness, adding that “whenever we are caught in a literal view, a literal belief, a literal statement, we have lost the imaginative metaphorical perspective to ourselves and our world.”<sup>61</sup> Reflecting this view, *Beelzebub’s Tales* offers the critique that the sickness of our contemporary age is literalism. In a psychological mode, Hillman offers that the proper aim of individuation should be the deliteralization of consciousness. *Beelzebub’s Tales*, with its emphasis on the creation of the soul, aims first—again using Bakhtin’s language—to destroy the ideational stratum that supports the literal understanding of religious teachings. *Beelzebub’s Tales* works—through its challenging prose, neologisms, and the whole range of retelling and reframing of the legominisms from the past—to deliteralize consciousness and to restore a connection with the “imaginative metaphorical perspective.” In relation to Christianity in particular, Gurdjieff attempts to restore and reinstate a view of the imaginative, allegorical perspective that is offered in the discussion of The Last Supper. From this perspective, we are stuck in a literal orientation, where words and ideas lack the depth and dimension that are otherwise

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60. Hillman, “A Note on Story,” 45.

61. *Ibid.*

made accessible through conscious labor and intentional suffering (and the acquisition of handbledzoin in the process). In the next passages of *Beelzebub's Tales*, Beelzebub describes further the results of automatic, literal thinking. In the analysis, Gurdjieff provides a brief, but meaningful comment on the role of feelings in the process of genuine “being-pondering.”

In the next segment of the story of Christianity, there is an explanation of automatic thinking and its results, one of the critical explanations regarding the literalism of Christianity. First, allegorical thinking is contrasted with the disunified process of mentation that every human being now possesses:

In other words, in order to explain to themselves, or to any others, some act or other, the three-brained beings of the planet Earth then referred to the understanding of similar acts which had already formerly occurred among them.

But, meanwhile, this also now proceeds in them according to the principle called “Chainonizironness.”<sup>62</sup>

The beings of earlier times created texts in a way that allowed others to understand actions according to other, similar acts. In contrast, currently a deficient form of thinking operates according to the principle of “Chainonizironness.” This root of this neologism can be related to automatic thinking through “chain,” or *chainon* in French, meaning “link.” Like links in a chain, words and ideas are automatically associated together in the unending flow of thoughts. Rather than containing any substantive inner meaning, or reference to inner experience, they are linked only by their immediate, external significance.

In a striking, but brief, passage, Beelzebub mentions one of the reasons for this dissipation in human mentation:

And this first proceeded there because, thanks as always to the same abnormally established conditions of ordinary existence, their being-mentation began to proceed without any participation of the functioning of their what are called “localizations of feeling,” or according to their terminology “feeling center,” chiefly in consequence of which this mentation of theirs finally became automatized.

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62. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 738.

The unusual conditions of life have generated a being-mentation which proceeds without the participation of the feelings. The participation of “the feeling center” is, as noted in other passages, essential for the fulfillment of being-duty.

The importance and potential role of feeling becomes, here, central to the critique of culture and institutions, including Christianity. In the first part, they are a necessary element in a being-mentation capable of understanding the implications and indications of the allegorically coded texts that have come down to us in the form of legominisms. In an early talk on “energy accumulators,” Ouspensky records Gurdjieff remarking upon the importance of the emotional center in the apprehension of new knowledge:

The emotional center is an apparatus much more subtle than the intellectual center, particularly if we take into consideration the fact that in the whole of the intellectual center the only part that works is the formatory apparatus and that many things are quite inaccessible to the intellectual center. If anyone desires to know and to understand more than he actually knows and understands, he must remember that this new knowledge and this new understanding will come through the emotional center and not through the intellectual center.<sup>63</sup>

This inversion and prioritization of emotion, or feeling, before intellect is noteworthy, since knowledge is typically thought of as the purview of the intellect. The “formatory apparatus” is the aspect of associative thinking that occurs mechanically in the mind, and is viewed as a necessary, but lower-level function. In general, people often take the associative thinking that occurs in them as the intellect. And, while the higher intellectual center is essential, it is the emotional center that provides the force and intensity required to understand new knowledge and attain a new understanding. Hence, the restoration of the feelings and their importance is critical to Gurdjieff’s revised understanding of genuine legominisms such as those found in the teaching of Jesus, and also the whole enterprise of soul-making that is addressed throughout *Beelzebub’s Tales*.

Of significant import here is the role of emotions in understanding ideas and information allegorically. From this perspective, “the feeling center,” balanced

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63. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 235–6.

and fully integrated with the other centers, is what enables the appropriate apprehension of higher truths, and for humans to understand their place and position of things in the world, including themselves. J.G. Bennett emphasizes the importance of feelings in spiritual transformation: “It is feeling that can be transformed into being. Our feelings are capable of going beyond anything that knowledge can give us. Feelings reach the world of being.”<sup>64</sup> Bennett emphasizes the importance of feelings as a means of perception, and as a way to apprehend qualities or attributes, as well as the world not visible to us. In relation to The Lord’s Supper, we are given the view that it is with and through the feeling center—the source of the third force—that we can apprehend the sense and significance of the ceremony.<sup>65</sup> This view is also indicated and reinforced by the notion that communication is made possible in the ceremony between one Kesdjan body and another. The images that Gurdjieff evokes in the explanation and emphasis on Kesdjan direct the reader toward a view of the world of being as tangible and real.

Beelzebub goes on to describe how thought is reduced to an automaticity that produces a peculiar form of mentation:

And hence, during all this time, in order to have the possibility of even approximately making clear to themselves or explaining anything to anyone, they were themselves automatically compelled and continue to be compelled to invent very many almost nonsignificant names for things and also words for ideas, great and small; and therefore the process of their mentation began little by little to proceed, as I have already said, according to the principle “Chainonizironness.”

And it is just with this mentation of theirs that your contemporary favorites try to decipher and to understand a text written still in the “Similnisirnian” manner for the mentation of beings, contemporary with the Divine Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup>

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64. Bennett, *Deeper Man*, 19.

65. In Chapter 17, “The Arch-Absurd,” regarding, “the place of concentration and source for the further manifestation of the third holy force of the sacred Triamazikamno, namely, the Holy-Reconciling,” Beelzebub remarks: “It is interesting to notice that most of the separate parts of this being-brain are localized in them, just in that place of their planetary body where such a normal being-brain should be, namely, in the region of their breast, and the totality of these nerve-nodes in their breast, they call the ‘Solar Plexus.’” Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 147.

66. *Ibid.*, 738–39.

Without the participation of feeling, automatic thinking predominates. Automatic thinking does not have the depth or dynamism to decipher the story of Jesus as it was written, nor its inner significance. In this passage he employs the word “Similnisirnian” to describe this special rendering of a text to encapsulate and convey the higher meanings contained within. The reference to Similnisirnian, in the root, may refer to the notion of a similitude—something that can compare to something else. This is also linked to the notion of Podobnisirnian, or allegorical thinking that is required for the interpretation of texts written in this special way.<sup>67</sup> In a discussion of symbols and symbolic language, J.G. Bennett offers that “symbols can convey an unlimited range of meanings, and differ thereby from signs that can have only one meaning. Signs belong to the realms of science and philosophy whereas symbols belong to the realm of consciousness and being.”<sup>68</sup> Here we can connect Bennett’s presentation of the symbolic with texts written in the Similnisirnian manner. By definition, then, these texts are multivalent, dialogical, and are thereby opened and accessed through an allegorical interpretative mode.

While the meaning of the events is not fully explicated in these passages, the reader is provided with some important indications. In making the distinction between the preparation for the ceremony and the ceremony itself, the significance and interpretation of the events of Jesus’s life are cleaved apart. If we are to properly understand the inner meanings, then we must go beyond both the inherited tradition and our own automatic thinking to engage with the text—and the liturgy—in a different way. The first indications are given when making connections to the sacred Almnoshinoo that was presented in the discussion of Tibet. In this frame, the Lord’s Supper is in fact the preparation

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67. The 1992 edition of *Beelzebub’s Tales* changes “Podobnisirnian manner” to “imagonisirnian manner,” which suggests another possible indication of “image” or, even, imaginal. This connection to image, allegory, and art can be connected back to Gurdjieff’s earlier discussions of legominisms and art in Chapter 30.

68. Bennett, *Concerning Subud*, 154.

for the more important exchange or communication that becomes possible after the death of Jesus. The implied critique is that the preparatory portion of the ceremony has been misunderstood and even conflated with what comes after death. What has traditionally been theologically emphasized and prioritized is the resurrection of Jesus's physical body. The interpretations and ceremonies built up around this view are reinforced in the authoritative texts or "Holy Writ" that comprise much of Christian teachings. This is where the most significant break with the original interpretation on the physical resurrection occurs, and where Gurdjieff pushes the reader to reappraise their own thinking about the meaning and significance of Jesus, his teachings, and their own relationship to the Eucharist—or the reenactment of the Last Supper.

Though only partially explained, we can identify two potential purposes of *Almznoshinoo*. The first is the communication or exchange between the one who has passed and those who remain alive. The second is the aid that those remaining may provide to the one who has passed in continuing the process of completing or coating the soul, or highest-being body. And, importantly, all who participate in the process must already have the second being-body. While this restricts the overdetermined interpretations of the Last Supper, it makes other interpretations and emphases possible. This may include, for example, a more dynamic and participatory mode of engaging with the texts of Christianity, and the Eucharist. Even if one only conditionally considers—or even rejects—Gurdjieff's pronouncements concerning the possibility of a physical resurrection, the critique of the literalization of both the ceremony and our consciousness remains potent. In part, the force lies in the reorientation from an outward-looking or externalized view of the meaning and significance of The Last Supper—and the entrapments that come with it—and towards spiritual transformation. In the image of the intermediate and accessible realm of Kesdjan creation, he attempts to reinstate a more immediate and urgent view of the transformative potential of the Eucharist on the level of being in the present.

## A Reconsideration of Judas

Building on the prior discussions, the final segment of the chapter presents a revision of the importance of Judas Iscariot in the story of Jesus. Of significance in these passages is the gesture of compassion that Beelzebub provides in the reinterpretation of Judas. Here, I propose, one can connect the reinstatement of “being-feeling” in Beelzebub’s interpretation, made more accessible with a more generative and—in Gurdjieff’s terms—practical understanding of the Last Supper. Beelzebub addresses Hassein with the introductory phrase, “And so, my boy” that characteristically denotes a shift in focus in the text, and proceeds to decry the travesty perpetrated against the disciple Judas. Beelzebub again critiques the accepted wisdom regarding the Gospels that have made their way to the current period noting this time that there is everything in them except “reality and truth.” He describes Judas as the “chief, most reasonable and most devoted of all beings, directly initiated by this Sacred Individual.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, due to the lack of anything accurate in the “Holy Writ,” one would inevitably draw the conclusion that Judas was “the basest of beings conceivable, and that he was a conscienceless, double-faced, treacherous traitor.”<sup>70</sup> According to the previous analysis, we can understand that the information found in the Gospels has been interpreted automatically, according to the principle “Chainonizironness,” rather than “Podobnisirnian,” or allegorically, and thus without engaging the feelings.

With a sense of compassion towards Judas, Beelzebub attributes the continuing existence of the teachings of Jesus for the past twenty centuries to the role that Judas played:

But in fact, this Judas was not only the most faithful and devoted of all the near followers of Jesus Christ, but also, only thanks to his Reason and presence of mind all the acts of this Sacred Individual could form that result, which if it did not serve as the basis for the total destruction of the consequences of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer in these unfortunate three-brained beings, yet it was nevertheless, during

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69. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*, 739.

70. *Ibid.*

twenty centuries the source of nourishment and inspiration for the majority of them in their desolate existence and made it at least a little endurable.<sup>71</sup>

He goes on to say that it should be well understood by anyone who ponders reasonably that any of the disciples of Jesus would have attained a very high level of Reason. All twelve apostles were beings who were chosen and specially educated by Jesus personally, and Judas Iscariot was one of the more important and advanced of them.

In the frame of *Almznoshinoo*, we understand that Jesus gathered the twelve disciples around him in order to complete the transmission of his teaching. Before Jesus could completely explain certain cosmic truths to his disciples, he was forced by conditions to allow “the cessation of his planetary existence to be accomplished,” and become crucified.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, he decided along with the twelve specially selected beings, to complete the transmission of the truths after his death by the process known as *Almznoshinoo*. As noted as a requirement in the tale of the Tibetans, each one of the disciples had acquired a second-being or *Kesdjan* body. When the group was surrounded by guards, it looked as though they would not be able to finish the preparatory part of the process of *Almznoshinoo*. It was Judas who then took it upon himself to make the necessary arrangements and thereby delay the capture of Jesus so that they could finalize the necessary preparations for the ceremony:

And it was just here that this Judas, now a Saint and formerly the inseparable and devoted helper of Jesus Christ and who is “hated” and “cursed” owing to the naive nonreasonableness of the peculiar three-brained beings of your planet, manifested himself and rendered his great objective service for which terrestrial three-brained beings of all subsequent generations should be grateful.

This wise, onerous, and disinterestedly devoted manifestation taken upon himself consisted in this, that while in a state of desperation on ascertaining that it was impossible to fulfill the required preliminary procedure for the actualization of the sacred *Almznoshinoo*, this Judas, now a Saint, leaped from his place and hurriedly said:

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71. *Ibid.*, 740.

72. *Ibid.*

“I shall go and do everything in such a way that you should have the possibility of fulfilling this sacred preparation without hindrance, and meanwhile set to work at once.”

Having said this, he approached Jesus Christ and having confidentially spoken with Him a little and received His blessing, hurriedly left.<sup>73</sup>

Gurdjieff here inverts the story of Judas, who has become the supreme scapegoat of the tradition. The reevaluation of Judas’s role is predicated upon the foregoing discussions of Almnoshinoo and understanding of the preparations that were necessary for the ceremony. For it was he who sacrificed himself so that Jesus would have sufficient time to prepare for the ceremony. In this retelling, it is Judas who sacrificed the most for the final transmission of Jesus’ teaching and its continuation in the sacred ceremony. Beelzebub offers that Judas is even now considered a saint for the exceedingly difficult actions that he took upon himself.

Beelzebub reveals his absolute indignation at this widespread blame put upon Judas and asks, since Jesus is such a “Sacred Individual,” how could he have been so naïve to have not known that there would be such an unworthy person in his presence? Beelzebub, in a personal comment, remarks,

I personally even think that if this Judas was presented in their Holy Writ as a type of this kind, then it may have been for this reason, that it was necessary for someone or other, also belonging to the mentioned types, to belittle in this way, for a certain purpose, the significance of Jesus Christ Himself.

And, namely, He appeared to be so naïve, so unable to feel and see beforehand, in a word, so unperfected that in spite of knowing and existing together with this Judas so long, He failed to sense and be aware that this immediate disciple of His was such a perfidious traitor and that he would sell Him for thirty worthless pieces of silver.<sup>74</sup>

From Beelzebub’s view, an insult to Judas is likewise an indictment of Jesus. Jesus, as a being “sent from Above,” would surely recognize the innate qualities of those around him, especially his closest disciples. Judas is seen as exemplary

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73. *Ibid.*, 741.

