

International conference

# The Avant-Garde and the Jews

**February 2nd - 4th 2015**

University of Antwerp | Hof van Liere  
Prinsstraat 13b | 2000 Antwerpen

Conference in English

Participation is free

Registration: <http://www.uantwerp.be/en/rg/ijs/enroll>



In the last decade, a number of studies in various disciplines have addressed the role of Jewish topics and motifs taken from the Judaic tradition, Jewish avant-garde movements, and Jewish artists belonging to the avant-garde. However, today the phenomenon as such still remains largely uncharted even though the level of participation by Jewish avant-garde artists in literature, visual arts, theatre and film has been strikingly high. In literature, Jewish involvement in the avant-garde covers not only avant-garde texts produced in Jewish languages (Yiddish, Hebrew) but also works in other languages by artists of Jewish descent. The reasons for the considerable impact of Jewish artists within avant-garde movements were varied, as were the ways in which the Jewish origin of these artists manifests itself in their work.

This conference will deal with the significance of the avant-garde(s) for modern Jewish culture and the impact of the Jewish tradition on the artistic production of the avant-garde, be they reinterpretations of literary, artistic, philosophical or theological texts/traditions, or novel theoretical openings linked to elements from Judaism or Jewish culture, thought, or history.

## Monday 2 February 2015

- 11.00-12.00 Registration
- 12.00-12.30 Welcome and Introduction
- 12.30-13.30 Lunch (speakers only)
- 13.30-15.00 **Session I: Avant-Garde and Tradition** (Chair: **Alfred Bodenheimer**)  
**Radu Stern** (independent curator): *Jews and the Avant-Garde: The Case of Romania*  
**Birgit M. Körner** (Justus-Liebig-University): *Avant-Garde Midrash: Else Lasker-Schüler's Hebrew Ballads and Cultural Zionism as Part of the Avant-Garde Movement*  
**Sami Sjöberg** (University of Helsinki): *The Controversy Regarding "Jewish Essence" in German-Jewish Avant-Garde*
- 15.00-16.00 **Session II: Transnationalism** (Chair: **Dennis Baert**)  
**Zoë Roth** (Durham University): *The Transnational Imagination: Race, Nation, and the Jews of the Francophone Avant-Gardes*  
**Małgorzata Stolarska-Fronia** (Nicolaus Copernicus University): *Saints and Tzaddikim: The Religious Syncretism of Jewish Expressionism*
- 19.00 **Keynote Steven Aschheim** (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)  
*The Avant-Garde and the Jews*  
 followed by a reception

## Tuesday 3 February 2015

- 09.30-11.00 **Session III: Interreligious Dialogues** (Chair: **Geert Lernout**)  
**Dávid Szolláth** (University of Pécs): *Modernism and Jewishness in Hungary—Two Examples*  
**György C. Kálmán** (Hungarian Academy of Sciences): *The Non-Jewish Jewish Avant-Garde in Hungary*  
**Benoît Bondroit** (University of Leeds): *"253 I Might as well Look Shagetz as much as Jew": Louis Zukofsky and the Paradox of Cultural Assimilation*
- 11.00-11.15 Coffee
- 11.15-12.45 **Session IV: Jewish Literature and Philosophical Reflections** (Chair: **Sami Sjöberg**)  
**Olivier Salazar-Ferrer** (University of Glasgow): *Reflections on the Role of Judaism in Benjamin Fondane's Existential Poetics*  
**Andreas Kramer** (Goldsmiths University of London): *Carl Einstein, Jewishness and the Communities of the European Avant-Garde*  
**Catrinel Popa** (Bucharest University): *Experience and Experiment in Max Blecher's and H. Bonciu's Novels*

- 12.45-13.45 Lunch (speakers only)
- 13.45-15.15 **Session V: Yiddish and Hebrew Avant-Gardes** (Chair: **Mark Gelber**)  
**Aviv Livnat** (Tel Aviv University/ Bezalel Art Academy): *The Avant-Garde of Statics*  
**Laëtitia Tordjman** (Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3): *The Yiddish Avant-Garde, a Literary "Third Space": The Example of Khaliastra*  
**Ari Ofengenden** (George Washington University): *Between the Law and the Real: On Creating a Cultural Space for Hebrew Modernism*
- 15.15-15.30 Coffee
- 15.30-16.45 **Keynote Alfred Bodenheimer** (University of Basel)  
*Dada Judaism. Avant-Garde in WWI Zurich*
- 18.00 Conference dinner (speakers only)

## Wednesday 4 February 2015

- 09.30-09.45 Coffee
- 09.45-11.45 **Session VI: Cultural Policies** (Chair: **Steven Aschheim**)  
**Rudolf Klein** (Szent István University): *Mapping Jewish Influence on the Architectural Avant-Garde*  
**Mirjam Rajner** (Bar-Ilan University): *Sarajevo's Jewish Intellectuals and the Collegium Artisticum*  
**Raphael Koenig** (Harvard University): *The Mad Book: Authorship, Outsider Strategies and Jewish Tradition in Der Nister's From my Estates*  
**Alexandru Bar** (University of Bucharest): *The Jewish Culture and the Politics of National Unification in Greater Romania*
- 11.45-12.45 Lunch (speakers only)
- 12.45-13.45 **Session VII: Post-WWII Avant-Gardes** (Chair: **David Dessin**)  
**Elizabeth Ferrell** (Miami University): *Wallace Berman, Kabbalah, and Collaboration*  
**Eszter Vilmos** (University of Pécs): *Motifs of Jewish Identity in the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde*
- 13.45-14.00 Coffee
- 14.00-15.30 **Keynote Mark Gelber** (Ben Gurion University)  
*The Avant-Garde from Cultural Zionism to Israel*  
followed by a closing discussion

[Steven E. Aschheim](#)

### The Avant-Garde and the Jews

This lecture will attempt a general analysis of the variants of the relationship between the Avant-Garde and the Jews. It will examine three aspects of that relationship and their interconnections: the participation of Jews generally within Avant-Garde movements; some explicitly "Jewish" Avant-Garde projects; and the diverse attitudes of various Avant-Garde groups (left, right, and Fascist) toward the Jews.

