

Sex and Subtle Bodies in the Work and the Gnosis

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Abstract

This article examines the often-overlooked influence of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff on Samael Aun Weor and the Gnostic Movement, the largest self-described Gnostic religion today. While previous scholarship has emphasized the role of Arnoldo Krumm-Heller and esoteric traditions such as the OTO and Tantra in shaping Weor's teachings, this study argues that the Gurdjieff Work provides the structural foundation for the Gnosis. Drawing on fieldwork conducted during a 23-week introductory course with a Gnostic group in Edinburgh, the article demonstrates that core practices—including division of attention, self-remembering, and the creation of subtle bodies—are directly traceable to Gurdjieff's system. Moreover, the article proposes that, although seminal retention can be attributed to Tantric sources, the use of sexual energy to create subtle bodies is unique to the Work and the Gnosis. Moreover, this shows that Gurdjieffian elements are the foundational structural core of the Gnosis. By reassessing the lineage of the Gnosis, this study contributes to a more nuanced re-evaluation of Gurdjieff's legacy in contemporary global spiritual discourse.

Keywords: Samael Aun Weor, Gnosticism, New Age, Gurdjieff, Tantra

Introduction

The numerous organizations founded by the Colombian “Avatar of the New Age” Samael Aun Weor (1917-77) and his followers, which I refer to in this study as the Gnostic Movement,¹ make up the world’s largest self-identifying Gnostic religion today, with a significant presence in South and Central America, in US cities with large Hispanic communities, and a smaller proselytizing presence in Europe.² Weor’s teaching, often referred to simply as the Gnosis, mixes ideas and practices from Gnostic Christianity, kundalini yoga, and New Age, with some groups presenting as mainstream Christianity, notably Brazil’s *Egrija Gnóstica do Brazil*,³ while others promote the

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¹ There are dozens of Weorite groups of varying and contested legitimacy. They often use confusingly similar acronyms, and sometimes there are differences between Spanish-, Portuguese- and English-language communities. Using the simple “Gnostic Movement” allows me to keep this article somewhat readable.

² Membership is hard to ascertain. There are different levels of involvement and/or initiation, and membership may be spread across multiple organizations and so not indicative of actual involvement. The legitimacy of different groups is often contested, and furthermore, the sexual nature of the teachings means initiates may prefer to remain private. Estimates (both by insiders and academics) vary wildly. From what I have been able to glean during research, my estimate is that global membership peaked somewhere in the hundreds of thousands during the 1980s and is considerably reduced from that today.

³ Andrew Dawson, *New Era, New Religions* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), p. 60.

Gnosis in online wellness spaces.⁴ Nevertheless, what makes Aun Weor's teaching distinct from other Gnostic new religions is its use of sexual techniques, specifically a particular form of seminal retention. This was the subject of Aun Weor's first book, *The Perfect Matrimony* (1950), and remained at the forefront of his teachings, never secret or restricted to initiates or higher grades. Indeed, Weor portrayed seminal retention as the secret at the heart of *all* religious traditions—including for the original “primitive” Christians, whose religion the Gnostic Movement would restore.

Weor and the Gnostic Movement are not well-known in Religious Studies, for a number of reasons. In part, this is simply because it originates in the southern hemisphere and does not primarily use English. In part, it is because its diffuse structure, emphasis on direct teacher-student transmission and, sometimes, a degree of secrecy, present methodological issues for researchers. However, it is also in part because they are tricky to categorize, self-identifying as both gnostic and New Age, but not falling within the typical scholarly understanding of either, for example. Outside of the anglosphere however, the work of Marcelo Campos and others has recently fleshed out the bones of Aun Weor and the Gnostic Movement's history considerably.⁵

Something missing from de Campos' account however is Weor's reliance upon the work of George Gurdjieff in constructing the Gnosis. This connection is not made by the contemporary Gnostic Movement, and although the influence is noted by James Webb,⁶ and Johanna Petsche,⁷ PierLuigi Zoccatelli remains the only scholarly attempt to map the relationship to date.⁸ Zoccatelli finds considerable evidence for Gurdjieff's influence on Weor's ideas, concluding that “in Weor's system, Gurdjieff provided the theory and Krumm-Heller the practice.”⁹ I take this as a starting point to analyse fieldwork I carried out in Edinburgh between December 2017 and October 2018. During this period, I was a participant observer in a Gnostic community, primarily through attendance at their twenty-three-week introductory course, as well as attending occasional social events and public lectures, and formal interviews with both leaders. I encountered a surprising amount of material that was already familiar to me through Gurdjieff's (or Ouspensky's) writings,

⁴ David G. Robertson, ‘Diversification in Samael Aun Weor's Universal Christian Gnostic Movement’, in *Radical Change in Minority Religions*, eds Eileen Barker and Beth Singler (London: INFORM/Routledge, 2022).

