

Preprint manuscript of: C. M. Cusack, "Fourth Way / The Work", *Dictionary of Contemporary Esotericism* (ed. E. Asprem), Leiden: Brill. Archived at ContERN Repository for Self-Archiving (CRESARCH) <https://contern.org/cresarch/cresarch-repository/> Feb. 5, 2019.

---

## The Fourth Way / The Work

The tradition of the Greek-Armenian esotericist and spiritual teacher George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (c. 1866-1949) is known by a variety of names, the most common of which are "the Work" and "the Fourth Way". The first is derived from Gurdjieff's insistence that work and "conscious suffering", which he terms the Fulasnitamnian principle, is the path to developing a *kesdjan* body, also called a higher-being body, which is a kind of soul (Thomson 2003, 29). The second is derived from Gurdjieff's principle that three spiritual ways connect to the three human brains, or centres of being. He linked the way of the *fakir* (Sufi ascetic) with the sensory centre; the way of the *monk* (Christian renunciate) to the emotional centre; and the way of the *yogi* (Hindu ascetic) with the intellectual centre (Ouspensky 1971 [1957], 97-99). From 1912, when Gurdjieff emerged as an esoteric spiritual teacher in Moscow and St Petersburg, to his death in Paris in 1949, the teaching was transmitted orally to small groups of pupils. On two occasions Gurdjieff founded the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man (Tiflis 1919 and Paris 1922-1924). He also conducted large-scale public demonstrations of the Movements or sacred dances, a method of teaching that was aimed at harmonising the three centres and growing a soul that he introduced in 1919, and taught sporadically in later years (Azize 2012, 307-308).

After Gurdjieff died the authorised Work lineage was led by Jeanne de Salzmann (1889-1990), a senior pupil who had joined him (with her husband Alexandre) in Tiflis in 1919. From 1939 she had occupied the role of senior pupil and heir apparent. She founded the Institut Gurdjieff in Paris, the parent of all the official Foundation groups (in London, New York, and Caracas, Venezuela). There are affiliated groups in the United States, and in India, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa (Gurdjieff Electronic Publishing 2015). The Foundation jealously guarded the Work, in particular the Movements and "inner exercises" (or esoteric practices) that Gurdjieff taught. However, certain changes in the

teaching and practice were questioned: these included the introduction of "sittings", a type of meditation, and the language of kundalini yoga, which Gurdjieff explicitly rejected (Moore 1994, 13). de Salzmänn's 1992 publication of a "bowdlerised" version of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950), Gurdjieff's most significant book, made the "Great Helmswoman", as she was known, a divisive figure in the Fourth Way lineage (Moore 1994, 14). Changes that she made may be seen as a response to an altered spiritual climate post the 1960s.

There were, however, pupils who taught independently and created informal teaching lineages while Gurdjieff was still alive. Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky (1878-1947), an early pupil, had broken with Gurdjieff in 1924 and had a sizeable following, as did other Gurdjieff associates, including John Godolphin Bennett (1897-1974) and Nathan "Jean" Toomer (1894-1967). The Ouspensky lineage, carried on via Francis Roles' Study Society, Scottish psychiatrist Maurice Nicoll (1884- 1953), and to a lesser extent Leon MacLaren (1910-1994) and the School of Economic Science (Petsche 2013), remains important. Bennett broke with de Salzmänn in 1953 and spent the rest of his life teaching at the residential schools he founded: Coombe Springs in Surrey; Sherborne House, Gloucestershire; and Claymont Court, West Virginia (Cusack 2015, 170). Further, the heads of the Foundation groups had pupils that left to form new lineages; David Kherdian and his wife Nonny Hogrogian were initially pupils of John, Lord Pentland (1907-1984), the head of the New York Foundation, but later moved to Two Rivers Farm in Oregon, where the teacher was the heterodox Annie-Lou Stavely (1906-1996). They later left the Farm and Kherdian became an independent teacher (Kherdian 1998 [1991]. Other important teachers in America include Louise Goepfert March (1900-1987), Gurdjieff's secretary and German translator, and Dutch born Willem Nyland (1890-1975).