74. *Ibid.*

for he has been prepared and then volunteers for this special duty and sacrifice. In this sense, Judas stands as a paradigm of conscious labor and intentional suffering, rather than as a scapegoat of the tradition. As Beelzebub has offered throughout *Beelzebub's Tales*, a being that functions properly and in accordance with the requirements of being-Partkdolg-duty develops a special type of reason with a high level of mentation and perception. All messengers, prophets and saints are exemplary in this regard. Thus, as Beelzebub offers, it would be inconceivable for someone directly trained and educated by Jesus to take any action without his knowing about it or understanding the motivation behind it. The implication is that one who has also participated in conscious labor and intentional suffering, developing the capacity for “being-pondering,” would also be able to understand these truths. Perhaps, like the choice of Beelzebub for the narrator of *Beelzebub's Tales*, Gurdjieff has a sense of sympathy for those who have been perceived as outcasts. As Beelzebub has been misunderstood, so has Judas. While there is certainly more to explore in this discussion, the frame fits in with Gurdjieff's view that blame and scapegoating do not accord with the view of the “Divine and uniquely accomplished teaching of salvation of the All-Loving Jesus Christ.”<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

As I have contended, Gurdjieff attempts in *Beelzebub's Tales* to destroy the ideational strata that propagate and reinforce the literal interpretations of religious teachings while simultaneously rebuilding a new, more immediate picture of the world, the self, and its possibilities. In the chapter “Religion,” the initial introduction of the ceremony of Almznoshinoo in the context of Tibetan Buddhism creates a new allegorical sheath—unencumbered by the overdetermined interpretations and ossified associations inherited from the past—through which the story of Jesus can be understood anew. By introducing The Last Supper through the lens of the sacred ceremony Almznoshinoo,

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75. *Ibid.*, 736.

and the explanations of the ceremony according to the second body Kesdjan, Gurdjieff's text undermines and unhinges literalizing readings of the sacred texts and practices of Christianity. In the process, Gurdjieff seeks to deliteralize the awareness and consciousness of the reader. In the restorative mode, through the emphasis on conscious labor and intentional suffering, and the awakening and integration of the feeling center, the capacity to understand and interpret texts is renewed. The aim of *Beelzebub's Tales*, then is to realign and reunite consciousness with metaphorical thought patterns that are made possible through the process of spiritual transformation.

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## Gurdjieff and C. G. Jung: *Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*’ and the Question of Individuation

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### Abstract

The third part of Gurdjieff’s trilogy *All and Everything* has not been studied sufficiently or earned any considerable attention by scholars. Its structure seems rather incoherent and circumstantial and its overall message diffused and centerless. However, in the last book Gurdjieff illustrates *metonymically* the transition from self-consciousness to what he called *objective knowledge*, a cogitation on the self and the world around it without any psychological projections or emotional transferences. An analogous approach to the question of the personal and collective identities can be found in C.G. Jung’s principle of individuation according to which the individual has to not only appropriate the collective myths of its society but also to see them “objectively” which means as “social objects.” The present paper discusses the process of psychological projection as advocated by Jung—in order to individuate collective representations and experience the objectivity of the real—while delineating Gurdjieff’s response to one of the central principles of depth psychology. Can we individuate reality and yet see it without our own projections? Gurdjieff’s answer is more practical than Jung’s but raises complex questions about the ability of human consciousness to reach beyond its own cognitive limitations. Although Gurdjieff’s last book remained unfinished, certain challenging insights into the meaning of “a veritable, nonfantastic representation of the world as it is” are elaborated by P.D. Ouspensky’s *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution* (1950) which essentially attempts to construct a Gurdjieffian theory of the psyche.

Keywords: G. I. Gurdjieff; C. G. Jung; individuation; *Life is Real Only Then, When I Am*’; objectivity; psychoanalysis; psychosynthesis; P.D. Ouspensky; self-consciousness; objective consciousness

### 1. Gurdjieff Amongst the Psychoanalysts

*Life Is Real Only Then, When I Am*,’ the third part of G. I. Gurdjieff’s trilogy *All and Everything*, has not been studied sufficiently or earned any considerable attention by scholars. Its structure seems, and probably is, rather incoherent and fragmented, while its overall message diffused and centreless. Any comparison

between this and his other two main books, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, would also show that despite the fact that it was planned to be the final and culminating part of the trilogy, the book is simply a collection of fragments and *ad hoc* “talks” made under different circumstances, especially during his visit to the United States during which Gurdjieff was trying hard to understand the different “groups” within his own school and their different perspectives. The cultural tensions and misunderstandings are obvious throughout the book and somewhat account for the lack of a coherent argument.

Consequently, not many scholars have dealt with it because of this fractured composition which in part frames its rather peculiar central idea to explore what Gurdjieff called “the abnormal psychic factor, which in the last centuries has generally become an imperceptible inherency of contemporary people.”<sup>1</sup> Jeanne de Salzmann wrote that “The Third Series, incomplete and unfinished as it is, reveals the action of the master—of the one who, simply by his presence, obliges you to come to a decision, to know what you want.”<sup>2</sup> As in everything written by Gurdjieff, it is the voice of the master that matters and the signifying practices of his actual presence that make the sentences, so long-winded and serpentine, ultimately converge not on the written page but on the embodied reality of their speaker. The master *is* the message and not simply the messenger. This is emphasised by the strong oral character of the text: Gurdjieff primarily articulates a narrative about the speaking subject and only secondarily talks about what the speaking subject wants to reveal about life, experience and knowledge. As de Salzmann states in the foreword: “Gurdjieff had an indirect way of making people feel the truth.”<sup>3</sup>

The indirect way focused on his personality to a considerable degree and later P.D. Ouspensky declared that, “[when] I ceased to understand him, or his views had changed, . . . I found it necessary to separate G. and the system of which I

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1. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 74.

2. de Salzmann, “Foreword” in Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, x.

3. de Salzmann, “Foreword,” xi.

had no doubts.”<sup>4</sup> Ouspensky was one of the few disciples who knew how to dissociate the personality of the master from the essence of his teaching—and although these are to a large degree interconnected, he managed to present the teaching as an implied critique of the master himself.

The truth is that in the five talks and the final chapter which constitute the book, Gurdjieff manages only peripherally to create the same narrative atmosphere that we find in his other two books, or to stay true to his own project as formulated with previous two books: “to assist the arising, in the mentation and in the feelings of the reader, of a veritable, nonfantastic representation not of that illusory world which he now perceives, but of the world existing in reality.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is obvious that fragmentation and the rather impromptu form of delivery go beyond the oral character of the text. Being “talks” and lectures and not essays or diatribes, these chapters try to grapple not only with what is “abnormal” in contemporary social reality, but more than anything else try to address through discursive interaction between teacher and student the question of what constitutes *psyche* in contemporary human beings. The underlying question in this book is not if “there is life on this planet” but if “there is a psyche in human beings” and how it is manifested, or more pertinently how it could be manifested within the given conditions of the surrounding world.

In order to be clearly understood therefore the book must be seen in its contextual perspective of being composed in different periods and circumstances, but overall during the period when psychoanalysis was gaining momentum after World War I with the proliferation of different schools of psychoanalytic thought in the wake of Sigmund Freud. The “talks” are in an implicit dialogue with various dominant psychoanalytic ideas, especially one would claim with Alfred Adler’s “individual psychology,” but even beyond this to the various tendencies of psychological debates. Viktor E. Frankl later juxtaposed three different forms of psychoanalysis which came out of Vienna:

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4. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*, 126–127.

5. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 3.

According to logotherapy, the striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a *will to meaning* in contrast to the “pleasure principle” (or, as we could also term it, the *will to pleasure*) on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centred, as well as in contrast to *the will to power* stressed by Adlerian psychology.<sup>6</sup>

Between the will to meaning, the will to pleasure and the will to power, Gurdjieff's own approach to the question of the human psyche is more complex and less theoretical, more open-ended and less structured. His project, as set out in this lecture, is about the will to have will in order to be able to act: the will is not directed towards abstract concepts but towards material activity and the constructive ability of the mind. The purpose of psychological reflection is the intensification of action, not simply the affirmation of the old Socratic idea of knowing thyself.

Amongst psychoanalysts, Alfred Adler throughout his professional life always tried, in the detached manner of biological sciences, to organise basic modes of human behaviour not as psychic forms of manifesting intentionality but as expressions of organic and corporeal foundational structures. His famous inferiority complex for example is part of his wider project of “teleological psychology” in which Freud's notion of libido has been replaced by Adler's concept of striving for superiority. But for Adler self-knowledge is the ultimate outcome of a persistent “re-tracing,” as it were, of all stages of development since birth (childhood, education and maturation), as he states in the end of his most famous book, and still worth reading, *Understanding Human Nature*:

This law of psychic development seems to us to be irrefutable. It is the most important indicator to any human being who wishes to build up his destiny consciously and openly, rather than to allow himself to be the victim of dark and mysterious tendencies. These researches are experiments in the science of human nature, a science which cannot otherwise be taught or cultivated. The understanding of human nature seems to us indispensable to every man, and the study of its science, the most important activity of the human mind.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 12.

7. Adler, *Understanding Human Nature*, 286.

If we could persist on this exploration, we could find many parallels between the thought of Adler and Gurdjieff. The parallels however could be attributed mostly to the *zeitgeist* and the common questions of the same period and less to a common “professional” understanding of psychology. In the 30s, psychoanalysis was also very much of a novelty and was seen as subversive and revolutionary, something that it cannot claim today anymore after its normalised canonisation and institutional medicalisation, especially in the United States.

Gurdjieff’s questions in this book still reflect the realities of the inter-war period regarding the validity of psychological research amid the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 30s and the articulation of a psychology “of the masses and for the masses”; a time when, as José Ortega Y Gasset observes,

the mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated. And it is clear, of course, that this “everybody” is not “everybody.” “Everybody” was normally the complex unity of the mass and the divergent, specialized minorities. Nowadays, “everybody” is the mass alone.<sup>8</sup>

The self-perception of the “masses” was manufactured and imposed on them by the dominant ideologies of fascism and communism. For Gasset, the surrender of the individual will to such “ideological” abstractions is probably the most dangerous element of societal morality and the self-perception of the individual. As Gasset concludes: “The mass-man is simply without morality, which is always, in essence, a sentiment of submission to something, a consciousness of service and obligation.”<sup>9</sup> Close to Gasset, from the opposite side, stands Wilhelm Reich, who in his *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, makes some analogous claims: “By moulding human psychological structure, social ideology not only reproduces itself in the people. More importantly, it becomes a material force in the form of the altered human structure, with its contradictory thinking and acting.”<sup>10</sup>

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8. Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, 8.

9. *Ibid.*, 143.

10. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 14.

Generally speaking, scholars tend to underestimate or disregard the historical and intellectual context of Gurdjieff's work by de-temporalizing him as a timeless guru or presenting his work as not being directly associated or related to the dominant intellectual conversations of its time. However, being close to some of the most educated intellectuals, artists and thinkers of the period, P. D. Ouspensky and most crucially, Alfred Richard Orage (whose death looms large in the background of *Life is Real*), Gurdjieff must have had ample information about the psychoanalytic movement, its various manifestations and the debates about its legitimacy as creative engagement with the human mind and status as scientific discipline of mental processes.

Most importantly he would have known the impact of the then dominant philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, which privileged “the will to power”<sup>11</sup> and the cult of the charismatic individual, in all forms of the radical modernism of the period from art to politics. The connection between such cultural conversations and Gurdjieff may be rather indirect but, in *Life is Real* the references to Russia and his experiences in Essentuki and later in France indicate the cultural agendas of the time in the most eloquent but somehow indirect manner. Indeed, in this little book, Gurdjieff tries hard to elucidate the contextual realities of his own teachings by indirectly reviving the knowledge of psychology, which as Ouspensky later wrote: “Psychology is sometimes called a new science. This is quite wrong. Psychology is, perhaps, the *oldest science*, and, unfortunately in its most essential features *a forgotten science*.”<sup>12</sup>

Ouspensky's small book, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, published after Gurdjieff's death, tries to bring the focus back to the psychological dimensions of his teachings not in the form of a systematic doctrine or theory prescribing practices and therapeutic regimes but as living interaction within active communities through projects of communal work and ultimately as

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11. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*.

12. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, 3.

instigation to purposeful activity. Ouspensky insisted that “men who want to change their state of consciousness need a school.”<sup>13</sup> Ultimately he stressed—and this is what permeates the Gurdjieffian way of thinking—that in their school’s approach there is a difference between “knowledge” and “being,” and the confusion we have in psychoanalysis today is precisely because of the conflation of these two categories: “What people do not understand in most cases is the idea of being as quite separate from knowledge; and further, the idea of the relativity of being, the possibility of different levels of being and the necessity for the development of being, [are] separate from the development of knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> This statement, although written after Gurdjieff’s passing, expresses and frames the core questions in the structure of their common psychological projects.

Gurdjieff had to work, as he states, with “the esoteric schools of being and comprehension”<sup>15</sup> in order to practically and pragmatically implement his school-making project and its various groups. He wanted to establish in the Institute “three independent groups,” the exoteric, the mesoteric, and the esoteric, from which the members of the last one would have “a real possibility of self-perfecting ... after having been for a long time experimentally tried and verified in quite exceptionally planned circumstances.”<sup>16</sup> However, in his book Gurdjieff illustrates *metonymically* the transition from self-consciousness to what he called *objective knowledge*, a knowledge of the self and the world around it without any psychological projections or emotional transferences, as he claimed. Throughout his talks, he would stress that the initiates want to know themselves not for the sake of knowledge but for the sake of *being*, of actualising their existence within “a world as existing in reality.”

The context is very important and indicates the analogies between Gurdjieff and the cultures around his work; but, as is obvious from his own pronouncements,

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13. *Ibid.*, 53.

14. *Ibid.*, 78.

15. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 75.

16. *Ibid.*, 77.

objective knowledge and self-remembering could become real only if each individual exited their comfort zone and entered “quite exceptionally planned circumstances.” This indicates the wide gap between the Viennese mainstream bourgeois perception of the individual as pathologized patient and Gurdjieff’s idea of a “domestic animal” capable of “self-remembering,”<sup>17</sup> a psychic nomad deceived and de-centred by the competing idols of each age which impose mechanical sensations and the state of sleep that dominates human minds. Gurdjieff did not isolate or separate the individual from the community of practices and intentions around it; on the contrary, he intended to maintain a constant connection, indeed a constant friction, between them by pointing out spaces of simultaneous divergence and convergence. Individuals like, desire, or strive to see and be seen: the act of being a *visible event* in the public sphere of face-to-face encounters, and not an isolated human on the couch of someone who has superior knowledge over your own self, is at the foundations of Gurdjieff’s psychology.

Essentially, in these lectures Gurdjieff simply reiterates the primacy of the individual vis-à-vis the professional analysts who supposedly know more about the soul than the individual itself. It is a completely different approach to the relationship between them, given in forms of common exercises and not as medical prescriptions or the so-called talking cure that prevail to this day in the practice of the psychological profession. Gurdjieff calls himself a “diagnostician” of common place truths like “when it rains, the pavements are wet.”<sup>18</sup> Self-observation is also observation of the surrounding actual world which underlines the continuum between the inner and the outer realities of human corporeality. The idea that Gurdjieff suggests of self-observation in a communal project is extremely significant in the framework of his psychology as it leads to “the manifestation of subjectivity,”<sup>19</sup> as the expression of being which by then was displaced by the automatised, mechanistic practices of everyday life.

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17. *Ibid.*, 83.

18. *Ibid.*, 76.

19. *Ibid.*, 87.

The idea of *displacement* is different and quite opposite from what we find in Freud's perception as transference of desires, wishes, or emotions onto something concrete like objects, other humans, or even our body.<sup>20</sup> Such displacement always has an element of aggression or more pervasively a constant anxiety. In Gurdjieff's system the manifestation of displacement comes out or is "crystallised" in concrete forms of activities within a community and not as emotional outpouring or even creative endeavours. In a sense, Gurdjieff's psychology is *kenotic*, as it aspires through such communal activities to empty the mind of all impositions from the outside world, essentially forcing the individual to remember itself and then finally bring out through the various tasks the actual *level of your being*, as Ouspensky would say.<sup>21</sup> Examination of the self and self-remembering are not things in themselves: they are only ways of understanding the totality of one's being, and so such minds "have consciously perfected themselves to the so-called 'all-centres-awake-state,' that is the state of being able in their waking state to think and feel on their own initiative."<sup>22</sup>

It is true that the book remains unfinished, but some challenging insights into the meaning of "a veritable, nonfantastic representation" of the world can be extracted in many different ways. Through concrete activities, the movements, exercises or menial tasks, the negative energy of aggression and anxiety is displaced onto external objects as projects of self-remembering. Gurdjieff gives detailed descriptions of how this might happen,<sup>23</sup> although he points out that this cannot happen as individual ascesis or as distancing from the community but on the contrary as "manifestation of *reciprocal action* between themselves in complete accordance with the fundamental law of the World, the sacred Heptaparaparshinokh."<sup>24</sup> In describing these seven stages it is interesting

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20. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 322.

21. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 86.

22. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 145.

23. *Ibid.*, 108.

24. *Ibid.*, 109.

that Gurdjieff also raises the linguistic aspects of such manifestation, as the conceptualisation of what he calls “the entire sensing of the whole of oneself.”<sup>25</sup>

Discussing the linguistic semantics of the verbs “can” and “wish” Gurdjieff articulates the following cryptic statement: “I wish—I feel with my whole body that I wish. I wish—because I can wish.”<sup>26</sup> The difference can be attributed to the degree of conscious understanding of what we really want and focus our energies on; it is a difference also based on the impulse of “feeling” and that of “sensing,” according to him, and the various ways that different centres in our body remain “dispersed,” which means uncoordinated. The seven exercises given here by Gurdjieff towards “the acquisition of one’s own individuality”<sup>27</sup> pave the way towards the complete actualisation and realisation of the psychic reality in all humans (especially in the community of his disciples, as the talk is addressed primarily to them) with the awakening of being. Individuality means to be aware of being aware of your being: in a sense, it is both a rational and mystical vision of self-knowledge which makes Gurdjieff’s approach so intriguing as a bridge between esoteric experience and demonstrable realism.

In a way, this was probably the central point of his psychology, indeed, using another term by Robert Assagioli, of his *psychosynthesis* because after the four stages of consciousness have been completed, through the exercises, only then is the individual psyche complete. As Assagioli, obviously influenced by Gurdjieff, later wrote: “Let us examine whether and how it is possible to solve this central problem of human life, to heal this fundamental infirmity of man. Let us see how he may free himself from this enslavement and achieve an harmonious inner integration, true Self-realization, and right relationships with others.”<sup>28</sup> When “objective knowledge” is achieved, only then the psyche becomes objective, namely understood, and the being becomes actualised as harmonious inner integration.

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25. *Ibid.*, 111.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, 115.

28. Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis*, 21.

This of course is a complex and somehow contradictory question to be “rationally” analysed and conceptually articulated. Gurdjieff avoided the deep and complex theorisation of human psychology and orientated himself and his disciples towards activity and engagement, to what he called “conscious labour and intentional suffering.” As Kenneth Walker aptly articulates it: “The highest that a man can attain is to be able to *do*.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Gurdjieff consciously and deliberately tried to disconnect psychology, in the sense of the language we use to talk about the human soul, from any form of abstraction and dematerialization. He expressed this primarily with the Movements, especially dance and what Fritz Peters called “senseless activity” that he almost imposed upon his students at the Prieuré.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that what seemed like senseless activity was his conscious effort, as the centre of the community, to organise time around short-term projects that gave focus and shared structures to otherwise dispersed and somehow contradictory efforts for self-realisation.

His psychology and potential *psychosynthesis* was always more corporeal and volitional. The persons involved were surrendering their will, their corporeal agency and most importantly their sense of controlling time: Gurdjieff’s idea about “self-remembering” is not simply about recollecting the past or reconstructing its possible narratives. On the contrary, self-remembering is about precisely the gradual and somehow incomplete awareness of the temporal structures of *being*. Memory becomes the most important catalyst in this process, which Gurdjieff expressed in his “fantastic soliloquy” which precedes the talks, stating: “According to all past events I must still be. I wish! . . . and will be!! . . . I wish still to be . . . I still am!”<sup>31</sup>

The most significant aspect of Gurdjieff’s initial statement is that with the third book, he wants to “share the possibilities which I had discovered of touching reality and, if so desired, even merging with it.”<sup>32</sup> The idea of *merging* with

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29. Walker, *A Study of Gurdjieff’s Teaching*, 211.

30. Peters, *My Journey with a Mystic*, 11.

31. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 9.

32. *Ibid.*, 12.

reality as two distinct entities merge or two bodies copulate is one of the most interesting aspects of his prologue to the actual talks. What distinguishes this book is the persistent attempt to bring all forms of experience, from drinking, eating, having sex or dreaming, into the sphere of pure rational understanding with an absolute and determined focus on the comprehensibility of the most trivial and insignificant actions. On this theme he builds the main body of his talks which is about his own “subconscious mentation.”<sup>33</sup>

The fact that Gurdjieff persistently and consciously avoids all philosophical conceptualisation of the human psyche, especially as the locus of ultimate self-consciousness, can be easily detected in the Fourth Talk when Gurdjieff addresses the Orage group. In this talk, there is a consistent attempt not to define any “aspect of objective truth,”<sup>34</sup> or any other element that could be considered the “chief actualizing factor” in the process of finding truth. It is also obvious that Gurdjieff exhibits a rather ironic attitude towards the intellectual curiosity and the philosophical approach that Orage is constantly exhibiting by demanding for definitions and principles. In the metaphoric language of Gurdjieff the substantial food of existence “is nothing other than the ‘air’ we breathe,”<sup>35</sup> which also points to the different approach that both of them had towards the projects that the “group” was implementing. In this we can simply state that while Gurdjieff wanted a practical elucidation of what evokes “abnormality and disharmony,” Orage pursued philosophical formulations and abstract definitions, even in his most “Gurdjieffian Psychological Exercises.” Such difference of approach was also a difference in the goal of their pursuit and by extension in the nature of the pursuit itself.

In the last talk, Gurdjieff tries to recapitulate and almost synthesise what he calls “the ‘assisting means’ for acquiring one’s own real I.”<sup>36</sup> He insists on the

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33. *Ibid.*, 57.

34. *Ibid.*, 129.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*, 132.

need and the practice of “exercises” because for him the psyche gains self-awareness as interaction in transpersonal circumstances. It is not the individualised form of self-understanding that we find from Freud to Michel Foucault, and in much of Western philosophy, but a gradual emergence in self-perception which takes place through and during the four exercises that he defined for the members of the group, the initiates as he calls them, reminding us of forms of Eastern Buddhism, in particular meditation with the repetition of the cosmic sound *aum*.

Gurdjieff describes how the repetition of the simple verb “I am” causes a certain form of reverberation “that is something like a vibration, a feeling, or something of the sort.”<sup>37</sup> This exercise in verbal repetition is also close to the Orthodox Jesus Prayer which, by suspending the influence of the external world, leads to “the presence of the spiritual and inaccessible divine essence [which] can be imagined in the mind and recognised in the heart entirely without images.”<sup>38</sup> The mystical idea of Orthodox Christianity about the formlessness of the soul in its pure essence and self-understanding is also lurking in Gurdjieff’s psychological project. It is interesting from a historical point of view that Ouspensky mentions *The Philokalia*, which he considers as an “excellent work on psychology ... especially for the instruction of monks.”<sup>39</sup>

Gurdjieff’s exploration focuses on the various forms for self-actualisation and self-remembering and how they lead to the “solar nexus” as breathing exercises, through a characteristic reversal of grammatical structure. The repetition of the expression changes its meaning and creates an atmosphere of self-differentiation and self-othering. “I am, I can, I am can. I am, I wish, I am wish.”<sup>40</sup> Only when they realise the power of I am, can initiates awaken in themselves the “Divine impulses ... based for humanity the entire sense of everything existing in the

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37. Ibid., 134.

38. Anonymous, *The Pilgrim’s Tale*, 209.

39. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*, 5.

40. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 135.

Universe.”<sup>41</sup> Gurdjieff insists that such emergence or assimilation happens only through collective work; the individual gains its individuality only through practical activities and interactive projects, not through the analysis of subconscious or dreams, like we find in Freud’s idea about “dream-work” in his *Interpretation of Dreams*<sup>42</sup> and his other clinical writings. There is no solid essence in the human psyche: it is the product of a perpetual re-working of various potentialities as energised in common projects and activities.

Furthermore, Gurdjieff tries persistently although in an unsystematic manner to dismantle the Freudian, psychoanalytic understanding of the psyche as inherited and localised cerebral activity, but most importantly also as a conceptualizable and comprehensible mental structure. The autobiographical I, the author within the author, offers examples of what he achieved and the practical ways he performed his task to proceed from the abnormal and fragmented world to the actual reality of “remembering the whole of myself.” Gurdjieff adds: “I want this something arising in my head brain to flow directly into my solar nexus, I feel how it flows. I no longer notice any automatic associations proceeding in me.”<sup>43</sup>

Gurdjieff’s monologue is extremely interesting, even from a psychological perspective, because it stands against the tradition of the West going back to Socrates’ idea that there is a distinct self to be known, an idea which defined the existential cognitive limits of classical thinking and later of the Christian belief expressed in Augustine’s *Confessions* that the self exists only in relation to God.<sup>44</sup> Both approaches, despite having different centres of gravity, advocate the existence of a substantial self to be knowable, which also presupposes the possibility that we can know the knowing subject, or, in Augustine’s case, that the knowing subject can relate to something that is presupposed and which can be understood as its own creator. The question therefore is not simply

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41. *Ibid.*, 136.

42. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 295–493.

43. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 141.

44. Augustine, *Confessions*, 121.

psychological, but above all ontological, addressing the problem of on what foundational *urgrund* we can base the human desire for knowing itself and knowing its *originary* grounding. The positioning of Gurdjieff *vis-à-vis* this dual tradition is extremely ambivalent and somehow evasive. The talk ends in a rather inconclusive—not to say dismissive—manner: “Now, without philosophizing and without your, for you, maleficent discussion, try first of all to understand the totality of all that I have said today, and then do the exercise for yourself, but without any hope or expectation of any definite results.”<sup>45</sup>

The absence of “definite results” can be seen in the many misunderstandings between Gurdjieff and his students, from Orage to Ouspensky. Of course, Gurdjieff does not exclude the possibility of knowing, but he surmises that this comes out in the process of harmonizing our centers—and proposes different ways to achieve this. Yet in his overall project there is an element of deliberate inconclusiveness. Not simply because there is no easy way to know or achieve the state of objective consciousness; more than that there is no reason to know and we must remain in constant friction with our self. “If a man lives without inner struggle,” he said to Ouspensky, “if everything happens to him without opposition, if he goes wherever he is drawn or wherever the wind blows, he will remain such as he is.”<sup>46</sup> Self-knowledge comes through self-observation, which has its own “technical side” and if practiced leads to “. . . remembering about different states of consciousness, about our sleep, and about the many ‘I’s’ in us.”<sup>47</sup> Through self-observation we manage to distinguish the central I in us and the deep structure in us that establishes the certainty and the reality of a distinct and demonstrable form of “I am” in self-consciousness and in objective terms. This is very close to another psychoanalytic theory which bears resemblance to Gurdjieff’s project.

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45. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 142.

46. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*, 32.

47. *Ibid.*, 46.

## 2. Jung and the Process of Individuation

Historically, part of the exploration of Gurdjieff's psychological insights is to point out how they are associated with similar tendencies and currents in Western and probably Eastern thinking. Given the fact that Gurdjieff's third book tries to put forward a new psychological understanding of the human psyche, his work both bears close resemblance but also radically differs from the dominant ideas of his day. The closest that his insights can approach the mainstream ideas and practices of psychoanalysis is with C. G. Jung's "individuation."

Certainly, any comparison between their ideas would seem rather forced and absurd. The scope and most importantly the purpose of their psychological "projects" were different and quite hostile to each other. Jung's prodigious multidimensionality of thinking in terms of interpreting cultural symbols is far above Gurdjieff's much more mundane enterprise of establishing "a veritable, nonfantastic representation not of that illusory world . . . but of the world existing in reality." Jung's multilayered enterprise on the unconscious, the structure of the psyche, dreams, symbolic life, the question of psychic opposites, creativity, and ultimately the individuation process is completely different from anything that Gurdjieff ever attempted. If we also add Jung's study of alchemy, Eastern practices, and especially the question of evil, we can safely claim that Gurdjieff structured his exploration of the psyche against everything that Jung ever articulated.

However, the question of individuation stands close to both of them as an analogous, or probably homologous, approach to the question of the personal and collective psychology. Jung's principle of individuation—according to which the individual not only has to appropriate the collective myths of its society but also must see them "objectively"—is quite close to Gurdjieff's ideas of creating the conditions for the emergence of the "nonfantastic representation" he professed in his work. Individuation, of course, is a very ambiguous term. Jung wrote that the individuation process consists "in integrating the unconscious, in bringing

together ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious.’”<sup>48</sup> For him, “it is a process...of development arising out of the conflict between the two fundamental psychic facts,”<sup>49</sup> the conscious and the unconscious of each individual. Through this constant friction the “indestructible whole which we call the individual is forged,” he adds. Elsewhere he clarified: “In general, it [individuation] is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology.”<sup>50</sup>

Later in his intellectual development and after he became heavily involved in deciphering the gnostic and alchemical symbolism, Jung tried to shake off the idea that the process leads to isolation and indeed particularisation of psychic and mental realities: “Individuation,” he writes, “does not shut one out from the world but gathers the world to oneself.”<sup>51</sup> In *Man and His Symbols* he also stresses emphatically: “The individual is the only reality.”<sup>52</sup> In his earlier thinking, for example “The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious” (originally published 1921), he had almost advocated a rather solipsistic model about the structure of the individual: “Individuation means becoming an ‘individual’, and, in so far as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as ‘coming to selfhood’ or ‘self-realization.’”<sup>53</sup> In one of his discussions of Eastern traditions he even suggested that: “The instinct of individuation is found everywhere in life, for there is no life on earth that is not individual. Each form of life is manifested in a differentiated being naturally, otherwise life could not exist. An innate urge of life is to

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48. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, 459.

49. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 275.

50. Jung, *Psychological Types*, 757.

51. Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 432.

52. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 58.

53. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 266.

produce an individual as complete as possible.”<sup>54</sup> The idea there is an instinct for individuation, the way that there is an instinct for survival and reproduction, shows how fundamental this belief became for Jung as he was distancing himself from the Freudian idea of libido or even Freud’s meta-psychological insights.

There is a marked and considerable ambiguity in the way Jung employs a concept that he himself strongly advocated throughout his whole life. Jung seems to be rather ambivalent about how this process can be achieved and what its results will be for the individual person itself. Furthermore, it seems that his conceptual vocabulary is not psychoanalytic but philosophical, drawn from German romantic philosophy and its educational projects of self-invention. This can be also seen in the references to the process in his presumed “autobiography” and other writings, such as his *Answer to Job*. In the latter, in which Jung tries to give an answer to the question of evil, we find one of his most interesting and confusing statements. Jung says:

the metaphysical process is known to the psychology of the unconscious as the individuation process. In so far as this process, as a rule, runs its course unconsciously as it has from time immemorial, it means no more than the acorn becomes an oak, the calf a cow, and the child an adult. But if the individuation process is made conscious, consciousness must confront the unconscious and a balance between the opposites must be found. As this is not possible through logic, one is dependent on *symbols* which make the irrational union of opposites possible. They are produced spontaneously by the unconscious and are amplified by the conscious mind.<sup>55</sup>

His suggestion that the process of individuation is a “metaphysical process” is highly problematic, together with the idea that only symbols can become the space in which reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious can happen so that the individuation process can be achieved because of and within these symbols. Following Jung, when Edward Edinger addresses the idea of the “individuated ego” he states that “the individuation urge promotes a state in

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54. Jung, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, 4.

55. Jung, *Answer to Job*, 755.

which the ego is related to the Self without being identified with it.”<sup>56</sup> Edinger asserts that the gap between ego and Self is bridged by symbols, dreams and images, which “re-establish meaningful contact with the primitive layer of the psyche.”<sup>57</sup> Individuation, as urge and realisation, means returning to an archetypal condition of being immersed into symbols and patterns of collective imagination.

