

GURDJIEFF'S SUCCESSORS AND TEACHING LINES

George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff died in Paris on the morning of October 29, 1949. The impact on those closest to him was immediate and overwhelming. According to biographer James Moore, Gurdjieff's death, although long anticipated, "registered on his pupils like some primordial catastrophe, a monstrous reversal of nature." (1)

During the days before he died, the instructions Gurdjieff imparted to his closest students were contradictory and subject to multiple interpretations. His last words are reported to be, "Now I leave you all in a fine mess." Gurdjieff recognized that many influences could potentially deflect the trajectory of his teaching and dilute and compromise its substance and integrity:

He not only expected change, he prepared for it. He knew that -- as with all things in time -- the sacred teaching he brought must come to moments, intervals, where counter currents could deflect it from its original impulse. To maintain the integrity of its movement, the dispersive influences of the ordinary world would have to be resisted and rightly absorbed. (2)

Gurdjieff clearly foresaw the task confronting his students and took measures to ensure the preservation and transmission of his Fourth Way teachings. According to his attending physician, Dr. William Welch, Gurdjieff spoke with his closest pupil Jeanne de Salzmann two days before his death and issued instructions for the continuation of his work and the publication of his writings. Most important to Gurdjieff was for de Salzmann to assemble a core group of followers capable of and responsible for preserving Gurdjieff's Work and moving it forward. Many years later she wrote that "the truth became clear to me: at the same time that the First Series was being published, it was necessary to work without respite to form a nucleus capable of sustaining, through its level of objectivity, devotion and the demands it would make on itself, the current which had been created." (3)

On the evening of Gurdjieff's burial in Avon, France, Jeanne de Salzmann addressed a large group of his former pupils. While acknowledging that a teacher of Gurdjieff's magnitude could never be replaced, she urged the group to consider working together to preserve and transmit his teachings.

While he was alive, Gurdjieff had not designated any one individual to be his successor. On this critical issue he remained true to form, making contradictory pronouncements appointing one student or another as the "only one" who could carry on his legacy. (4) This left his students confused and uncertain as to who among them was to carry on the Work as Gurdjieff's appointed successor.

Shortly before his death, Gurdjieff nominated three literary executors to oversee the publication of his books: René Zuber for France, John Bennett for England and John Pentland for America. He also appointed three individuals to lead his Work: Pentland in America, Bennett in England and de Salzman in France. John Bennett believes that Gurdjieff divided the responsibility for maintaining the Work among several pupils as a deliberate means to prevent any one individual from claiming to inherit the title of Gurdjieff's successor. According to Bennett he provided each of them with an incomplete formulation of his ideas so that no one could claim that they had the final definitive teaching.

He did not leave behind him either an embryo organization, or a fixed teaching or a designated successor. He did leave a small group of loving and devoted pupils who have set themselves to keep his work in the form in which they received it, passing it on to those who are prepared to accept it without modifying it or adding anything from other sources. (5)

The first generation of Gurdjieff's students strove to faithfully transmit Gurdjieff's teachings without distortion. In France, England and America teaching organizations were created to continue the original impulse. Gurdjieff-inspired groups, some under the direction of Mme de Salzman, were widespread in Central and South America in the 1950s, with groups in Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. Other groups were established in Australia and South Africa. However, amongst the numerous teaching groups none appeared to have "the authoritative knowledge, influence and gifts to carry things further." (6)

Other sources appear to confirm that no one student of Gurdjieff had the mandate or capacity to teach. Rafael Lefort, who travelled throughout the East in search of the sources of Gurdjieff's knowledge, claims he was told by the Sufi Sheikh ul Mashaikh that when Gurdjieff died the residual 'baraka' in his teachings died with him. Baraka is subtle enabling energy considered to be essential for effective spiritual transmission from teacher to student. (7) Gurdjieff clearly possessed the ability to transmit baraka, but it is unlikely that any of his students attained the degree of spiritual development required to transmit baraka to their own followers.

While the energy and resources expended to carry on Gurdjieff's Work were immense, the results were clearly mixed. While some of Gurdjieff's successors tried to preserve his teachings to the letter, others began to experiment and add new ideas and emphases. This led to confusion about the authenticity and value of the various organizations and schools claiming to be legitimate successors of Gurdjieff.

Although Gurdjieff's successors arguably did not reach his level of spiritual development, their contributions were nevertheless significant: "many of them, living to an advanced age, went on to become the source of direct inner guidance for hundreds of individuals throughout the Western world." (8) They endeavoured to transmit Gurdjieff's teachings as faithfully as possible within the limits of their capacity and vision, and without their efforts the Work would have died with Gurdjieff.

Jeanne de Salzmann and the Gurdjieff Foundation

Following Gurdjieff's death, various groups from France, England and America organized themselves around Jeanne de Salzmann. De Salzmann had worked with Gurdjieff since 1919 and was his most trusted and experienced pupil. During the 1930s and 1940s she led Work groups in France and assisted Gurdjieff in many aspects of his teaching enterprise. Immediately after Gurdjieff died, she addressed a large group of French pupils, suggesting that they unite to carry on his Work:

When a teacher like Mr. Gurdjieff goes, he cannot be replaced. Those who remain cannot create the same conditions. We have only one hope: to make something together. What no one of us could do, perhaps a group can. We no longer have a Teacher, but we have the possibility of a group. Let us make this our chief aim in the future. (9)

The majority responded by accepting de Salzmann as their new leader. A number of them, however, turned to John Bennett as an alternative. Others believed that none of Gurdjieff's successors was worthy of leading the Work. Kathryn Hulme, a member of Gurdjieff's group 'The Rope,' echoed the sentiment of many former students when she commented that it was wholly unsatisfactory to study with Gurdjieff's successors "once having fed at the source." (10)

In late 1949, Mme de Salzmann assumed direction of the Work in France. She endeavoured to protect the authenticity of the Work by ensuring that Gurdjieff's teaching was structured in such a manner that it could be entrusted to trained and authorized instructors. During the early 1950s, de Salzmann supervised the organization of scattered groups throughout the world into a network of formal Gurdjieff foundations, societies and institutes based primarily in Paris, London and New York. The task of uniting the various Gurdjieff groups was formidable, calling forth de Salzmann's skills as mediator and leader. Many feel that she succeeded by keeping the disparate factions all focused on the common goal of carrying on the master's work as if he were only temporarily away from them.