The first sign that the official Fourth Way was moving toward a more open policy was the release of Peter Brook's film of Gurdjieff's quasi-autobiographical book, *Meetings With Remarkable Men* (1979). Brook (b. 1925), like Stavely, had studied under Jane Heap (1887-1964) in England, and after Heap's death he and his wife

Natasha moved to Paris to work with Jeanne de Salzmann. In the mid-1970s de Salzmann suggested he make a film of *Meetings*; the film was shot in Afghanistan with Serbian actor Dragan Maksimovic (1949-2001) as Gurdjieff. It became a cult classic, appealing to a new audience of spiritual seekers who did not wish to join the initiatory and authoritarian Work, but admired the portrayal of Gurdjieff as a spiritual seeker who achieved enlightened status. Brook's film afforded a glimpse of the Work to an audience that had read Gurdjieff's books, and the accounts of his pupils, though the fragments of Movements that are shown in the film's final sequence have deliberate errors to prevent reproduction (Azize 2012, 321). De Salzmann's alleged dismantling of "Gurdjieff's canon of effort, striving, and self-reliance" (Moore 1994, 12) may have been, as her authorisation of Brook's film certainly was, an attempt to adapt the Work for a post 1960s countercultural generation that was entranced by India and Eastern spirituality. The death of de Salzmann saw her son (and Gurdjieff's), Michel de Salzmann (1923-2001) as head of the Foundation worldwide.

The academic study of the Fourth Way was slow to develop. Andrew Rawlinson's pioneering treatment in 1997 was important, in that he attempted to map a genealogy of Work teachers and groups, and gave equal space to mavericks and fringe groups, as to authorised groups. The mavericks include E. J. Gold (b. 1941), founder of the Institute for the Development of the Harmonious Human Being; the Bolivian Oscar Ichazo (b. 1931), founder of the Arica school and theorist of the Enneagram; Gary Chicoine (b. 1942, aka Rishi Dada Narayan), who founded the Alexandrian Foundation (Rawlinson 1997); and Robert de Ropp (1913-1987), who established the Church of the Earth and devised the Master Game (Jones 2008, 42). Rawlinson widened the Fourth Way lineage, but it was the Internet that rendered the initiatory and secretive nature of the Work within the Foundation no longer tenable. Sites such as the *Gurdjieff International Review*, owned by Gurdjieff Electronic Publishing (Gurdjieff Electronic Publishing 2015) represent the Foundation online. The provision of such content about Gurdjieff is important, but it should be noted that the fixedness and lack of interactivity of the site reflects the Foundation principle that to *really* be in the Work a real-world teacher is required. The Foundation provides what Christopher Helland

calls "religion online", which provides religious information but no real-life interaction. These contrast with "websites where people [can] act with unrestricted freedom and a high level of interactivity (online religion)" (Helland 2005, 1).

In the twenty-first century there are many Gurdjieff-related websites that are outside the Foundation. *The Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation: The Teaching For Our Time* has as its founder William Patrick Patterson, a long-time student of Lord Pentland. This site hosts the Online Fourth Way School, of which Patterson is founder and director. Patterson combines Advaita Vedanta with the Work, and has written books on alternative spiritual teachers including Adi Da Samraj and Carlos Castaneda (The Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation 1996-2016). Anthony Blake (b. 1939), a pupil of Bennett, founded the International Gurdjieff Society in 1983, and in 1998 he founded DuVersity with Karen Stefano. This online institution also operates in real world contexts, and is committed to dialogue and a teaching method termed "Psychic Integration", which Blake states draws on Gurdjieff, Carl G. Jung (1875-1961), the lesser-known Gordon Lawrence, founder of "social dreaming", and psychotherapist Patrick de Maré (DuVersity 1998-2004). Other Gurdjieff-inspired projects include the All and Everything Conference, which began in 1996 as a collaborative effort between Sy Ginsburg, Nick Tereshchenko, and Bert Sharp, with support from respected Work figures such as James Moore and Annie-Lou Stavely (All & Everything 2016). These are now major annual gatherings that generate remarkable volumes of conference proceedings that make new and challenging Fourth Way research readily available.

