Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way: Giving Voice to Further Alterity in the Study of Western Esotericism

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Introduction

The last half of the twentieth century saw the gradual but steady burgeoning of work on the various permutations of what Francis Yates, as the most famous exemplar of this development, called 'the Hermetic tradition' or what others have almost as influentially classed with the set of 'alternative religions' of the West, under the general rubric of the humanities, i.e., scholarship governed by rules of ratiocination, or dependence upon data that can be shared, evidence that can be evaluated, and judgments that can be assessed by others.[1] This drift away from starkly apologetic and polemic treatments of such religious traditions has lead to an appreciation of their contributions to the making of modernity.[2] Recently this trajectory has culminated in a new generation

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1 G. Lease, 'What are the Humanities and Why do they Matter? The Case of Religion and the Public Life', *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*, 1998, Vol. 27, No. 4, p. 93.

2 A comprehensive examination of the history behind this development lies outside the scope of this exploratory study. However, I feel that it would be useful for the reader unfamiliar with the field to briefly and in a limited fashion identify studies that have been part of this revaluation. Francis Yates has already been mentioned; her argument for the pivotal role of 'the Hermetic tradition' in the birth of modern science was first presented in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago, 1964. The so-called 'Yates thesis' has been tentatively accepted in a historically revised and weak form by contemporary historians of science; *cf.* H.F. Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*, Chicago, 1994, pp. 169–183. Other germinal figures focusing on the 'magic' complex and early modern studies include W. Schumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance; A Study of Intellectual Patterns*, Berkeley, 1972; K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Belief in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, London, 1973; and most recently S. J. Tambiah, *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990. C. McIntosh, *Eliphas Levi and the French Occult Revival*, London, 1972 and *The Rosicrucians. The History and Mythology of an Occult Order*, Wellingborough, 1987; J. Webb, *The Occult Underground*, La Salle, 1974 and *The Occult Establishment*, Glasgow,

of scholars who regard their sum as an object of study in its own right, an epistemic shift reminiscent of the emergence of a scholarly study of religion in the nineteenth century and with which these scholars have self-consciously aligned themselves.[1] This realization among a number of scholars has seen an increased tendency toward wider consultation about and institutionalization of 'western esotericism,' seen to be both a newly emergent subdiscipline and an integral research programme.[2]

Such an alliance, while strategic, is far from straightforward. In identifying with religious studies, the study of western esotericism recapitulates and becomes caught up in the very same debates through which religion became the object of Western scholarly research. The identity of other fields does not depend (solely) on the study of religion; *ipso facto*, the broadly scientific study of western esotericism, like the ancestral 'science of religion' before it, will also become, to borrow from Clifford Geertz, 'a conflicted discipline, perpetually in search of ways to escape its condition, perpetually failing to find them'.[3] The

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1976, have contributed to the historiography of post-Enlightenment developments, with varying degrees of polemic, particularly virulent in Webb's case.

1 For more on the ways in which religion became the object of scientific research in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see A. L. Molendijk and P. Pels, *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, Leiden, 1998. I will look at the problematic question of 'disciplinarity' in religion studies and consequently western esotericism later in this paper.

2 In summary, there are now two academic chairs devoted to western esotericism: the 'History of esoteric and mystical currents in modern and contemporary Europe' since 1979 in the fifth section of the *Ecole Practique des Hautes Etudes* in Paris; and, since 1999, the 'History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents' at the University of Amsterdam. In addition, the latter has established the world's first complete (sub)department within the auspices of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. Initiatives devoted more to sub-categories of the field have been organised by international academic organizations, such as the *American Academy of Religion* (*AAR*). On the other hand, esotericism as a total field has been included by the *International Association for the History of Religions* (*IAHR*) since its seventeenth Congress in 1995. For a more comprehensive history, see A. Faivre and K.-C. Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion', *Numen*, 1995, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 48-77; W. Hanegraaff, 'Introduction,' in A. Faivre and W. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, Peeters, Leuven, 1998 (Hanegraaff, 1998a); and Afdeling Theologie en Religiestudies, *History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents: Report 1999-2000*, Amsterdam, 2001.

3 C. Geertz, 'Culture War', *The New York Review of Books*, 1995, Vol. 14, No. 19, p. 4.

purpose of this exploratory study, then, is to explore the categories of western esotericism rather as sites of contestation by questioning aspects of the disciplinary consensus arrived at thus far and to give voice to muted discourses within the field. The constitution of imagination as the central element of esoteric discourse has become foundational to this consensus. Of the esotericist voices which speak otherwise, that of the little-studied Russian-born esotericists G.I Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky will be presented here.

Terms Of Reference And A Cursory Examination Of The State Of Research

The author assumes on behalf of the interested generalist only a fleeting acquaintance with all but the most exotic, topical and tenuous elements of contemporary esotericism, such as the New Age and Wicca, for example.[1] Even those aware of the consolidating developments in the study of western esotericism may be unfamiliar with P.D. Ouspensky (1878–1947), his significant contribution to a constellation of esoteric doctrines and practices known collectively as the 'Fourth Way', and his relationship to another important though little-studied esotericist, G. I. Gurdjieff (1886?–1949).[2] Given this situation and the still marginalised space of esotericism in the academy as a whole, what will be attempted here is a brief preliminary heuristic orientation to the terms that will be used and to those elements of research in this field useful to this study.

The 'Fourth Way'

If the study of western esotericism can still be regarded as embryonic, comprehensive academic treatments of the 'Fourth Way' are even more

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1 See W. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden, 1996 and B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century*, Philadelphia, 1999, respectively.

2 So little studied is Gurdjieff that even his date of birth has not been established to any satisfaction, hence the question mark; 1886 was adduced by Gurdjieff's most recent biographer, who also discusses the alternative dates of birth. See J. Moore, *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth*, London, 1991, pp. 339–340.

nascent, and it would be fair to say that most studies still fall into either the apologetic or the polemic. Again, historiography is also just beginning. Unfortunately, given the limitations of this study, this is not the place to make an assessment or anything but the briefest of historical accounts.[1] Rather, from the literature I will distil a brief preliminary heuristic definition that others can attempt to falsify.

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1 Any reader who wishes to engage with the extant literature should consult W.J. Driscoll, *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography*, New York, 1985, but should bear in mind its apologetic cast (of a distinctively 'heresiological' nature), produced as it was under the auspices of The Gurdjieff Foundation, which was established to preserve (or, as others in the Fourth Way would argue, embalm; for example, see the 'unorthodox Gurdjeffean', J.G. Bennett, *Witness: The Story of a Search*, London, 1962, p. 233) the teachings of Gurdjieff from vulgarization and 'deflection' from their 'original' intent.

Verifiable information about Gurdjieff's dates only from his arrival in Moscow in 1911; he was in Russia and Georgia until 1920, emigrating to western Europe via Istanbul. In 1922 Gurdjieff and his followers moved to Fontainebleau, south of Paris, where he established the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man and which operated into the late 1930s. He visited the United States in 1924, were he also found followers, and again in 1930. For the decade 1924 to 1934 Gurdjieff dedicated himself to writing books to communicate his ideas. From the early 1930s until his death in 1949 Gurdjieff lived in Paris, with occasional trips to America. The scarcity of reliable information about him and the Fourth Way in general is evidence of few attempts at historiography. William Patterson has attempted something of a comprehensive historiography of Gurdjieff, *Struggle of the Magicians. Exploring the Student-Teacher Relationship*, Fairfax, 1996. However, as his autobiography, *Eating the 'I'. An Account of the Fourth Way – The Way of Transformation in Ordinary Life*, Fairfax, 1992, along with a catalogue of 'deflections' from an assumed 'orthodoxy' as intended by Gurdjieff (*Taking With the Left Hand, Enneagram Craze, People of the Bookmark & The Mouravieff 'Phenomenon'*, Fairfax, 1998) evince, Patterson's historiographical work suffers from the opposite tendency of apologetics. Similarly, H.J. Reyner, *Ouspensky: The Unsung Genius*, London, 1981 oscillates between biography and hagiography without clear demarcation. Recently, though, a number of biographies which seek to avoid such sharp dichotomies (P.B. Taylor, *Shadows of Heaven: Gurdjieff and Toomer*, Maine, 1998; and K.F. Rosenblatt, *Rene Daumal: The Life and Work of a Mystic Guide*, Albany, 1999), as well as histories of the Theosophical Society and Russian esotericism in general that place Gurdjieff and Ouspensky in their contexts (M. Carlson, *'No Religion Higher Than the Truth'. A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922*, Princeton, 1993; B.G. Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Ithaca, 1997; but see also W.F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: Magic in Russia*, Pennsylvania,1999) are also beginning to emerge, which are slowly shedding more light).