These organizations were registered as the Institut Gurdjieff in France, The Gurdjieff Society in England and The Gurdjieff Foundation in the United States. Today, they are collectively referred to as the Gurdjieff Foundation and, as the direct line of transmission of the teachings from Gurdjieff himself, are considered the authoritative source of the Work.

In the early 1950s, criticism of the Paris-based Institut Gurdjieff surfaced in articles and books. Pupils expressed concern about the practices and general atmosphere of the institution. French writer Louis Pauwels described cases of manipulation, rigidity, high-handedness and ostracism of former members in groups under the direction of Mme de Salzmann.

A decade later, Rafael Lefort closely observed the workings of the Institut Gurdjieff in Paris. His assessment was not favourable. His impression was that students were learning by rote, were not properly processing and integrating ideas, and were assimilating practices which were no longer productive. Moreover, they appeared to be kept in line by a hierarchy of teachers who Lefort believed lacked the essential qualifications to transmit Gurdjieff's teachings. He concluded that what was needed was a return to the original source or school from which Gurdjieff had originally received the teachings:

I had tried to follow the meaningless pattern of repetitive activity kept up by the inheritors of Gurdjieff's mantle in Paris, and at length disillusioned, had decided to seek the source or sources, school or teachers who had given him a glimpse of what man's destiny really is, really can be. . . It was easy to be sidetracked from this by the very monolithic nature of the 'activities' in Paris and the USA, to be blinded by their claims and brainwashed by their 'movements.' (11)

For many years following Gurdjieff's death, de Salzmänn appeared to adhere closely to Gurdjieff original teachings. (12) But, as time passed, she began to innovate by shifting her emphasis and adding new exercises. For example, pupils were instructed in a form of meditation to visualize fine spiritual energy entering and flowing through the body. This practice was a significant departure from Gurdjieff's insistence on effort rather than passive receptivity in spiritual matters:

The teaching introduced by de Salzmänn in Paris in the late 1960s or early 1970s . . . emphasized the notion of reception, of 'being worked on', 'being remembered'. Although Gurdjieff may have introduced new teachings at the end of his life about which no records are available, de Salzmänn's teaching differs from Gurdjieff's demands for unremitting struggle and effort that are echoed in his pupils' writings of their experience with him. Gurdjieff stressed that active man serves evolution but passive man serves involution. (13)

The idea of passively opening to a new movement and circulation of higher spiritual energy was derided as a "new quietism" that "strayed from Gurdjieff's effort-driven path" (14) and was met with resistance by many traditional Work practitioners: "this kind of language seemed not only difficult to accept but also impossible to understand. It also required a new category of effort not readily comprehensible to the literal mind." (15)

In the 1980s, de Salzmänn decided to publish a revised edition of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. The new edition was an attempt to make Gurdjieff's complex and difficult text more accessible by "clarifying the verbal surface while respecting the author's thought and style." Her revision created a controversy in Work circles. De Salzmänn was accused of diluting the impact of *Beelzebub's Tales* by softening many of the demands and difficulties in Gurdjieff's original wording. She was also criticized for failing to adequately consult with other Gurdjieff groups during her rewriting process.

Despite the criticisms she attracted on many counts, de Salzmann made a number of singular contributions to the Work that received widespread praise. She brought together the many disparate Gurdjieff groups under the umbrella of a central authoritative organization -- the Gurdjieff Foundation -- and established a sense of continuity and stability in the transmission of the Work. She was responsible for creating an archive of ten films of the Gurdjieff movements as an authentic record for future generations. Under her initiative the Gurdjieff Foundation financed the production of a film to introduce Gurdjieff and his ideas to a broader international audience. She collaborated with director Peter Brook to write the screenplay for a film adaptation of *Meetings With Remarkable Men*. (16) Released in England in 1978 and in America in 1979, the latter film contains the only publicly available images of the Gurdjieff movements.

Gurdjieff considered Jeanne de Salzmann to be his most spiritually evolved pupil, at one point describing her as “going out of idiocy.” (17) Throughout her long life (she died in 1990 at the age of 101, fulfilling Gurdjieff’s admonition to live to be “over 100”) she faithfully preserved and transmitted Gurdjieff’s teachings in their original form. The recently published *The Reality of Being*, drawn from her personal notebooks, is a masterful presentation of the living expression of the Work and attests to her very high level of being and spiritual understanding. She also guided countless students in their own personal work, although never claiming to be a spiritual teacher in her own right. Many of her students disagreed:

Mme de Salzmann disclaimed any pretense of being a teacher. For her, Gurdjieff was the teacher, the master, and every action of hers bore witness to her total dedication and devotion to his work. Yet we all accepted unquestioningly that she had a greater understanding than we had . . . For all of us who were able to approach her without any intermediary, Madame de Salzmann was our teacher. (18)

The Work in England

Before his death Gurdjieff appointed John Bennett to lead the Work in England. The choice of Bennett was not popular among many of Gurdjieff’s followers, as the mercurial Bennett lacked their trust and respect. Beyond Bennett’s own personal shortcomings, the climate in England for the continuation of Gurdjieff’s Work was challenging in the wake of many divisive actions taken by Gurdjieff himself. About the formidable obstacles confronting him, Bennett was realistic:

The situation in England was not easy. People had gone to Gurdjieff from various groups that had been closed, and even hostile, towards one another. There were still sharply conflicting loyalties and differences of understanding. Gurdjieff had done nothing to harmonize these differences. On the contrary, his very method of work often required that people should needlessly be set in conflict. Again and again, he would give two or more people, without telling the others, authority to act for

him in a particular matter. They would all set to work, and find the others in the field. Each was sure that he alone was the one Gurdjieff had intended to do the job. This led to endless friction and misunderstanding, which we accepted as the stimulus that would make us search within ourselves for a deeper understanding. (19)

A further complicating factor was the tension between Bennett and members of groups previously established in England by P.D. Ouspensky (20) and his student Maurice Nicoll. Many of these groups remained aloof from Gurdjieff's named successor, choosing to preserve the Work exactly as taught by Ouspensky and Nicoll.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Maurice Nicoll emerged as an important teacher of the Work in England. Ouspensky had authorized Nicoll to hold his own study groups in London in 1931 which, by the time of Gurdjieff's death in 1949, had grown to many hundreds of pupils. In the early 1950s, Nicoll published his five-volume *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky*. The *Commentaries* met with immediate approval from Jeanne de Salzmann, who praised them as "the exact formulation of Gurdjieff's ideas without distortion." (21) After Nicoll's death in 1953 efforts to unite Nicoll's students with the more orthodox Gurdjieff groups were successful, and by the end of the decade many of Nicoll's pupils had joined the Gurdjieff Society of London.

Another important figure who taught groups in England was American-born Jane Heap. Heap met Gurdjieff in 1924, studied with A.R. Orage in New York and was directed by Gurdjieff in 1928 to give weekly talks on his ideas in Paris. Members of her Paris group eventually formed 'The Rope' (22) which worked intensively with Gurdjieff in the 1930s. In 1935, Heap was sent by Gurdjieff to London to teach, and there she quietly formed a study group that worked independently of the much larger English groups associated with Ouspensky, Nicoll and Bennett. In 1946, members of Heap's group travelled to Paris where they studied with Gurdjieff for the next three years. Following Gurdjieff's death in 1949, Heap continued to teach, aligning her group with the Gurdjieff Society of London and accepting Jeanne de Salzmann as the ultimate authority in preserving the authentic transmission of Gurdjieff's teaching. Jane Heap died in 1964.

As early as 1950, John Bennett's role as the leader of the Work in England was in question. (23) Always prone to experimentation with other spiritual systems and teachings, Bennett was considered unpredictable and a threat to the established Work. In the spring of 1950, Jeanne de Salzmann appointed Henriette Lannes as her representative in England. Lannes had joined a group led by de Salzmann in 1938 and later studied with Gurdjieff in Paris in the 1940s. She conducted groups in England and headed the Gurdjieff Society of London until her death in 1980.

For his part, Bennett was prepared to begin experimenting with new methods and ideas within the fundamental tenets of Gurdjieff's teachings. In the early 1950s, Bennett expanded the size and scope of his community at Coombe Springs outside of London, and planned a series of public lectures on Gurdjieff's ideas. This initiative to publicly

promote Gurdjieff's teachings met with strong disapproval from Jeanne de Salzmann. In 1955, she travelled to London and removed Bennett from any role as an authorized teacher of the Work in England.

As a result, Bennett was ostracized by the more orthodox followers of the Work in England. However, Bennett was undeterred and continued leading groups in England in the ensuing years. His work became increasingly independent, incorporating strands of teachings from the many spiritual traditions that Bennett had studied in his extensive journeys in the East. In 1971, Bennett founded his own institute, the International Academy for Continuous Education, at Sherborne House, Gloucestershire. Much of the program of the Academy was based on Gurdjieff's teachings, but Bennett added many of his own ideas as well as methods and exercises drawn from a wide range of metaphysical schools and traditions. The Sherborne Academy closed in 1975 following Bennett's death.

Bennett was widely viewed by many students of the Work as a controversial figure. An essential duality in his nature appeared to lessen his effectiveness as a leader and to undermine his role as a successor to Gurdjieff. Robert de Ropp, a student of Ouspensky for many years, met Bennett in the early 1970s and observed two contradictory sides to Bennett that prevented him from fully disseminating Gurdjieff's teachings in their original form. (24)

Fourth Way author William Patterson believes that, despite his shortcomings, there was a great deal about Bennett that was praiseworthy. However, although Patterson considers Bennett the most promising of all of Gurdjieff's principal students, his ultimate effectiveness as a successor was thwarted by his own ego and ambition:

Whatever his human failings, many of his ideas are potent, visionary, and bring a perspective not to be dismissed . . . His insights and assessments are mostly on target and his recognition of what was needed following Gurdjieff's death seems now, in hindsight, to be largely true. Many of his ideas could have been helpful. But he could not subsume himself for long to any group effort which he did not lead. He was a slave to his own brilliance . . . Whether Bennett helped or hindered the Work after Gurdjieff's death remains a matter of heated opinion. (25)

The Work in America

Gurdjieff travelled to the United States nine times between 1924 and 1949, meeting with followers and members of groups established in the 1920s by his deputy A.R. Orage. During his final visit, Gurdjieff appointed John Pentland to lead the Work in America. Pentland had been a student of Ouspensky for many years in England and America but had not met Gurdjieff until 1948. He was admired by many of Gurdjieff's students for his organizational and leadership skills. Following Gurdjieff's death, Pentland worked

closely with Jeanne de Salzman, who had assumed overall leadership of the Work in both Europe and America.