This became the goal of Jung’s life as, after the publication of *The Red Book: Liber Novus* in 2009, it seems that a new and extremely complicated picture about his personality and work started to emerge. This strange book, the ultimate example of the individuation as a creative process, expressed a new understanding of what he called “active imagination” and articulated new practices about the realisation of the self through the individualisation of symbols. In the book the self is configured around images and imaginary patterns framing a “wounded” existence and its painful attempts to achieve its cathartic fulfillment through the reconciliation of opposites. Despite its pictorial and imaginary exuberance, *The Red Book* is the product of a deeply traumatized being unable to define itself through its surrounding realities and symbolic order; the trauma of being forced to re-imagine and re-articulate who one is becomes the central theme of this book as its writer becomes the recipient of a profound revelation; the revelation is about what makes the self become aware of its own self-awareness. As he confided in his autobiography:

It was only after the illness that I understood how important it is to affirm one’s destiny. In this way we forge an ego that does not break down when incomprehensible things happen; an ego that endures, that endures the truth, and that is capable of coping with the world and with fate. Then, to experience defeat is also to experience victory.<sup>58</sup>

In this process Jung “individuated” practically the language of romanticism, and to a certain degree of the ancient gnostic gospels, by re-signifying them through his own personal inner conflicts and experiences. *The Red Book* itself as

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56. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, 96.

57. *Ibid.*, 100.

58. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 297.

an artifact, a surreal medieval illustrated manuscript, and then as narrative, is the result of the individuation process. Only in this sense can we find some points of convergence with Gurdjieff's anti-psychoanalytic approach to psychology. Yet, following his famous commentary on the Chinese alchemical treatise the *Secret of the Golden Flower*, which is the definitive turning point in his thinking, Jung posited new foundations for a hermeneutics of the self, constructed around para-linguistic or meta-linguistic strategies. *The Red Book* is probably the most complex articulation of the self's *structural unknowability*. The book addresses the fundamental question of Jung's psychology: how a traumatized and fragmented self regains its completeness. The answer is not in the book, but is the book itself. The actual writing and illustrating of it, like the work of Tibetan monks and their mandalas, becomes the process itself of experiencing the work as the *topos* of reconciliation and convergence of opposites.

Sonu Shamdasani writes that: "*Liber Novus* depicts Jung's reappraisal of his previous values, and his attempt to develop the neglected aspects of his personality. Thus, it formed the basis of his understanding how the midlife transition could be successfully navigated."<sup>59</sup> Through this process individuation becomes ultimately self-realisation and self-manifestation, which is perhaps problematic, and in the context of our discussion quite opposite to Gurdjieff's ultimate quote, as he claims, from "a very old Persian song" that "soul is for the lazy fantasy, / luxury for the indulger in suffering; / it is the determiner of personality. The way and the link to the Maker and Creator. / Leader of the will, / its presence as 'I am' / It is a part of the All-Being, / It was so and always will be."<sup>60</sup>

It is rather obvious that Gurdjieff's "I am" is completely different from Jung's individuation process. Jung suggests that the process of individuation takes place through the mediation of symbols and images. Gurdjieff's "I am" happens through bodily exercises. Jung deals with individuation as personal creativity. Gurdjieff

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59. Shamdasani, "*Liber Novus*: The 'Red Book' of C.G. Jung," 81.

60. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 160.

deals with “I am” as interpersonal activity. For Jung, the writing itself of the process becomes essential for its own realisation whereas for Gurdjieff it is only a fragmented commentary of mnemonic reconstruction. Ultimately, individuation is a self-healing process for Jung whereas it is mostly a self-revelatory activity for Gurdjieff. In this sense, individuation for Jung is icon-making, but for Gurdjieff is icon-breaking. The difference between an iconophile and an iconoclast is probably the best foundation for understanding their grounding ontologies about the self.

### 3. Beyond Symbols and Symbolism

Ultimately, Jung’s question if we can individuate the real and yet see it without our own projections remains unanswered. Gurdjieff on the contrary transposed the answer onto projects of de-automatising, or de-mechanising, activities. In both of them, the old Aristotelian and Kantian question about a core self as refracted historically through the concepts of psychoanalysis is addressed in different ways. Gurdjieff’s approach is much more fluid and definitely less systematic; it is indeed explicitly undefined, to the degree that one thinks his idea of the psyche is only a heuristic tool indicating the specificity of the corporeal presence of each individual and not an essential idea or a transcendental emanation from God. For Jung and especially for the Jungians, the individuation process became one of the most important themes of depth psychology, yet it remained always an exercise in symbolism and symbology, and not a transcendence of the symbol-making practices from within specific cultural eras.

In a famous critique, Marshall McLuhan observes that, “archetypes are not universal or primordial figures or ideas which mystically appear from time to time, but are accumulated collections of particular, historically specific clichés,”<sup>61</sup> and the clichés become an archetype through a process that he calls *retrieval*. Through retrieval takes place “the nostalgic ‘archetypalizing’ ... to see recent developments as instances of a universal archetype, rather than as the retrieval

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61. McLuhan and Watson, *From Cliché to Archetype*, 19.

of earlier environments, i.e. clichés.”<sup>62</sup> For Gurdjieff retrieval would have been the mechanical repetition of practices and everyday addictions. What Jung would have considered as the revelation of archetypal essence, Gurdjieff would have thought as the encrypted messages of “legonomism,” which the modern mind must decode and yet use as tools for their own transformation, although as he quipped “try first to understand the totality of all that I said today, and then do the exercise for yourself, but without any hope or expectation for any definite results.”<sup>63</sup>

Overall, Gurdjieff’s answer is more *praxial* than Jung’s; yet, it raises certain profound questions about the ability of human consciousness to see beyond its own limitations. Jung suggested that we individuate reality through the non-verbal connection with its archetypal, or more accurately, *originary* symbols. Gurdjieff obviously rejected such an approach and privileged the immediate perception of individual existence in an active community of co-workers. He stands in opposition to other sages, like Rudolf Steiner for example and the work that his disciples performed in the first Goetheanum, when the construction of the building itself was transformed into a “gesture language” so that ultimately “the building becomes man.”<sup>64</sup> Gurdjieff struggled to maintain a sense of practical immediacy and conscious engagement with the community of participants irrespective of the results of their work. For him, creativity was an endless process of reinvention and not of materialisation, and in an interesting way, creativity was the most significant process of self-revelation and indeed self-materialisation.

Fritz Peters writes in his memorable recollections about his work: “Gurdjieff, while remaking the lawns, would march up and down among all the workers, criticising them individually, goading them on, and helping to contribute a feeling of furious, senseless activity to the whole proceedings.”<sup>65</sup> In the introduction of the American edition of Peters’ book, Henry Miller made the following

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62. *Ibid.*, 180.

63. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real*, 142.

64. Turgeniev, *Reminiscences of Rudolf Steiner*, 61.

65. Peters, *My Journey with a Mystic*, 56.

statement: “In a sense, he was like a cross between the Gnostics of old and the latter day Dadaists”<sup>66</sup>—and probably this is an apt description of Gurdjieff’s overall approach to psychology and psychoanalysis. Indeed, he approached psychoanalysis as a grand metaphysical cosmic drama while maintaining a jocular and whimsical attitude towards its practice. Maurice Nicoll was one of the first psychoanalysts who migrated from Jung’s “archetypalism” to Gurdjieff’s “psycho-synthesis,” as his monumental psychological commentaries show. Working on something is much more crucial than thinking about something:

The work, he wrote, is not a place, the work is not a thing that you can touch or handle, the Work is not in France or England or America, or in any place in the world. The work is in your hearts and in your own understanding, and wherever a man has to go, the work can always go with him, if he maintains the right attitude towards it.<sup>67</sup>

Gurdjieff’s psycho-synthesis had more long-term intellectual effects and probably demands much more discussion and attention. In his project he tried to empty the mind of its preconceived ideas about itself, indeed, to liberate it from its own tendency to be deceived. But as Orage observes: “Something in us is never self-deceived; and such an effort as we have just described is a means of arriving at our own conscious self-realisation of the truth that is in us.”<sup>68</sup>

Gurdjieff’s indirect effort was intense and not always understood. Probably Osho approached closer to his understanding of the human psyche when he wrote:

The innermost being is just like a mirror. Whatsoever comes before it, it mirrors, it simply becomes a witness. Disease comes or health, hunger or satiety, summer or winter, childhood or old age, birth or death—whatsoever happens, happens before the mirror. It never happens TO the mirror. This is non-identification, this is cutting the root, the very root—to become a mirror.<sup>69</sup>

Gurdjieff’s project had already started with his other two books, when in *Meetings* he wrote:

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66. Miller, Preface to Peters, *My Journey with a Mystic*, 3.

67. Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, 15.

68. Orage, *Psychological Exercises and Essays*, 103.

69. Osho, *Meetings With Remarkable People*, 76–77.

I have written down for the second series, in the hope that these ideas may serve as preparatory constructive material for setting up in the consciousness of creatures similar to myself a new world—a world in my opinion real, or at least one that can be perceived as real by all degrees of human thinking without the slightest impulse of doubt, instead of the illusory world which contemporary people picture to themselves.<sup>70</sup>

He indicates precisely the gradual “psycho-associative” analysis in order for the mind to become the all-seeing and yet all-transcending mirror that Osho points out.<sup>71</sup>

#### 4. Epilogue

Gurdjieff's difference from the psychoanalytic movement is therefore profound, diverse and challenging. In fact, it is rather plausible that he considers psychoanalysis as part of the self-deception mechanisms that the fragmentation of modernity erects in order to distract the mind's attention from its own centre. Gurdjieff's psychology is encapsulated in the following statement: “Man is a being who can do, and ‘to do’ means to act consciously and by one's own nature,”<sup>72</sup> a statement that challenges the established practices of psychoanalysis through its different medicalised approaches to the human psyche. Such a subversive humanistic and humanising project set up by Gurdjieff still constitutes a major challenge to the dominant orthodoxies of our time. It also raises questions however about the role of the “master” in the process of attaining self-awareness. It seems that Gurdjieff considered himself as the instigator and the catalyst for such a process, something which his own disciple Ouspensky seemed to dispute and rather challenge. The fact that the most accomplished and complete articulation of his psychology comes to us through Ouspensky makes everything more complex and therefore raises the questions of psychodynamics in their relationship, which would be interesting to explore further.

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70. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, 3–4.

71. *Ibid.*, 6.

72. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales*, 1101.

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# The Fourth Way and the Internet: Esotericism, Secrecy, and Hiddenness in Plain Sight

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## Abstract

Peter Brook's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979) was a watershed in Fourth Way history, in that it was a public, visual, and dramatised version of G. I. Gurdjieff's search for wisdom, presented to uninitiated film audiences as a model of the esoteric spiritual quest. A decade later the Internet shifted from geeks' domain to popular playground, via the introduction of Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web interface. Since 2000 Fourth Way schools and websites (official and unofficial) have proliferated as the official and unofficial Work lineages in the "meat world" have diminished. The outcome of this cultural shift is uncertain; it may be, as some online teachers aver, that "real" spiritual work can be done in virtual environments, but it is equally possible that the tsunami of Fourth Way schools, books, DVDs, CDs, and journals will result in Gurdjieff's teaching being co-opted by what Guy Debord termed "the Spectacle." The commodification of a powerful esoteric teaching with high spiritual aspirations due to the viral replication of online material is one possible future for the Work. Alternatively, Internet schools may transform the Fourth Way, affirming its importance for the "digital native" generation.

Keywords: G. I. Gurdjieff; Internet; Work; Fourth Way; esotericism; commodification; the Spectacle

## 1. Introduction: Religion, Esotericism and the Internet

In the twenty-first century the Internet is all-pervasive, with billions around the globe going online for a broad range of information, dating and romance opportunities, films and music, employment and education, and religion and spirituality. The transformation of the Internet from an arcane realm, inhabited by military analysts and IT geeks, to the playground and workspace of the masses was brought about by the introduction of the World Wide Web interface, launched by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. By the mid-1990s a range of mainstream

religions had developed web presences.<sup>1</sup> Christian institutions, including Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches, joined Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim groups in supplementing their embodied and material activities with sites hosting scriptures, prayers for holy occasions, virtual pilgrimages and other resources for the faithful.<sup>2</sup> Christopher Helland has distinguished between a “majority of religious websites . . . [which] provide only religious information and not interaction (religion online)” and “religious websites where people could act with unrestricted freedom and a high level of interactivity (online religion).”<sup>3</sup> Traditional religions were providers of religion online, as participant-directed content and interactivity could potentially undermine their authority. There is a close relationship between computer innovation, new spiritualities and 1960s counterculture, and before the domination of the graphics interface alternative religions had a stronger presence online than the “world religions.” For example, Michel Bauwens has noted such innovations as Mark Pesce’s shamanic ritual to “sacralise” his Zero Circle (a virtual *axis mundi*), and cyber-rituals by “techno-pagans.”<sup>4</sup> These examples are most definitely online religion.

Douglas E. Cowan has recently argued that, despite the Internet being hailed as a sacred space and digital religion as an important new phenomenon, much “activity was limited to online replication of off-line material and computer-mediated imitation of real-world behaviour . . . the Internet [was] more of a delivery system than a qualitatively different . . . environment.”<sup>5</sup> This is undeniable with regards to the online presence of institutional religions. Yet, in the contemporary West individualisation has dramatically changed the religious landscape, with de-institutionalisation, *bricolage*, and personal spiritualities as now-dominant modes and themes. The Internet has become a

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1. Hutchings, “Religion and the Humanities,” 283–94.

2. Krüger, “Media,” 395.

3. Helland, “Online Religion as Lived Religion,” 1.

4. Bauwens, “Spirituality and Technology.”

5. Cowan, “The Internet,” 462.

site of self-conversion, of experimentation with multiple religious and spiritual options, and of truth-telling about experiences with various organisations (religious, commercial, legal and political, among others), some of which are historically secretive and formerly enjoyed protection from exposure.<sup>6</sup> The best-known example of this phenomenon is the Church of Scientology, which prior to 2009 had protected esoteric and confidential texts from public scrutiny using strategies that included harassment and “threatened or actual litigation against critics,” a policy that Scientology’s founder L. Ron Hubbard called “Fair Game.”<sup>7</sup> In 1996 Andreas Heldal-Lund established the Norwegian not-for-profit Operation Clambake, a website that hosted Scientology texts, news articles, petitions and other documents. The Church of Scientology repeatedly harassed him and attempted to take down the site. In 2008 the free-speech group Anonymous launched Project Chanology, an anti-censorship campaign aimed at the Church of Scientology, and a large number of celebrity defectors from the Church used the Internet and other media, including self-published memoirs, print media and television interviews, to tell their stories. The “viral” nature of Internet dissemination resulted in an information tsunami Scientology was powerless to stop.<sup>8</sup>

Religions with secretive or esoteric elements serve to link religion with esotericism or occultism, a multi-faceted phenomenon that has historically been treated as radically other to both official (Christian) religion and scientific modernity, but which has been re-evaluated of late and hailed as a parallel strand of culture that is deeply constitutive of Western modernity.<sup>9</sup> The Latin *occultus* means “hidden” and the Greek *esōterikos* is related, referring to something that is “inner,” known to only a limited, secretive circle.<sup>10</sup> Concealment is a vital element of such traditions, and epistemological dilemmas arise from the

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6. Barkun, “Religion and Secrecy After September 11,” 275–301.

7. Cusack, “Media Coverage of Scientology in the United States,” 304.

8. *Ibid.*, 313.

9. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 16.

10. McLaughlin, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 53.

study of these phenomena. Hugh B. Urban identified what he terms a “double bind”: if a group practices secrecy one strategy to penetrate it is to become initiated, but the demands of vows of secrecy mean that “if one ‘knows’, one cannot speak, and if one speaks, one must not really ‘know’.”<sup>11</sup> The ethics of seeking to acquire such knowledge with a view to disseminating it are also complex, whatever the content of the teaching in question. Urban posits that secrecy is deployed to transform information into symbolic capital, something that is rare and thus valuable, and that esoteric content “is capable of bearing an enormous variety of different interpretations. Secret discourse, in short, is *extremely indeterminate and radically contextual*.”<sup>12</sup>

More than two decades have passed since Urban’s important article was published, and the issue for many esoteric bodies now is how to manage the proliferation of previously secret or limited distribution material now available on the Internet. What Egil Asprem has called “the rise of the occult information society”<sup>13</sup> is not merely the publication of such material online, but the ease and speed with which such content can be duplicated. Cavan McLaughlin has opined that multiple modes of digital communication (discussion sites, blogs, e-mail, file transfer programs, and social networks, to name but a few) “have facilitated unparalleled acceleration in both exoteric *and* esoteric discourse . . . ultimately leading to a multitude of new magical groups and systems.”<sup>14</sup> McLaughlin connects this with occulture, a term coined by Christopher Partridge to describe the reservoir formed by the interpenetration of popular culture, esotericism, and spirituality (somewhat like Colin Campbell’s “cultic milieu”) that people draw upon in crafting individual spiritual beliefs and practices.<sup>15</sup> Occulture includes

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11. Urban, “The Torment of Secrecy,” 210.