Firstly, in an historical sense, it is the set of doctrines and practices developed by Gurdjieff *and* those sets of doctrines and practices developed by others through contact with Gurdjieff (either directly or indirectly). Taken all together, they constitute a unique object of study: namely, a set of lineages all claiming to represent Gurdjieff.

Secondly, utilising the broadest possible characterisation, the entire set of doctrines and practices of these lineages emphasise *awakening*: it presents a hierarchical cosmos of vast size, imbued with forces and purposes which are incomprehensible to most people. And for a simple reason: most people (and this includes thinkers/intellectuals) are asleep and simply react like machines to external conditions. Subjectivity and selfhood are illusory, as each reaction is equated with *a* self. Indeed, shocks must be administered to wake them all up. Only then can 'work on oneself' begin – the 'direct awareness' of other forces and energies that move within them and around them on this planet – which is essential if one is to wake up and fulfil the role for which this cosmos has designed humanity.

Thirdly, in the pedagogical sense, this can only be accomplished under the guidance of a teacher who is already awake; and even the guidance of the teacher requires the existence of a 'school' if anything substantial is to be accomplished. The *fourth way*, the term the founding 'awakener' gave to the method of such schools, as opposed to the first three ways of the yogi (mental), monk (emotional), or fakir (physical) which require particular conditions, is the way of the person encountering ordinary life and striving within it for a state of 'self-remembrance' in which all three aspects participate and then engage in those aforementioned forces and energies.

Finally, in terms of textual traditions, this study will take the writings of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky as paradigmatic and foundational, especially Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* and Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* – as do the Fourth Way lineages collectively.[1]

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1 The few episodic analytical (i.e. academic) treatments of the teachings were consulted (J. Webb, *The Harmonious Circle. An exploration of the lives and work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky and others*, London, 1980; M. Walberg, *Gurdjieff: An Approach to his Ideas*, trans. Steven Cox, London, 1981; J. Gordon Melton, *Biographical Dictionary of American Cult and Sect Leaders*, New York, 1986, p.

The Faivrean 'empirical' definition of esotericism.

Throughout his publications, Antoine Faivre, holder of the first chair for the study of esotericism, has tentatively but consistently delineated a six-point heuristic of esotericism. This asserts that firstly, the world, both manifest and unmanifest, is a network of universal *correspondences*, encompassing the terrestrial, the celestial, the supercelestial, the scriptural and the transhistorical; and secondly, that nature is seen as a multiple-tier, living *organism*, a tissue of sympathies and antipathies in which humanity is profoundly imbricated.

Thirdly, *imagination*, as a creative as opposed to mundane faculty, gives access to the various levels of reality, and functions through images or symbols as *mediations*; and fourthly, a belief in, and desire for, *transmutation*. The culminative and interlocking nature of the antecedent characteristics 'catalyse' a soteriological and epistemological rupture which both radically removes prior limited conditions while simultaneously endowing a greatly expanded condition, to both humanity and nature.

Fifthly, there is a *praxis of concordance* through which a superior wisdom can be found by synthesising a variety of pre-existing traditions; and finally, there is a dynamic of *transmission* by which teachings are passed from one person to another, and traditions thereby established.[1]

103; J. Needleman, 'G. I. Gurdjieff and His School', in A. Faivre and J. Needleman, *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, New York, 1992, pp. 359–380; A. Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions*, Chicago and La Salle, 1997, p. 27, 132; J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, sixth edition, Detroit and London, 1999, p.179, pp. 864–865; G. Baker and W. Driscoll, 'Gurdjieff in America: An Overview', in Timothy Miller (ed.), *America's Alternative Religions*, Albany,1995, pp. 261–263) as well as a cursory and heuristic examination of some of the polemic and voluminous apologetic.

1 A. Faivre, 'Esotericism', in M. Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 5, New York, 1987; A. Faivre, 'Introduction 1', in A. Faivre and J. Needleman, 1992, *op. cit.*, xv–xx; A. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, Albany, 1994; A. Faivre, 'Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism', in R. van den Broek and W. Hanegraaff (eds), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, Albany, 1998, pp. 119–122 (Faivre 1998a); A. Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, Albany, 2000, pp. xxi–xxv, and A. Faivre and K.-C. Voss, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–64.

According to Faivre, the first four are 'intrinsic' in that in so far as they are mutually involved and interdependent they must be present for the definition to apply. The other two are considered 'extrinsic' in that they are not necessary to the function of the definition.

Faivre also emphasises that this is not a definition arrived at by deduction but rather by induction, from the examination of particulars to general principles: having studied certain historical traditions and their textual products, he has found that certain characteristics are always present, and that these may accordingly be used to define and demarcate these traditions. In other words, it was an extrapolation from a number of European post-Renaissance discourses which possessed a kind of *air de famille*.[1] Moreover, this relationship had not previously existed, and amounted to an interpenetration of discrete pre-existing traditions, ideas and practices.[2] This growing scholarly realisation of commensurabilities and epistemological similarities between the various religious traditions marginalised by both the predominant churched religious bodies and the traditions of reason which lead to modern science, was made explicit by Faivre and lead him to understand 'esotericism' historically as a modern Western 'form of thought,' a 'style of imaginary', one among others, like modern science, mysticism, theology, or utopia.[3] This understanding Faivre characterises as the 'empirical approach' of being 'anchored in history', which has the advantages of facilitating the sketch of a possible boundary around the field and to distance the scholar from the ideological *a priori* of the esotericist which collapses differences.[4]

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1 Mainly, the neo-Alexandrian Hermeticism and Christian Kabbalah which had its beginnings in the Renaissance with the rediscovery of the Hermetica in 1463 and its subsequent translation, and the development of Paracelsianism, *the philosophia occulta*, Rosicrucianism and the theosophy of Boehme and his continuators in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

2 A. Faivre, 'Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe', in R. van den Broek and W. Hanegraaff (eds), Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times, SUNY Press, Albany, 1998, (Faivre, 1998b), pp. 6–8.

3 In the sense that has recently acquired in the humanities, mostly in France, 'imaginary' refers to the images, symbols, myths, which consciously or not underlie and/or permeate a discourse, a literary or artistic work, a current of thought, an artistic or political trend; see Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–19.

Hanegraaff and Method.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, who now holds the only other chair as well as heading the only academic department dedicated to the study of western esotericism, has offered the most sustained and decisive reflections upon method and definition proper to the newly institutionalised field. As such, they are largely concerned with defending and establishing Faivre's empirical approach in opposition to either the religionist or the reductionist approaches that have been presented as the only options available to scholars who study religions, of which 'western esotericism' is seen by Hanegraaff as a particular instantiation.[1]

His defence of Faivre's research program is theoretically reinforced in two ways. Firstly, by the scholar of religions Jan Platvoet's notion of 'methodological agnosticism' which rejects the axiomatically-held meta-empirical claims of both religionist and reductionist scholars of religion alike made about the 'multiple-tier cosmology' of the believer, a worldview that encompasses an empirically perceptible and one or more meta-empirical dimensions.[2] That is, in studying religion, scholars are dependent on believers expressing their awareness of a meta-empirical reality in empirically perceptible ways, but *qua* scholars, they do not themselves have direct access to the meta-empirical. While religionism blurs the distinction, incorrectly claiming 'scientific' validity for non-empirical knowledge, the reductionist is inevitably self-contradictory is so far as falsification would require the meta-empirical to be empirical. For this reason Platvoet argues that only the scholar who holds to a 'one-tier cosmology' nonaxiomatically produces 'scientific' knowledge about religion.

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1 W. Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1995, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 99-129; Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–7, and W. Hanegraaff, 'On the Construction of "Esoteric Traditions"', in A. Faivre and W. Hanegraaff (eds), 1998, *op. cit.*, (Hanegraaff, 1998b) are programmatic here.

2 J. Platvoet, 'The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1990, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 180-212; cf., Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–108; Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–67; for a balanced account of the 'sociology of the occult' position within the social sciences as an example of reductionism in regard to esotericism, see Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–120; Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–42.

Platvoet also uses linguist Kenneth L. Pike's '*emic/etic*' distinction, as mediated by anthropologist Marvin Harris.[1] In this case, the *emic* refers to 'the believer's perspective'; it is essential to a valid study of religions at all interested in taking its subject matter seriously. The researcher spares no effort to represent this perspective as adequately as possible. Such a representation is predicated upon on an attempt to 'bracket one's own biases'. The *emic* refers to any theoretical perspective researchers may propose in order to 'make sense' of their findings. On the one hand, then, empirical research of esotericism is *etic* and should draw on methods of interpretation intrinsically not those of the esotericist. On the other hand, in the *emic* stage, an unbiased presentation of 'the believer's perspective' is the scholarly goal that should motivate research.