At the time, there were a large number of former students of P.D. Ouspensky in New York and New Jersey, working either independently or under the direction of Ouspensky's wife Sophie. Sophie Grigorievna Maximenko met P.D. Ouspensky in 1915 and was introduced to Gurdjieff and his teachings shortly thereafter. When Ouspensky left for London in 1921, Sophie stayed with Gurdjieff and later resided and studied at the Prieuré in France. At Gurdjieff's insistence she rejoined Ouspensky in London in 1927 and became an integral component in the running of Ouspensky's school at Lyne Place.

"Madame," as she was called, provided 'work for the emotional center' and patterned her methods after those she learned from Gurdjieff. She was adroit at exposing an individual's weaknesses and conditioned personality and often reduced pupils to tears. She accompanied Ouspensky to the United States in 1941 where she helped establish a Work community at Franklin Farms, New Jersey. Robert de Ropp was a frequent visitor to Franklin Farms and provides a taste of the experience of working with Mme Ouspensky:

She could, in the space of one half hour, lead the student through a whole spectrum of emotions ranging from despair to exaltation. My own feelings toward her could range from overwhelming dislike to something that came close to adoration. Of all my teachers she gave me the most direct experience of awakening and of the kind of effort that awakening involves. (26)

Following her husband's death in 1947, Mme Ouspensky directed her pupils to contact Gurdjieff in Paris. Many did so and eventually a number of them worked directly with him until his death in 1949. Mme Ouspensky, although greatly restricted by illness, continued to supervise students until her death in 1963.

Relations between the Ouspensky-inspired groups and the New York groups formerly led by Orage were strained and there was little sense of cooperation or common purpose between them. In 1950, Jeanne de Salzman met with senior members of these groups to attempt to bridge their differences and unite them.

De Salzman's efforts were largely successful, and gradually over the next three years the competing groups became integrated. In 1953 the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York was formed with trustees appointed from each of the American groups and John Pentland as President. In 1955, Pentland founded the Gurdjieff Foundation of California, with centres in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The New York Foundation was modelled on the Paris Foundation and included a similar program of studies and activities: lectures, music, movements, group work, drama and crafts. The weekly group meetings served as an introduction to the Work and were tightly structured. The format of the group meetings and subsequent order of studies has remained unchanged to the present day:

The weekly group meetings at the Foundation are almost ritualized. There is silence until someone asks a question that is answered by a group leader, and silence between questions. Students are taught to do the “morning exercise” daily and discuss their attempts to maintain awareness throughout daily life. Because the topics arise from members rather than from the leader, it is theorized that people receive just as much as the collective level of understanding permits and no more. After a few months of discussion students are usually allowed to study the movements. In addition there may be readings of Gurdjieff’s works, published and unpublished, that are open to all members, and work periods at some country retreat where small crews labor under the guidance of teachers and elder students. (27)

Within the Gurdjieff Foundation in the United States there was some degree of tension between those who wished to preserve Gurdjieff’s teachings in the exact form they were transmitted and those who sought to evolve and innovate. In the end, the traditionalists carried the day: “The prevailing sense that nothing must change, that a treasure in their safekeeping must at all costs be preserved in its original form, was stronger than any wish for a new wave of inspiration.” (28)

Another area of dissension concerned the secret or esoteric nature of the teaching. Reservations were expressed about the pervasive secrecy surrounding the Foundation and its activities, considering it a direct reversal of Gurdjieff’s open door practice for anyone seriously approaching the Work. Many older pupils of Gurdjieff were especially troubled by the issue of secrecy of the Work. Solito Solanao, who donated Work-related papers and letters to the Library of Congress, was criticized by John Pentland on the basis that such gifts would give “outsiders” access to private Work material. Some commentators have speculated that the confidentiality which was ostensibly there to protect the teaching from outside influence was actually motivated by the desire by group leaders to protect themselves from criticism.

The wish to keep the teaching “pure” and free of distortion even extended beyond the confines of the Gurdjieff Foundation. The Work was seen as sacrosanct and in need of protection from outsiders and the uninitiated. Senior members clashed with academics who tried to explore the Work objectively (29) and even tried to prevent certain researchers such as biographer James Webb from making their work available to the general public.

Some students who attended the Gurdjieff Foundation during the 1960s and 1970s have commented on the serious, often tense atmosphere (30) and the hierarchical structure of the organization. (31) David Kherdian, who was a student at the time, criticized the Foundation for the absence of love and compassion in the groups led by senior members, the practice of basing seniority in studies on length of time in the Work rather than actual capacity, and the apparent lack of purpose or function of many of the practical activities. Kherdian’s strongest criticism is directed at the question-and-answer exchanges which are the focus of the weekly study groups: “Both the questions and the answers seemed forced, without any urgency on the part of the questioners, or any feeling on the part of those

who were replying.” (32) He also felt that many of the answers failed to connect with the developmental needs of the pupils. (33)

Although the Gurdjieff Foundation is generally considered to be the authoritative institution responsible for the dissemination of the Gurdjieff teaching in America, many pupils of Gurdjieff established their own separate study groups and teaching centres in the United States. Figure 2 depicts the numerous lines of transmission that emerged as the Work developed in America after Gurdjieff’s death:

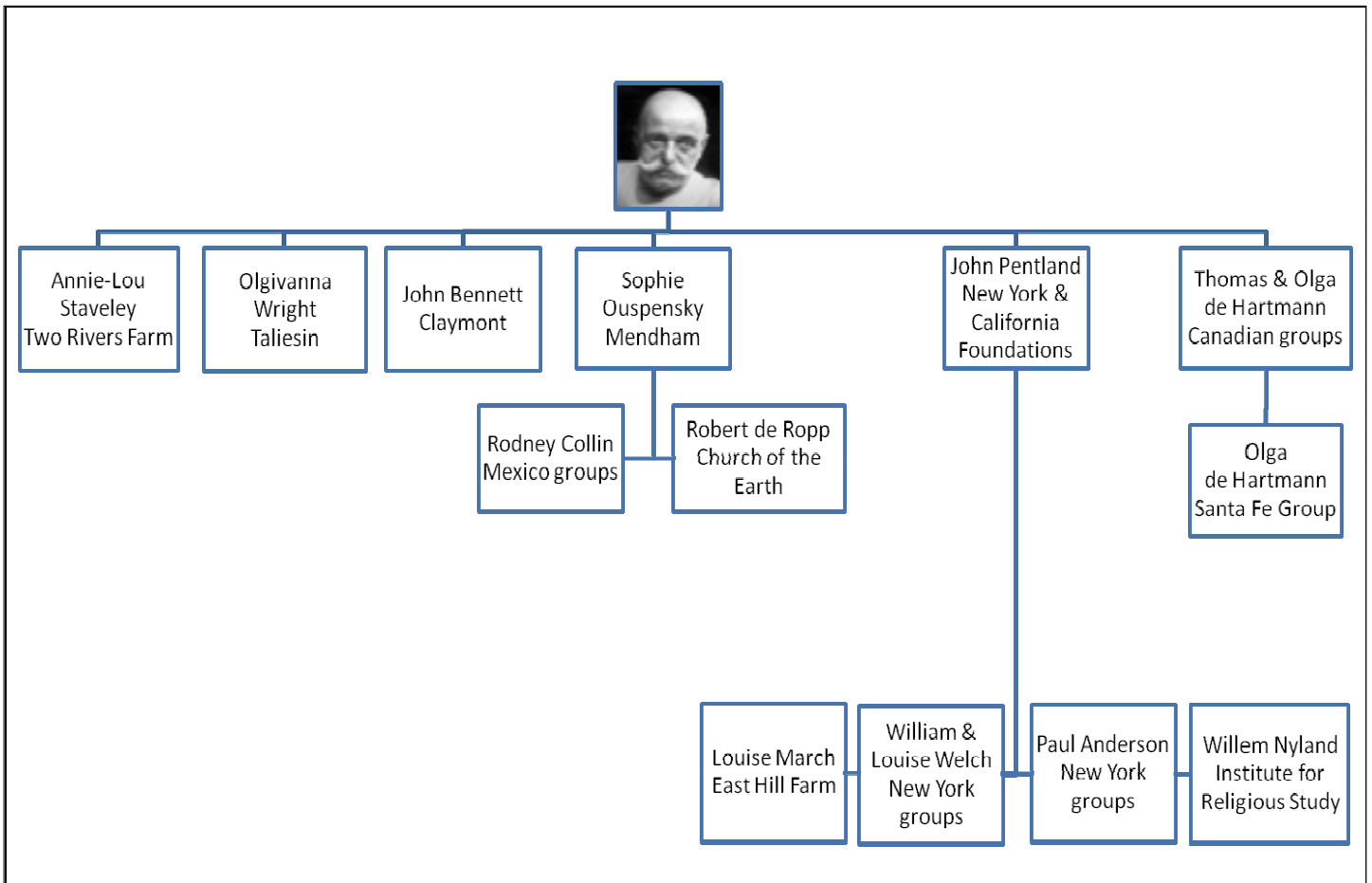


Figure 2: Gurdjieff’s Teaching Lines in the Americas

Thomas and Olga de Hartmann

Following Gurdjieff’s death, Thomas and Olga de Hartmann moved to New York where they assisted Mme Ouspensky at Franklin Farms. After her husband died in 1956, Olga established the first Canadian Gurdjieff study group in Toronto. She subsequently relocated to Santa Fe, New Mexico where she lived until her death in 1979. There a group of friends and musicians gathered around her for discussion and Movements sessions based on her experience from her many years of study with Gurdjieff. The major focus of the community was the performance of the music composed by Thomas de

Hartmann and Gurdjieff. In fact, performers of the de Hartmann and Gurdjieff musical legacy often travelled to Mme de Hartmann for study and coaching before concerts.

John Bennett

In 1975, students of the late John Bennett established the American Institute for Continuous Education at Claymont, West Virginia. The school had a similar structure and programming as Bennett's International Academy for Continuous Education at Sherborne House in England which he established in 1971. The Claymont Institute was initially directed by Pierre Elliott, a senior student of Bennett from England. The curriculum was a mixture of Gurdjieff's teachings and Bennett's own ideas derived from his many years of study of Eastern esoteric teachings.

William and Louise Welch

Dr. William Welch and his wife Louise were introduced to the Work in New York in 1924 by A.R. Orage and met Gurdjieff in 1948. Dr. Welch was consulted and flew to Paris during the last days of Gurdjieff's life in October 1949, presiding at his bedside. He became president of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York following John Pentland's death in 1984. For many years he and his wife led groups in New York City where they were highly regarded as group leaders. Recollections of their time spent with Orage and Gurdjieff are contained in William Welch's *What Happened in Between* and Louise Welch's *Orage with Gurdjieff in America*.

John Pentland

Henry John Sinclair or Lord Pentland was introduced to P.D. Ouspensky in 1937 in London and for the next decade studied with him in England and later in America. In 1948, Sinclair met Gurdjieff and worked closely with him until his death a year later. Pentland eventually played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Work in North America and was dedicated to ensuring that Gurdjieff's teachings were preserved and transmitted in their original form, so as to retain their true power and value. (34) He was also closely involved with the publication of posthumous books by Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Pentland's own book *Exchanges Within* is highly regarded in Work circles.