12. *Ibid.*, 235.

13. Asprem, “Contemporary Ritual Magic,” 385.

14. McLaughlin, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 54.

15. Partridge, *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, vol. 1 of *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 62–86.

not merely ideas and symbols, but “*crucially* . . . the very institutions, fora and networks that create them”; that is, the technology that creates the Internet as a digital “space,” and machines to access it (smartphones, computers).<sup>16</sup>

For previously “real-world” organisations that practiced secrecy, concealment, non-disclosure, initiation or any other strategy to keep their group(s) and teachings out of the public eye, the transition to the open-source marketplace of contemporary online esotericism may have been eased by earlier processes of print publication of key texts, the establishment of unofficial lineages by breakaway teachers, and experiments with media including film and television. The case study in this article is the Fourth Way or the Work, the teaching established by George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (c. 1866–1949). After his death this manifested in an official form as the Gurdjieff Foundation or the Institut Gurdjieff under the leadership of his nominated successor Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990), and also in multiple unofficial lineages established by others among his pupils.<sup>17</sup> While Gurdjieff lived the transmission of the teaching involved personal interaction with him; as individuals, in small groups, or in larger groups like Movements classes. Gurdjieff’s Three Series, also known as *All and Everything*, was published posthumously: *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950); *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963) and *Life is Real Only Then, When I Am*’ (1975). These books served to introduce Fourth Way ideas to the uninitiated, and Peter Brook’s film of *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), made with Jeanne de Salzmann’s approval, was an arthouse cinema success and won Gurdjieff a new audience.<sup>18</sup> I argue that these experiments with media, which were supplemented by journalistic accounts of Gurdjieff’s work, film footage of Movements demonstrations, and pupil memoirs of time with the master, crafted a public reputation for the Work. However, they did not prepare a discreet and reticent organisation for the radically subjectivist, “non-hierarchical

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16. McLaughlin, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 57.

17. Petsche, “A Gurdjieff Genealogy,” 49–79.

18. Cusack, “An Enlightened Life in Text and Image,” 72–97.

and authority-rejecting”<sup>19</sup> open-source occultural bear-pit that is the twenty-first century Internet. The Fourth Way online retains, in some cases, strong links to real-world institutions, but other sites and schools are entirely separate, and this more radical online presence suggests that there is potential for the Work to develop into an entirely new phenomenon.

## 2. G. I. Gurdjieff as Spiritual Teacher and the Work as an Esoteric Teaching

Gurdjieff was born in Alexandropol (modern Gyumri), in Russian eastern Armenia, and his life prior to his emergence as a spiritual teacher in Moscow and St Petersburg in 1911 or 1912 is clouded in obscurity. Biographical details are recorded in his writings, but it is difficult to determine which stories are historical and which are metaphorical, or even downright fictional. Gurdjieff first taught in small groups, using a question-and-answer format, and this phase of his teachings is represented by P. D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*, a record of his years as a pupil of Gurdjieff.<sup>20</sup> Gurdjieff taught that humans are machines who pass through life asleep. There are four states of human consciousness; sleep, waking consciousness (which is close to sleep), self-remembering, and objective consciousness, the attainment of which is accompanied by the acquisition of a “higher-being-body,” the equivalent of a soul. There are three higher-being bodies; the astral or *kesdjan* body, the mental body, and the causal body.<sup>21</sup> In *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950) Gurdjieff articulated a genealogy of his teachings that reached back to Atlantis, via ancient Babylon (identifying it as both a manifestation of the true and eternally relevant *philosophia perennis* and of the *prisca theologia*, a doctrine that was pure in the ancient world but has undergone dilution and corruption over time).<sup>22</sup>

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19. McLaughlin, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 57.

20. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*.

21. Wellbeloved, *Gurdjieff*, 27.

22. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*.

The state of self-remembering, which is required for the survival of bodily death, is facilitated by the range of teaching methods employed by Gurdjieff.<sup>23</sup> These include his written works (chiefly the trilogy *All and Everything*), the sacred dances or exercises called “Movements,” the music he wrote in collaboration with the Ukrainian composer Thomas de Hartmann (1885–1956), physical labour, fasting, and “inner work” (esoteric exercises he gave to particular individuals and groups of pupils). This emphasis on personal effort is the reason that Gurdjieff’s teaching is termed the Work; its other name, the Fourth Way, referred to his claim that it integrated the spiritual ways of “the fakir (who works on his body), the yogi (who works on his mind), and the monk (who works on his feeling).”<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, Gurdjieff’s teaching techniques and spiritual exercises were not to be revealed to those outside the Work.

Gurdjieff’s pupils undoubtedly derived their conviction that his teachings must be kept within the ranks of the initiated from the teacher himself: Gurdjieff said the revelation of esoteric material to the unprepared was dangerous.<sup>25</sup> In the Fifth Talk of the Third Series, he discussed initiation into his esoteric exercises, and remarked:

Besides these exercises of which I now speak and also the information about them into which I now wish to initiate you, being for you a really good means for this aim, they will help you firstly to apprehend and understand many details of the significance and sense of the first of the seven what are called “cardinal” exercises I mentioned, and secondly, you will . . . learn, by the way, of two definite notions which from the dawn of centuries among all categories of initiated persons on the Earth have been considered and are at the present time considered “secret,” and an acquaintance with which for the average man can, according to the convictions of these initiates, even prove ruinous.<sup>26</sup>

This concern for appropriate preparation of pupils by an authentic teacher was linked to Gurdjieff’s emphasis on the benefits of a group over individual

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23. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises*, 66–68.

24. *Ibid.*, 51.

25. I have previously demonstrated that the Work meets the six-point typology of Western esotericism proposed by Antoine Faivre. See Cusack, “The Enneagram,” 34–36.

26. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real Only Then, when I Am*, 132.

striving. Individuals, he averred, could achieve nothing. Ouspensky documented Gurdjieff's use of the image of a jail break: to dig a tunnel, to negotiate the outside world after escape, is beyond the capacity of a single prisoner. A group, a leader and contact with "*those who have escaped before*" makes escape a possible reality, not a mere dream.<sup>27</sup> Gurdjieff's Institute, which he established twice, was an environment for spiritual development, and key pupils later led similar residential or semi-residential large estates, facilitating community in imitation of their teacher. These included the following: Ouspensky and his wife Sophia Grigorievna (1978–1961) at Lyne Place in Surrey and later at Franklin Farms in Mendham, New Jersey; John Godolphin Bennett (1897–1974) at Coombe Springs, Surrey and later at Sherborne House, Gloucestershire; Maurice Nicoll (1884–1953) at Tyeponds, Essex and then at Great Amwell House, Hertfordshire; and Annie Lou Stavely (1906–1996) at Two Rivers Farm, Oregon.<sup>28</sup>

In another talk addressed to his pupils, Gurdjieff affirmed the traditional understanding of the preparedness for esoteric teaching among the general population:

... mankind consists of two circles: a large outer circle, embracing all human beings, and a small circle of instructed and understanding people at the center. Real instruction, which alone can change us, can only come from this center ... the aim of this teaching is to help us to prepare ourselves to receive such instruction.<sup>29</sup>

Arguably, Gurdjieff and his major pupils—Ouspensky (1878-1947), Bennett, and Jeanne de Salzmann, who created the Foundation after his death—believed the Fourth Way should remain esoteric and hidden from sight. This necessitated instruction in the form of an oral tradition that was passed from teacher to pupil, in intimate environments. This *modus operandi* is evident at all stages of Gurdjieff's career as a teacher: small groups in Moscow and St Petersburg prior

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27. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, 30.

28. Cusack, "Intentional Communities in the Gurdjieff Teaching," 159–78.

29. Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 78. This is important for the development of the Work, which is divided between the "orthodox" Gurdjieff Foundation, and heterodox groups from non-established lineages.

to the Revolution; the first Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man established in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in 1919 after he and his pupils had fled Russia, and where he first taught Movements; a residential school at the Prieuré des Basses Loges, a former Carmelite monastery, in Fontainebleau-Avon south of Paris where the second Institute was opened in 1923; and in the gatherings he taught in Parisian cafés and in his apartment at 6 Rue des Colonels Renard, Paris.<sup>30</sup> The initiatory mode of teacher and pupil and oral tradition is found in most esoteric schools; the reluctance to divulge secret teachings to the uninitiated was present in the Work. For Gurdjieff's successors, to be exoteric or popular was undesired and undesirable.

Yet, this initiatory teacher-pupil relationship and oral tradition was under threat from the beginning, as Ouspensky—and others including Boris Ferapontoff (1891–1930), Anna Butkovsky-Hewitt (1885–?), and Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch (1900–1958)—made notes of Gurdjieff's lectures and question-and-answer sessions to aid in their learning and retention of the complex cosmology and unfamiliar concepts that their teacher presented to them.<sup>31</sup> These texts circulated among pupils prior to their publication many decades later. Texts were supplemented later by choreographies for Movements and the musical scores of Thomas de Hartmann, who composed music—for Movements and also a separate corpus of piano pieces—with Gurdjieff.<sup>32</sup> Pupils also wrote of their time with Gurdjieff, and a steady stream of such publications ensued from the start of the 1960s, the decade in which Charles Stanley Nott (1887–1978) released *Teachings of Gurdjieff: A Pupil's Journal* (1961), American *littérateur* Margaret Anderson (1886–1973) published *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (1962), and novelist and memoirist Kathryn Hulme (1900–1981) published *Undiscovered Country: A*

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30. Azize in “The Four Ideals”, 174 notes that the “Four Ideals” exercise was given orally by Gurdjieff, and written versions exist only because pupils committed it to writing.

31. Ferapontoff, *Constantinople Notes on the Transition to Man 4*; Butkovsky-Hewitt, *With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris*; Tchekhovitch, *Gurdjieff: A Master in Life*.

32. Petsche, *Gurdjieff and Music*, *passim*.

*Spiritual Adventure* (1966).<sup>33</sup> These books can be understood as standing in for the absent (because now dead) master, and to be intended to convey the flavour of being in his presence. Anderson and Hulme were members of the all-female and predominantly literary lesbian group called “the Rope” (*la Cordée*) that Gurdjieff taught in Paris in the 1930s; when the notes that Hulme prepared with fellow American author and Rope member Solita Solano (1888–1975) were published in 2012, the esoteric aspects of what they learned from Gurdjieff were revealed in greater detail.<sup>34</sup> However, when Gurdjieff died in 1949, the only publicly available record of his teachings was Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*, which had been published that year with Gurdjieff’s approval, and the future popularity of that work as a minor countercultural spiritual “classic” was unanticipated.

### 3. Secrecy and Disclosure in the Work Before the Internet

After Gurdjieff’s death Jeanne de Salzmann took charge of his legacy. With her husband Alexandre (1874–1934) she became a pupil of Gurdjieff in Tiflis in 1919. Her training as a pianist and instructor of the Eurhythmics method of the Swiss composer, musician and music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950) facilitated Gurdjieff’s introduction of Movements.<sup>35</sup> In the 1930s Gurdjieff was in semi-retirement, and the de Salzmanns had a group based in Sèvres. Jeanne continued the “Sèvres group” after her husband died, and in 1940 and 1941 she introduced its members to Gurdjieff. Many later Work teachers—Henriette Lannes, Henri Tracol, Solange Claustres, and Pauline de Dampierre, for instance—were part of that group. The Paris branch of the Foundation was initially led by de Salzmann, then by Tracol (1909–1997), then by Jeanne’s son with Gurdjieff, psychiatrist Michel de Salzmann (1923–2001). After his death, theatre and film director Peter Brook (b. 1925) and cinematographer

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33. Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff*; Anderson, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*; Hulme, *Undiscovered Country*.

34. Solano and Hulme, *Gurdjieff and the Women of the Rope*.

35. Azize, “Gurdjieff’s Sacred Dances and Movements,” 308–9.

Jean-Claude Lubtchansky were jointly in charge. The Paris Institut Gurdjieff is “the premier centre for Gurdjieff’s Movements, and is the most exclusive and secretive group in the Foundation network.”<sup>36</sup>

During Gurdjieff’s lifetime he authorised various pupils to start groups and teach his “system” and there were many such groups, chiefly in Europe and America, that de Salzman sought to unify under the banner of the Foundation. Tensions emerged with various pupils, and in 1953 Bennett officially broke with de Salzman. He offered a different model of Fourth Way teacher, one who did not hold a “fundamentalist” stance on Gurdjieff’s teaching, but engaged with other religious traditions and teachers; he was initiated into the Indonesian new religious movement Subud, founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901–1987) in 1956, converted to Catholicism in 1960, visited Kathmandu to meet the Shivapuri Baba, and was involved with for more than a decade with Sufism, through figures as disparate as Shaykh Abdullah Fa’izi ad-Daghestani (1891–1973) of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi order and the *soi-disant* Sufi master Idries Shah (1924–1996).<sup>37</sup> The Bennett teaching lineage preserved the Movements and the spiritual exercises, continued residential schools at Coombe Springs and Sherborne House, and broadly maintained the confidential, esoteric teacher-to-pupil mode of instruction. New technologies meant that Bennett’s pupils and he himself were recorded on film, with Movements demonstrations and talks by Bennett preserved and now available, in a limited way, on YouTube.<sup>38</sup> In 1974, the year of his death, Bennett established the Claymont Society for Continuous Education, and at Claymont Court, West Virginia his teaching continues in the context of a self-sustaining community.<sup>39</sup>

However, de Salzman would lose the confidence and loyalty of other, less obviously independent, teachers during her four decades as head of the

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36. Petsche, “A Gurdjieff Genealogy,” 65.

37. Blake, “The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path,” 26–29.

38. Cilento, “Who Am I?”

39. Pittman, *Classical Spirituality in Contemporary America*, *passim*.

Foundation. While the Foundation has a reputation for conservatism, elitism and secrecy, de Salzmänn herself wrought great changes in the Work, changes that had implications for the esoteric aspects of the Gurdjieff teaching. James Moore, a pupil of Madame Lannes, the main Foundation teacher in the United Kingdom for thirty years, described the changes.

A [*sic*] oligarchy-led modulation of idiom from active to passive voice: the pupil no longer “remembered himself” but “was remembered”; no longer “awoke” but “was awoken.” Pupils did not, need not, could not work; they were “worked upon” (even while they literally slept!)<sup>40</sup>

This “grace paradigm” (the totality of which is known as the “New Work”) brought about other disquieting changes. Gurdjieff’s *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* was reissued in 1992 in a new translation that many Fourth Way teachers decried as a bowdlerisation, and “sittings” were introduced, in which pupils sat in silence and focused on receiving a fine energy (“love from above”) entering the crown of the head, flowing down the spine through the subtle body, then rising to exit at the centre of the forehead.<sup>41</sup> Most drastic of all measures was de Salzmänn’s “forbidding anyone to use Gurdjieff’s exercises.”<sup>42</sup>

Under de Salzmänn the Foundation remained committed to secrecy, but a limited kind of disclosure existed, too. She collaborated with Peter Brook to make the film *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), based on the Gurdjieff’s quasi-autobiographical text, starring the Serbian actor Dragan Maksimović (1949–2001), and this functioned as a revelation of the Work to a new demographic.<sup>43</sup> While not a major success, the film garnered an appreciative art-house audience, joining Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous* and Gurdjieff’s *Meetings with Remarkable Men* as a minor “New Age” spiritual classic, and a way for outsiders to familiarise themselves with the Work. Yet as de Salzmänn revealed she also concealed: the extracts of Movements shown in the film’s climactic sequence in

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40. Moore, “Moveable Feasts,” 13.

41. Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters*.

42. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises*, 222.

43. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. See Cusack, “An Enlightened Life in Text and Image,” 88–93.

the monastery of the Sarmoung Brotherhood are not accurate, such that those who saw them might be able to imitate them via frame-by-frame analysis of the film footage. On the contrary, they have errors built into them, to deflect the possibility of imitation in a non-initiatory context.<sup>44</sup>

After de Salzmänn's death the Foundation issued a book under her name, *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*. This text was excerpted from her notebooks; the "Foreword" clarifies her role, "to give the teaching a form for practical work towards consciousness," from that of Gurdjieff, who "created conditions for his pupils and was the dominant influence for each person."<sup>45</sup> De Salzmänn, it is suggested, created an organisational structure for (more or less standardised) group teaching, while Gurdjieff instructed individuals and small groups in targeted, more personal ways. The content of de Salzmänn's text is interesting in terms of the dynamic of revealing and concealing, in that there is discussion of spiritual exercises, some identifiably from Gurdjieff and some that reflect her "New Work" orientation. Joseph Azize has a chapter on de Salzmänn in his magisterial *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation & Exercises*. He notes that *The Reality of Being* is probably "the preeminent practical guide" while Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* remains the preeminent theoretical guide.<sup>46</sup> Yet the editing of the book is such that vagueness around which exercises precisely are being discussed is a constant issue, and some ideas she expresses appear far from Gurdjieff's own. Azize analyses her "Exercise for Feeling," finding in it elements of Gurdjieff's "Lord have mercy," "Second Assisting," and "Atmosphere" exercises, and faint traces of the "Four Ideals" exercise. However, his interrogation of her "I, Me" exercise confirms it is not a transmission from Gurdjieff; moreover, in terms of secrecy, one of Madame de Salzmänn's students told Azize that "the published version is not an accurate version of what de Salzmänn would say" but "did not . . . feel at liberty to disclose the true exercise."<sup>47</sup>

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44. Azize, "Gurdjieff's Sacred Dances and Movements," 321.

45. De Salzmänn, *The Reality of Being*, xiv–xv.

46. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises*, 215.

47. *Ibid.*, 220.

In the approximately five decades between Gurdjieff's death in 1949 and the Fourth Way establishing a web presence, the Foundation remained largely secretive and the spiritual exercises were taught as an esoteric discipline from teacher to pupil until Jeanne de Salzmann, in the last decade of her life, inaugurated the "New Work" and retired the exercises. During that time, the Foundation became established in London, Paris, New York and Caracas, and many Gurdjieff Societies that were affiliated with it were started in other countries and cities. Some teachers who were not Foundation members but were broadly in harmony with de Salzmann, such as Maurice Nicoll and Francis Roles (1901–1982), leader of the Study Society, based at Colet House in London, continued with the teachings and Movements. Some leaders, including Rodney Collin (1909–1956), a pupil of Ouspensky who established the Work in Mexico, the biochemist Robert de Ropp (1913–1987), and the more controversial E. J. Gold (b. 1941) and Robert Burton (b. 1939), and many others, established teaching lineages entirely outside the Foundation.<sup>48</sup> These groups have varying attitudes to secrecy and esoteric transmission, and most do not teach the spiritual exercises as laid down by Gurdjieff, though sacred dances, often called "Movements," are taught in a number of disparate organisations.

Before considering the Fourth Way online, and the impact of the digital context on its esoteric status, it is worth noting that the Foundation and other teaching lineages have produced a large number of books, with wide-ranging content, on Gurdjieff and Work topics, and other media, including DVDs by teachers including William Patrick Patterson (b. 1937), a former member of the New York Foundation, and CDs of the Gurdjieff-de Hartmann music. This commercial activity is unremarkable; traditional religions sell CDs of sacred music and books, souvenirs and memorabilia, products which are available to members and non-members alike. However, the diversity and eclecticism of the Work online, and the proliferation of products associated with it, call to

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48. Petsche, "A Gurdjieff Genealogy," *passim*.

mind the Guy Debord's concept of the Spectacle, an advanced form of consumer capitalism "in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy."<sup>49</sup> This overwhelming materialist system, Debord (1931–1994) averred, replaced the religious (and, arguably, the spiritual and esoteric) worldview, and rendered human interactions null in the face of the compulsion to possess consumer products. The commercialised Work "industry" is inextricably linked to both occulture and the occult information society, discussed above.

#### 4. Internet Mediation of the Fourth Way and Possible Futures for the Work

The top twenty results of a Google search for "G. I. Gurdjieff" generally contain a variety of sites, headed by Wikipedia's "George Gurdjieff" and "Fourth Way" pages and including the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry. Also included are the groups Be Community, The Wisdom Way of Knowing, and The Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation, and the Foundation-endorsed journal the *Gurdjieff International Review*.<sup>50</sup> The *Review* is a "religion online" site, with every issue of the journal since it debuted in 1997 available. Editor Gregory M. Loy and Associate Editor June S. Loy established Gurdjieff Electronic Publishing as "a nonprofit corporation established to conduct research, publish, and disseminate educational material to the public on the ideas and teaching of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff."<sup>51</sup> This site provides supplementary reading for Work members and high-quality content for non-Work people interested to learn more. This emphasis on information provision in an open context informs Wikipedia, *Britannica*, and a host of other Gurdjieff-related sites. Schools tend to focus on a teacher: The Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation's Patterson was a long-term pupil of Henry John Sinclair, Lord Pentland (1907–1984), who led the Foundation in New York; and the Wisdom Way of Knowing is led by Cynthia Bourgeault (b. 1947), an Episcopal priest

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49. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 17.

50. Pecotic and Cusack, "The (World Wide) Work 2.0, 94–98.

51. Loy and Loy, *Gurdjieff International Review* (1997–2020).

who is particularly influenced by Nicoll. Schools that are further down the list of results include DuVersity and All and Everything: DuVersity was founded in 1998 by Anthony Blake (b. 1939), a pupil of Bennett, and Karen Stefano and is an online institution with real-world seminars; All and Everything was established in 1996 through cooperation between Seymour (Sy) Ginsburg, Nick Tereshchenko and Bert Sharp, and is an annual ecumenical conference for all who identify as “Companions of the Book.”<sup>52</sup>

In the decade since 2010, videos and books that discuss the inner exercises have been released. Between 2013 and 2015 five volumes of talks by Alfred Richard Orage (1873–1934), the foremost teacher of Work ideas in America until his untimely death, entitled *The Force of Gurdjieff*, were published by Magisteria, a publisher based in Bucharest.<sup>53</sup> The centrepiece was C. Daly King’s *The Oragean Version*, which was issued in a limited edition in 1951 and has also been re-issued by Book Studio, a Gurdjieffian press based in the United Kingdom. The fourth volume is of especial interest as it contains the exercises Orage taught his pupils. Joseph Azize has argued that Orage’s publication of *Psychological Exercises* in 1930 (some of which were Gurdjieff’s but unattributed) was the impetus for Gurdjieff to develop his “Transformed-contemplation” exercises.<sup>54</sup> Many Fourth way members that were aware of the exercises emphatically believed they should not be published or discussed, but rather should remain esoteric, transmitted from teacher to pupil.<sup>55</sup> However, by the time Magisteria issued the Orage pupil notes, many of the exercises were in the public domain, not least because the Foundation published de Salzmann’s *The Reality of Being*, and certain pupil memoirs contained brief references to them.

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52. Pecotic and Cusack, “The (World Wide) Work 2.0,” 97.

53. Orage, *The Force of Gurdjieff*, five vols. The volumes contain C. Daly King’s *The Oragean Version* (Volume 3), recollections of Orage’s talks by B. B. Grant and L. S. Morris (Volume 1), Frederick Schneider and L. S. Morris (Volume 2), and Sherman Manchester (Volume 5). The fourth volume, *Exercises*, contains inner exercises from Daly King and Morris.

54. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises*, 40–42.

55. Azize, “The Four Ideals,” 177.

For example, Frank Sinclair, head of the New York Foundation from 2000 to 2011, says that once, at the end of a Movements class, Gurdjieff said, “At this time [around Christmas], many people pray. Their prayers go only so far up in the atmosphere. You can suck these into yourself; this force.”<sup>56</sup> Sinclair states that Martin Benson, an early pupil of Gurdjieff, said that after the car accident in 1924 Gurdjieff went to cafés where prostitutes congregated to “feed” off their vibrations. Gurdjieff told him, “Go to church, Benson, and *steal*. Their prayers will not reach God. Steal them.”<sup>57</sup> Sinclair recalls that Louise March and his fiancée Beatrice also heard Gurdjieff’s injunction at the Wellington Hotel on Christmas Day of 1948 to go and “draw in,” “steal,” or “suck in” the energies being poured out “by millions” of people in prayer. March remembered this exercise as:

I wish give [*sic*] *real* Christmas present. Imagine Christ. Somewhere in space *is*.” Mr Gurdjieff forms an oval with both his hands. “Make contact, but to outside, periphery. Draw from there, draw in, *I*. Settle in you, *Am*. Do every day. Wish to become Christ. Become. Be.”<sup>58</sup>

The academic study of the Gurdjieff exercises is in its infancy; the Australian scholar Joseph Azize is the leader in the field. He has argued that Ouspensky records only one contemplative practice, the “I Am” exercise, and that Gurdjieff did not develop the exercises till the 1930s, after the publication of Orage’s exercises.<sup>59</sup> The exercises were aimed at the formation of a higher-being-body, the transformation of the fragmentary person into a “real I,” a process akin to the Orthodox Christian *theosis*; and he locates Gurdjieff’s exercises in the Orthodox Christian tradition of the monastery of Mount Athos. Azize notes that Gurdjieff told Nicoll, “Behind real I lies God;”<sup>60</sup> this clarifies spiritual progress in the Work, in that mechanical soulless people lack a unified self and

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56. Sinclair, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 125.

57. *Ibid.*, 146.

58. *Ibid.*, 230–31.

59. Azize, “The Practice of Contemplation in the Work of Gurdjieff,” 137–56.

60. Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises*, 74.

being soulless will not live after death; the acquisition of such a self/soul, the higher-being-body that survives bodily death is evidence of coming close to God.

Reading about Gurdjieff's exercises is not the same as being shown "how" to do them. YouTube is particularly important for the esoteric aspects of the Fourth Way, and this video medium hosts the following: films of Movements demonstrations; talks by Work teachers, mainstream to fringe; and increasingly, material that openly discuss the contemplative exercises. For example, both Romanian Alexandru Eugen Cristea (to a group called The Force of Gurdjieff, which is clearly associated with the Magisteria publications) and Canadian Allan Clews have clips on YouTube that discuss the "Atmosphere Exercise," uploaded respectively in 2016 and 2018.<sup>61</sup> Clews, in fact, has clips with voice-over of a number of the inner exercises. Cynthia Bourgeault, on the Wisdom Way of Knowing website, hosts a diverse array of materials, including detailed instructions for doing Gurdjieff's Movement #39, with a textual explanation, music and videos.<sup>62</sup> Some of the internet schools assert the possibility of doing real inner work online. Reijo Oksanen (b. 1942), the founder of the Gurdjieff Internet Guide (GIG), in an interview conducted with Kristina Turner (who now manages the site), discussed the place of cyberspace in the Work. He acknowledged that the Work was "incomplete without direct human contacts and personal attempts to wake up." Yet, he was optimistic in conversation with Turner:

I think that if you're asking generally what is the value of working in the virtual internet space or using telephones, videos or whatever, my personal answer is that I am able to work with some people in a fairly serious way with the help of these; not many people. I have put a condition on the possibility of starting to work like this, and that is that we really need to know each other quite well to be able to do any meaningful work. When we know each other we can see each other's reactions. I would even think that the substance that is needed for transmission can be exchanged to some extent with the help of modern media. After all, long distance guidance of others without telephone lines or anything else has been possible in the past. So why not use this media, if we do

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61. See Cristea, "Most Important Exercise"; Clews, "The Collected State."

62. See Bourgeault, "Gurdjieff Movement #39."

not pay too much attention to the media itself, and try to be in an actively receptive state, and also an actively transmitting state. I think that this is the precondition that I have: if you know a person then there is a possibility that you can work together remotely, like so many healers also do. For me it works to have meaningful inner work going on in an exchange with some people, as I have said. It can even work through an email exchange.<sup>63</sup>

Oksanen is not alone in this belief. In interviews with the GIG, Kenneth Jonsson shared a computer “Stop Exercise” he devised; Gurdjieff’s “Stop Exercise” involved him giving a command as pupils were in motion, and all were to freeze. Jonsson’s application has a sound file with the “Stop!” command, and can be used in any activity, not merely online tasks. An interview with Ian MacFarlane probes the possibilities of online Fourth Way groups; he insists “it is time that the veil of secrecy about Work practices is lifted,” and notes that Gurdjieff was interested in machines, supporting the case for online Work:

In this day and age, so much of what we do is conducted online or through cellphones and instant messaging, and so on and so forth—there has to be some way to make use of these technological innovations, to participate in the Work. To say that the Work shouldn’t be conveyed through technological means is ridiculous. Gurdjieff himself embraced new technology, as is evidenced by the availability of the recordings of him playing the harmonium. *Gurdjieff also used electro-therapy devices, which were very fashionable in the 20s and 30s, in his “healing” practices.* Where did Gurdjieff ever say that Oral Transmission was the only true way to transmit the Work? If he had felt that way, he would never have written three books about the Work, and called them *All and Everything*.<sup>64</sup>

MacFarlane and Anthony Blake have explicitly rejected the hierarchical structure of older “real world” groups, in which the teacher was an elevated being and the pupils were at a “lower” stage of development and treated accordingly. MacFarlane offers the model of the “computer network, where every node is connected with every other node . . . we need to get more networked and sharing and Working together as individuals rather than marching behind a leader,” and Blake avers that the DuVersity model (which is also the All and Everything

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63. Oksanen and Turner, *Gurdjieff Internet Guide* (2002–2020).

64. *Ibid.*

model) where people gather for short periods of intense work with many leading workshops and reading groups, and then the larger group disperses, so no hierarchical relationships are established, is the way forward.<sup>65</sup>

These non-traditional Work leaders all admit that the innovations they have pioneered have, in the main, been ignored by the Foundation, which has retreated as its members have aged. Jan Jarvis, who joined the Work in 1977 and studied with George and Mary Cornelius, Pierre and Vivian Elliot, and Elizabeth Bennett (all of whom were pupils of Gurdjieff), was uncompromising in an interview with the GIG. She criticised the lack of third line Work, which aims for the betterment of humanity, and advocated opening the large estates used by various Fourth Way groups for communal gatherings and physical labour to be opened up to serve the wider community, to avoid becoming entirely inward-looking. She remarks that “when all labor goes to maintenance of the property there is little left over for any real growth beyond the personal work of dealing with people who share your interests. It is not dealing with the real annoying people out there.”<sup>66</sup> Online schools and groups are rapidly proliferating, and those engaged with them are in favour of rejecting secrecy and revealing esoteric Work in the digital realm. The Foundation model of hierarchy and gate-keeping, essentially inward-looking and seeking to avoid publicity and exposure, is increasingly outmoded. Even advocates for real world groups like Jarvis appreciate the communicative power of the Internet; she rejects hierarchical organisation structures and stresses the value of engagement with the wider world.

## 5. Conclusion

In the contemporary world the Internet is a given, and the twenty-four-hour media cycle constantly delivers questionable information, conspiracies and leaks, “fake news” and puff pieces, creating an impression of evanescent illusions,

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65. *Ibid.*; Anthony Blake, personal communication; All and Everything Conference, Kendal (UK), 3–7 April 2019.