**Steven E. Aschheim** is Emeritus Professor of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he has taught Cultural and Intellectual History in the Department of History since 1982 and held the Vigevani Chair of European Studies. He has also acted as the Director of the Franz Rosenzweig Research Centre for German Literature and Cultural History. He has taught at numerous universities, including the University of Wisconsin, Columbia University, the University of Maryland, Reed College, the University of Toronto, the University of Michigan, the Free University of Berlin, and the Central European University in Budapest. His publications include *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans and Jews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), and *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton University Press, 2007). He is the editor of the conference volume *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), also translated into Hebrew. His book *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German and Jewish History* (Palgrave Macmillan) appeared in June 2012.

[Alfred Bodenheimer](#)

### Dada Judaism. Avant-Garde in WWI Zurich

Dada Zurich has become almost a synonym for the determination of art and literature to withstand the destruction of European culture during World War I – not by escapism and not by radical anti-war agitation, but by radically new forms of language and visual art, and in combining both of them in spectacular performances.

Two of the most influential artists of Dada Zurich were Jews from Romania: Tristan Tzara (whose civil name was Samuel Rosenstock) and Marcel Janco. This lecture will be concentrating especially on Tzara and the question, whether the search for new forms of language, by him, but also by other exponents of Dada like Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck, may also be seen as a form of de-isolating Judaism, which had the reputation of being a kind of mere 'sub-culture' within Europe. Especially the destruction of language, as Dada practiced it, in this case could be seen as a form of resistance against the alleged impurity of Jewish language. By this, the absurdity of modern warfare is unmasked as a symbol of the absurdity of occidental systems of meaning and classification. Modern Judaism though, that had been defining itself by submitting itself to this systems, enters forms of its early self-deconstruction by Dada, already in the second decade of the 20th century.

**Alfred Bodenheimer**, born 1965 in Basel; doctorate in German Literature, University of Basel 1993 (Dissertation: *Die auferlegte Heimat. Else Lasker-Schülers Emigration in Palästina*, Tübingen 1995); Habilitation University of Geneva 2002 (*Wandernde Schatten. Ahasver, Moses und die Authentizität der jüdischen Moderne*, Göttingen 2002); post-docs and several University positions in Israel, Switzerland and Germany; since 2003 Professor for the History of Religion and the Literature of Judaism, head of the Center of Jewish Studies of the University of Basel. Among his recent publications: *Ungebrochen gebrochen. Über jüdische Narrative und Traditionsbildung* (Göttingen 2012); *Haut ab! Die Juden in der Beschneidungsdebatte* (Göttingen 2013); *Klagen, Bitten, Loben. Formen religiöser Rede in der Gegenwartsliteratur* (ed., with Jan-Heiner Tück, Ostfildern 2014).

[Mark H. Gelber](#)

### The Avant-Garde from Cultural Zionism to Israel

This lecture attempts to comprehend the Zionist variant of Jewish expression, or at least a certain flamboyant section of it, as a revolutionary and an avant-garde movement from its inception in the late 19th century. In the first part of this presentation seminal figures, texts, images and artistic moments will be presented and analyzed from this same vantage. They range from Nathan Birnbaum and Martin Buber to the poetry and artwork of the early cultural Zionist anthologies and magazines, focusing on their tendency to promote avant-garde art within these frameworks. Berlin and Prague are the primary loci for this investigation. The emergence of avant-garde in Israeli culture is documented and analyzed against this background, with a focus on theater, music and art from the time of the founding of the State of Israel and extending until today.

**Mark H. Gelber**, born 1951 in New York City. Studied Letters, Philosophy, History, German, and Jewish Studies in the U.S., Germany, France, Austria, and Israel. Ph.D. 1980, Yale University, USA. Doctoral Dissertation: *Literary Anti-Semitism in English and German Literature*. Since 1980 at Ben-Gurion University in Beer Sheva and presently senior professor of comparative literature and German-Jewish Studies. Director of the Center for Austrian and German Studies, BGU. Elected in 2001 to membership in the German Academy for Language and Literature (Darmstadt). Major areas of research and publication: German/Austrian-Jewish Literary and Cultural History, Cultural Zionism, Literary Anti-Semitism. Fifteen authored, edited and co-edited books, 180 conference papers and public lectures, author of over 75 scholarly essays. Latest book publication: *Stefan Zweig, Judentum und Zionismus* (Studien Verlag, Innsbruck, 2014).

## Radu Stern

### Jews and the Avant-Garde: the Case of Romania

How could one explain that the overwhelming majority of avant-garde artists and writers from Romania were Jews? Some authors explored, rather unsuccessfully, some hypothetic connections between Hasidism and the creation of Dada. Rather than finding possible connections between Judaism and avant-garde aesthetics Radu Stern makes an essential methodological distinction between Judaism as religion and Jewishness as ethnicity and explains the overrepresentation of Jews through the obsession of the Romanian culture of the time with "national specificity" and its refusal that Jews could contribute to what they called "national Romanian art." If only "Romanians by blood" could be accepted, then the artists' Jewishness permitted a somehow easier relation to universalism and cosmopolitanism that generally define avant-garde.

**Radu Stern**, born 1951, art historian and former Director of Education at the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne, Switzerland. He is currently an independent curator and researcher. Among his latest publications: *Against Fashion: Clothing as Art 1850-1930*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004); *The Ubiquity of the Image* (with Christian Caujolle and Joan Fontcuberta, Barcelona: KRTU); 2009, *From Dada to Surrealism; Jewish Avant-Garde Artists from Romania* (Amsterdam: The JHM, 2011).

## Birgit M. Körner

### Avant-Garde Midrash: Else Lasker-Schüler's Hebrew Ballads and Cultural Zionism as Part of the Avant-Garde Movement

My paper connects literary and cultural avant-garde studies with Jewish studies. I argue that Else Lasker-Schüler developed her highly intertextual and meta-poetic literary approach by combining avant-garde writing techniques with her commitment to the Jewish tradition in the context of the Cultural Zionist project of a "Jewish Renaissance". The latter, especially in the version of Martin Buber, is linked to the avant-garde movement and developed in the context of Bohemian lifestyle and "Lebensreform" in Berlin around 1900. In this context, German-Jewish writers used the commentary approach of rabbinical writing and attempted to continue the concept of an Oral Torah in the field of literature.

I will show that Else Lasker-Schüler developed her own poetic project of "Jewish renewal". Her *Hebräische Balladen* (Hebrew Ballads 1912/13) can be considered as an avant-garde Midrash giving Jewish tradition a new direction that ranges between a subversive rewriting and a self-confident continuation in the succession of Heinrich Heine's *Hebräische Melodien* (Hebrew Melodies, 1851). The poem *Esther* reflects the subversive and destructive potential of scripture and by this it establishes an alternative tradition. In the poem *Jakob* Lasker-Schüler rewrites the Jewish rabbinical tradition by integrating "wild" aspects attributed to his brother Esau. At the same time she contributes to the creation of a poetically productive Jewish myth, while challenging Zionist concepts of Jewish masculinity and imagining poetic creativity in collaboration with JHWH.