Modification and Extension of the Faivrean Definition.

From this basis, Hanegraaff further argues that a continuing interplay of *emic* material and *etic* interpretations is the indispensable foundation for an empirical study of esotericism.[2] In fact, he points out that Faivre's definition entailed just such a dialectical, as opposed to an analytical, procedure: 1) a pre-reflective intuition that, in spite of the extreme variety, all of the phenomena nevertheless share some *air de famille*; 2) the phenomena regarded as belonging to this class are studied; and 3) on that inductive foundation, proposals are made to substantiate the intuition by clarifying the empirical similarities in the form of theoretical generalisations. This is also essentially what happens in empirical definitions where 'religion' is seen as the class to which religion*s* belong simply because they share certain empirical similarities.[3] Such

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1 K. L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*, The Hague, 1967, pp. 38–39; M. Harris, *Cultural Materialism: the Struggle for the Science of Culture*, New York, 1979, pp. 32–45; J. Platvoet, *Comparing Religions: a Limitative Approach. An Analysis of Akan, Para-Creole and IFO-Sananda Rites and Prayers*, The Hague,1982, pp. 4–5; cf., Hanegraaff 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 65–67; Hanegraaff 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–15.

2 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 45, n.110.

3 Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45. On the emergence of an intuitive sense of this *air de famille*, see Faivre and Voss, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

operational definitions have the distinct advantage of falsifiabilty over undertakings that assume an *a priori* essence, which ultimately reflect the ideological preferences of its inventors.[1]

However, unlike 'religion', which is already a universalising definition, 'western esotericism', although specifically demarcated as a historical development of post-Renaissance western culture, can be used to universalise the concept of 'esotericism' by applying it to other discourses falling outside the scope of the original intuitively perceived field. This leads to what Hanegraaff calls the 'interesting problem' of scholars using the characteristics as a '*heuristic tool*' in order to discover 'esotericism' in other religious (and perhaps even nonreligious) contexts.[2] Complicating matters further is the fact that Faivre himself seems to leave open the possibility that esotericism existed before this period, and thus, possibly, outside of the specific historical demarcation.[3]

It is in this light that we should interpret Hanegraff's modifications of Faivre's definition.[4] I also feel that it is safe to say that, as Hanegraaff leaves himself out of his comprehensive and acute review of various *etic* constructions of esotericism, it is his explicit narrative of an empirical procedure *vis-à-vis* esotericism that is most representative of his own position, and that we must also take this into account.[5] His attempt at a comprehensive doctrinal analysis of New Age religiosity and his own pre-reflective intuition that it shared an *air de famille* with previous esoteric discourses, then, was without a doubt the catalyst for such modifications.[6]

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1 P. B. Clarke and P. Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained*, New York, 1993.

2 Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

3 For just a few examples, see Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 56.

4 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–113; Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 397–405; Hanegraaff, 1998b, pp. 46–59; W. Hanegraaff, 'Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism', *Theosophical History*, Vol. 7, Vo. 6, 1999, pp. 223–226, 231 n. 21 (Hanegraaff 1999a).

5 Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp.43–45; that he left out his own contribution to the study of esotericism is strange but made explicable by his own culminative and 'dialectical' position within the newly institutionalised field.

6 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, *passim*. This work, in particular, focusing as it does on late modern religious traditions, must have been instrumental through its relevance in justifying the study of western esotericism outside of a limited number of specialists.

The problem Hanegraaff seemed to have with Faivre's definition in terms of possible empirical similarities is that no new developments of the tradition can lead to the emergence of new characteristics, or, if they do emerge, are only to be included as non-intrinsic elements.[1] Although not essentialist, the definition was a 'theoretical generalization about *Christian* traditions of a particular period'.[2] Moreover, Faivre was adamant that a 'universal esotericism' could not be established.[3] In order to overcome such localisation while avoiding essentialism, and perhaps taking his cue from Faivre's own seeming inconsistencies, Hanegraaff co-opted the scholar of gnosticism Gilles Quispel's fundamental distinction between 'reason', 'faith' and 'gnosis', in which primacy is accorded to personal experience over reason and faith.[4] However, whereas Quispel saw these distinctions as particular instantiations of a universal human nature, Hanegraaff took them to mean, in a more limited ideal-typical sense, a tripartite typology of European cultural tradition.[5] That the central belief systems *both* of western esotericism and of New Age religiosity share what might be called a 'holistic gnosis' supports this.[6]

Yet it is also evident that the two do not share the same worldview. Discontinuity somehow had to be accounted for. As Faivre categorised esotericism as a 'form of thought', Hanegraaff was justifiably able to make use here of the approach of historian of ideas Arthur O. Lovejoy in order to formulate an 'empirical history of ideas'.[7] The most important

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 401.

2 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 122; original italics.

3 Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

4 G. Quispel (ed.), Gnosis: *De derde component van de Europese cultuurtraditie*, Utrecht, 1988, p. 9.

5 W. Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological Approach to the Problem of "Post-Gnostic" Gnosticism', *ARIES*, 1992, Vol. 16, pp. 5–43; Hanegraaff,1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 517–521; Hanegraaff, 'Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection', in van den Broek and Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–21 (Hanegraaff, 1998c).

6 W. Hanegraaff, 'The New Age Movement and the Esoteric Tradition', in van den Broek and Hanegraaff, *op. cit.*, p. 374 (Hanegraaff, 1998d).

7 A. Lovejoy, 'Reflections on the History of Ideas,' in D.R. Kelly, *The History of Ideas: Canon and Variation*, Rochester, 1990, pp. 1–21; A. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, Massachusetts, 1964, pp. 3–23; and, in terms of application, Lovejoy, 'The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas', *Journal of the*

element of that approach was a 'temporalistic realism' which emphasised 'that experience itself is temporal'.[1] From this notion of the 'genetic' in the history of ideas, Hanegraaff derived a diachronic definition of esotericism as a 'form of thought' on historical-genetic premises:

> An esoteric *tradition*, on this foundation, may be defined as a historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influence in their life and thinking by the esoteric ideas formulated earlier, which they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period.[2]

In tracing the filiation of ideas over time, and bearing in mind the irreversibility of historical time, the intention must be to clarify 'the complex ways in which people process – absorb, (re)interpret, (re)construct, etc – the ideas of the past accessible to them', while leaving 'room for relatively constant factors'.[3] In the final analysis, a 'diachronic study of esotericism would have to consider *any* of its historical manifestations not in terms of continuation but in terms of *reinterpretation*'.[4]

History of Ideas, 1941, Vol. 2, pp. 257–278; cf., Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 113–117. On the history of ideas in general, see Kelly, 1990, *op. cit. passim*.

1 A. Lovejoy, 'A Temporalistic Realism,' in G.P. Adams and W.P. Montague (eds), *Contemporary American Philosophy: Personal Statements*, Vol. 2, New York, 1962, p. 87. Another is the still not widely recognised emphasis on non-logical factors in the development of ideas, 'more or less unconscious mental habits' that are tacitly presupposed rather than formally expressed and argued for – such as 'dialectical motives' and diverse kinds of 'metaphysical pathos' like 'the eternalistic' and 'the monistic' – in the dynamics of intellectual change, as opposed to only the logical 'pressure' of ideas whereby logical implications are drawn by inferences cf., Lovejoy, 1964, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–13. There is no reason to think that this 'neo-Lovejoyean' modification is incompatible with methodological agnosticism.

2 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–118.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 118. Such factors included by Hanegraaff are certain types of religious experiences, certain inferences which are likely to be drawn from such experiences, the 'logical pressure' of ideas and basic assumptions, and various pre-rational factors proposed by Lovejoy. Nor does this mean that Hanegraaff suggests that the study of esotericism should restrict itself to the study of ideas; cf., *Ibid.*, p. 119.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Within this diachronic parameter, Hanegraaff demonstrates that a pivotal watershed in the development of the post-Renaissance synthetic traditions was reached under the broad impact of Enlightenment values and the rise of mechanistic science.[1] These post-Enlightenment developments of esotericism he collectively classed together as 'occultism', which reached its apogee in the period covering the second half of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the nineteenth century.[2] Esotericists living in the post-Enlightenment period were profoundly influenced by the new rationalism, positivism and scientism. Brendan French has pointed out that the 'occultists' of this period – of which Blavatsky, as the primary ideologue of the Theosophical Society, can be seen as the zenith – self-consciously sought to usurp the rhetoric and vocabulary of the scientific rationalist paradigms of their era, and then wed them to traditionalist esoteric discourses, in an attempt to redeem the world from 'the errancy of (Positivist) materialism'.[3] Hanegraaff reached a similar generalisation:

> Occultism, I suggest, can be defined as a category in the study of religions, which comprises all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world, or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted secular world.[4]

The result was a collision between two different and inherently incompatible worldviews: the organicist worldview of esotericism based on 'correspondences' and the post-Enlightenment worldviews based on

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1 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

2 Hanegraaff, 1998a, *op. cit.*, p. 375; for a detailed exposition of the period in question, see J. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1994. The term 'occultism' emerged at the same time as 'esotericism'; for a brief history of the term and the historical currents involved, see Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–34, 74–77, 86–90; for more detailed exposition, see B. French, *The Theosophical Masters. An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H.P. Blavatsky and C.W. Leadbeater*, 2. vols (Ph.D. thesis), Sydney, 2000 *passim*.