66. Oksanen and Turner, *Gurdjieff Internet Guide* (2002–2020).

that all is provisional and temporary. Facebook friends, Snapchat, Twitter and a multitude of social media outlets suggest that “real-world” interactions are unnecessary. The spiritual seeker model reduces the valuation of the dedicated quest for faith, knowledge, or esoteric wisdom. Such a quest is not mainstream. In Christian terms, Matthew (7:14) puts it, “small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” The fate of the Work online is not unique; in the three decades since the Web debuted “secret” teachings of many religions (prominent examples being Scientology and Mormonism) and esoteric spiritual teachings have been “published” online, becoming effectively public and available to any interested person. Fourth Way schools and websites (official and unofficial) have proliferated since the year 2000, as the Work in the “meat” world has aged and numbers dwindled.<sup>67</sup>

At the core of these possible futures for the Work is the question of physical presence and the traditional requirement of master-student transmission of secret teachings. In addition to Movements, lectures, physical labour, and ritualised eating and drinking, Gurdjieff challenged students to rethink their habits. The oral transmission of the Work is a marker of its status as “a teaching replete with esoteric knowledge to wake humans up from their existence as sleeping machines, and to assist in the development of a soul.”<sup>68</sup> Oral tradition keeps esoteric knowledge rare; widespread publication seemingly should cause it to lose currency, as it is available to all. However, as McLaughlin notes, esotericists and scholars have agreed that it is possible “there are orders of mystery that can *never* be communicated ... even if materials related to said secret are freely available, it still requires progressive multileveled understanding and penetration.”<sup>69</sup> This insight reinforces Urban’s contention, mentioned earlier, that esoteric discourses are “capable of bearing an enormous variety of different

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67. Pecotic and Cusack, “The (World Wide) Work 2.0,” 96.

68. *Ibid.*, 95.

69. McLaughlin, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 55.

interpretations.”<sup>70</sup> Foundation members are likely to argue that consuming web content about Gurdjieff is a passive activity that is very similar to reading Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous* or a book by Gurdjieff. The mere act of reading will not enlighten the reader; the experiential nature of Gurdjieff’s teachings is stressed by teachers orthodox and unorthodox. The Movements are often seen as a sign of “real” Work, in that they are an embodied activity that aligns the centres, they are enacted to music which similarly acts upon pupils, and late in Gurdjieff’s life he incorporated specific inner exercises to be done during them.<sup>71</sup>

The outcome of this extraordinary cultural shift in the Work is uncertain; in 1990 there was virtually no Gurdjieffian online presence on the Internet, but thirty years later the online Work is more prominent and active than older lineages, however distinguished they may be. Perhaps, as some online teachers aver, that “real” spiritual/esoteric work can be done in virtual environments, but it is possible that the tsunami of Fourth Way schools, books, DVDs, CDs, conferences and Movements workshops have resulted in Gurdjieff’s teachings being co-opted by what Debord called “the Spectacle.” That this commodification, and the neutralisation attendant upon it, could be the fate of a once-disciplined, powerful esoteric teaching with high spiritual aspirations, due to the viral replication of online material, is one possible future for the Work. Alternatively, the Internet schools and technological mediations may succeed in transforming the Work tradition, repositioning it as relevant for and attractive to the “digital natives.” The great variety of groups, teachers, and products, as well as the the fragmentation of lines of transmission and the hostility of some groups to others, confirms the Work’s esoteric tradition as radically indeterminate and capable of multiple (and conflicting) interpretations, which should ensure its survival in the future.

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70. Urban, “The Torment of Secrecy,” 235.

71. Azize, “Gurdjieff’s Sacred Dances and Movements,” *passim*.

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Roger Lipsey. *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2019. 280 pp. ISBN: 978-1611804515. \$24.95

Roger Lipsey's *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy* is a timely and welcome entry in the literature about G. I. Gurdjieff, an important but often overlooked figure of the early twentieth century. Appearing a little over 100 years after Gurdjieff began teaching in the West (though this dividing line is somewhat artificial), it is time for a reappraisal of his importance and, especially, the importance of his ideas and methods. Lipsey presents an erudite and accessible narrative of Gurdjieff's life, with a focus on his teaching career after 1912 until his death in 1949. Attempting to "leave no stone unturned," Lipsey draws on a wealth of historical, biographical, and personal journals, including material from the relatively protected archives of the Gurdjieff Foundation. Lipsey is a careful and discriminating reader of both Gurdjieff's own work and the body of literature left to us by and about Gurdjieff. Especially noteworthy is that Lipsey's prose and approach avoids the errors of other less careful works which have dared to fill in the gaps of Gurdjieff's life with invented scenes and a tendency towards purple prose. The reader also benefits from Lipsey's experience as a writer, his familiarity with a wide range of historical and literary sources, and his own experience as a practitioner of Gurdjieff's ideas for many decades. Though Lipsey exhibits some bias in favor of the Gurdjieff Foundation—even as he admits some hagiographical-leaning descriptions in his portrayal of Jeanne de Salzmann—the reader benefits from the informal gleanings included from his conversations with members of the Foundation, as well as his access to their archives. It is also worth noting that, in comparison to other works, Lipsey is balanced in his presentation of nonetheless influential figures outside the Foundation circles, such as J. G. Bennett, who he describes as a "born seeker of truth" (54). His knowledge of French helps with sources

inaccessible to Anglophone readers. A more recent publication in French by François Grunwald from 2017 provides both insightful vignettes from Gurdjieff's life, as well as inspiration for Lipsey's intermittent comparisons of Gurdjieff to the Renaissance author (and Benedictine) François Rabelais (d. 1553). The result is a detail-rich story of Gurdjieff and his teachings imbued with warmth and insight.

Lipsey begins early on with a reflection: "Gurdjieff and the teaching that bears his name are now all but sealed off from mainstream history and current concern. There are too many things to care about in our immensely troubled world. Why would one care about Gurdjieff?" (1). This entrée provides impetus to his work, and sets the stage for the presentation and justification for a reconsideration of his work and ideas. Lipsey also places Gurdjieff in a longer line of figures, including Diogenes—"master of edgy philosophical theater"—and Pythagoras and his esoteric school, who both made a contribution by standing outside the conventions of their own time, and offering a larger view of life and its possibilities.

Lipsey covers Gurdjieff's early life briefly—a wise choice, given that we largely have only Gurdjieff's own semi-autobiographical work to provide the details. The influence of the culture and context of Gurdjieff's early life is, nonetheless, important—his early years in the Caucasus, and what is now Eastern Turkey were certainly foundational. His early life in Armenia, and Turkey, and his early travels are presented as a sketch—but that is, in fact, all that we have to go on. Lipsey is more careful, providing images of the strengths, and sifts out the elements that drove Gurdjieff's work with others—which justifies the continued study of Gurdjieff's work and legacy.

He addresses some of the major ebbs and flows of his early teaching career, from 1912–1917, much of which has been made popular through P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*. Here he provides both a fuller picture of that time, beyond the words transmuted through Ouspensky, and yet highlights some of the important ideas and formulations Gurdjieff presented during this period. Lipsey moves easily from summaries of talks, ideas, and first-hand reports, and positions

them in light of a wider perspective of the man and his approach. He highlights the importance that Gurdjieff placed on one's own disappointment—"in their own power, and . . . in all the old ways"—as a precursor to approaching the "system." Then, he carefully selects representative examples of his ideas and formulations which support the argument for continued consideration of Gurdjieff. For example, the discussion of being vs. knowledge, an example of one of Gurdjieff's ideas formulated in this period, may have continuing interest and relevance.

He next covers in rich detail the period of 1922-1932, an emblematic and transformative time in Gurdjieff's life, which took place at The Prieuré in Fontainebleau, France. This period is explored through several first-hand reports, including Katherine Mansfield, Alfred Orage, and lesser-known entries, such as the recently published journals of Tcheslaw Tchekovitch. It also addresses, and weighs, the impact of the serious auto accident that Gurdjieff had in the summer of 1924, which directly led to both the dissolution of his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man and the initiation of his life as an author.

The more obscure period of the 1930s is filled out in detail through notes from the collective of women known as The Rope, which included Jane Heap, Kathryn Hulme, and Solita Solano. Though typically considered his more hermetic years, these journals relate a side of Gurdjieff that is more overtly compassionate and even warm. This is a period when Gurdjieff continued to materially support many who were not involved in his work. And for those who were involved in his work, his warmth was displayed in a line captured by Solita Solano, "I hope with all my heart . . . that there will arise in all of you a feeling for humanity" (157).

In the 1940s, many, especially following Ouspensky's death in 1947, returned to find Gurdjieff holding forth at the rue des Colonels Renard in Paris. This chapter details the relationship with Jeanne de Salzman, and synthesizes some of the accounts provided from the last years of his life. The next chapter, "The Great Prayer: 1950-1956," addresses the years immediately after Gurdjieff's death, and the founding of the different lineages, some of which continue uninterrupted.

Following the thoroughgoing presentation of Gurdjieff and his contributions in the chapter “Derision,” Lipsey considers and weighs the views of some of Gurdjieff’s detractors, including Louis Pauwels—who had some negative influence on the reception of Gurdjieff in France—and the psychiatrist Anthony Storr who described Gurdjieff as a dictator. Lipsey also addresses Whitall Perry’s *Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition* (1978) through the lens of the traditionalist school of René Guénon (while courteously avoiding the controversies surrounding Perry’s own teacher and heir to that tradition, Frithjof Schuon). Lipsey fends off the critics who, without consideration of context, dismiss him for an idiosyncratic act, or critique the way that he worked with a student in a given moment. Lipsey remarks upon a critic who derisively called Gurdjieff just an Armenian carpet seller, admonishing that he would probably have accepted that. Lipsey hears and considers the more serious and critical-minded challenges, while also not letting off lightly those who have misrepresented and distorted Gurdjieff’s words and approach to students. Though the responses he provides may not be satisfactory to his ardent detractors, in the end, Lipsey offers that perhaps it is time for Gurdjieff to be forgiven. In this way, perhaps Gurdjieff’s legacy, including his teachings, the movements (his choreography), and his writings, can speak for themselves.

In the following chapter, he presents a keen though necessarily brief discussion of *Beelzebub’s Tales to his Grandson*, which holds many of Gurdjieff’s key ideas. He concludes this section by remarking that *Beelzebub’s Tales* is an ocean of story and thought. And, to this, I would add that the ocean that Gurdjieff left also includes not just his writings, but—as Lipsey amply demonstrates—the movements, his music, and his ideas. Thus, with this work as a new entry we might review afresh the legacy and potential of Gurdjieff’s ideas for the future of the human condition.

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Joseph Azize. *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xvii + 326 pp. ISBN: 9780190064075. \$99.00

In this trailblazing book about philosopher and spiritual teacher G.I. Gurdjieff (c.1866–1949), religious studies scholar and Gurdjieff practitioner Joseph Azize argues that the central insight of Gurdjieff's approach is that we as human beings “do not perceive reality, but we can change our being, and with that change, we will be able to perceive our own reality, at least to some degree” (52). In other words, human beings are not fully conscious and live their lives in a shallow “waking sleep.” As Gurdjieff associate P.D. Ouspensky summarized the situation: “Compared to what we are capable of, our normal waking state is more like sleep-walking” (12).

Standard summaries of Gurdjieff's methods of self-development identify three central components: his *writings*, facilitating students' intellectual development; his *music*, facilitating students' emotional development; and his *sacred dances*, or “Movements,” facilitating students' bodily development, especially a deeper mode of corporeal awareness, engagement, and presence. Azize's book is an innovative addition to the Gurdjieff literature because he offers convincing evidence for a fourth key component that Gurdjieff introduced to his teaching around 1930—what he called “transformed-contemplation” exercises; i.e., precisely directed inner exercises strengthening students' attention, intention, will, and self-awareness. Azize explains that these exercises were provided by Gurdjieff “so that the outer life (life in the social domain) and the inner life should be harmonized by the development of one's individual reality, with consciousness, conscience, and will” (304).

Drawing on published works, unpublished archival sources, and firsthand accounts from students who worked directly with Gurdjieff, Azize aims to “introduce Gurdjieff's inner exercises . . . to a wider world” (80). He attempts to “expound the nature and basis of Gurdjieff's contemplative methods and

to explore his sources, to the degree that is possible” (5). Azize contends that, from one perspective, Gurdjieff can be understood as “a ‘mystic’ who, in his earliest efforts, tried to fashion a workable system [of spiritual development] without contemplative methods, but later found them necessary supplements to his practical methods” (5). Azize proposes that Gurdjieff derived at least some of these inner exercises from Hesychasm, a contemplative practice in the Orthodox tradition associated with the monastery of Mount Athos in Greece. Specifically, Azize argues that some of the exercises were adapted from the hesychast “Prayer of the Heart” and its simpler version, the “Jesus Prayer,” both laid out in the writings of Nicephorus the Solitary, a thirteenth-century Mt. Athos monk and spiritual writer. Azize also links Gurdjieff to the mystical tradition of Neoplatonism, claiming that “there are affinities and some literary dependence” (83). Azize points out that both the Athonite and Neoplatonist mystical traditions are Greek and that this linkage is “not accidental,” since “Gurdjieff identified as a Greek and considered Greek to be his mother tongue” (83).

In presenting Gurdjieff’s transformed-contemplation exercises, Azize divides the book into three parts, the first of which reviews Gurdjieff’s biography and philosophy and justifies associating his efforts with a mystical tradition: “Gurdjieff’s system can be interpreted as a method to achieve the mystic experience in such a way that it can, as needed, be remembered and productively influence ordinary life” (83). In the book’s second part, Azize provides, in tentative chronological order, descriptions of the transformed-contemplation exercises as mostly presented in unpublished archival materials as well as in published writings by associates and students. This second section of the book is the longest and includes chapters on Gurdjieff’s time in Russia; his two books, *Beelzebub’s Tales to his Grandson* and *Life Is Real Only Then, When “I Am”*; and descriptions of exercises mentioned in transcripts from Paris group meetings with Gurdjieff and his students in the 1930s and 1940s.

In the book’s third part, Azize covers exercises described by Gurdjieff associates George and Helen Adie (mostly through unpublished transcripts) and Jeanne de Salzmann (as described in *The Reality of Being*, published posthumously

in 2010). Since there are overlaps in several of the exercises as Azize presents them, one cannot provide a precise count of the transformed-contemplation exercises described in the book, though there are at least twenty, including “Preparation,” “Relaxation,” “Sensing,” “I Am,” “The Four Ideals,” “Lord Have Mercy,” and “Clear Impressions.” These exercises vary greatly in their complexity and difficulty. One of the first exercises to which students are introduced is the “Relaxation exercise,” in which one begins by bringing attention to the eyes and head, directing any bodily tensions to loosen and relax. One moves from the head to the neck, shoulders and shoulder joints, to the upper arms, elbows, lower arms, hands, hip joints, and so forth. Gurdjieff emphasized that “It is only when you relax consciously . . . that the relaxation has value” (190).

Azize explains that this effort to relax one’s body consciously is “the first step in all of Gurdjieff’s exercises” (173), which are said to facilitate modes of attention and inner awareness not usually noticed or worked with in everyday life experience. In the “I Am exercise,” for example, one works to feel in the breast a sense of self-presence via feeling “I” emotionally on the inbreath and feeling “am-ness” emotionally on the outbreath; this “am-ness” should be simultaneously “sensed” through actual physical awareness of the right arm, thus setting up an inner effort whereby emotion and body are integrated experientially through a process that Gurdjieff called “blending.” One then moves to the right leg, left leg, and left arm, carrying out this same “I-am” sequence via the four limbs for three more cycles. One then completes the exercise by feeling the whole body in the inbreath of “I” and feeling and “sensing” the whole body in the outbreath “am.” Particularly in the later 1930s and 1940s, Gurdjieff gave progressively more emphasis to these inner exercises. Azize conjectures that this shift happened because Gurdjieff realized that his other methods were not fully facilitating the self-transformation he hoped for his students. “Exercises, exercises, thousands and thousands of times,” Gurdjieff exhorted members of a Paris group meeting in the early 1940s. “Only this will bring results” (17).