Lasker-Schüler's approach shows that a Jewish contribution to the avant-garde challenges the avant-garde self-myth of the total destruction of tradition while continuing the commentary tradition of Jewish texts. In her intertextual approach Lasker-Schüler changes tradition by freely combining different aspects of it, for instance from the Hebrew bible, the prophetic, the rabbinic and the German-Jewish literary tradition. The cabalistic influenced concept of working together with JHWH also shows that the popular thesis of a secularized avant-garde has to be differentiated.

**Birgit M. Körner**, M.A., is a doctoral research assistant at the Department of German Literature at the Justus-Liebig-University (JLU) Giessen, Germany and currently preparing her doctoral thesis titled: "Hebrew Avant-garde. Else Lasker-Schüler's poetic approach in the context of Cultural Zionism" (supervised by Prof. Joachim Jacob, German Literature Studies, JLU Giessen, Germany and Prof. Alfred Bodenheimer, Jewish Studies, University of Basel, Switzerland). She is a member of the Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the JLU Giessen.

## Sami Sjöberg

### The Controversy regarding “Jewish Essence” in German-Jewish Avant-Garde

The Jewish presence in the germanophone avant-garde of the interwar period was conspicuous but far from uncomplicated. Numerous prominent Jewish intellectuals ruminated on the relation between the “new aesthetics” and Jewishness. The German-Jewish theatre critic Julius Bab (1880-1955) and the author Alfred Wolfenstein (1883-1945) addressed the diversified relations between religious-secular and traditional-modern axes in order to outline what they termed the Jewish character (*jüdische Wesen*) of the avant-garde. Essentially, both regarded the new poetry of Jewish writers as a Jewish phenomenon, but ended up implicitly defining Jewishness from different aspects. Bab posited the avant-garde into a continuum of “timeless manifestations” of Judaism through which a new understanding about the contemporary could develop. Wolfenstein, for one, located the Jewish character in the contingencies of the contemporary and argued for the relinquishment of tradition. In other words, Bab regarded the avant-garde in terms of Jewish continuity and it became defined via tradition. Wolfenstein identified Jewishness with novelty, which signified a kind of a utopian reboot of its cultural and historical background—in a vein similar to the Russian “Jewish renaissance”. Yet, Wolfenstein’s stance is not straightforwardly secular or religious, but rather encloses the religious and advances beyond it. Regardless of its thematological connections with tradition, the standpoint redefines the religious elements of Jewish vanguard poetry.

**Sami Sjöberg** is Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki, Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies. He holds a PhD in Comparative Literature. His thesis *Anterior Future. Essays on Messianism, Anti-Rationality, and Mystical Language in Lettrism* (2012) addresses the manifestations of messianic and kabbalistic themes, motifs, and techniques in the avant-garde movement "lettrism." He has written on French avant-garde literature and its relation to Judaism, on lettrism, contemporary European art and the poetics of the avant-garde. His academic articles, criticism, and essays on art have been published in international and in Finnish journals.

## Zoë Roth

### The Transnational Imagination: Race, Nation, and the Jews of the Francophone Avant-Gardes

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires after WWI transformed Jewish communities across Europe and the colonies, and many moved to metropolitan capitals such as Paris. Nationalism produced discourses about the “Jewish” race, a concept combining biology, nationality, and religion that resonated across European borders. Scholars have examined the relation between the emergence of modernism and émigrés (Eagleton 1970; Williams 1992), but scholars overlook how Jews used radical avant-garde aesthetics to challenge race and nationality. My paper will explore this subject through the lens of francophone Jewish avant-garde artists and writers from Europe, North Africa, and the Americas between the two World Wars. Modernist scholars have analyzed how the “Jew” symbolized racial difference in British and American modernism (Cheyette 1995; Tova Linett 2010). And Jewish and postcolonial studies have linked French and German fascist and colonial violence to elucidate contemporary debates about minorities (Mufti 2007; Rothberg 2009). Yet, without an understanding of the way Jews challenged expressions of race in French modernism, we overlook how nationalist and colonial legacies still shape representations of ethnic minorities across transnational spaces.

I will connect postcolonial concepts of race and identity to Jewish cultural practices in French modernism. My paper will explore how Jews created works that expose the process of representation in order to reveal the fictive nature of race and Jewish identity in the French imaginary. Through case studies of Claude Cahun (France) and Tristan Tzara (Romania), this paper demonstrates how Jews created works that expose the process of representation in order to reveal the fictive nature of race and Jewish identity in the French imaginary.

**Zoë Roth** is a lecturer in French at Durham University. She obtained her PhD in Comparative Literature from King’s College London in 2013, where she was also a visiting lecturer. She was a junior research fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies between 2012-2013, where she began to research the role of Jews in transnational francophone avant-garde movements. She has published on Jewish American writers, visual culture, and the avant-garde in such journals as *Philip Roth Studies* and *Word & Image*.

## Małgorzata Stolarska-Fronia

### Saints and Tzaddikim: The Religious Syncretism of Jewish Expressionism

Jewish Expressionism was a cultural phenomenon of transnational character, especially as represented by artists working between 1912 and 1939 in the Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and German environments. The artists within this informal milieu shared a common interest in searching for a new Jewish identity, one inspired by contemporary Jewish thought and philosophy. They adopted the aesthetics of expressionism as a means to express and engage these ideas.

An important impulse for the Jewish Expressionists was the search for an authentic religious experience; this was an attempt to return to primal, spiritual values considered to be ecstatic and thus sincere. This was a complex process for Jewish artists, because they lived within an awareness of two religious cultures: Judaism and Christianity. Thus, in their mysticism-related quest they achieved a fusion of ideas and topics specific to the interconnected theologies of the two faiths. In the case of art, this was extended to iconographic figures and ways of expression.

This paper analyzes the iconographic motifs related to representations of moments of prayer, or religious ecstasy. Such representations are a common theme in the works of many Jewish expressionist, such as Ludwig Meidner, Jacob Steinhardt, Heinrich Tischler, Jankiel Adler, Marek Szwarc, and Henoch (Henryk) Barciński, among others. During the presentation I will address key aspects related to the following questions: Why, besides tzaddikim and pious Jews at prayer, were the common motifs Christian saints and other Christian themes? Were these issues important in how Jewish avant-garde artists formed and developed their faith and religious identity? What concepts of contemporary philosophy and religious thought fueled these processes? Discussion of the last issue will include analysis of formal means of expression (design, color, composition) and will demonstrate their relevance to the topics presented.