3 French, 2000, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1., xi–xii. For a 'macro-historical' perspective, see G.W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner, and Guenon,' in Faivre and Hanegraaff, 1998, *op. cit.*

4 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 422; original italics.

instrumental 'causality'.[1] Hanegraaff explained the rise of New Age religiosity as a 'secularised' esotericism in terms of this incompatibility and the differences between the largely nineteenth century occultism and the occultism of the later decades of the twentieth century, particularly the emergence of 'depth psychology' which largely solved this incompatibility.[2]

Hanegraaff's contribution to the study of esotericism centers on shifting the focus from Christian to *para*-Christian constructions. With his diachronic modification of Faivre's definition, he arrived at post-Christian esotericism, which emerges as Christianity ceases to be the dominant symbolic idiom and becomes one of several in a culture dominated by secularity.[3]

The Method Of Western Esotericism And The Contested Ground Of Religious Studies

A cursory glance at even a few randomly chosen systematic treatments subsequent to Faivre's empirical definition and Hanegraaff's later dialectical modifications support my claim that they are seen as consensually programatic and foundational; so much so that Faivre has himself assimilated Hanegraaff's efforts.[4] In the development of this

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1 cf., Tambiah, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–10.

2 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 121, n.45. Through depth psychology in particular and Jung specifically, Romanticism and more specifically Romantic *Naturephilosophie* was the other major strand which formed one of the influences upon New Age religion. Hanegraaff perceptively accounted for Romanticism as a reinterpretation of esoteric cosmology, based on universal correspondences which were a legacy of Renaissance Hermeticism, under the impact of the new evolutionism which changed the nature of esotericism but left it with an internally consistent worldview; cf., Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 406–407. However, it is difficult to believe that secular esotericism have remained such pure 'types' on the ground, so to speak, as we will be apparent in the case of Blavatsky later in this paper.

3 W. Hanegraaff, 'New Age Religion and Secularization', *Numen*, 2000, Vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 288–312.

4 D. Merkur, *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions*, Albany, 1993, p. ix (Faivre); J. Snoek, 'On the Creation of Masonic Degrees: A Method and its Fruits'. in Faivre and Hanegraaff 1998, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–147; J. Williams-Hogan, 'The Place of Emmanuel Swedenborg in Modern Western Esotericism', in Faivre and Hanegraaff, 1998, *op. cit.*, pp. 201–202 (Faivre); K-C. Voss, 'The University as

base framework for generalisation, both Faivre and Hanegraaff have from the outset positioned the study of western esotericism within the field of religious studies.[1] An academic discipline, as religious studies is taken to be, is 'characterised by the existence of general questions and problem areas of a comparative or systematic nature'. Hanegraaff to this effect advocates the development of 'interpretive theories pertaining to various dimensions of western esotericism in general – or, at least large and significant sub-areas of it'.[2] This kind of scholarship, being written in the growing sense of the boundaries of a field, has recapitulated, as we have seen, the major methodological controversies of its construed ancestral discipline, mainly the debate over reductionism as against religionism, and sought to navigate a path between them through the adoption of an empirical approach.[3]

Yet, if we examine historiographically the emergence of the 'sciences of religion' in the nineteenth century, the notion of empiricism as a *tertium quid* which escapes dichotomous problematics also radicalised the notion of 'religion' as an object of study in its own right.[4] Moreover, there is a growing awareness among contemporary scholars of religion – the very body of knowledge practices and outcomes with which they are

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a Space of Possibility', *Recontres transdisciplinaires*, 1998, Vol. 12; O. Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge. Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Brill, Leiden, 2001, pp. 6–8 (Faivre), 22, 48–49 n. 3, 51, 83, 507 (Hanegraaff) (Hammer, 2001a); O. Hammer, review of 'Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition' by Antoine Faivre, *Theosophical History*, 2001, Vol. 7, No. 7, p. 208 (Faivre) (Hammer, 2001b). For Faivre's own redaction, see Faivre & Voss 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–67; Faivre, 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.

1 Faivre, 1987, *op. cit., passim*; Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. ix; Faivre, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. xiii; Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, 99–101; Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5. However, with regard to Faivre, the positioning is less straightforward in that he seems sometimes to be arguing for the 'transdisciplinary' status of esotericism.

2 Hanegraaff, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

3 For the most recent instalment of this ongoing debate, see T.A. Indinopulos and E.A. Yonan (eds), *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, Brill, Leiden, 1994; for an examination of the debate in terms of the discipline of western esotericism, see Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–108.

4 A.L. Molendjik, 'Introduction', in A.L. Molendjik and P. Pels, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 3. In this case the dichotomy was between 'religion' as an instance of either superstition or natural religion – precursors to contemporary to contemporary reductionism and religionism.

consciously aligning – that whether reductionist, religionist or empirical, religious studies has remained unabashedly modernist in its self-understanding and definition.[1] This is despite the contrary and increasing acknowledgment throughout the rest of the humanities and the social sciences of the situated nature of human inquiry, previously occluded by processes of abstraction, universalisation and their propagation that are the hallmark of 'modernity' and which *ipso facto* structures scholarly activity.[2]

The phenomenology of religion and the empirical study of western esotericism.

While Hanegraaff is aware that it is precisely this 'broadly "postmodern" *Zeitgeist*, instinctively critical of the "grand narratives" of modernity and therefore sympathetic towards the recovery of "suppressed alterities"' which has created the academic milieu for the study of esotericism, this appears at odds with the seemingly uncritical advocacy of an unproblematic empiricism in the study of esotericism.[3] What I will attempt, then, in this section is to problematise the empirical approach as a method for the study of esotericism by repositioning it within the ambit of an emerging 'critical' and 'postmodern' scholarship on religions.[4]

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1 M. Joy, 'Beyond a God's Eyeview: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Religion,' in A.W. Geertz and R.T. McCutcheon (eds), *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion. Adjunct Proceedings of the XVIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*, Mexico City, 1995, Leiden, 2000, p. 117.

2 C. Bell, 'Modernism and Postmodernism in the Study of Religion', *Religious Studies Review*, 1998, vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 17, p. 187 and *passim*. On the recontextualisation of this production, see B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Massachusetts, 1993; for a comprehensive look at both the hermeneutical problems entailed and possible resolutions, see R.J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism. Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia, 1983. For discussion about the meaning of 'postmodernity' within the social sciences, see P. Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences. Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*, Princeton, 1991.

3 Hanegraaff, 1999a, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

4 In comparison to other fields, the literature with which I have engaged is still sparse. The most representative anthologies are M.C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago, 1998; and J. Platvoet and A.L. Molendijk (eds), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion. Contexts, Concepts, and Contests*, Brill, Leiden,

As we have seen, both *epoche* and the notion of methodological agnosticism which are the basis of this approach are explicitly used by Hanegraaff and implicitly endorsed by Faivre.[1] The notion of 'methodological agnosticism', as well as the commensurable notion of *epoche*, or 'bracketing one's conceptions', have a distinguished pedigree in the twentieth century study of religion as a prelude to the *emic* phase of research. The more primitive term *epoche* was originally a central platform of the phenomenological tradition of continental philosophy that began formally with Husserl. This was later appropriated by a number of scholars who sought to create a rigorous 'phenomenological' method for the study of religion, what has come to be known as the 'phenomenology of religion'.[2] Later, and more influentially, scholar of

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1999. For individual monographs, see T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore, 1993; R.T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion. The Discourse of Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, Oxford, 1997; G. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology. Rethinking the Study of Religion*, London, 1999; and R. King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*, London, 1999. For a good but brief introduction, see W. Braun and R.T. McCutcheon (eds), *Guide to the Study of Religion*, London, 2000. Such 'critical' scholarship is not historically unprecedented; figures such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Jonathan Z. Smith and Donald Wiebe are obvious candidates for progenitors of the movement; cf., W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion, A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*, New York, 1962; J.Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago, 1982; and D. Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies: the Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy*, New York, 1998.

