It is safe to say that the film *Groundhog Day* (1993, hereafter *GD*)—directed by Harold Ramis, starring Bill Murray and written by Ramis and Danny Rubin—has become an established part of contemporary popular culture and everyday vernacular. Originally intended as a modest romantic comedy, it was deemed “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” and added to the United States National Film Registry in 2006, and is now considered one of the masterpieces of 1990s Hollywood cinema, much to the bemusement of those who brought it about (Gilbey 2004).

What may perhaps be more surprising is that *GD* has also come to be seen as one of the great ‘spiritual’ films of all time (Kuczynksi 2003). It is not immediately obvious why this would be the case for a film in which Murray plays Phil Connors, an egocentric Pittsburgh television weatherman who, during a hated assignment covering the annual Groundhog Day event in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, finds himself indefinitely repeating it. An equally surprising resolution to this puzzle may lie with the only novel penned by the Russian journalist and philosopher Piotr Dem’ianovich Ouspensky [Ouspenskii] (1878–1947). Ouspensky is better known as one of the earliest and greatest followers of the Greek-Armenian virtuoso of twentieth century ‘unchurched’ mystical religiosity, George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1866?–1949), the founder of the new religious movements (NRMs) known collectively today as the ‘Work’. Ouspensky’s (1947) novel *Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* (hereafter *Osokin*), as “a haunting novella about eternal recurrence” (Needleman 2006b: 912), is a prime candidate to be a major source of the film’s mystique.

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly trace the thread that leads from the novel to the film. An initial stumbling-block for the purposes of establishing a common methodological approach to this, is the seeming incommensurability of a popular film with a NRM. However, as a ‘Gurdjeffian’, Ouspensky contributed to the creation of one of the largest bodies of
literature of any NRM (Heelas 1996: 8; Driscoll 1985; Driscoll 1994). A high proportion of writers have also been attracted to the NRM (Rauve 2003; Byrd 1990; Patterson 1999; Rosenblatt 1999; Taylor 1998; Taylor 2001). Gurdjieff (1993[1950]) was himself an author of the NRM’s primary text. The production of literature is clearly central to the organisations involved. Given the context of creative production from which both novel and film arise, a ‘production perspective’ that looks at “how the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved” will prove fruitful (Peterson and Anand 2004: 311). It provides one method that is “useful for systematically understanding the working of diverse cultural production systems” behind each (Peterson and Anand 2004: 321). In addition, contemporary film adaptation theory with its concern to problematise the “indefensibility of fidelity as a criterion for the analysis of adaptations” (Leitch 2003: 162) provides another useful method regarding the production and reception of the adaptation of Osokin into GD.

A valid criticism of the production perspective employed here is that it tends to “ignore the meaning of culture productions” and that “[d]educing meaning from reading texts is not part of the perspective” (Peterson and Anand 2004: 327). This is pertinent to an analysis of the relationship between the production of NRM literature and a ‘spiritual’ film, especially with reference to the “intertextuality” that is the focus of adaptation theory (Leitch 2008: 63). To mitigate the consequences of this theoretical blind-spot, an initial reconnaissance of Ouspensky’s literary production will be briefly canvassed. Then how the novel was ‘created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved’ will be addressed and which will enable the examination of Osokin’s textual meaning. It is only at that point that the ‘intertextuality’ between the novel and film can be considered. The chapter concludes by examining the problematic notion of ‘orthodoxy’ in a NRM and the accompanying paradox of quantitative marginality but qualitative impact.

**Ouspensky: A Biography of his Literary Production**