**Małgorzata Stolarska-Fronia**, Ph.D., art historian, curator, translator, academic teacher. Researcher at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; former Head of the Scientific Department of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw; involved in designing the core exhibition as a curator of the 17th c. gallery. Author of the book *Participation of Breslau Jews in the Artistic and Cultural Life of the City from the Emancipation until 1933* (Warsaw, 2009) and several articles devoted to the issue of modern art in Jewish culture. Studied at the University of Wrocław (Poland), Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany), University of Sussex (UK). Awarded by the National Science Centre in Poland a three-year research grant. Currently implementing the project “Jewish Expressionism – a quest for cultural space”.

## Dávid Szolláth

### Modernism and Jewishness in Hungary – Two Examples

The most significant Hungarian literary review of the twentieth century was founded in 1908 by three men of letters, all of them assimilated Jews, Hugo Ignóty, Miksa Fenyő, and Ernő Osvát. The orientation of the review was marked unambiguously in the title: *Nyugat* “The West”. They tried to accelerate cultural modernisation by reviewing and translating Western European works. The pursuit of transferring aestheticism, late Symbolism and *décadence* was regarded by conservatives of the time as an attack against the nation’s glorified patriotic traditions. They came out with the anti-semitic idea that Modernism is a somewhat obscure business of the Jews. The fear of a “failed assimilation” of the Jewry was interlaced with the fear of a foreign cultural impact on Hungarian literature.

Two waves of modernism came after each other within a short period of time in Hungary. *Nyugat* was followed by the first Avant-Garde review of Lajos Kassák in 1915. Inspired by Whitman, Expressionism and Futurism, the review was soon banned for making propaganda for Hungary’s war enemies. Kassák started a new review, titled “MA” (“Today”) which joined revolutionary art with revolutionary political vision of a new mankind emerging from the labour-class youth. After the failure of the Hungarian Communist revolution in 1919, Kassák and his followers left the country and restarted MA in Vienna.

Kassák himself was not Jewish, but most of the Hungarian Avant-Gardists were of Jewish origin. They have chosen another strategy than that of the Jewish authors of *Nyugat*. They firmly believed that all social, ethnic and religious differences will be erased by the revolution soon to come. While in *Nyugat* there were articles about Jewish culture, and authors of *Nyugat* reflected on anti-Semitism, the Avant-Gardists regarded these questions as debris of the past, not worth talking about. Religion and traditions of their fathers had no place in a review of the art of the future. This could be a possible interpretation of the surprising lack of Jewish subjects in the reviews of the Hungarian Avant-Garde made mostly by Jewish contributors.

**Dávid Szolláth** is since 2012 Assistant lecturer at the Department of History of Modern Literature and Theory of Literature at University of Pécs, Hungary. He obtained his Ph.D. in 2008 at the University of Pécs. The title of his dissertation is *A kommunista aszketizmus esztétikája* (Aesthetics of Communist Ascetism). The dissertation analyses the self-formative practices of Hungarian Communist and Avant-Gardist writers in the first half of the 20th century. His book *A kommunista aszketizmus esztétikája*, based on his dissertation, was published in 2011 with Ballasi Kiadó, Budapest. He has published in 2012 the new Hungarian translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (with Marianna Gula, András Kappanyos, Gábor Kiss; Európa Kiadó, Budapest). Since 2008 he is research fellow at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Literary Studies and editor of *Jelenkor* literary and art review of Pécs.

[György C. Kálmán](#)

## The Non-Jewish Jewish Avant-Garde in Hungary

In an influential and controversial paper, the philosopher Ágnes Heller has argued that in the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in Hungary there was a tendency to conceal the Jewish origin of the figures in the narrative works; i.e., a certain “de-Jewification” was in effect, a masking or understating of all possible Jewish elements, hints or references.

Although there may be serious counter-arguments for this idea, it is more than conspicuous that the Avant-Garde movement in Hungary, starting in 1915, does not seem to have any Jewish character; that is, the most important authors – the majority of whom were in fact Jewish by origin – do not emphasize their connection to Jews; the text themselves carefully avoid alluding to Jewish symbols, topics, word usage, characters, etc.; and the whole context of their presence in the literary field (audience, circulation, movement activities, popularization, association with other circles, etc.) lacks any connection to Jewishness, either religious or cultural.

There may be several explanations for this phenomenon: assimilation (a movement very strong and influential in the age); personal considerations (a marginal cultural and social position should not be aggravated by belonging to a despised religious or national minority); but, most importantly, the idea of internationalism and Leftist political commitment. The paper addresses the strange un-Jewish scene and its possible reasons of the early Hungarian Avant-Garde.

**György C. Kálmán** is senior researcher at the Department of Literary Theory of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest. He obtained his PhD in 1990 at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences with a dissertation on *Literature as speech act: A study in the history of literary theory*. Habilitation in 2000 at the Graduate School of Literary Studies, Pécs University on “Communities, Canons, Interpretations”. Recent publications include (ed.) *Az értelmező közösségek elmélete* (The Theory of Interpretive Communities, Budapest: Balassi, 2001), *Mű- és valódi élvezetek* ([P]leasures of the [he]art, Pécs: Jelenkor, 2002) and *Élharcok és arcélek. A korai magyar avantgárd költészet és a kánon* (The Early Hungarian Avant-Garde Poetry and the Canon, Budapest: Balassi, 2008).

[Benoît Bondroit](#)

## "253 I Might as well Look Shagetz as much as Jew": Louis Zukofsky and the Paradox of Cultural Assimilation

At the turn of the 20th century, “assimilation” in the United States was still construed by many as a necessary process of adjustment to the American culture and ideals. This very concept was thereby deeply rooted in a deficit model, and soon became a synonym for the social pressure fostered upon first-and-second-generation immigrants to become “true” Americans by overcoming economic, linguistic, or cultural deficits.

The only one of his siblings born in the United States to Lithuanian-Jewish parents (both religiously orthodox), Louis Zukofsky grew up speaking Yiddish and had no real contact with the English language until he started school at the age of 6. He was nevertheless to become one of the most influential American poets of the second half of the century and his importance is still acknowledged today by contemporary avant-garde movements such as the OuLiPo in France, or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E in the United States.