⁵ Marcelo Leandro de Campos, ‘Esoterismo, Modernidade e Secularização: a Gnose de Samael Aun Weor’, *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 159-163; Marcelo Leandro de Campos, ‘Lideranças femininas no gnosticismo samaeliano: uma análise a partir da biografia de Arnilda Garro de Gomez (1920-1998)’, *Revista Melancolia*, vol. 3 (2018), pp. 92-107; Ana Rosa Cloclet da Silva and Marcelo Leandro de Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos: a biografia de Samael Aun Weor e o gnosticismo colombiano’, *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões*, vol. 9, no. 27 (2017), pp. 85-114.

⁶ James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky and Their Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), pp. 532-533.

⁷ Johanna J. M. Petsche, ‘Gurdjieff on Sex: Subtle Bodies, Si I2, and the Sex Life of a Sage’, in *Sexuality and New Religious Movements*, eds Henrik Bogdan and James R. Lewis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 127-148.

⁸ PierLuigi Zoccatelli, ‘Sexual magic and Gnosis in Columbia: Tracing the influence of G. I. Gurdjieff on Samael Aun Weor’, in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, eds Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), pp. 135-150.

⁹ Zoccatelli, ‘Sexual magic and Gnosis in Columbia’, p. 145.

which I will outline here. The key contribution of this article is to add descriptive weight to Zoccatelli's "red line"¹⁰ connecting the Work and the Gnosis, and what this shows us about the relationship between theory and practice in the Gnosis, both of which I now see as grounded in Gurdjieff's teachings.

It will also help bring more granular detail to understanding the complex relationships between teachers, groups and traditions. Aun Weor and Gurdjieff are also comparable in respect to the structure of their communities. In both communities, authority is multiple and relative, and rather than tending toward centralisation, individual students take the material and use it more or less freely in establishing their own communities. Moreover, both have in this way maintained small but relatively committed communities of followers into the twenty-first century. Yet there remain significant lacunae in our understanding of both these significant but overlooked teachers, their writing and their communities of followers.

Assuming readers of this special issue will already be more-or-less familiar with Gurdjieff and the Work, I will proceed to introducing you to Aun Weor and the Gnosis.

Background: Samael Aun Weor and the Gnosis

Samael Aun Weor was born Victor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez in Bogotá, Colombia on 6 March, 1917, to a middle-class, military family. He attended a Jesuit school, and though his mother was also involved with Kardecist spiritist groups. He became an active Theosophist in the mid-1930s, where he was introduced to yoga and Rosicrucian ritual magic.¹¹

The Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua (FRA) was formed in Mexico in 1927 by the peripatetic German doctor Arnoldo Krumm-Heller (1876-1949), former Director General of Mexico's special schools and a member of the Theosophical Society since 1897. Krumm-Heller was personally appointed by Papus (Gérard Encausse) to represent both the Martinist Order and the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis and Misraïm (a precursor to the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO)) in Chile, Peru and Bolivia.¹² Using the occult name Frater Huiracocha, Krumm-Heller was a regular lecturer at the Colombian branch of the FRA until the outbreak of the second World War, which kept him in Germany under the suspicious watch of the Nazis, where he would remain until his death in 1949. Aun Weor later described Krumm-Heller as his mentor, though there's no evidence that they ever met in person (Konig, n.d.). He certainly idolised Krumm-Heller however, even studying medicine so he could follow in his career path.

By 1940, with Krumm-Heller in Germany and an acrimonious leadership battle over whether to introduce Aleister Crowley's teaching underway, Victor Manuel broke with the FRA.¹³ He was also facing hostility at the medical college for espousing esoteric treatments, and his marriage had broken down after only a few months, and so he abandoned Bogotá for the life of a

¹⁰ Zoccatelli, 'Sexual magic and Gnosis in Columbia', p. 146.

¹¹ da Silva and Campos, 'Entre contextos e discursos', p. 87.

¹² Richard Kaczynski, *Forgotten Templars: The Untold Origins of the Ordo Templi Orientis* (USA: Privately printed, 2012), pp. 253-254.

¹³ da Silva and Campos, 'Entre contextos e discursos', p. 88.

peripatetic healer. During this period, in which he claimed to live for a time with Arawak people, he met his second wife, Arnolda Garro Mora, with whom he would remain until his death and have four children.

In 1947, Victor Manuel claimed to have experienced a spiritual awakening and first encounter with his higher self, named Aun Weor.¹⁴ By early 1948, Victor Manuel—now known as Samael Aun Weor—had gathered a community of students, whom he taught what he claimed were authentic Tantric techniques, in explicit contrast to the Crowleyan versions.¹⁵ When Krumm-Heller died on May 19, 1949, Aun Weor may have regarded the torch have been passed from Master to pupil. His first book, *The Perfect Matrimony*, was published in 1950.