1 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 4; and Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

2 For an anthologised introduction to the vast literature on the 'phenomenology of religion', see S.B. Twiss and W.H. Cosner, Jr. (eds), *Experience of the Sacred. Readings in the Phenomenology of Religion*, Hanover, 1992. Many germinal scholars of religion have been construed as 'phenomenologists', such as van der Leeuw, Scheler and most infamously the 'straw man' of the field, Eliade; for pre-1950s figures, see J. Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion. Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, Berlin, 1999, pp. 639–664, and U. King, 'Historical and Phenomenological Approaches,' in F. Whaling (ed.), *Theory and Method in Religious Studies. Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religions*, Berlin, 1995 for the post-1950s developments. However, while outside the scope of this study, there is some real historical and conceptual confusion as to actual phenomenological sources of this appropriation; on this matter, see W.H. Capps, *Religious Studies. The Making of a Discipline*, Minneapolis, 1995, pp. 110–128 and T. Ryba, *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion*, New York, 1991 *passim*.

religion Ninian Smart translated *epoche* into the terminology of the antipathetic social sciences as 'methodological agnosticism', or the suspension of truth questions concerning the focus of religion, allowing for the development of typologies in lieu of an explanatory model.[1] [2]

It is upon this foundation of 'empirico-historical description of narrowly-circumscribed currents and personalities' that Hanegraaff has recently argued for the pursuit of a 'methodological pluralism' which will change the already established 'field' into a 'discipline' through the development of competing and complementary '*interpretive* theories pertaining to ... western esotericism "as such"'.[3] This new shift in emphasis, then, is the culmination rather than a rupture with the empirical approach, mainly in response to the plethora of theoretical and interpretive frameworks in the wake of the aforementioned 'postmodern turn'. Indeed, some of their less systematic applications to western esotericism Hanegraaff has acknowledged as producing 'interesting results'.[4] Again, in this vein he argues that while the

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1 For example, cf., N. Smart, *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge. Some Methodological Questions*, Princeton, 1973, pp. 53–54. I suspect that Smart's paradigmatic use of *epoche* and the resulting typologies had at least an indirect influence on Hanegraaff; cf., Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

2 Given the importance of Husserl in religious studies methodology, there has been little continued discussion of him and, surprisingly, no development of the phenomenological method since its adaptation. However, outside of religious studies things have moved on considerably and the phenomenological tradition has offered critiques of Husserlian method and has set out in new directions, some of which engage with the wider cultural movement of postmodernism; *cf.*, Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 16. It is interesting to note that the at least three paths of critical development that can be traced from Husserl have had little influence on the phenomenology in the study of religions: first, the central tradition of philosophical phenomenology represented in the work of the phenomenological circle (Edith Stein, Adolf Reinach and others) through to the French phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel, along with the theological phenomenology of Max Scheler; secondly, a path of existential phenomenology in Heidegger which leads into the hermeneutics of Gadamer on the one hand, and the existentialism of Sartre and de Beauvoir on the other; and thirdly a sociological phenomenology in the work of Moritz Geiger and especially Alfred Schutz, which draws on Weberian sociological and develops into ethnomethodology.

3 Hanegraaff, 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 226–227.

4 Among those mentioned are T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Massachusetts, 1989; G. Tomlinson, *Music*

> existence of a subjective element in research in the humanities must thus be recognised ... this recognition should not be misused as a pretext to abandon the *ideal* of objectivity altogether ...[otherwise it] produces a pseudo-scientific enterprise which allows its representatives to abandon any attempt to understand 'otherness'.[1]

The transcendentalist implications of the phenomenological project in the study of religions.

However, as Hans Penner has observed, phenomenology in the study of religions is not simply a 'neutral method or pure description of phenomena' but is a 'transcendental philosophy'.[2] As long as the modernist 'ideal of objectivity' is upheld, any claim of 'methodological pluralism' will lack substance, for many of these theoretical and interpretive frameworks now question such an investment. It is possible, though, to delineate two broad groups into which these frameworks divide and this may render Hanegraaff's problematic defence of objectivity intelligible. As Gavin Flood has pointed out, in response to structuralism, two currents have developed: 'postmodern deconstruction', a hypercritical account of modernism, suspicious of all claims to certainty and knowledge which tends to read knowledge as power; and 'dialogism' with its links to hermeneutics and narrativism, which is suspicious of claims to objectivity and truth, but is fundamentally grounded in communication and acknowledges self-in-relation.[3] This distinction is not often made, and has led in this case to an unnecessary elision.[4]

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in Renaissance Magic. Toward a Historiography of Others, Chicago, 1993; and Merkur, 1993, *op. cit.*; cf., Hanegraaff, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 231, n. 20.

1 Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, p. 16; *contra* G. D'Costa, 'The End of "Theology" and "Religious Studies"', *Theology*, 1996, September/October, p. 345.

2 H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion*, New York, 1989, p. 44.

3 Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12.

4 For example, useful distinctions have been made between 'skeptical' and 'affirmative' postmodernism, and between 'fragmentary' and 'relational' subjectivity, and thus to the reappraisal of postmodern frameworks in the social sciences; cf., Rosenau, *op. cit. passim* and King, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 198 respectively.

Recently, Flood, engaging with this dialogical current, has sought to further demonstrate the transcendentalist underpinnings of religious studies, and it is to this demonstration I now turn; of course, I can only here provide a brief synopsis.[1] In brief, Flood argues that the phenomenology of religion which advocates a method of bracketing the ultimate status of research data, the creation of typologies, and empathy, inevitably brings with it Husserl's idea of a disembodied, disengaged and ahistorical consciousness or epistemic subject who has privileged access to knowledge.[2] It is from Husserl that this assumption of a transcendental 'I' as the absolute ground of certainty enters the phenomenology of religion. This 'philosophy of consciousness' entailed by the phenomenological method Flood critiques from the perspective of the 'philosophy of the sign' as presented by Ricoeur and Bakhtin, in which the self is represented as a sign-bearing agent embodied within social and historical contexts, within narratives, rather than a disengaged consciousness. Communication and intersubjectivity takes precedence over subjectivity as the basis of epistemology and analysis, and interpretation takes precedence over ontology.[3] This critique of consciousness is a critique of the phenomenology of religion.[4]

Furthering Alterity: Gurdjieff And The Fourth Way As Hertoglossia In The Study Of Western Esotericism

At this juncture, the reader is sufficiently versed in the issues involved for a comparison of the heuristic definition of the Fourth Way with both Faivre's procedural definition of western esotericism and Hanegraaff's

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1 Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, *passim.*

2 *Ibid.*, p. 14. Historically, phenomenological tradition which Husserl bequeathed was a development of the German tradition of a philosophy of consciousness (*Subjektphilosophie*). It can be traced back to Descartes, and beyond him to Greek thought, but is especially developed within the German idealism of the late Enlightenment and early Romanticism, particularly Fitche's foundational notion of the 'I' as the absolute ground of knowledge. Kant, though critical, accepted as axiomatic the presence of an intelligible, autonomous self, and both had a formative influence on Husserl. cf., Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 14 and M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, Austin, 1981.

observations regarding occultism as its modern development to be relevant.

Faivre, imagination and the Fourth Way.

A comparison between Faivre's six-point procedural definition and my heuristic definition of the Fourth Way, while a good fit on most counts, encounters problems with the third characteristic, *imagination and mediation.*

Firstly, as we have seen, given that somnambulism *is* the structure of the unregenerate human condition in the Fourth Way, it is not a surprise to discover that rather than being integral the goal of transformative gnosis, imagination is seen by Gurdjieff and hence paradigmatically for all of the Fourth Way lineages to be 'one of the principal sources of the wrong work of the centers,' that is, the primary stumbling block to 'self-remembrance'.[1] If reality is to be apprehended, imagination is to be disengaged. The Fourth Way, then, is closer to Faivre's characterisation of mysticism, which aspires to complete suppression of images and intermediaries as obstacles to union with God, as opposed to the esoteric interest in intermediaries that revealed to the inner eye, through power of creative imagination.[2]

Also, while, for Faivre, the 'idea of correspondence already presupposes a form of imagination', it is clear that Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way entertain a form of correspondence, particularly between the microcosm and the macrocosm in the state of 'self-remembrance', which is indispensable to awakening and yet does not engage in a discourse of 'imagination'.[3] Williams-Hogan has encountered a related problem with regard to Emmanuel Swedenborg and his ambiguous relationship to western esotericism. In Swedenborg's case, she too found a good fit for all the six-points of the definition except *living nature*, as from Swedenborg's point of view, nature is not essentially alive in all its parts, nor can it anticipate salvation.[4]

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1 P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1950, p. 111.

2 Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13.

3 Faivre, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

4 Williams-Hogan, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

Hanegraaff, occultism and the Fourth Way.