The question of “assimilation” haunts Zukofsky's poetry from the beginning. In this paper, I will argue that in spite of his early withdrawal from religion and his apparent “assimilation” into a dominant culture, Zukofsky used his poetry as a means of deconstructing specific cultural representations. I will envisage this counter-poetics as a conscious attempt to redefine “assimilation” by integrating the heritage of a secular Jewish culture – ranging from Spinoza to Marx to Einstein – within the American literary tradition itself, one which was notoriously elitist at the time and, more often than not, antisemitic. I intend to demonstrate that his works challenge, and ultimately reverse, the “cultural deprivation” or “deficit” model of assimilation; thus partaking in a displacement of power relations at the level of both language and culture.

**Benoît Bondroit** is associate fellow at the University of Leeds and PG student at the University of Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle.

## Olivier Salazar-Ferrer

### Reflections on the Role of Judaism in Benjamin Fondane's Existential Poetics

The function of Judaism in Benjamin Fondane's poetical and philosophical works has to be studied from a diachronic point of view, in contextualizing carefully the key-works, including the article: ‘Lev Shestov and the quest for a lost Judaism’ (*Revue juive de Genève*, IV, 1936), in avoiding any anachronism which would blur the main theoretical directions and the evolution of his ideas. His participation to the Avant-Garde in the period 1924-1929 (*Cinépoèmes*, 1928) and the early critic of silent cinema is transformed by his conversion to the shestovian philosophy which inspires the writing of the long poems *Ulysse*, 1933, *Titanic*, 1938; *L'Exode super fluminas Babylonis*, 1965. Their essential topics (exode, emigration, prophetic witness, appeal and prayer) are found in the Jewish culture in Romania (mainly during the period 1914-1924). After 1929, they will be progressively transformed in an existential reflection in dialogue with Shestov, Nietzsche, Pascal, Kierkegaard but also Heidegger, Maritain, Husserl and Bergson (*La Conscience malheureuse*, 1936). In considering the theoretical writings collected in *Benjamin Fondane et l'avant-Garde*, Paris Méditerranée, 1996), we shall question the rebirth of the religious thought in these works: what is the role of the intertextual dialogue with the key Judaic or Christian texts (*Apocalypse de Jean*, *Thorah*, *Ketouvim*, *Nevi'im*) in the metaphysical revolt addressed in the long poems (*Ulysse*, 1933; *Titanic*, 1938, *L'Exode super fluminas Babylonis*, 1965)? How can the poetical, dramatic and philosophical works transform the Dadaist revolt in the religious metaphysical claim or ‘Judaism of subversion’? Based on the analysis of unpublished manuscripts, we shall also provide also some reflections about the rediscovering of Benjamin Fondane in the period 1980-2013.

**Olivier Salazar-Ferrer** is Lecturer and Director of the Department of Literature and French at the University of Glasgow. He is an international expert on the work of Benjamin Fondane. He is secretary of the Benjamin Fondane Association (Paris) and founder of the website [www.benjaminfondane.org](http://www.benjaminfondane.org). He is the author of *Benjamin Fondane* (Oxus, 2004) and *Benjamin Fondane et la révolte existentielle* (2007), and has written critical editions on *Benjamin Fondane, Ecrits pour le cinéma*, Verdier, 2007 and *La Conscience malheureuse*, Verdier, 2013. He is one of the designers of the Benjamin Fondane Exhibition at the Mémorial de la Shoah de Paris (2009).

## Andreas Kramer

### Carl Einstein, Jewishness and the Communities of the European Avant-Garde

While most accounts of Jewish aspects of the European avant-garde focus on individual biographies, thematic or stylistic trends or the role played by a given national culture, the case of Carl Einstein (1885-1940), the German-Jewish writer, art critic and theorist, invites a slightly different approach. While his biography amplifies issues of national belonging, displacement and exile, his work – from his early experimental novel *Bebuquin* (1912) to his Dada satires, to a monumental history of 20th century visual art and its intellectual underpinnings, to his late *Fabrikation der Fiktionen* (*The Fabrication of Fictions*, a highly critical account of the collective failure of the artistic and the intellectual avant-garde) – has been recognised as belonging to the idea and practice of a European avant-garde.

To counter-balance Einstein's own and some recent critical attempts to de-emphasise his Jewishness, this paper will explore two inter-related questions. (1) In what ways does Einstein, in his creative and critical work, ‘write’ or ‘construct’ Jewishness – including his own? In attempting to answer this question, I will look at three representative examples, to identify, not ‘Jewish motifs’ but a common structure – a short autobiography from the late 1920s; a ‘special issue’ of the Dada magazine, *Der blutige Ernst*, on ‘Der Jude’ (The Jew) which Einstein edited and which, to an extent, is continued in his controversial play *Die schlimme Botschaft* (The Bad Gospel); and his accounts of Jewish avant-garde artists and their art

(from both the Eastern and the Western traditions). What might be called Einstein's dissident Jewishness draws attention to the continuity of insidious mechanisms of political and social exclusion, and it does satirise Messianic hopes within specific contexts, but at the same time it suggests the possibility of a trans-individual, collective Jewish identity which is analogous to the identity of the cultural avant-garde within European modernity.

The second question follows from this: (2) how might we understand Einstein's idea of 'Jewish avant-gardism' as a kind of 'community' of or within European avant-garde? In answering this question, I propose developing Vivian Liska's term of the 'uncommon community' to outline the idea of a provisional, open-ended 'Jewish avant-garde' that might operate beyond the parameters of belonging and exclusion, and whose avant-gardism might call into question notions of 'the individual' and 'social and cultural institutions'.

**Andreas Kramer** is Senior Lecturer in German and Comparative Literature at the Department of European Languages at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His research interests include expressionism, modernism, and the avant-garde, contemporary writing, and comparative literature. He has written books on the expressionist writer Carl Einstein and on the reception of Gertrude Stein in Germany, and co-edited the autobiography of Eugene Jolas.