He was still catching the attention of the authorities, however, and a charge of “quackery” led to five days in jail in March 1952.¹⁶ Upon his release, Weor and his followers retreated to the Sierra Nevada mountains, and began a project to construct a temple, the Summum Supremum Sanctuarium, to be the “spiritual headquarters” of the nascent Gnostic Movement. Over the next two years, the community established centres in four nearby cities, establishing the style of proselytization that continues to this day.¹⁷ On 27 October, 1954, during a ceremony attended by the nascent Gnostic Movement’s luminaries, Weor revealed that his Kundalini had unfurled, his Higher Self had merged with the Godhead, and he had become the Venerable Master of the Bodhisattva Samael Aun Weor, Avatar of the Age of Aquarius.¹⁸ His mission was threefold: “forming a new culture”, “forging a new civilisation” and “creating the Gnostic Movement.”¹⁹

The police were still pressuring him. So, Weor set off on a tour of Latin American countries with existing Spiritualist and esoteric circles, through Panama, Costa Rica and El Salvador, finally arriving in Mexico in January 1956.²⁰ Mexico was in the middle of “The Mexican Miracle”, a period of economic and political stability marked by a growth of “cultural nationalism” and religious freedom, and Weor found a much more amenable environment for disseminating the Gnosis.²¹ During this period, Weor began to study different kinds of yoga (including kundalini), and it was following this that he began to conceive of the Gnosis as a pan-religious project, a teaching underlying all religions—“the Synthesis of all Religions, Schools and Sects.” This is significant, because while kundalini ideas would be introduced following this, seminal retention was already central to the Gnosis by the publication of *The Perfect Matrimony* in 1950, so must have a different source.

1957 saw the beginning of a period of fracture, during which Weor fell out with several of his closest collaborators, who then took control of some of the Colombian study centres. Nevertheless, the years that followed were pivotal to the long-term survival of the Gnosis. Weor

¹⁴ da Silva and Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos’, pp. 88-90.

¹⁵ da Silva and Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos’, p. 90.

¹⁶ da Silva and Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos’, pp. 94-95; Dawson, *New Era, New Religions*, p. 55.

¹⁷ da Silva and Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos’, pp. 95-99.

¹⁸ Dawson, *New Era, New Religions*, p. 56.

¹⁹ Andrew Dawson, “The Gnostic Church of Brazil: Contemporary Neo-Esotericism in Late-Modern Perspective”, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, vol. 1, no. 8 (2005), p. 7.

²⁰ da Silva and Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos’, pp. 101-102.

²¹ da Silva and Campos, ‘Entre contextos e discursos’, pp. 102-103.

published his most significant books (including a revised version of *The Perfect Matrimony* in 1961)²² and led the institutionalization of the Gnostic Movement, founding five interconnected organizations, under the broader umbrella of the *Movimiento Gnóstica Cristiano Universal* (MGCU). The ecclesiastical arm was the *Iglesia Gnóstica Christiana Universal* (IGCU), which had branches in several Latin American countries; *Instituto de Caridad Universal* focused on public works; the Gnostic Association of Scientific, Cultural and Anthropological Studies (*Asociación Gnóstica de Estudios Antropológicos Culturales y Científicos* or AGEACAC) was established to be the academic wing, focused on archiving and publishing Weor's work. The political wing, the Latin American Christian Workers' Party (POSCLA), is no longer in existence.

When Weor died on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1977, this complicated structure meant that succession was not clear cut, and the different lineages into which today's Gnostic Movement can be organized emerged from the resulting schisms.²³ Eventually, Joaquin Amortegui Valbuena (or the Venerable Master Rabolú, 1926-2000) assumed leadership of the MGCU, positioning himself as Weor's authorized successor. Rabolú emphasised an apocalyptic element to Weor's teachings, claiming that Weor had told him that only five of his books should be used.²⁴ The group that I undertook fieldwork with, the Gnostic Cultural Association SAW, are also in the Rabolú lineage. Moreover, the largest English-language branch of the Gnosis, the Gnostic Movement, was founded by Mark Pritchard (aka Belsebuub). Pritchard was a former student of Rabolú who similarly claims to be his authorized successor. The Gnostic Movement was active from 2000-2011, and claimed more than 90,000 participants during this time, in person in Australia and online.

Enter the First Chamber

The Gnosis is presented in three "chambers", or levels—"exoteric", "mesoteric" and "esoteric". I undertook the exoteric First Chamber—a twenty-three week lecture course—between December 2017 and October 2018, at the Edinburgh Gnostic Centre. The Centre is a branch of the Venezuelan Rabolú group, the Gnostic Cultural Association SAW. It was run by a couple, Nomita and Gareth, who offered a schedule of weekly classes and occasional public lectures, and also organised the local Gnostic community, apparently consisting of perhaps twenty people with varying degrees of involvement. I was open about my position as a scholar from my first contact with Nomita and Gareth, and they had no objections, albeit with explicit boundaries on a couple of points.²⁵ So far as I could tell, they were open and honest with me, sometimes surprisingly so. The course consisted of twenty-three hour-long lectures, plus an introductory week, taking place on Wednesday

²² Samael Aun Weor, *The Perfect Matrimony: The Door to Enter into Initiation* (Brooklyn, NY: Thelema, 1961).

²³ Robertson, 'Diversification in Samael Aun Weor's Universal Christian Gnostic Movement'.

²⁴ Massimo Introvigne and PierLuigi Zoccatelli, 'Gnostic Movement (Samael Aun Weor)', in *Religions of the World*, eds Martin Baumann and J. Gordon Melton (Santa Barbara: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 533.