For Hanegraaff, this incongruity was resolved with his emphasis on occultism as the reinterpretation of these constituent elements between generations and networks of esotericists: that 'a combined Cartesian and Christian dualism... forms the cosmological framework of Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences' and that the 'frameworks he inherited from esoteric traditions were changed by him into something new'.[1] It would seem natural to seek a resolution to the problem of imagination in the Fourth Way through its application.

Central to Gurdjieff's teaching is the idea of cosmic law: in his own characteristic syntax, 'the conscious striving to know ever more and more concerning the laws of World-creation and World-maintenance' is the 'being-obligation' of every human being.[2] Like Blavatsky's synthesis, Gurdjieff's notion of a universal law seems based not on correspondences but on causality, highly characteristic of the occultist rather than the earlier esotericisms from which Faivre's definition originates. Law is inescapable and has different cosmological orders which compound upon the levels beneath them, which is reflected in the 'Ray of Creation', a pivotal idea in the Fourth Way to which we can only allude here.[3] There are two 'fundamental cosmic sacred laws'.[4] The first Gurdjieff terms *Heptaparaparshinokh,* 'the Law of Sevenfoldness,' or as he described it Ouspensky, 'The Law of Octaves'.[5] Gurdjieff quite simply defines this law as 'the-line-of-the-flow-of-forces-constantly-deflecting-according-to-law-and-uniting-again-as-it-ends.'[6]

The 'second fundamental cosmic law', *Triamazikamno* or 'the Law of Three' according to Gurdjieff 'manifests in everything, without exception, and everywhere in the Universe ... a law which always flows into a consequence and becomes the cause of subsequent consequences,

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1 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 428–429.

2 G. I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*, 1950, p. 386.

3 For a description and an allusion to its importance, see Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–86, 137–140.

4 Gurdjieff, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 755.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 461; Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, pp. 124–137.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 750.

and always functions by three independent and quite opposite characteristic manifestations, latent within it, in properties neither seen nor sensed', named 'Holy Affirming', 'Holy Denying', and 'Holy Reconciling'.[1] These laws are also present in the human constitution and are the basis of self-study in the Fourth Way; hence, a definite connection between causality and correspondence through the equivalence of the microcosm with the macrocosm.

Hanegraaff and French have convincingly demonstrated that Blavatksy's fundamental belief system was an occultist version of romantic evolutionism from beginning to end.[2] However, rather than being concerned with evolutionism opposed to materialism, Gurdjieff's paradigmatic formulation of the Fourth Way seems engaged with the more contemporaneous rupturing in the Newtonian physical model. For example, Gurdjieff spoke of the total 'materiality of the universe' and the different levels of materiality which ran parallel to the different orders of cosmic laws. The matter that we knew was only one such lower order.[3] He made use of an analogous '*principle of relativity*' in relation to the notion of materiality.[4] Even 'the Absolute, where all is one', was characterised by Gurdjieff (to Ouspensky) as the unity of 'matter and force'.[5] Blavatsky instead talked of a *karma* which was assimilated within an already-existing western framework of spiritual progress and was adopted in order to provide her evolutionism with a theory of 'scientific' causality.[6]

Indeed, Gurdjieff is highly critical of Blavatsky and the occultistic version of romantic evolutionism prior to his teaching. He claims that neither '*theosophy*' nor 'so-called *Western occultism* ... possesses full

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1 *Ibid.*, pp. 138–139.

2 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, pp. 448–455 and French, 2000, *op. cit.*, *passim.*

3 Ouspensky 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 207–208.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

6 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 472. It is not the case that she abandoned western beliefs in favour of oriental ones; what was derived from Hinduism and Buddhism is not reincarnation, but the idea of an impersonal 'causal law' which could serve as a 'scientific' alternative to Christian morality; cf., Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 480. How this relates to the analogous issue of Gurdjieff's relationship to Sufism, imputed to him by apologists, polemicists and researchers alike, is a question worth exploring.

knowledge and therefore attempts to bring them to practical realization give only negative results' – a claim, interestingly enough, which echoes Blavatsky's criticisms of spiritualism.[1] Evolution was presented as the great Law of Nature, which governs the natural as well as the supernatural levels of existence. Accordingly, the eighteenth century theory of spiritual evolution through many lives in this world, on other planets, and in higher worlds – seen, for example, in Swedenborg – was adopted by Blavatsky, but it was reconceptualised by her as based on Natural Law rather than divine providence.[2] Similarly, Gurdjieff is critical of such spiritual evolution:

> the systems with which you are acquainted with [i.e. Theosophy and occultism] ... state that *all men* have an 'astral body.' This is quite wrong. What may be called the 'astral body' is obtained by means of fusion, that is, by means of terribly hard inner work and struggle. Man is not born with it. And only very few men acquire an 'astral body.' ... it is not immortal but it can live long after the death of the physical body.[3]

In this way, Gurdjieff (to Ouspensky) acknowledges reincarnation as a post-mortem possibility but 'the development of these possibilities is not a law. The law for man is existence in the circle of mechanical influences, the state of "man-machine"'.[4] Moreover, '[k]nowledge about the repetition of lives will add nothing for a man if he does not see how everything repeats itself in one life, that is, in this life, and if he does not strive to change himself in order to escape this'.[5] Later Gurdjieff himself was to write that 'they suppose among other things that each of them already has a higher-being part or, as they call it, a soul, and that transmigration must be occurring all the time to this soul', with the

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1 Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 286. On Blavatsky's criticisms of spiritualism see Godwin, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 281–282, and French, 2000, *op. cit.*, pp. 85–92. French's further and in-depth analysis of occultism has informed this paper throughout.

2 Hanegraaff, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

3 Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 250–251.

implication that what he calls 'higher-being bodies' are not at all common, can only be *attained.*[1]

In a similar vein, the notion of *chakras* or a system of 'subtle bodies' in contemporary post-theosophical esotericism, appropriated from India and now companion-idea to the older occultistic astral body, is ubiquitous.[2] Basic to the *chakra* system is the evolutionary, seminal and energising function of the *kundalini chakra* at the base of the spine, and it rose to prominence in occult circles in the late nineteenth century. Yet, for Gurdjieff, '[i]n reality Kundalini is the power of imagination, the power of fantasy, *which takes the place of a real function* ... [it] is the force put into men in order to keep them in their present state ... [it] is the force that keeps them in a hypnotised state. "To awaken" for man means to be "dehypnotized"'.[3] It was to make a reappearance within Gurdjieff's later cosmology as the 'organ Kundabuffer'.[4]

Naturephilosophie – Faivre revisited.

Although absent from Hanegraaff's analysis of occultism, Faivre, in his most comprehensive historical overview, has made an attempt to include both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky as 'esotericists who take on the task of building a *Naturephilosopie*'.[5] Faivre claims that Gurdjieff's teachings, in particular, are 'among the most representative of a *Naturephilosophie*' in twentieth century esotericism, though in Ouspensky's own exposition of the Fourth Way he finds a more 'complete teaching of *Naturephilosophie*'.[6] This would seem, on the face of it, to support my intuitive sense of the Fourth Way as sharing some *air de famille* with western esotericism.

Once again, the fit is not exact. Faivre has characterised *Naturephilosophie* as a Romantic – and particularly German Romantic – innovation of earlier theosophical and alchemical traditions with 'a view

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1 Gurdjieff, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 767.
2 Hammer, 2001a, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–97, 181–198.
3 Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
4 Gurdjieff, 1950, *op. cit.*, pp. 88, 233, 374.
5 Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

to proposing a vision of the world resting on scientific foundations'.[1] This functioned as a 'point of departure for an inclusive grasp of invisible processes' in which knowledge of Nature, identified with Spirit, and knowledge of oneself went 'hand in hand'.[2]

In as much as the presence of an active and intelligent Great Nature is important to Gurdjieff's overall cosmology, so far so good.[3] The problem this time arises with Faivre's further characterisation of *Naturephilosophie* as 'the attempt to grasp the whole animated by dynamic polarities' as oppositional to 'a mechanist imaginary'.[4] Not only does this imaginary, as we have seen, structure Gurdjieff's vision, but as a consequence of this opposition Faivre characterises that vision of Nature as dualistic, which does not accord with the primacy that Gurdjieff as well as Ouspensky regard the 'Law of Three'. Another problem involves the difference between Gurdjieff's later cosmology and the cosmology he earlier presented to his pre-Revolutionary Russian group, documented by Ouspensky, where the 'way of development of hidden possibilities is a way *against nature, against God*'.[5]

Gnosis, para–Christian esotericism and the Fourth Way.