## Catrinel Popa

### Experience and Experiment in Max Blecher's and H. Bonciu's Novels

The impact of Jewish artists among the Romanian avant-garde movement is undoubtedly a noteworthy phenomenon. It is enough to mention such names as Tristan Tzara, Victor Brauner or B. Fondane. The purpose of this paper is to analyse two experimental "novels of the self", written by two of the most innovative Jewish-Romanian writers of the '30s: Max Blecher and H. Bonciu, stressing on those aspects they have in common with the mainstream of the 20th century Western literature. Max Blecher's *Occurrence in the Immediate Unreality* (1936) has been compared with André Breton's *Nadjia*, being, to a certain extent, influenced by Surrealism, while H. Bonciu's *Mrs. Pipersberg's Lodgings* (1936) has many characteristics in common with the Expressionist movement. In both cases, inward disquietude is experienced as outward atmosphere, submerging the world in indefinable strangeness and mystery. In this context, the concept of "inner exile" may prove useful in defining the particular status of the narrators' representations of the self, as well as their relationship with objects, settings and "sickly spaces" which thereby become "invisible traps". Moreover, both authors have in common the tendency of counterbalancing the empty transcendence of Modernism by imagining luxurious settings, disturbingly artificial and theatrical, mysteriously displayed in a universe that seems nothing more than a vast museum of strangeness.

**Catrinel Popa** is assistant lecturer at the Literary Studies Department of Bucharest University (Faculty of Letters). Doctor of literature from 2006, she teaches literary theory, history of Romanian literature and Romanian culture and civilization. Her main field of research is Romanian modern and contemporary literature. Between October 2002 - June 2004, she was a "Vasile Pârvan" fellow at the Romanian Academy in Rome (Accademia di Romania in Roma); between February 2012 and July 2012, she followed a postdoctoral research program at INALCO (Institut des Langues et Civilisations Orientales), Paris. The title of her ongoing research is *Memory of the Book, Books of Memory. Marks for an Archeology of Reading during Communism*.

## Aviv Livnat

### The Avant-Garde of Statics

The poetry and writing of Dvoyre Foygel (1900-1942), a poet and philosopher of art from Lvov, was brutally ended before her artistic and philosophical project could be fully developed. Besides her books of poems and montages, she had published criticism and essays on art and aesthetics in which she articulated her philosophical ideas and gave expression to mutual connections between the visual and the literary. Her inclination towards Cubism made its mark on her artistic and philosophical project of Statics which she had developed and which differed from analytical Cubism in its striving towards a softer mode of Cubism which was dialoguing with the philosophical motivation of the movement.

In my lecture I will examine her unique avant-garde approach within the Yiddish literary scene while examining both her artistic and literary paths. Those are paths of different dynamics which in the course of her creative artistic processes meet each other in "slow-motion" and enter into the regions of Statics. Those were the territories she was trying to conquer in her avant-garde art while maintaining a dialogue with other avant-garde artists in Poland such as Stanislaw Witkiewicz,

Bruno Schulz, the "Legerists" painters in the Lvov region or the Inzikhist group of Yiddish poets in New York in whose journal she published her first montages. The lecture will be accompanied by a visual presentation.

**Aviv Livnat** is a lecturer at Tel Aviv University and the Bezalel Academy of Art, and an artist and musician. He graduated in Philosophy and the multidisciplinary program in the Humanities at Tel Aviv University. He completed his PhD in the interdisciplinary program at the school of Jewish Studies at Tel Aviv University and achieved scholarships and awards for his thesis from the Institute for the History of Polish Jewry, the Bubis and Lerner foundations, the N.Y Memorial Foundation and the Dov Sadan Prize. Livnat deals with issues of commemoration and memory in philosophy and the arts with emphasis on East European Jewish history and the Yiddish Avant-Garde. He assisted in establishing The Goldreich Family Institute for Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture within which he initiated special projects. His articles appear in academic journals and books. Recently a volume of the history journal *Zmanim*, edited by Livnat, appeared and was dedicated to 100 years of An-sky's ethnographic expeditions.

## Laëtitia Tordjman

### The Yiddish Avant-Garde, A Literary "Third Space": The Example of *Khaliashtra*

The first issue of *Khaliashtra*, a Yiddish avant-garde review, was published in Warsaw in 1922, when the city was a crossroads of all *Yiddishland*, and especially of avant-garde artists and writers. The three creators of the review: Melekh Ravitch, Peretz Markish, and Uri-Zvi Grinberg, embodied the paradoxes and tensions representative of the Yiddish avant-garde. They were influenced by Eastern and Western cultural and artistic movements of modernity, the secular heritage of the *Haskala*, and Jewish religious traditions.

This collective work, which brought together the best avant-garde Yiddish writers and artists of the time, can be understood as a literary "third space." It is a literary piece that substantiates crossing borders and finding new motives and forms. Transnational writers such as Joseph Opatoshu, who wrote *Fir niger* (*Four Negroes*), and Oser Warszawski, who wrote *In di berg* (*In the mountains*), cross geographical borders in these short stories. Both are literary attempts to escape the *shtetl* and describe unexplored spaces (the United States and their racial violence, or the Tatra mountains and their popular superstitions) by utilizing expressionist writing, that is direct, colorful, and vibrant.

Symbolic borders can also be overstepped, with regards to religion, like in Melekh Ravitch's poem *Gezang tsum mentshlekhn kerper* (*Song to the human body*), in which figures from Judaism and Christianity meet in the midst of a global chaos; or in Uri-Zvi Grinberg's blasphemous *Velt Barg-arop* (*The world down the slope*), in which the Virgin Mary is described as a prostitute. In Melekh Ravitch's manifesto, there are no more borders between past, present and future in the "Babylonian chaos"; only the song of the revolutionary poet - as a modern Messiah - can give redemption to the world.

*Khaliashtra* is an attempt to build a 'literary third space' into which it would be possible to find unity from its own differences, like a polyptich in painting. The existence of such a piece of literature is an ode to creative liberty, transnational, and hybrid art.

**Laëtitia Tordjman** began her PhD at the Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3 in September 2012. Tordjman's background in Yiddish language, literature, and culture comes from her studies at Ecole Normale Supérieure in Lyon and Columbia University. She now specializes in diaspora and avant-garde literature, the construction of space in the diasporic avant-garde, and the relationship between the 'classical' avant-garde writers and Yiddish avant-garde writers with regards to their respective traditional and religious backgrounds.

## Ari Ofengenden

### Between the Law and the Real: On Creating a Cultural Space for Hebrew Modernism

The talk will use Pierre Bourdieu cultural field theory in order to analyze the way in which Shlonsky created an autonomous place for an eclectic kind of modernist poetry by a power struggle with Judaism, with nationalist romanticism and with socialist realism. The conflict with traditional Judaism will be described through Shlonsky's antinomian negation of Jewish code of Law, yet affirmation of a kind of fiery dialogical searching for the divine. The struggle against nationalist romanticism included his explicit public criticism of Bialik's poetry as well as an active insistence on writing cosmopolitan poetry against pressure of both the readership and the critics. The struggle against socialist realism took the argumentative form of persuading the audience that modernism best reflects the real life aspirations of Shlonsky's audience and that

complexity and development of technique including language as technique should be aspired. The talk thus will try to characterize the way in which Shlonsky has created the cultural space of Hebrew modernism.