²⁵ They insisted that I do not share a full, detailed chronological account of the teaching, and were unwilling to let me progress to higher levels.

evenings at 7PM. Two others attended the course with me, although neither attended consistently and one dropped out completely before the end.

The Gnostic Centre itself was a modified shopfront on Gorgie Road, west of the center of Edinburgh. The curtains were drawn, but the window display space had a wintery diorama which I later learned was dedicated to elementals and changed with the seasons. Inside, the room was set up for lectures, with folding chairs, whiteboard and projector, and decorated with commonplace occult trappings, including posters of the Zodiac, Tree of Life, the Age of Aquarius and several Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and a table bearing incense, Weor's books and two pentacles in the style of the Golden Dawn.

The lecture, however, was all Gurdjieff. The theme was "inner work," which was described specifically as the "creation of the Christ within." Nomita (who gave the majority of the lectures and seemed to be the more senior) explained that "Christ, in authentic esotericism, is the solar logos, represented by the sun." I had underlined "solar logos" in my fieldnotes at the time, but I was struck looking back that the course began this way, framing it overall in Gurdjieff's terms. The following week, the first lecture of the course proper, again used Gurdjieff's terms to describe the body as having different centers that must be harmonized, as well as the Law of Three and the Law of Seven.

This continued into the second week's lecture on untangling the Personality, the Essence and the Ego. While the explanation and terminology again drew liberally from Gurdjieff's psychological ideas (as presented P. D. Ouspensky),²⁶ Weor has added the Ego, which is not present in Gurdjieff. Our Essence was presented as the innate and eternal expression of divinity within us, apparently amounting to 3% of our being and representing the spark of the Divine. This recurring motif is highly important, as it is through this that Aun Weor connects Gurdjieff's ideas to Gnosticism (at least as understood at the time that they were writing).²⁷ I have found no direct analogue for this claim of an inherent Essence/"spark of the divine" in Gurdjieff, however, who seems rather to think that we must build from nothing.²⁸ On the other hand, the Ego (in fact an aggregate of *many* egos) is the part that keeps us asleep, sucking up our energy and so keeping our Essence from expressing itself. Overcoming the Ego is done through "harmonious development", which the Gnosis teaches, Nomita explained, apparently unaware of the reference to Gurdjieff's "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man".²⁹

²⁶ P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of The Miraculous: Fragments of An Unknown Teaching* (London: Arkana [1949] 1987), p. 161.

²⁷ Weor developed his ideas at a time when Gnosticism was a particularly fashionable trope for both religious entrepreneurs and academics. Interest in the Gnostics of the early Christian period had boomed since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi scrolls in Egypt in 1945, but for various reasons its contents would not be available to scholars until the 1960s, and to the public until the 1970s. Much of what is theorised about Gnosticism during that period, which still has a good deal of currency today, was extrapolated from notes written by Jean Doresse after a brief viewing of one of the codices, and some already-extant texts including the *Pistis Sophia*. Essentially, scholars and seekers alike constructed an entire "world religion" from these fragments (e.g. Gilles Quispel, *Gnosis als Weltreligion* [Zurich: Origo Verlag, 1951]). See Robertson, 'Diversification in Samael Aun Weor's Universal Christian Gnostic Movement' for a full account.

²⁸ Petsche, 'Gurdjieff on Sex', pp. 130-131.

²⁹ C. S. Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 7.

We were given our first piece of practical work, ‘The Observer and the Observed’, explicitly described as an exercise for learning to divide our attention. We were requested to pay attention to where our attention was, at numerous points throughout the day, while doing everyday things. This starts to show us that we’re not as present as we tend to assume we are. However, the ultimate point of the exercise is that in training our attention; we were training ourselves to be able to act from Essence—in this exercise, The Observer—rather than from our ego or personality—The Observed.

Only in the third week did I encounter ideas that were not familiar to me through my readings of Gurdjieff. Weor’s “Three Factors of the Revolution of the Consciousness” were introduced, namely, “Death, Birth, and Sacrifice”. “Death” means in this case psychological death, or the death of the Ego(s); “birth” meanwhile signifies the birth of subtle bodies through “inner alchemy”, that is, using our energy (specifically sexual energy) to create an internal structure. The third Factor, “sacrifice”, here indicates service to humanity—which often means promulgating the Gnosis. Understood in this way, the Three Factors succinctly outline the Gnosis, and make its structural relationship to the Work clear. This process—creating an internal structure which then supports the birth of subtle bodies using the conscious transformation of energy—is the primary inner purpose of both the Gnosis and the Work, but no other tradition. This, I suggest, shows that the connection between Weor and Gurdjieff is not merely surface or coincidental, but structural. Rather than a clear split between OTO/Tantric practices and Gurdjieffian theory, seminal retention is added onto an otherwise Gurdjieffian system of practices.