As Hanegraaff has made clear, all unifying conceptions of western esotericism emphasising certain commonalities and continuities, and de-emphasising differences and discontinuities, what Faivre has referred to as an *air de famille*.[6] Whether implicitly or explicitly, both consider some notion of 'gnosis' to be the broadest commonality.[7] 'Gnosis' in this sense is only indirectly concerned with the historical 'Gnosticisms' of the first few centuries of the Common Era.[8] It refers, rather, to a

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

3 Gurdjieff, 1950, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 146, 327–328.

4 Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

5 Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 47; original italics.

6 Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

7 cf., Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 276.

8 However, even the validity of the category 'Gnosticism' has been challenged for its monolithic presentation of diverse religious traditions; cf., M.A. Williams, *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton, 1996.

diachronic phenomenon of religious soteriological epistemology, but with which it does bear a certain conceptual resemblance, that is, an emphasis on personal, inner revelation, in contrast with the knowledge of reason or faith.[1]

As we have seen, Hanegraaff's concern with a diachronic modification of Faivre's definition lead to the notion of post-Christian and *ipso facto* para-Christian esotericism. In this vein, entertaining the possibility of esotericism as a domain of the scriptural traditions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – he also tentatively posits an *extra*-Christian esotericism in two senses: 1) considering the coexistence of these traditions for long periods in roughly the same geographical area, it is possible that esoteric traditions within the domain as a whole may be explained by genetic diffusion based on inter-religious contact; and 2) the possibility of (relatively) independent invention, based not on a universal mysticism but on the '*logic(s) of monotheism and scripturalism*'.[2]

The study of 'esotericism', then, may have to be regarded as part of a larger, more complicated domain including 'esotericism', 'gnosticism', and 'mysticism' so-called, but in which they function more as ideal-typical distinctions.[3] To this effect, Dan has suggested that it is of minor importance whether one chooses 'mysticism' or 'esotericism' as a generic term, and adds that 'the modern study of gnosticism almost completely neglects the aspect of gnosticism as mysticism'.[4]

This possibility of extra-Christian esotericism has many implications for the transgressive status of Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way within the categories of western esotericism and occultism. The roots of Gurdjieff's doctrines and practices have been variously associated with *Kabbalah*, Hermeticism, the Sufi *tariqas* of both Turkey and Central Asia, the Isma'ili branch of Shi'a Islam, and the *hesychasm* of both the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches – leaving aside for the moment his own

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1 Hanegraaff, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

2 Thereby combining the 'contingent' approach of the scholars of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem and Joesph Dan to mysticism as a 'tradition of commentary on scripture' with that of his (neo)Lovejoyean modification of Faivre; cf., Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–124; Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–54, 59.

3 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–123.

4 J. Dan, 'In Quest of a Historical Definition of Mysticism: The Contingental Approach', *Studies in Spirituality*, 1993, Vol. 3, pp. 62–64.

claim to be a messenger or initiate of the 'Sarmoung' or 'World Brotherhood'.[1] His own autobiographical claims of extensive travel throughout the Middle East and Central Asia prior to 1912 would make an exploration of the first sense relevant. However, considering that we have thus far no independent means to verify Gurdjieff's claims, I will pass this sense by without comment, except to note the inevitable Orientalist problematic of cultural (mis)appropriation with this possibility.

It is with regard to the second sense of an extra-Christian domain encompassing gnosticisms, mysticisms and esotericisms structured by the 'logic(s) of monotheism and scripturalism' that we will be on safer ground for the time being. It is clear that in Gurdjieff's own writings, such logics are present, particularly in the form of resemblances to certain strands of gnosticism such as Valentinianism.[2] For example, as one commentator on *Beelzebu's Tales to His Grandson* has pointed out, Gurdjieff presents throughout not an utterly perfect God-creator but an unknowable, material 'Absolute' whose power becomes gradually

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1 On Kabbalah and Hermeticism, see the speculative links made in Webb, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 499–542. Melton has advocated the classification of the Fourth Way as 'refurbished Sufism'; cf., Melton, 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–104; Melton, 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 864–865; and also by Baker and Driscoll, 1995, *op. cit.* For more on the *tariqas* of which 'Sufism' in the abstract is historically comprised, see J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam*, Oxford, 1973. On Isma'ili Shi'ism, see P.K. Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1995, pp. 149–150. On the influence of *hesychasm* and the idea of the Fourth Way as 'esoteric Christianity', see R. Amis, *A Different Christianity. Early Christian esotericism and Modern Thought*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1995, esp. pp. 347–348; and for a brief classic account of *hesychsam*, see V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London, 1957, pp. 196–216. We must also leave aside his possible historical relationship to Blavatsky's synthesis of occultism, his apparent sojourn in Tibet, and the similarities between his cosmology and that of 19th century American occultist Randolph Beverley Pascal who also claimed to have travelled in the Middle East.

2 On Valentinianism, see H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion. The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, Boston, 1963, pp. 174–206. On historical Gnosticism, the best general work is still K. Rudolph, *Gnosis. The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson, Edinburgh, 1983. On the different though related issue of the recurrence of gnostic narrativities in the structuring of modernity, see C. O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2001.

diminished in an elaborate cosmology of inevitable diffusion of energy. For Gurdjieff, God seems to be imperfect inasmuch as he is not entirely in control of creation; on the other hand, it is this preconditioned limitation that facilitates the processes of creation. This process still serves 'Nature' but something went wrong with the situation of the people of this planet, which as a consequence is in a very bad part of the universe.[1]

Indeed, Gurdjieff pictures much of creation, including our situation, as the responsibility of the 'higher' beings or 'Sacred Cosmic Individuals' who form an angelogical hierarchy; and that the creation of the 'organ Kundabuffer' which keeps humanity from awakening is a direct result of their attempt to correct that mistake due to their fallibility. In this way, fallibility is equated with evil, caused by a gradual increasing density of matter as it proceeds downward from the Absolute. As there are two movements in the universe – one downward from the Absolute, the other is upward and toward it – there is a means of escape.[2]

Where Gurdjieff's notion of escape differs to the historically known gnosticisms is with regard to the modern idea of causality, whereby mechanism and determinism also increases along with the density of matter and the diffusion of energy: 'General laws are by no means obligatory for man; he can free himself from any of them if he frees himself from "buffers" and from imagination'.[3] I feel that we can go some way in clarifying the sense of *air de famille* – and bearing in mind the idea of para-Christian esotericism – by further categorising the Fourth Way, within the rubric of western esotericism, as a species of *gnostic occultism*. That Gurdjieff claimed to have spent much of his unverifiable years in Central Asia, long a hotbed for the propagation of 'gnostic' doctrines and practices, makes this characterisation very suggestive.[4]

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1 M. Seymour-Smith, *The 100 Most Influential Books Ever Written. The History of Thought from Ancient Times to Today*, Toronto, 1998, p. 452.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

3 Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

4 For brief introduction to Central Asia from this perspective, see R.C. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road. Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, New York, 1999; and U. Stoyanov, *The Other God. Dualist Religion from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, New York, 2000.

Transcendentalism, esotericism, and heteroglossia.

Faivre has contended that 'imagination ... is a tool for the knowledge of the self', and many traditions that fall into the category of western esotericism exemplify this.[1] Imagination does not play this 'gnostic' role in the Fourth Way for a very simple reason: Gurdjieff and the subsequent Fourth Way lineages do not allow the possibility of a unified subject in 'hypnotized' humanity: '*Man has no permanent and unchangeable I ...* Man has no individuality. He has no single, big I. Man is divided into a multiplicity of small "I's"'.[2] Indeed, as we have seen, post-mortem existence is predicated upon such an *acquisition* of greater and greater subjective unity. It is these '"I's" [that] must die in order that the big I be born'. The complete identification of all the energy diffused to us through the processes of creation with each 'I' prevents the growth of the 'higher-being-bodies'. Gurdjieff claims that imagination, in particular, encourages such identifications.[3]

Faivre's misreading of the Fourth Way, as well as Hanegraaff's and subsequent researchers' unfamiliarity with the tradition, I believe stems from the phenomenology of religion's and therefore the empirical method's assumption of an ahistorical unified subject – what Husserl called the transcendental ego – dwelling behind experience, both of the researcher and the object of study; an assumption brought into question by Flood.[4] While 'gnosis' has been characterised as an inner, transformative and personal 'religious experience', an examination of Fourth Way doctrines and practices demonstrates that a 'soteriological epistemology' does not necessarily coincide with a unified subject.[5]

Flood notes that the practice of a 'conversation' with our subject that takes into account the situated nature of inquiry gives rise to a context-

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1 Faivre, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

2 Ouspensky, 1950, *op. cit.*, pp. 59–61.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

4 Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

5 Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11, 11–12. Buddhism, too, particularly the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism, can be said to display a similar configuration but from within an 'non-theistic' context; cf., C.W. Huntington, Jr., *The Emptiness of Emptiness. An Introduction to Early Indian Madhyamika*, Honolulu, 1989.