Paul Anderson

Paul Anderson studied with A.R. Orage and was a resident at the Prieuré in the 1920s. He acted as Gurdjieff's American secretary during visits to New York in 1948 and 1949. After Gurdjieff's death, Anderson was a leading member of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York but eventually left to establish his own groups. His most important group, which he directed with his wife Naomi, was located in Conway, Massachusetts and was later incorporated as the American Institute for Continuing Education. In the final years of his life, Anderson became deeply involved with Tibetan Buddhism and introduced many of his students to the ideas and practices of the Nyingma sect.

Willem Nyland

Willem Nyland was a Dutch chemist and musician who studied with A.R. Orage for many years. He was directed by Gurdjieff in 1949 to start a study group in America. Nyland was a senior member and trustee of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York, but in the mid 1960s he distanced himself from the activities of the Foundation. In the late 1960s he established a Work center in Warwick, New York which later became formalized as The Institute for Religious Study. Nyland also established groups in a number of cities throughout the United States. Following Nyland's death in 1975 his pupils sought out and worked with members of the Gurdjieff Foundation both in New York and California.

Louise March

Louise March studied with Gurdjieff at the Prieuré between 1929 and 1932 when she returned to the United States. She was asked by Gurdjieff in 1929 to do a German translation of *Beelzebub's Tales* and she served as his secretary when he visited America during the 1930s and 1940s. After working with the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York for a number of years, March established the Rochester Folk Guild in 1957, a community founded on Gurdjieff's ideas and engaged with the making of crafts and other communal physical work. In 1967, she founded East Hill Farm near Rochester, a self-sustaining community of farmers and craftspeople which was based on the same model as the Rochester Folk Guild. March directed these activities until her death in 1987 and they have continued to the present day under the guidance of senior pupils.

Annie-Lou Staveley

The Two Rivers Farm was a Work group established in rural Oregon in the 1970s under the direction of Annie-Lou Staveley. She had studied with Jane Heap for many years and visited Gurdjieff in Paris frequently following the Second World War. The community was largely self-sustaining and emphasized physical labour, group meetings and Movements classes. The relationship between Staveley and the Gurdjieff Foundation was often strained as Staveley was considered somewhat unorthodox in her approach to the dissemination of Gurdjieff's teachings. (35)

Olgivanna Wright

Olgivanna Wright was trained by Gurdjieff in the Movements and sacred dances and was a principal performer in public presentations in the 1920s in France and America. She married architect Frank Lloyd Wright and they established the Taliesin Fellowship with centres in Wisconsin and Arizona where Olgivanna attempted to duplicate Gurdjieff's community at the Prieuré. Although at first embraced by many of Gurdjieff's principal students, she soon raised the ire of the orthodox Gurdjieff establishment by giving public performances of the Movements in the 1950s and 1960s. Following Gurdjieff's example, Olgivanna became adroit at manipulating individuals and situations in order to create opportunities for self-study. She was described by her students as powerful, imperious and controlling with a penchant for becoming involved in the per-

sonal lives of her followers. In her later years she was accused of abusing her power and position and even created a network of informers to report on virtually every aspect of life at the Taliesin communities.

Robert de Ropp

Robert de Ropp met P.D. Ouspensky in 1936 and studied with him for many years before briefly meeting Gurdjieff in 1948. De Ropp was a scientist who was deeply interested in the ecological movement as well as the process of spiritual transformation. His book *The Master Game* influenced many Western seekers to explore Gurdjieff's ideas and teachings. In the 1970s he formed a Gurdjieff group in northern California called The Church of the Earth, a self-sustaining eco-farming community with utopian visions of harmonious co-existence with nature. Unfortunately, the experiment was not a success and de Ropp, disillusioned with his inability to effectively teach others, eventually disbanded the school.

Rodney Collin

Rodney Collin began studying with Ouspensky in London in 1936 and became one of his closest students. He accompanied Ouspensky to the United States and was encouraged by his teacher to investigate the connection between the cosmological principles of the Work and contemporary scientific knowledge. The fruit of Collin's extensive research was the publication in the 1950s of *The Theory of Celestial Influence* and *The Theory of Eternal Life*. Following Ouspensky's death in 1947, Collin emigrated to Mexico and established several communities dedicated to the study of the Work. His incorporation of the ideas and practices of many other spiritual traditions in his teaching, including Roman Catholicism, was met with disapproval from the orthodox Gurdjieff establishment. After Collin's death in 1956, the Mexican groups that he founded eventually dissolved. (36)

All of the first-generation students of Gurdjieff have died and many of the groups and organizations they founded are no longer in existence. Some groups have continued under the leadership of pupils who studied under Gurdjieff's own students, while others are directed by individuals with no direct connection to the original Gurdjieff Work.

Commentary

More than half a century has elapsed since Gurdjieff's death, but the spiritual current he created lives on, albeit in a modified form. Gurdjieff's immediate successors faced the great challenge that a teacher of his magnitude can never be replaced. They forged ahead into uncharted territory while trying to remain faithful to Gurdjieff's original vision and teachings. The results of their efforts were clearly mixed, and it is apparent that none of Gurdjieff's primary students were able to maintain the level of teaching that Gurdjieff had initiated.

A number of factors contributed to the dilution of the Work during this period. Once potent ideas and methods can lose their power to challenge and transform if transmitted through mechanical repetition or if not adapted to the conditions and requirements of ‘time, place and people.’ Organizations designed to maintain the purity of a teaching can easily degenerate into hierarchical, authoritarian institutions lacking flexibility, openness and innovation. (37) However, a valid spiritual teaching is not merely a series of ideas, practices and exercises but a way of being which requires a human exemplar or guide to make it a living reality. It is doubtful whether any of Gurdjieff’s first-generation students attained the level of development required to transmit the teachings with the same effectiveness and impact as Gurdjieff.