A second exercise, called the SOL Key, was added to our practical work at this point. SOL stands for “subject, object, location;” we first remember our subjectivity, or in other words, self-remembering; second, we remember what the object is, in other words, the thing outside ourselves so that we don’t get lost in it by identifying with it; and thirdly, location; where are you, and what’s around you? I was told that by practicing the SOL Key exercise multiple times every day, the Ego becomes habituated to asking “where am I?” in the material world, and so begins to do it while dreaming too. This can enable us to wake up in the astral plane, also called lucid dreaming, something that was stressed multiple times during my course. Later, it was explained that when we are operating completely from essence, you no longer dream at all, but rather all sleep is taken up with conscious activity on the astral plane. And indeed, we were also tasked with recording our dreams upon waking, and given a mantra to recite before sleep to encourage our recall. This was joined a few weeks later by reviewing the day before sleep, or “retrospection”. Recording dreams and reviewing the day are not unique to the Gurdjieff work, and are in fact a common feature of introductory material for many esoteric systems, including Golden Dawn-style initiatory orders, paganism and others. Division of attention exercises, on the other hand, are specifically Gurdjieffian, and were the first exercise he would give to students from at least 1923.³⁰ The emphasis on lucid dreaming, however, isn’t something I have encountered elsewhere.

³⁰ Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff*, p. 21; Joseph Azize, ‘Practice of Contemplation in the Work of Gurdjieff’, *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2016), pp. 139–158.

At this point in the course, the practical aspects of the Gnosis departed from Gurdjieff, with a Tantric aspect instituted. In traditional Work teaching, a contemplation exercise known as the Morning Sitting (as per J.G. Bennett)³¹ or the Preparation (as per the Adies)³² involves moving the attention slowly around the body, holding each area in conscious attention as you continue to scan and add to it. Accompanying breathing exercises encourage the accumulation of “higher foodstuffs” in the air for transformation in the body. The Weor version moves the attention up the chakras instead, with the aspirant instructed to visualize them while vocalizing their specific mantra sounds, seven times daily. The sound, I was told, would “regenerate ourselves from the atomic level.”

Around this point in the course, I asked both Gareth and Nomita (separately) about Gurdjieff. Neither knew much about him; Nomita had heard the name, Gareth had not. In both cases, their reaction of vague interest and bemusement suggested to me that they were genuinely unaware of the influence, which in turn suggests that the influence isn’t widely known within the organisation. This is surprising, but may explain some of the lack of notice from academics, if those within the Gnostic Movement are unaware of it themselves.

The following week’s lecture was again unambiguously Gurdjieffian, describing each of the body’s “centres” (Intellectual, Emotional and Motor, with a “higher” version of the Intellectual and Emotional, plus the Instinctive and Sexual centres). Here, the centres are *physical* loci, rather than the energetic loci of the chakras, although the two do overlap to some degree. While the sexual aspects of the Gnosis remain implicit at this point in the course, there was considerable emphasis put upon the importance of the sexual centre here as the source of the body’s energy. Our sexual energy is our creative energy, “the most powerful force in the universe” and is necessary for spiritual work. Other centres rob energy from it, however, and when it runs out, we die. The importance of practices including the SOL Key is to become conscious of our ego stealing this energy and thereby diverting it away from its intended purpose—building the spark of essence into an immortal soul. We were tasked with “balancing the centres” by, for example, mixing mental activity with physical activity, a teaching of Gurdjieff recorded in Nott’s description of life with Gurdjieff at the Priory, among other accounts.³³

Following this, I was taught “The Rune FA”, apparently the first in a series of rituals, or “runes,” combining gestures, vocalizations and visualizations. Specifically, while holding a pose in the shape of the rune, we were to make specific sounds while visualizing that vibration in specific places in the body. This has no analogue that I am aware of in the Gurdjieff Work, but clearly resembles Pranayama, with its mixture of asanas, mudras and mantras. However, I was reminded that the key practices to waking up were self-remembering, the Observer and the observed and the SOL Key; I took it from this that the rune FA and presumably further Runes would be the focus of the mesoteric Second Chamber.

³¹ See Robert Fripp, *The Guitar Circle* (Hardwick, UK: Panegyric Publishing, 2022).

³² See Joseph Azize, *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, and Exercises* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 319-343.

³³ Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff*, pp. 5, 36-37, 65-66.

The next block of weeks was more concerned with cosmological matters than with practical materiality. This was the only section where the influence of Theosophy dominated, with a dharmic model of time with long cyclical “cosmic days”, reincarnation, elemental beings, ascended masters, root races, “the lower fifth dimension”, and so on. Yet Gurdjieff again dominated the following, final block, which served as an overview of the more practical work to come in the mesoteric and esoteric chambers. The first week of the block was based on the paths of the Fakir, Monk and Yogi, and of the Fourth Way, of the Balanced Man—undoubtedly taken wholesale from Gurdjieff, possibly via Ouspensky.³⁴ Then we return to the transformation of energy, and again the terminology is clearly influenced by Gurdjieff, most clearly in the identification of three foods, digestion, air and impressions, in terms taken directly from Ouspensky’s scientific exegesis of Gurdjieff’s ideas. Weor develops these with ideas drawn from Tantra, including names of the devas/“elemental beings” and the explicit identification of sexual energy.