The *Gurdjieff Internet Guide* (GIG), founded in 2002 by Reijo Oksanen (also known as Reijo Elsner) takes the online Fourth Way teaching institution further. Oksanen first heard of Gurdjieff in his native Finland and joined the Work in England in 1967. After his return to Finland in 1971 he was received into the Orthodox Church. In 2002 he inaugurated the GIG, which he transferred to Kristina Turner in 2012 (Oksanen and Turner 2002-2015). Oksanen explained that the "aim of the web site is to provide an open forum for those interested in the teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way ... Today part of this work is to

deal with the Internet in the right way" (Oksanen and Turner 2002-2015). The GIG is radical and innovative in that Oksanen is convinced that "meaningful inner work" can be done on Work members in circumstances when physical presence is not possible. To enable this exchange participants in the GIG promote crowd-sourced spiritual exercises, do participant-observation of Facebook groups, use online chat services, and communicate via Skype (Pecotic and Cusack 2016, 99).

The *Gurdjieff Internet Guide* demonstrates how Work teachers and members are engaged in the production of a new online discourse, expanding real world Fourth Way practice into a digital "Work" that may transform the possible future of the Gurdjieff teaching. In the twenty-first century offline world the Foundation is aging and the Work in general struggles to attract younger members (Zaleski 2015). The reality is that non-Foundation teachers and groups currently dominate the Gurdjieff tradition. Information that was previously only for initiates is readily available online, and non-Foundation sites such as the Gurdjieff Internet Guide, the Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation, and DuVersity, and real-world gatherings like the All and Everything Conferences, have opened the Work to a much larger audience, for whom secrecy and commitment to an institution are no longer a priority. In view of these developments, the future of the Fourth Way as a restricted, initiatory tradition within Western esotericism appears to be in doubt, though the future of the Fourth Way as an open source, self-directed teaching lineage is looking bright.

Carole M. CUSACK

## Bibliography

- All & Everything. 2016. *All & Everything: International Humanities Conference*. URL: <http://aandeconference.org> (accessed 25 August 2016).
- Azize, Joseph. 2012. "Gurdjieff's Sacred Dances and Movements". In Carole M. Cusack and Alex Norman (eds.), *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, pp. 297-330. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Cusack, Carole M. 2015. "Intentional Communities in the Gurdjieff Teaching." *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 6.2: 159-178.
- DuVersity. 1998-2004. *The DuVersity*. URL: <http://www.duversity.org> (accessed 25 August 2016).
- Gurdjieff Electronic Publishing. 2015. "Institut Gurdjieff – The Gurdjieff Society." *The Gurdjieff Foundation*. URL: <https://www.gurdjieff.org/foundation.htm> (accessed 15 Jan 2016).

- Helland, Christopher. 2005. "Online Religion as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet." *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1(1): 1-16. URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/5823/1/Helland3a.pdf> (accessed 24 August 2016).
- Jones, Constance A. 2008. "Gurdjieff Schools in the United States, Europe, and Italy." In Constance A. Jones and Levan Khetaguri (eds), *Gurdjieff in Tiflis*, pp. 39-50. Tbilisi: Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film, Georgia State University.
- Kherdian, David. 1998 [1991]. *On a Spaceship With Beelzebub: By a Grandson of Gurdjieff*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Moore, James G. 1994. "Moveable Feasts: The Gurdjieff Work." *Religion Today* 9.2: 11-16.
- Oksanen, Reijo and Kristina Turner. 2002-2015. *Gurdjieff Internet Guide*. URL: <http://www.gurdjieff-internet.com/index.php> (accessed 25 August 2016).
- Ouspensky, Pyotr Demianovich. 1971 [1957]. *The Fourth Way*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pecotic, David J. and Carole M. Cusack. 2016. "The World Wide Work 2.0." *Fieldwork in Religion* 11.1: 91-103.
- Petsche, Johanna. 2013. "A Gurdjieff Genealogy: Tracing the Manifold Ways the Gurdjieff Teaching Has Travelled." *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 4.1: 49-79.
- Rawlinson, Andrew. 1997. *The Book of the Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions*. Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- The Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation. 1996-2016. *The Gurdjieff Legacy Foundation: The Teaching For Our Time*. URL: [http://www.gurdjiefflegacy.org/ofws/ofws\\_intro.htm](http://www.gurdjiefflegacy.org/ofws/ofws_intro.htm) (accessed 25 August 2016).
- Thomson, Garrett. 2003. *On Gurdjieff*. London: Wadsworth.
- Zaleski, Jeff. 2015. "Review: A Stopinder Anthology, Edited by David Kherdian." *Parabola: The Search For Meaning* 40(3). At: <http://parabola.org/2015/10/29/parabola-volume-40-no-3-fall-2015-intelligence-2/> (accessed 25 August 2015).