In the course of his unique career as a magus-cum-mystic, George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (? 28 December 1865–29 October 1949) taught two distinct series of sacred dances and movements (‘the Movements’). To understand the significance of the Movements within the Gurdjieff teaching, one must consider both this teaching and the man himself. Further, neither the teaching nor the Movements were entirely isolated from broader contemporary currents that influenced their form, at least to some extent. Both Gurdjieff’s ideas and the movements he fashioned owe much to older traditions, although he remade these traditions, as it were, by including them within his ‘system’, although it would be misleading to think that Gurdjieff forged a closed system.

In terms of Gurdjieff’s methods, the Movements fulfil several purposes. First, they are a means of self-study and thus of self-development. They aim to develop, crucially, the attention, but also to improve physical, mental, and emotional health and coordination. Second, the Movements themselves are said to be like books written in postures, gestures, carriage, steps and displacements, hops and skips, kicks and swings, bends, prostrations, turns of the head, counting, strong exhalations, enunciation of words and sounds, manoeuvres, and transitions between these. If they are books, they disclose a knowledge that is not only ‘self-knowledge’. Third, there is what we could call a mystical value to the Movements: they can help one come to a sense of a higher consciousness present through and beyond our state. In addition to the physical movements mentioned at the second point, there are inner attitudes, which at a certain stage become even more crucial than the corporeal dimension. This chapter will first consider Gurdjieff and his ideas, then the Movements in Gurdjieff’s teaching and in the teaching of groups after his death (with a special focus on Helen Adie as a Movements teacher), and finally, the Movements outside of Gurdjieff groups and the Gurdjieff tradition.
In my view, Gurdjieff was a mystic who fashioned a system of ideas and methods that were above all indebted to three sources: (a) Neoplatonic and Orthodox Christian traditions; (b) Asian, possibly Central Asian, teachings; and (c) his own personal discoveries (Azize 2010). Gurdjieff contributed the glue, as it were, which held these together. As his teaching developed, his individual discoveries loomed larger in the total mix. Gurdjieff’s teaching, especially in his earlier years, was expressed in a complex and almost clinical manner. The classic account of Gurdjieff’s earlier approach is P. D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous* (1977 [1949]). The best account of his later teaching, known to the author, is Solange Claustres’ *Becoming Conscious With G. I. Gurdjieff* (2005). For handy reference, Sophia Wellbeloved’s rigorous *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts* (2003) is recommended.

Although Gurdjieff’s ideas strike one as quite original, the master idea is familiar from other traditions, although he rarely stated it; that humanity is made to find God. This is most evident in *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* (1950) especially in the chapter entitled “Holy Planet Purgatory.” The basis of this more mature teaching was laid in Russia, where Ouspensky (1977 [1949]) records his time as Gurdjieff’s pupil, especially between 1915 and 1919. According to the ideas Gurdjieff adumbrated then, God calls into being diverse worlds. Each world exemplifies a ‘Ray of Creation’, and is a locus for two continual processes: one of involution, which soon becomes a mechanical involution, from unity to diversity; and a second process, which is one of conscious evolution and reintegration, the return towards God. The unceasing process of exchange between unity and diversity is governed by Laws (observable regularities) of various orders, some Laws being subsidiary to others. The two principal laws are the Law of Three and the Law of Seven (Wellbeloved 2003: 115–126). These laws govern the diverse processes and phenomena that obtain in the universe, and so apply to the sun and the solar system, to the planet earth, and to individual men and women. Any whole unit in which these Laws operate is called a ‘cosmos’: etymologically, a ‘cosmos’ is a body in which there is order, and hence some lawful regularity. Each cosmos is a “living being which lives, breathes, thinks, feels, is born and dies” (Ouspensky 1977 [1949]: 205–206).

As in Neoplatonism, each human being has spiritual as well as physical bodies. In Iamblichos, we possess not only a soul but also an envelope or vehicle for the soul, which needs to be purified. Similarly, Gurdjieff has it