The final lecture was entitled Initiation, and summarized the Teachings of the first chamber neatly:

our body is the image of God and contains all the potential that we have. You are not one mind but many Minds thinking different thoughts but through conscious shocks we can progress. the initiatory path is the purpose of our existence, and the three factors of the Revolution of the consciousness [i.e. the Gnosis] is that path of initiation from the human to the Essence (which we could also call the Christ, the Master, the Buddha and so on)... (transcribed from fieldnotes, 19 October 2018)

I was told clearly that, as a scholar, I would not be permitted to proceed to the Second Chamber. They did outline the Second and Third Chambers for me, however. The focus shifts more toward practice in the mesoteric level, which they called “the nine initiations of the minor mysteries”. I presume it includes the SOL Key and other “rune” rituals like it, but they didn’t mention a Gnostic Mass, or indeed any communal rituals. The Major Mysteries, which they called the esoteric level, is open only to couples, and so focuses on sex magic work. The Major Mysteries seem to operate similarly to the Grade system in Freemasonic esoteric orders like the Golden Dawn or A.:A.:—a series of initiations, with the final initiation being the birth of the Christ within us.

Where did the Gnosis come from?

To assess the degree to which the Gnosis owes its practices to Krumm-Heller, I should first clarify which specific practices we are considering. There are in fact three practices in the Gnosis which features which require further exploration: the use of Gnostic rituals and terminology; seminal retention; and “inner alchemy”—the construction of an immortal soul or “subtle body”. I will take each of these in turn.

³⁴ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 91-93.

As well as a high-ranking Rosicrucian and OTO member, Krumm-Heller was also a consecrated Gnostic Bishop.³⁵ There is a significant crossover between membership in the new Gnostic churches that appeared in France (and to a lesser extent Germany) from the 1890s, and membership of Freemasonic and/or Rosicrucian orders, Martinism and esoteric orders such as the OTO and Golden Dawn.³⁶ One of Krumm-Heller's activities in South America was to publish material from the French "Gnostic Revival" churches of the late nineteenth century translated into Spanish, in books and edited journals including *Rosa-Cruz* and *Gnose*. Given the MGCU's use of some of these specific rituals, including the Gnostic Mass, it seems uncontroversial that this is where Weor learned of it. Although sometimes identified as a Gnostic by scholars, Gurdjieff himself did not commonly use Gnostic terminology, and certainly did not utilise rituals from the French Gnostic churches. So we can safely assume a transmission to Weor through Krumm-Heller's FRA. However, I encountered none of this material during the First Chamber.

Despite heresiological accounts accusing early Christian Gnostics of sexual impropriety and other transgressive acts, seminal retention (or *coitus reservatus*) is a specifically Tantric practice.³⁷ Krumm-Heller was, as already noted, a high-ranking member of the OTO, an initiatory order founded in 1896 by Carl Kellner, a wealthy German Freemason who claimed to have been initiated into Tantra by Arab and Hindu adepts.³⁸ The OTO existed in name only until Kellner's death in 1905, whereupon Theodor Reuss incorporated teachings from Paschal Beverley Randolph (1825-75), a mixed-race Spiritualist and equal rights campaigner from New York.³⁹ However, while Randolph argued that at the moment of orgasm, "the souls of the partners are opened to the powers of the cosmos and anything truly willed is accomplished," he did not teach seminal retention, or any form of sexual abstinence.⁴⁰ Under Reuss, the first seven OTO degrees were based upon "opening the chakras"; eight and nine taught sexual techniques (apparently semen retention and possibly mutual "adoration of the phalli"); and the tenth was entirely titular, being granted to the organization's head.⁴¹ And indeed we have a direct first-person account of Krumm-Heller teaching Weor a seminal retention technique which would appear to match the Eighth grade: "the man... must introduce his penis into the female sex and keep it there ... until both experience a divine sensation which can last hours and withdraw at the moment the spasm approaches in order to avoid ejaculating sperm."⁴² This technique is well-known in popular accounts of Tantra (for

³⁵ Peter-R. Koenig, 'Arnoldo Krumm-Heller – Huiracocha', *Para Religion* (1994). At: <http://www.parareligion.ch/fra.htm>.

³⁶ See David G. Robertson, *Gnosticism and the History of Religions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 25-38.

³⁷ Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 88; p. 127.

³⁸ Francis King, *The Secret Rituals of the OTO* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1973), p. 22.

³⁹ King, *The Secret Rituals of the OTO*, p. 25; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁰ Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, p. 67.

⁴¹ These degrees were significantly developed by Crowley in the 1920s, incorporating a wider range of practices, including full intercourse and various other practices, but there is some evidence that Krumm-Heller rejected Crowley's material, and the young Victor Manuel left his Rosicrucian group after Omar Cherenzi Lind introduced Crowleyan material.

⁴² Weor as translated in Zoccatelli, 'Sexual magic and Gnosis in Columbia', p. 145.

example, a detailed account appears in Omar Garrison's *Tantra: The Yoga of Sex* ([1964]), so it seems entirely viable that Aun Weor learned it from Krumm-Heller.