**Ari Ofengenden** is the author of *The Passion for Absence in Abraham Shlonsky* (Hebrew University Press, 2010) and *Shlonsky: an Introduction to a Hebrew Modernist* (De Gruyter Press, 2014). He has written numerous articles and book chapters on Hebrew poetry, contemporary Israeli culture, Zionist thinkers, and literary theory, as well as on Jewish literature. He regularly presents at the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, the AJS, the World Jewish Congress, and at other venues. He studied for his Master's degree in Psychology at Tel Aviv University. He then wrote his Ph.D. on the poet Abraham Shlonsky at Haifa University and at Tübingen. From 2005-2008, he taught at the Protestant Theology department at Tübingen (Germany) and was a research fellow at the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW) at Tübingen, Germany. In 2010, he completed a post-doctoral research and teaching fellowship at Monash University (Australia). From 2010 to 2013, he was Assistant Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at Oberlin College.

## Rudolf Klein

### Mapping Jewish Influence on the Architectural Avant-Garde

It is common knowledge that Jews were overrepresented among Avant-Garde architects and theoreticians, but it has been seldom analysed what was the reason for that and what was the mechanism of their impact and the role of their ethnic-confessional origin in formulating the tenets of the Avant-Garde. While in the case of Marc Chagall or Arnold Schönberg it is easier to address these questions, mainly due to motives, narratives or structural principles, in the architecture of the Avant-Garde this task is more complex and difficult.

Still, elements of the Jewish tradition, such as the idea of the Exile or “placelessness” or being away from the real place, i.e. Jerusalem, in the architecture of the Avant-Garde comes to the fore as negation of the local roots, closed space of belonging and emphasizing universalism – values, formal language, and openness of space and structure. Similarly, the image ban, or the refusal of the traditional ‘façade discourse’ (string-courses, allettes, pilasters, lunettes, etc.) relates the minimalist, non-discursive façades of Avant-Garde to the Judaic/Jewish tradition.

Messianism, the belief of creating a new, righteous world on the ashes of the old, spoiled and corrupt has been one of the leading elements of the architecture and urban planning of the Avant-Garde. Some Avant-Garde architects explicitly mentioned the white walls of Zion. The most important element of the architecture of the Avant-Garde related to the Jewish/Judaic tradition is the preference of space over material, disabling material to incarnate ideas and putting forward space as the expressive element – open, unintelligible and infinite.

This paper concentrates not primarily on personalities, but on key notions and practices of the Jews and Judaism, which played a significant role in formulating the ideas of the architecture of the Avant-Garde and on selected examples of their implementation.

**Rudolf Klein** (1955), Dr. Eng., Dr. Phil., architect, is a theoretician and historian of modern architecture. His special interest is the link between architecture and ideas, the interaction of civilizations in the field of architecture (Judaism's influence on modernism, 19th century Orientalism, Japanese influence on 20th century western modernism,) architecture and ethnic or confessional identity in the 19th and 20th centuries. He is author of eight and co-author of three books in the field of architectural history and theory of modern times. He has published over 40 reviewed papers. He teaches at Szent István University, Ybl Miklós Faculty of Architecture, Budapest.

## Mirjam Rajner

### Sarajevo's Jewish Intellectuals and the *Collegium Artisticum*

In 1938, due to the worsening political situation on the eve of World War Two, a number of young intellectuals studying abroad returned to their native Sarajevo, then a backwater Bosnian city in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Among them were a number of young Jews – architects, musicians, choreographers, and visual artists of Sephardic and Ashkenazi origin (such as Emerik Blum, Yechiel Finci, Oskar Danon, Ana Rajs, and others), most of whom, due to the Sudeten crisis, interrupted their studies in Prague. Faced at home with an atmosphere of despair caused by poverty and political stagnation (multicultural Sarajevo was the least favored city of the ruling Serbian establishment), and acutely aware of the dangers that the spread of Fascism and Nazism meant for liberal-minded Europeans, they, soon joined by local Jewish and non-Jewish leftist artists, opted for an avant-garde inspired action. Hoping to bring to Sarajevo some of the live, avant-garde, and artistic atmosphere characteristic of Prague of the 1930s, filled with leftist émigré artists and writers, they formed a “synthetic theater” named *Collegium Artisticum*. It was inspired by *Dorival 38*, a similar Prague avant-garde theater founded and directed by the Czech poet,

journalist, musician, and actor Emil František Burian (himself influenced by the post-revolutionary work of famous Russian theater directors Vsevolod Meyerhold and Alexander Tairov). Sarajevo's group, that continued its activities until early 1941 and the very outbreak of WWII in Yugoslavia, united music, pantomime, architecture, painting, film, drama, and poetry. In addition, the members organized exhibitions and held public lectures, all of which were meant to increase awareness of the upcoming danger and offer solutions steeped in anti-Fascism, leftism, and Communism.

The paper will examine some of those unique enterprises, present the artists involved in them, and hopefully offer a little known picture of an intense avant-garde creativity that united Jews and non-Jews while stressing belief in humanism and universalism in the times of threatening racial and ethnic animosity.

**Mirjam Rajner**, Ph.D., is a senior lecturer at the Jewish Art Department of Bar-Ilan University, Israel, and co-editor of *Ars Judaica*. She published numerous essays dealing with the early art of Marc Chagall, the art of Russian, Polish, and Southeast European artists of Jewish origin active during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the art created during and immediately after the Holocaust. She is currently working on the book *Fragile Images: Jews, Art, and Wars in Yugoslavia*.

## Raphael D. Koenig

### The Mad Book: Authorship, Outsider Strategies and Jewish Tradition in Der Nister's *From my Estates*

In this paper, I will focus on *Fun mayne giter* (*From my Estates*), an often-overlooked collection of short stories by the avant-garde Yiddish writer Der Nister, published in Kharkov, Ukraine in 1929. This work corresponds to a particularly troubled period in the life and work of Der Nister, in which his writings, branded as "symbolist" and "bourgeois", came under heavy criticism, in the context of the increasingly repressive cultural policy of the Soviet state. I will analyze the ways in which these heavy pressures exerted on literary creation are reflected and echoed in Der Nister's work, forcing him to redefine the notion of authorship and his personal relationship with the Jewish tradition.