Gurdjieff, unlike his successors, was able to adapt the form and focus of his teaching to reflect the contemporary social, cultural and political milieu. Jeanne de Salzmann describes how Gurdjieff’s presentation of his teaching changed in accordance with circumstances and the needs of individual students: “While the truth sought for was always the same, the forms through which he helped his pupils approach it served only for a limited time. As soon as a new understanding had been reached, the form would change.” (38)

All spiritual traditions throughout history have undergone some measure of transformation in doctrine and practice, becoming increasingly diluted or divergent from their original source. Michel de Salzmann, who succeeded his mother Jeanne as the leader of the Institut Gurdjieff following her death in 1990, acknowledges this reality:

Wherein lies the integrity of a teaching? What are the conditions which will ensure that it is transmitted, actually continued? Cut off from the principal influence from which it originates . . . and which is the only source that can keep it alive, a teaching is bound to be transformed, essentially and substantially, into a different “apparatus,” unfitted for fulfilling the same purposes. Even if there are no significant changes in form, what is called a spiritual teaching can easily become no more than a moral or psychological doctrine. Whether or not it survives depends, in any case, on the level of spirituality attained by those who are supposed to be carrying it on. (39)

New students who approach the Work today are justified in questioning the legitimacy and authenticity of many of the schools and groups which have survived following Gurdjieff’s death. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way have entered the “spiritual marketplace” where authentic teachings and groups issuing from Gurdjieff’s primary first and second generation students stand side by side with well-intentioned but ineffectual imitators, misguided experimentalists and outright charlatans. The hope is that Gurdjieff’s legacy of a transformative body of ideas and practices, although having evolved and changed over time, will continue to inspire all who seek its wisdom.

NOTES

- (1) James Moore *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Bedfont, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 316.
- (2) William Patterson *Taking With the Left Hand* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1998), pp. 7-8.
- (3) Jeanne de Salzmann "Foreword" in G.I. Gurdjieff *Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am"* (New York: Triangle Editions, 1975), pp. xiii-xiv.
- (4) A typical example is an incident in 1945, when Gurdjieff ended a meal by rising and making a dramatic announcement to the assembled audience. After indicating that his life's work was now complete, he stated that he had finally found "one person to whom can give results my life's work." He then pointed a finger directly at a stunned Fritz Peters. There was an enormous silence as Gurdjieff left the room. Peters was baffled and later tried to interpret the experience in *Gurdjieff Remembered* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1971, p. 114):

It is at least possible that he was actually referring to me as his "successor." It was possible on many counts: (a) It was actually true; (b) It was intended to "expose" my ego to myself; (c) It was intended to produce various reactions in the other persons present; (d) It was a huge joke on the devout followers.

- (5) John Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 6.
- (6) Paul Beekman Taylor *Shadows of Heaven: Gurdjieff and Toomer* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1998), p. 223.
- (7) 'Baraka' is sometimes defined as an impalpable force possessed by certain spiritual masters and imparted to people, places and objects for a specific reason. John Bennett describes the influence of 'baraka' or 'hanbledzoin' (as Gurdjieff termed it) in *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 219:

The *Sohbat* -- communication by mastery is probably the literal meaning -- is associated with the transmission of *baraka*, the 'enabling energy' by which the Work of the pupil is greatly enhanced. This he refers to in another terminology as 'higher-emotional energy' or, as in *Beelzebub*, as *hanbledzoin*. This transmission of a higher energy that can be assimilated to the energy of the pupil is a vital part of the whole process, and in this sense it certainly can be said that Gurdjieff, at all times, was a teacher. Everyone who met him reported the sense of mastery, of a power which acted upon them, in much the same way as those who have been in the presence of the great Indian or Zen Masters, of whom it is said that by their presence alone the pupil had been transformed.

- (8) Jacob Needleman “Introduction” in *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* ed. Jacob Needleman (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. xvi.
- (9) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 274.
- (10) Kathryn Hulme *Undiscovered Country* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966), p. 295.
- (11) Rafael Lefort *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), pp. 11-12.
- (12) There is evidence which suggests that Mme de Salzmänn sensed something was incomplete in the teaching she and other students received from Gurdjieff. Shortly after Gurdjieff’s death she met with the French esotericist René Guénon in Cairo. The ostensible purpose of the meeting was to elicit Guénon’s opinion on the direction in which the Work should proceed. That she would approach Guénon for counsel seems ironic since Guénon was an open critic of Gurdjieff and often advised others to “flee Gurdjieff like the plague.”
- (13) Sophia Wellbeloved *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 154.
- (14) Gurdjieff biographer James Moore has been the strongest critic of the meditation practice introduced by Jeanne de Salzmänn. He forcefully outlines his objections in “Moveable Feasts: The Gurdjieff Work” *Religion Today* Vol. 9(2), 1994, pp. 11-15.
- (15) Frank Sinclair *Without Benefit of Clergy* (Xlibris, 2005), p. 228
- (16) The making of the film was not without its share of controversy. Kathryn Hulme, who had studied with Gurdjieff in the 1930s and 1940s and was an accomplished writer, was approached by Jeanne de Salzmänn to prepare a script based on Gurdjieff’s original text. However, a dispute arose between senior members of the Gurdjieff Foundation concerning the advisability of making the film available to the general public. Hulme withdrew from the project and stage and film director Peter Brook, in conjunction with de Salzmänn, wrote the final script. The film received a less than enthusiastic reception from critics and audiences and was considered a disappointment by many students of the Work.
- (17) Beth McCorkle *The Gurdjieff Years, 1929-1949: Recollections of Louise March* (Walworth, New York: The Work Study Association, Inc., 1990), p.76.
- (18) Frank Sinclair *Without Benefit of Clergy* (Xlibris, 2005), p. 26.