As was typical of the day, Reuss understood Gnosticism as the primitive (that is, uncorrupted) form of Christianity. Significantly, however, Reuss saw Tantra and Gnosticism as essentially identical, writing:

The secret teachings of the Gnostics (Primitive Christians) are identical with the Vamachari rites of the Tantrics ... Phallicism is the basis of all theology and underlies the mythology of all peoples ... The Phallus as a divine symbol received divine veneration for thousands of years in India.⁴³

This is further indication that Weor learned this technique from Krumm-Heller, along with the Gnostic terminology that would define his teachings. However, a marked difference between the Gnosis and the techniques of the OTO, Randolph *and* Tantra is their purpose—the creation of an immortal subtle body. As previously noted, Weor argues that we are not born with souls, but must construct one for ourselves. This is an idea that exists only in Gurdjieff and Weor. In the next section, I'll consider the evidence that Weor took this idea from Gurdjieff.

Sex and the birth of Subtle Bodies

While sex is not generally prioritized in accounts of the Gurdjieff Work, many scholars have pointed out the frequency with which sex comes up in his writings, talks and teaching. Johanna Petsche has recently argued that Gurdjieff's teachings are more concerned with sex than is generally considered to be the case.

Ouspensky lays out the importance of the sex centre: "If it uses its own energy ... all the other centres are subordinate to it. Therefore it would be a great thing if it worked with its own energy. This alone would indicate a comparatively very high level of being."⁴⁴ Gurdjieff considered the "sex centre" to be uniquely able to "receive the fine food of impressions", meaning it is particularly able to transmute matter to finer forms. In Gurdjieff's system, energy (or "food") is transmuted up the scale of octaves from food and water, to air, to impressions. In the functioning of the typical human, this is where the process stops, because the energy required is instead dissipated through "fornication", which includes masturbation but also egoic activities like envy, anger, and so on. But Gurdjieff did not teach that either sexual activity (of any type) or abstinence was requirement in itself, but rather that either could provide the "shock" needed to propel energy in the "impressions" octave into a still higher octave, so long as they being used consciously for this purpose.⁴⁵ Gurdjieff seems more concerned with the energy being wasted on mere pleasure, rather than fulfilling one's life purpose, than he was by any particular sexual activity.

⁴³ Theodor Reuss, 'Parsival und das Enthüllte Grals-Geheimnis', in *Der Kleine Theodor Reuss Reader*, ed. Peter-R. Köenig (Munich: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen, 2014), p. 72.

⁴⁴ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 258-259.

⁴⁵ Petsche, 'Gurdjieff on Sex', pp. 134-135.

Properly directed, this energy is used to “coat” or “crystallize” two “subtle” bodies, made of finer energy than matter. The first Gurdjieff called the Body Kesdjan, and corresponds to the Astral body in Theosophical terminology, but significantly the second, the “mental body”, can survive the physical death of the body when suitably coated with sexual energy, which Gurdjieff often called “Hydrogen SI-12”. Although not referenced as such, Weor’s description of the production of an astral body through seminal retention is taken wholesale, “Hydrogen SI-12” and all, from Gurdjieff, via Ouspensky:⁴⁶

<p>“The sexual hydrogen develops inside the human organism according to the musical scale: do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-si-do. The sexual hydrogen SI-12 is found plentifully in sperm. It crystallizes new human bodies and wisely transmuted, it gives form to the astral body. If the sexual impulse is inhibited in order to prevent the ejaculation of sperm, Hydrogen SI-12 receives a special shock which allows it to pass to the next higher octave”⁴⁷</p>	<p>“‘Hydrogen si 12 is the ‘hydrogen’ which represents the final product of the transformation of food in the human organism. This is the matter with which sex works and which sex manufactures ... hydrogen si 12 can pass into do of the next octave with the help of an additional shock ... this is the normal and natural way to use the energy of c12. But in the same organism there is a further possibility. And this is the possibility of creating a new life of than the actual organism, in which the si 12 has been manufactured, without the union of the two principles, the male and the female. A new octave then develops within the organism not outside it. This is the birth of the ‘astral body’.”⁴⁸</p>
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He never cites Gurdjieff or Ouspensky (although as we have seen, several passages are paraphrased), and rarely mentions them in his many books and published talks. It remains significant that we have no records of Aun Weor engaging directly with Gurdjieff’s teachings, either written or in a group. Perhaps this is nothing more than Weor himself trying to obscure the source he plagiarized.

It is worth asking to what degree Aun Weor literalises Gurdjieff’s talk of controlling sexual energy into simply retaining the semen. Gurdjieff is generally understood as seeking an accumulation of a particular *energy*, called “Exiohary”—“the means provided for man’s self-creation and for the creation of his higher bodies.”⁴⁹ In *Making a New World*, J. G. Bennett writes:

Sex ... was not only a legitimate but even a necessary part of the process of our development. It is of course clear from the chapter “Purgatory” of Beelzebub’s Tales

⁴⁶ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 254-259; Zoccatelli, ‘Sexual magic and Gnosis in Columbia’, p. 144.

⁴⁷ Samael Aun Weor, *Carpa Solari: Messaggio di Natale 1967-68* (Florence: Instituto Gnostico di Antropologia, 1991), p. 127.

⁴⁸ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 255.