sensitive discourse and writing, and entails the recognition of the 'many voices' with which subjects speak. Bakhtin called this *heteroglossia*: the presence in language of different (dominant and subservient, open and hidden, official and unofficial) discourses, as well as the trace of other utterances within any single utterance.[1] In this case, the basis upon which a number of religious discourses were classified was itself a hidden though dominant discourse, which has rendered at least one other discourse invisible to all intents and purposes. The unique features of many esotericisms have most likely fallen through the net in this way, as Hanegraaff himself has already demonstrated; indeed, esotericisms as cognitive spaces composed of networks of correspondences and interdependencies are perhaps best rendered by theoretical frameworks equally processual. Hanegraaff has gone to great lengths to expose the role of motivation in the construction of esotericism.[2] However, there is a danger of occluding disciplinarity with a new hegemony and marginalisation to the detriment of cultural understanding, regardless of intention. Flood argues that this recognition of the intentionality of method needs to be further understood as a dialogical process with the intentionality of its object.[3] For the study of the Fourth Way, this means recognizing at the very least that a method which assumes a unified self as a given will find it difficult to analyse a discourse where one can only be acquired and that rarely.

Notes Towards A 'Critical' Study Of Western Esotericism: Beyond The Ideal Of Objectivity

This study will conclude with a few observations with regard to the problems inherent in the dialectical asymmetry between the *emic* and *etic* perspectives.

If we are to take the situated nature of inquiry seriously, then instead of the notional value-free discourse and its ontological isolated consciousness which is the claim of phenomenology, we must acknowledge competing narratives and critiques stemming from those

1 Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

narratives, which indicate that all representations of the world are historically and linguistically mediated. While they have functioned to liberate the study of religions from theological dogmatism, these concepts now unnecessarily limit the range of methodological possibilities within the study of religions.[1] The cultural representations we call 'religions' are as much the products of signifying practices within a diversity of social contexts as are the practices which study those representations.[2] As Flood has observed, 'there are no truly "outsider" views but only "insider" ones'.[3]

What becomes important in the study of religions is not so much the distinction between insider and outsider but between the critical and non-critical.[4] To this end, with the growing acknowledgment of situatedness, contemporary scholarship on religions is also acknowledging the situatedness of 'methodological agnosticism' as a form of secularism. As King has pointed out, 'one must be prepared to confront the secularist context of religious studies head on and come to terms with the provisionality and fallibility of one's own findings'. At the same time this is not a reversion to a religionist position. Rather, it is to argue that 'religious studies' occupies a contested space in Western academic circles and in that respect can also function as a mediator between two different types of competing meta-discourses – the secular and the religious. Moreover, King argues that the effectiveness of scholars of religion resides precisely in an *unwillingness* to resolve this tension with any degree of finality.[5]

For King, this is not merely programmatic but practical, in so far as he seeks to address an ethic sensitive to the power relationships in any epistemology:

> The introduction of a variety of indigenous epistemic traditions is, in my view, the single most important step that postcolonial studies can

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 93. Not only Derrida, but Foucault and Deleuze have the critique of Husserlian phenomenology as their point of departure.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 226.

5 King, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

> take if it is to look beyond the Eurocentric foundations of its theories and contest the epistemic violence of the colonial encounter.[1]

Motivated by a concern to 'transgress' the limits set up by the European framings of much contemporary postcolonial theorising, King points out that Buddhist philosophy and practice is also grounded upon a realisation of the impermanent and fluctuating nature of the self and the non-essentialist notion of co-dependent origination of all things. The sheer radicalness of the Buddhist rejection of an abiding or essential self prevents the postulation of a sovereign or autonomous subject at the centre of history to the same degree as postcolonial critiques of Orientalism, while divesting itself of the humanist-anti-humanist *imbroglio*.

In a similar vein, Huntington has remarked that claims to methodological purity necessarily embody – and mask – a fundamental alienation from the objects of research to which they are applied, and was moved to ask, 'Is it not likely that the understanding achieved by such "controlled alienation" will be an alienated understanding?'[2]

In an analogous way, it seems that such 'controlled alienation' has, to some degree, become part of the major developments in the research program of the study of esotericism.[3] This is made particularly evident in the stated aims of the field's only (sub)department to be 'independent of any worldview' and to encourage 'the professional detachment and neutrality essential to academic research'.[4] However, as a species of the 'writing of religion', it is in fact the practice of a particular, historical discourse which distinguishes itself from the object of investigation and

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

2 Huntington, Jr., 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

3 Western esotericism's analogy to Buddhism can be further extended by the 'soteriological epistemologies' which are fundamental to both. For western esotericism, see Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–1, 11–2; for the distinct soteriological epistemology of Buddhism, see Huntington, Jr., 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–14, 58–59. It is interesting to note that neither the Fourth Way nor Buddhism have invested their respective soteriological epistemology's with an essentialist subjectivity.

4 Afdeling, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

presents itself by necessity as detached from what it studies. Indeed, the clearer the rift the more objective the discourse is perceived to be.[1]

Despite Hanegraaff's careful distinction between a defence of the merits of an empirico-historical methodology against 'religionist' methodologies and dogmatic attempts to impose such a methodology as the only scholarly valid one, he cannot avoid the hermeneutical problem, as framed by Gadamer, that 'this acknowledgment of the otherness of the other, which makes him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth', which is here a soteriological epistemology.[2]

The study of western esotericism exists, then, in a state of 'controlled alienation' in respect to its soteriological epistemology.[3] Although there have been developments since the creation of what amounts to an entire and previously non-existent field by Faivre and Hanegraaff, especially with regard to particular histories and biographies, this still holds in terms of systematic studies. The work of Olav Hammer is a good example. Like Hanegraaff, Hammer is also an academic formally part of the first institutionalisation of esotericism in the context of the university, examining further relationships between post-Enlightenment esotericism and modernity.[4] While insightful and a pioneer of disciplinary terminology, and although he too rightly finds the phenomenological, i.e. descriptive, study unsatisfactory as a terminus, he is equally imbricated in the same problems as those who identify the study of religion with a privileging of Enlightenment values, with which

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1 Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 19. This is directly akin to de Certeau's understanding of history as comprising a practice (discipline) and its results (discourse); cf., M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York, 1988, p. 23.

2 Hanegraaff, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 230 n.18 – contra Voss, 1998, *op. cit.*; H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, London, 1975, p. 270.

3 Faivre, 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11, 11–12.

4 Whereas Hanegraaff – as might be expected – has provided an exhaustive account of changes that occurred in the doctrinal contents of post-Enlightenment esotericism, Hammer has concentrated on the continuities and transformations occurring to the discursive strategies propagated since Blavatksy's synthesis, concentrating on the appeal to tradition, scientism as a language of faith, and narratives of experience; cf., Hammer, 2001a, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–49 n. 3, 53, 83.

he explicitly identifies.[1] Moreover, he also seems to conflate the phenomenological with the hermeneutical approaches to religion, thereby sharply differentiating between the *emic* and the *etic*, or as he terms it, the 'analytical' perspective, and simultaneously abstracting this 'analysis' from a historical context and masking its affiliation from the 'writing of religions' discourse.[2]

As a result, Hammer's privileging of his particular *etic* perspective is perpetually in danger of effacing and domesticating the *emic* perspective into a 'cognitive illusion'. Similarly, Hanegraaff's earlier observation that the '[n]et effect of a genetic approach ... may be to "demythologize" certain convictions and render them highly, even intolerably improbable' fits into this problematic.[3] Certainly, his casual assertion that 'truth is not a historical category' also suggests this.[4]

Flood's appeal to scholars of religion 'to develop methods sensitive to context ... open to the "otherness" of the material or persons who are the "object" of study and to recognise speaking and hearing subjects as the place of meaning' is, I believe, as urgent a theoretical hiatus to bridge as the secularisation of esotericism.[5] At the very least, I hope that this presentation of the Fourth Way will stimulate further research into a dialogical approach to the study of western esotericism.

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1 Hammer, 2001a, *op. cit.*, p. xiv. Those who prefer an explanatory approach to religion in terms of a critique of ideology will be inclined to attach greater importance to the Enlightenment tradition; cf., Molendjik, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

2 *loc. cit.*

3 Hanegraaff, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 105; cf., R.A. Segal, *Religion and the Social Sciences*, Atlanta, 1989, pp. 75–86. A very good example of this in action, with regard to the study of esoteric 'macrohistory', is L.S. De Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature*, New York, 1970 *passim*.

4 Hanegraaff, 1998b, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

5 Flood, 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 35.