- (19) John Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 274.
- (20) Ouspensky severed relations with Bennett in 1945 and instructed his students to avoid Bennett and members of his English groups. Following Ouspensky's death in 1947, his own groups splintered into several factions, none of which recognized Bennett as a legitimate teacher of the Work.
- (21) Andrew Rawlinson *The Book of Enlightened Masters* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p. 300.
- (22) The Rope was a female-only group which began working with Gurdjieff in 1935. The name of the group is an allusion to the connecting rope which provides mutual support and security to mountain climbers. For an insightful account of the group's history and the impact on the members of Gurdjieff's teaching, see William Patterson *Ladies of the Rope* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1999).
- (23) Jeanne de Salzman had always been ambivalent about Bennett's role as a Work leader. While recognizing his energy, commitment and persuasive speaking ability, she lacked confidence in Bennett and questioned his allegiance to the Paris-based leadership.
- (24) Robert de Ropp called the two sides of Bennett the "Seeker After Truth" and the "Arch-Vainglorious Greek." In *Warrior's Way* (Nevada City, California: Gateways, 2002, p. 290) he writes that "The Seeker After Truth was basically humble and sincere, content with little, modest and retiring. But the Greek was ambitious, full of great schemes, always liable to overextend himself, to attempt too much." The "Arch-Vainglorious Greek" is a reference to a phrase used by Gurdjieff in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* to describe Alexander of Macedonia, "the strutting hero who had spread havoc all the way from Greece to India and then expressed regret that there were no more worlds to conquer."
- (25) William Patterson *Struggle of the Magicians* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1996), p. 211.
- (26) Robert de Ropp *Warrior's Way* (Nevada City, California, 2002), pp. 96-97.
- (27) Kathleen Speeth *The Gurdjieff Work* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989, 2nd edition), pp. 99-100.
- (28) Kathleen Speeth *The Gurdjieff Work* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989, 2nd edition), p. 105.
- (29) Michel de Salzman has strongly resisted presenting Work ideas in the context of an academic setting, arguing that Gurdjieff's teaching would lose its spiritual potency

and influence if removed from a Work setting and introduced into an academic milieu. Although it may legitimize the teachings in the minds of the public, it would also distort the true nature of the Work.

- (30) William Patterson, who studied with John Pentland for many years at the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York, has remarked on the mood of somber seriousness during group meetings:

In all the group meetings and lectures I had attended over the years, I could recall only a handful of times when there was any laughter. I had always assumed that anything that had to do with the teaching had to be serious and somber: the *Work* was no place for laughter . . . Certainly the Work is no place for laughter in the sense of wisecracking. But that does not preclude warmth, good feeling and camaraderie among spiritual friends called to this esoteric path of understanding and conscience.

- (31) In the words of Frank Sinclair (*Without Benefit of Clergy*, Xlibris, 2005, pp. 20-22):

The New York Foundation could indeed seem old-line, conservative and reactionary, unfeeling and inconsiderate . . . just another setting for endless ego gratification, the play of great and small ambition, divisive personal agendas, boorishness, inconsiderateness, crass exploitation, and even brazen intimidation. That behavior would be a far cry from the ‘conscious egoism’ that Gurdjieff encouraged as the ground of one’s work. Conscious egoism refers to the inner life.

- (32) David Kherdian *On a Spaceship with Beelzebub* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1998), p. 53.

- (33) William Patterson, a contemporary of Kherdian’s at the Gurdjieff Foundation, argues in *Eating the “I”* (San Anselmo, California: Arete Communications, 1992, p. 356) that many former students who have criticized the Foundation do not fully understand the underlying purpose and principles of the Work:

People who have left the Work sometimes criticize the Foundation as being too organized and authoritarian. Rather than explore their reactions and resistance and try to see what part the Work’s structure plays in helping the students to awaken, they speak and act as if they know what the Work is about. They forget why they came to the Work, e.g., they were asleep and wanted to awaken . . . The pertinent question is not about structure and so forth but about one’s being, or lack of it.

- (34) William Patterson, who studied with Pentland for many years, describes Pentland’s importance in maintaining the integrity of the Work in America in *Taking With the Left Hand* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 1998, p. 130):

As Gurdjieff taught, in time all is deflected from its original course if not adequately resisted, and in Lord Pentland's day -- as ours -- the predominant deflections took the form of syncretism, eclecticism and other isms. These he stood resolutely against and for that was cast by some as being too doctrinaire.

(35) For an interesting glimpse into the day-to-day workings and interpersonal conflicts characterizing the Farm during the 1970s, see David Kherdian's *On a Spaceship with Beelzebub* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1998).

(36) The circumstances of Rodney Collin's death are controversial and shrouded in mystery. Some of the rumours that surfaced in Work circles are reported by Frank Sinclair in *Without Benefit of Clergy* (Xlibris, 2005, pp. 173-174):

His death in South America – where he fell from the bell tower of Lima Cathedral – was attributed to his alleged messianic ambitions: the story around Mendham was that his death was not an accident but that he had deliberately walked out into space, believing himself superhuman.

(37) This is a problem which faces any organization, whether religious or secular. David Kherdian argues in *On a Spaceship with Beelzebub* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1998, p. 274) that the Gurdjieff establishment was not able to see this reality:

There would need to be a leap of faith, a journey into the abyss of which all the great teachings speak. One had to give up what one had made, to let go completely, to risk everything before something new could enter. This is exactly what had not been done by those whom Gurdjieff had instructed and who had been charged with passing on the teaching to us. Perhaps they could not make that step.

(38) Jeanne de Salzmann "Foreword" in G.I. Gurdjieff *Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1973), p. v.

(39) Michel de Salzmann "Footnote to the Gurdjieff Literature" in Walter Driscoll, ed. *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1985), p. xix.