⁴⁹ John G. Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 289.

that Gurdjieff regards the *sex energy*, there called exiohary, as the main source of nourishment for the higher bodies in man.⁵⁰

However, this is complicated when we look at the 1930 manuscript of *Beelzebub's Tales*, where, in the “Holy Planet Purgatory” chapter identified by Bennett, Gurdjieff refers to Exiohary as “sperma”:

Either owing to the cosmic Triamonia for the formation of a new being, or, owing to the Pure Reason or Pure Will, for the forming of and perfecting of the second body of being, called ‘Kesdjan’, *the substances of this sperma or Exloehary can pass to the next octave...*

the knowledge was passed down to contemporary beings, that this Exloehary is really formed in them, and that its substances can serve beings for their perfection. That is true, but unfortunately for them, they did not acquire knowledge of the necessary means...

From that time on, very many of them began to abstain from the ordinary ejection of Exloehary from themselves. They joined together and formed large communities under various names; and today there exist very many of these sects whose members live together.

“They are called by other beings of the Earth ‘monks’; and the places where they dwell are called ‘monasteries’. “It naturally never enters the heads of these monks, that although it is possible to perfect oneself by means of Exloehary, yet this perfection can proceed only through the conscious consumption and digestion of the substances of Abrustdonis and Helkdonis, and this is why of course, no effective result has ever been obtained from their abstinence, or will ever be obtained (emphasis mine).

Similarly, in *Views from the Real World*, Gurdjieff describes this “special matter” (i.e., not “energy”):

When such *a special matter* accumulates in sufficient quantities, it may begin to crystallize, as salt begins to crystallise in water at more than a certain proportion is added. When a great deal of fine matter accumulates in man, there comes a moment when a new body can form and crystallizing him... A higher octave this body called the astral can only be formed from the special matter and cannot come into being unconsciously... To build this body inside of man is the aim of all religions and all school; every religion has its own special way, but the aim is always the same.⁵¹

“The aim of all religions and all schools” is of course how Weor described the Gnosis. Despite these hints, there is no way for me to ascertain if Weor literalized Gurdjieff’s teaching, or whether the literality of Gurdjieff’s teaching was deemphasized by Gurdjieff’s followers for matters of

⁵⁰ Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, p. 233. Emphasis mine.

⁵¹ George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World: Early Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York and Chicago* (London: Arkana, 1984), p. 202. Emphasis mine.

secrecy or propriety. These are questions that I hope Gurdjieff scholars may be able to address in future.

Conclusion

Where does us leave us then in the question of whether “Gurdjieff provided the theory and Krumm-Heller the practice” in the Gnosis?⁵² My fieldwork suggests that we have underestimated the influence of Gurdjieff and overestimated the influence of the OTO, Tantra or other sex magic traditions. Through undertaking the full exoteric course, seeing the relationship between the ideas and practices laid out systematically, it seems clear that Gurdjieff’s Work is a key inspiration, and of structural importance, permeating the Gnosis from the first practice to what it ultimately aims to achieve. For both Gurdjieff and Weor, sex is “the chief form of slavery and it is also the chief possibility of liberation.”⁵³

I looked at three main points of similarity with teachings that might have come from Krumm-Heller, Randolph or the OTO—the use of Gnostic ritual and terminology; seminal retention; and “inner alchemy”. The first seems quite likely to have come from Krumm-Heller via the FRA. The second point of similarity, seminal retention, is less clear. Paschal Beverley Randolph’s sex magic involves neither seminal retention nor subtle bodies. On the other hand, the specific technique taught by Aun Weor of penetration without ejaculation was taught by the (pre-Crowley) OTO, and indeed is perhaps the best-known Tantric technique in the West. Petsche’s work suggests that not only would Gurdjieff teach that sexual energy could be used consciously to create “shocks”, both through activity and abstinence, but that the primacy of the energy from the sexual centre has been underestimated by scholars, and should be considered central to Gurdjieff’s teaching. Despite tantalizing hints of secret teachings, we cannot presently know if Gurdjieff used this or a similar technique. In short, seminal retention seems likely to have come from Krumm-Heller, but the possibility that Gurdjieff also taught something similar remains, as Zocattelli suggests.

This leads us to the third point—the creation of subtle bodies. The fact remains that the connection between sexual magic and the establishment of astral bodies is not attested in Tantric sources, nor was it a doctrine of the OTO. It comes specifically from Gurdjieff where, as Petsche has argued, it is essentially the central purpose of the Work. Gurdjieff provided the theory, but also most of the practice. Most likely, Weor literalized Gurdjieff’s teaching on sex energy, by connecting it to kundalini practices learned from Krumm-Heller.

Nevertheless, there is a strong case for considering the Gnostic Movement through a Gurdjieffian lens, or even as a lineage of the Gurdjieff Work. If so, the case could be made that it that it was the largest of all such groups today. Such a perspective would somewhat challenge the standard view of Gurdjieff as somewhat of an outlier in the wider field of the New Age, but also of Aun Weor withing Gnosticism. It also reminds us that these traditions continue to be largely

⁵² Zocattelli, ‘Sexual magic and Gnosis in Columbia’, p. 145.

⁵³ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 255.

overlooked by scholars, and there remains much to their origins, development and influences. There remains much work to be done to understand.