Azize's book will have value for two contrasting readerships. On one hand, researchers of Western esotericism should find the study insightful because it is the first to discuss comprehensively Gurdjieff's inner exercises and to probe their possible provenances and developmental trajectories. Azize's account is also noteworthy because it provides a preliminary picture of how these exercises are actually conducted and what their potential value is for personal transformation. On the other hand, the book should also appeal to Gurdjieff practitioners; though for this readership, Azize's book may face criticism. As someone involved in Gurdjieff groups for some fifty years, I am ambivalent toward Azize's study, since Gurdjieffians are strongly advised never to discuss or demonstrate exercises to non-group members. The assumption is that these exercises (like the Movements) can only be passed on by direct transmission from teacher to student; even if one is qualified to instruct students in the exercises, they are said to be "sacred" and only potent in their workings through face-to-face, teacher-to-student contact.

Since Azize is a practicing Gurdjieffian himself, he is well aware of this concern, but justifies publication because "what is not recorded is lost" (273). In this sense, I sympathize with Azize's public presentation of the exercises; in my own experience, I have encountered personally how exercises not carefully recorded can become distorted or forgotten entirely. In this sense, Azize's book is an invaluable contribution for keeping one crucial component of the Gurdjieff tradition alive, accurate, and usable.

One other concern I have about Azize's presentation is he does not define or explain certain "tools" that are integral to doing the inner exercises properly. For example, several of the exercises he describes invoke *sensing*, which requires a specific kind of effort to activate a unique experiential "taste"—i.e., direct physical awareness and contact with a particular bodily part or one's whole body (note the "I Am" exercise above). Nowhere in the book does Azize clarify the importance of sensing or explicate its experiential qualities, which include a sense of tingling and thickening in the bodily part. One notes a similar lack of explanation for other important efforts like relaxing and blending.

One last point I feel it important to mention is that Azize's catalogue of transformed-contemplation exercises is incomplete and only a starting point. In the early 1970s, I studied at J.G. Bennett's International Academy for Continuous Education, a ten-month program in which Bennett introduced some one hundred students to the Gurdjieffian system. Each day would begin with a "morning exercise," a good number of which parallel the exercises that Azize presents. At the same time, however, a majority of these morning exercises are not included in Azize's book—e.g., "60-point," "6-point," "9-point," "Expanded Present Moment," and "Eye of the Needle." Bennett emphasized that these exercises were indebted to Gurdjieff, so it is significant that few are included in Azize's inventory.

In spite of these concerns, Azize made the right decision to publish this book, which is a worthy addition to the Gurdjieff literature. I emphasize, however, that Azize's effort is only a beginning and that there is much more to be said about Gurdjieff's transformed-contemplation exercises.

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Catharine Christof. *Rethinking Religion in the Theatre of Grotowski*. London: Routledge, 2017. ix + 237 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-29226-0. Hardback. AU\$252.00.

This is a serious and well-researched study of the work of the renowned Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999) that places him in the context of twentieth-century reformulations of the nature of religion and, perhaps, portrays him as a modern form of spiritual guide, connected with other such figures as Martin Buber and George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. Christof addresses the emergence of New Age thinking and attitudes; in particular, she highlights the treatment of the human physical body as an essential element of the sacred. As orthodox religion declined in its hold on the hearts and minds of people, adherence to dogma and ritual had to give way to a more experiential approach. This marked a shift in practice away from the forms prescribed in churches to experiential means of participation in which the theatre was a prime example. Christof could well have written a parallel book to this, delineating equally well the spiritual revolution enacted in the evolution of dance in the twentieth century from the Delsarte System to Butoh. Her views on religion take seriously Manuel A. Vasquez’s suggestion that “the focus [instead] should fall on the myriad of discourses, practices, environments, and institutions that accompany our experience of this-worldly transcendence, that is, our responses to the insoluble complexity and relative indeterminacy of our existential condition” (138).

Christof specifically draws attention to connections and or parallels between Grotowski and Gurdjieff. Both were practitioners rather than theorists. Grotowski spoke and wrote appreciatively of Gurdjieff but insisted his own approach was independent. Her 2017 article “Gurdjieff in the Theatre: The Fourth Way of Jerzy Grotowski” portrayed Grotowski as a Fourth Way teacher, though she added that this was not to say that he copied Gurdjieff in any obvious way.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the

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1. Catharine Christof, “Gurdjieff in the Theatre: The Fourth Way of Jerzy Grotowski,” *Religion and the Arts* 21 (2017): 209–35.

history she describes and discusses from a Gurdjieffian perspective, we can find similarities with, for example, Wim van Dullemen's account of the movements or sacred dances created by Gurdjieff. Dullemen is at pains to situate Gurdjieff's creativity within the context of Western explorations of dance. He and Christof are invested in the belief that people such as Grotowski and Gurdjieff, highly unique and creative individuals, were nevertheless very much part of a generic *Zeitgeist* of changing beliefs and methods in the twentieth century. Also, both Christof and Dullemen are in agreement in considering what is usually called art can be a modern expression of spirituality.

In some respects, art has taken the place of religion. Perhaps this has been the inevitable outcome of a millennium or more of change from outward forms and rites of communities to inner experiencings and actions of individuals. An obvious feature of this transition has been the modern tendency to evade questions of belief by calling on "personal experience." This does not excuse the fact that expressions of such experience must still of course be in the context of collective culture. While there has been emphasis on personal experience there has also been a recognition of value in ancient ritual and historical forms of dance. In tracing the development of Grotowski's work, Christof brings out the significance of the gradual change from the actor performing for audiences to performance for the sake of the actors themselves—as part of what Gurdjieff would have called "work on themselves." One of the features of the New Age, which is also to be found in most so-called esoteric ideas, is that there is a hidden unity behind the various religions that, outwardly, are at variance with each other. It is striking, then, that Grotowski looked to all kinds of ritual, dance, song, and so on to find, as it were, the universal elements of meaning in them. These became the *actions* Grotowski researched towards the end of his life which are now carried on by his successors Mario Biagini and Thomas Richards. The term "actions" brings us very close to the practice of Gurdjieff's movements and the very idea of work on oneself.

Christof brings out exciting and important detail. She describes how the Grotowski school eschewed self-observation in its Gurdjieffian sense and centred itself in the relationship between actor and director. This has enormous bearing on our understanding of what is required, in the spiritual sense, of the state of the actor. Strangely, she does not speak of what Gurdjieff himself wrote about acting in his major book *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950). In the chapter "Art" he describes Saturday in events in ancient Babylon organised by an elite group researching methods of carrying information to future generations through theatre. He describes improvisations (that later followers of Gurdjieff attempted with various results to emulate) and, most importantly, a particular state required for performing them. He called this *darthelbustnian contemplation*: "Well, then, two of the participants would always come upon these 'reflectors-of-reality' or stages, first; and then usually one of them stood for a while and, as it were, listened to his own what is called 'Darthelhlustnian' state, or as it is sometimes otherwise said, to the state of his own inner 'associative-general-psychic-experiencings'."<sup>2</sup>

Grotowski wanted to eliminate the influence of historical, ethnic and cultural factors in performance. This led to an emphasis on physical effort and to the embrace of pain and exhaustion. It must be noted that Christof makes no mention of traditions based on this, for example the Native American Sun dances, which can be described as inducing revelation by ordeal. Though there was physical demand in Gurdjieff's movements, the real challenge lay in their *internal complexity*, designed to separate and reorganise the centre at work in the students. In John Godolphin Bennett's terminology, it is *challenge* that evokes true consciousness and physical demand is the crudest form of it. It is common to come across the observation that exhaustion of efforts is a necessary prelude to creative insight. But this is a crude approach. Gurdjieff brought the possibility of a new kind of intention, in which the dichotomy of so-called conscious

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2. G. I. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything: "An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man" or, Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), 438.

effort and unconscious insight was superseded. Understanding is only possible through the independent but mutual operation of all three centres; thinking, feeling and moving. This cuts across the usual dichotomy between mind and body but also that between internal and external. The coalescence of the three centres is tantamount to a real autonomy. This might be called, as Christof does, “objective consciousness,” but these words are inadequate, despite Gurdjieff himself using such terms in his early teaching.

Christof follows the usual interpretation of Gurdjieff’s “super-efforts” and “intentional suffering” as much the same and consisting in *physical effort*, which I think misses the point. One of my teachers often used the phrase “making efforts to avoid efforts” to criticise how we would turn to making physical efforts to avoid intellectual and moral ones. This relates to important ideas about *temptation*. There is an idea that the devil is interested in people who work on themselves because those who do not have no soul worth having. Those who make efforts risk identifying with their efforts or resultant states. This is known in, for example, the Buddhist tradition, and its equation of *Māra* the evil one with the pleasure obtained in meditation. Temptation is crucial in Gurdjieff’s teaching and is sometimes presented as essential for our development of soul. Gurdjieff differentiated *intentional* suffering from *voluntary* suffering. Illustrating the latter, Gurdjieff talked about bandits sitting immobile in the blazing sun in order to attack people. For Bennett, intentional suffering is that incurred by someone in service of his neighbour. Sacrifice is at its core. Gurdjieff mocked “saintly” people who might meditate in caves in isolation for years.

Christof does an important job in describing *what* it is that is brought into manifestation through Grotowski-like work and speaks of “spirits” and “ancestors.” Practitioners of the Gurdjieff movements could do well to take note of this. Bennett spoke explicitly about the significance of the “spirit world” (called in Sufism the *‘ālam-i arwāḥ*) in such terms: “If you look at the movements in this way you may gain a different attitude towards them. The movements are not just

something that somebody invented in the past and put on a piece of paper to remind them what they were, or something like that. They are something that wants to come into being, wants to be flesh and blood, and when the movement is done by us then it wants to be done rightly. When it finds a body that is doing it rightly, the spirit becomes happy and you yourself feel happy.”<sup>3</sup>

Christof uses the idea of the New Age as “rethinking religion” as the unifying theme of her study. In her “Gurdjieff in the Theatre: The Fourth Way of Jerzy Grotowski” (noted above) she echoes Peter Brook’s impression on first encountering Grotowski, that he represented a lost branch or independent manifestation of the *Fourth Way*. I think the difference is important. In the *Fourth Way* the emphasis is on doing things intentionally with purpose, something often lacking or weak in most New Age movements. The idea of the New Age is nebulous, but nevertheless useful, as a catch-all phrase for a wide diversity of phenomena and beliefs. However, Christof’s wonderful survey, centring on the work of Grotowski, opens up a vista of the leitmotiv of “physical spirituality” that calls for an even wider perspective. There was a significant shift around 1900 from the last millennium and its manifestation of *devotion*. I’d go further, positing that before the devotional millennium there was an age of *intellect*, approximating the period from Plato to Aquinas. Gurdjieff’s *Fourth Way* integrates and supersedes the traditional ways of the Yogi (intellect), the Monk (devotion), and the Fakir (bodily discipline). It is important to realise that “embodiment” is only one leg of a tripod, and that Gurdjieff created haunting “religious” music and a complex set of writings in relation with his sacred dances. Christof’s study, firmly focused on Grotowski, is an interesting contribution to the study of body-based disciplines and esotericism.

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3. J. G. Bennett, *The Way to be Free* (Santa Fe: Bennett Books, 2006), 53.



Boris Ferapontoff. *Constantinople Notes on the Transition to Man Number 4*. Edited by Joseph Azize. Mount Desert, ME: Beech Hill Publishing, 2017. xiii + 200 pp. ISBN: 978-1-49681-947-5. \$30.00.

The publication of Boris Ferapontoff's *Constantinople Notes on the Transition to Man Number 4* is an important milestone for the study of G. I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866–1949) and the Fourth Way teaching lineage he established. The first published version of Gurdjieff's teachings was that of P. D. Ouspensky (1878–1947). His *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) was released with Gurdjieff's approval and provided a highly systematic and cognitively-inclined version of the teaching. Gurdjieff's "Three Series" was published posthumously and trenchantly resisted systematization and explanation, in favour of more indirect and challenging modes of expression. Ferapontoff (1890–1930) is little known, but his notes were written when Ouspensky and Gurdjieff were in Constantinople in 1920–1921. They exist in two copies, one which editor Joseph Azize received from the late George Adie (1901–1989), and the other in the P. D. Ouspensky Memorial Collection at Yale University. Ferapontoff's notes are important as he was a pupil of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, and no other records exist of the teachings in Constantinople, though they are mentioned in Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch's memoir (first published in French in 2003 and translated into English in 2006).

Azize is a distinguished scholar of the Fourth Way; his monograph *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation and Exercises* (Oxford University Press, 2020) is a major contribution to the academic study of Gurdjieff as a mystic and teacher of spiritual exercises. His exposition of Ferapontoff's text is a model of clarity and economy; commentary follows the numbered sections and is chiefly concerned to establish where he is dependent on either Gurdjieff or Ouspensky, or combining both, or proposing a novel interpretation or introducing new material that is not traceable to either teacher. Azize has reproduced the Yale

text; Adie's copy lacked the "Introduction" with biographical details about Ferapontoff, but where Adie made comments or corrections, these are indicated in footnotes. Ferapontoff, an expert Movements instructor, was nicknamed Starosta ("the Old One") on account of his grave mien. He served as Gurdjieff's secretary and was fluent in English, but left Gurdjieff and in the company of Ivanoff, another Movements demonstrator, emigrated to Australia in 1925. It seems that Gurdjieff pushed them away, as he did with so many pupils; however, the two had returned to Europe by 1928.

The Ferapontoff notes are very concise when compared to Ouspensky's detailed exposition of the teachings, and it does not seem they were intended for teaching purposes, though whether they were written as an *aide-memoir* or for another reason is not known. Azize concludes that they are in a preliminary rather than a final form, and notes omissions such as the lack of reference to the enneagram, a symbol "which was very important to Ouspensky" (8). Some sections in the Ferapontoff text are more extensive and can be linked not only to *In Search of the Miraculous*, but also to talks and teachings by Gurdjieff that have only recently been published, and to sundry pupil memoirs. In his discussion of Ferapontoff's notes on "2. Centres" Azize brings in Anna Butkovsky-Hewitt's memoir to explain that Gurdjieff's use of imagery from weaving (cotton reels and coloured threads) and from gramophone recordings (wax rolls or cylinders) illustrates his "idea of the relations (actual and potential) between unity and diversity in a striking way" (24) in the former case, and in the latter "the registering of impressions" (24). The discussion of centres continues in various sections, such as "5. Matter of Centres" which has quite a sizeable commentary attached, as it covers complex concepts such as the Food Diagram, chief feature, and the higher bodies.

Azize regards Ferapontoff as an important recorder of ideas that are not known from other sources, and lists some as: karma; "Studying the state of sleep and sleep pathology" (3); the draining of energy by imagination; our inability to see our "I"s; the links between various bodies and various knowledges; issues of nutrition; and ideas about laws. For example, in "15. Physiological Sleep" it is

posited that the sleeping state can be used to “better understand our situation” (79) and in “24. Karma” he writes that karma is “absolute conditioning of the smallest action” (107), to the extent that it dominates even the desire or interest to do or not do any specific thing, and also that humans are tied chiefly by “cares and imagination” (107) that consume their time and energy. In “30. Language. Logic. Knowledge. Part 2,” Azize identifies the idea that there are three kinds of knowledge (mechanics of facts, direct perception of facts, and knowledge of useful facts) as original to Ferapontoff. The mentions of mysticism, magic, clairvoyance and the cosmic in relation to higher bodies are particularly interesting.

Section “34. Nutrition” discusses the transformation of organic life into food and energy and heat (similar to entropy, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics?), and also observes that splitting atoms lets “the energy released to be consumed as food . . . a unique idea on the Gurdjieff literature” (135). In addition to noting original or novel ideas in Ferapontoff’s text, Azize also draws attention to his knowledge of academic philosophy, noting influences from figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Gurdjieff’s near-contemporary Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941). The notes are also contextualised in terms of Theosophical ideas current at the time, and Gurdjieff’s well-known interest in machines and mechanisation (despite his profoundly anti-modern stance on certain matters). This book is highly recommended to scholars and students of G. I. Gurdjieff and his Fourth Way teaching in all its multifarious lineages. One task of scholars of esotericism and esoteric teachers and schools is the historicising of ideas, and this unique text from 1920–1921 that contains both Gurdjieffian and Ouspenskyan ideas (which are seen as harmonious and essentially the same) and that offers thoughtful and novel interpretations and insights is a welcome additional text, in that it enables certain historical links and speculations. I recommend it highly.

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