I will describe Der Nister's auctorial persona as a case of "hyper-marginalization": rejected into the margins of what already constitutes the "minor literature" of an ethno-religious minority, Der Nister reacts by ambiguously embracing this marginality. He renounces any claim for *auctoritas* (authorship/authority), presenting himself as a madman and "unreliable author" in the context of what I will define as a Modernist "outsider strategy".

In turn, the angst aroused by this "hyper-marginal" status forces Der Nister to redefine his relationship with the Jewish tradition. Whereas his earlier writings were apologues inspired by Hasidic fables (especially the stories of Rabbi Nachman), *Fun mayne giter* constitutes a turning point in his career. The work could be interpreted along the lines of Walter Benjamin's reading of Kafka, as shards of an irremediably "broken" tradition in which the presence of elements borrowed from biblical or Hasidic sources tragically emphasizes the impossibility of a redemptive message. Nevertheless, the fact that the work leads to the grand finale of a mystical vision of the Temple complicates this narrative on many levels, creating an oscillation between redemption and hopelessness.

**Raphael D. Koenig** is Ph.D. Candidate in Comparative Literature (secondary field in Film and Visual Studies) at Harvard University. A.M. Harvard University, Comparative Literature (2013); A.M. Paris IV Sorbonne, Comparative Literature (2011); School Degree, Ecole Normale Supérieure Paris, French and Comparative Literature (2011); B.A. Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, History (2006). His research fields include French, German, and Yiddish Modernism; Romanticism; East Asian Literature (Chinese, Japanese); Film and Visual Studies; Art History; Translation, "Otherness" in Literature; Literature and Madness; Outsider Art.

## Alexandru Bar

### The Jewish Culture and the Politics of National Unification in Greater Romania

The overall aim of this research is to analyze the objectives of national cultural policy in the interwar Romania, based on the policies of intense national mobilization initiated by the Romanian Kingdom. Culture was at the heart of the policy agenda of the Romanian administration mainly due to the state of crisis in which it found itself after the end of the First World War and the necessity to assimilate the plurality of populations with very diverse backgrounds in terms of their cultures, with almost no common denominator, spread in the new provinces, territories to which Romania had longstanding

historical claims. The Romanian-Jewry, fragmented, extremely complex and difficult to treat as a homogeneous body and defined only under its religious affiliation, represented a chief concern of the Romanian elites who considered the exclusion of ethnic non-Romanians from the life of the nation would have been desirable. Rather than simply identifying some of the Jewish-Romanian ideological clashes, this is an attempt to analyze the Jewish-Romanian culture within the broader context of Romania's history in a period dominated by the unrest in pursuit of a modern identity. For this purpose, the following research questions were addressed: what goals, values and intentions are expressed in the policy agenda at national level in the selected time period and did the Romanian-Jews maintain their own culture or were they fully „Romanianized”, this being an evidence of the ‘rayonnement’ of Romanian culture? Additionally, I shall try to identify the areas where we can distinguish particularly Jewish intellectuals in Greater Romania: linguistic and literary. Textual analysis was used as methodology in order to enable the understanding of the Romanian Governments' intentions, the reactions of the Romanian-Jewish authors of that period (areas where we can distinguish particularly Jewish intellectuals) and the specificity of the Jewish literature especially in the context of the Romanian avant-garde, and the Dadaism, an art movement of the European avant-garde in the early 20th century.

**Alexandru Bar**, M.A., Associate Member of the “Goldstein Goren” Research Center for Israeli Studies, University of Bucharest, and Research Assistant at the Department of Political Science of the Gershon H. Gordon Faculty of Social Sciences, Tel Aviv University.

[Elizabeth Ferrell](#)

## Wallace Berman, Kabbalah, and Collaboration

Wallace Berman (1925-75) grew up in Los Angeles the son of Russian-Jewish parents. By the 1950s, Berman was a leading figure in California's burgeoning underground art scene. His collages, films, assemblages, and zines combined references to bebop jazz, drugs, sex, surrealism, and the Hebrew alphabet. This iconographic cocktail was popular with the countercultural musicians, artists, and poets that Berman assembled around him. However, the mix of religion and illicit activities in Berman's art challenged mainstream audiences, famously leading to his arrest on obscenity charges in 1957. What role did Judaism play in Berman's art practice? In particular, did Berman (who, by the 1950s, was no longer practicing Judaism) draw on Jewish traditions to help cultivate California's post-war avant-garde?

I argue that Berman used Kabbalah as a model for avant-garde collaboration. Through analysis of Berman's photographs and his zine, *Semina*, I demonstrate that he attempted to enact in his creative community the interdependence between individual production (God's word) and appropriation (the exegete's analysis) performed by Kabbalistic interpretation. This model of artistic production challenged the ideal of the artist as individual then dominant in the United States. It also defies the models of meaning production prescribed by modernism and postmodernism by demanding both a strong author and a strong reader. While I highlight the innovative nature of Berman's Kabbalah-inspired collaborations, I also acknowledge the challenges and failures that arose from his attempts to apply spiritual hermeneutics to a secular artistic community.

My paper contends that Kabbalah had a much deeper influence on Berman's art practice, and by extension California's post-war avant-garde, than has been acknowledged previously. The Jewish esoteric tradition was more than a motif, a decorative flourish, with which Berman dabbled. It provided an architecture of meaning production and subcultural community that permeated the most fundamental aspects of his artistic practice.

**Elizabeth Ferrell** is Assistant Professor of Art History at Miami University of Ohio. She obtained her Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley in 2012 with a dissertation on “The Ring around *The Rose*: Jay DeFeo and her Circle”. She has been Visiting Lecturer at the University of California, Davis and Teaching Assistant at the University of California, Berkeley.

Eszter Vilmos

## Motifs of Jewish Identity in the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde

During the late 1960's and 1970's, in the middle of the socialist era in Hungary, the artists of the underground culture were aiming to break down taboos caused by the severe censure, mostly by using the genres and artistic methods of the avant-garde. These taboos were often in connection with the Jewry: first of all, the Holocaust, but also the Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel of 1882 which is the most known Hungarian anti-Semitic affair of the 19th century.

The most representative figures of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde were of Jewish origin. This is not only a biographical fact as its main works of art problematize the Jewish tradition, the Holocaust or anti-Semitism. These motifs are mainly part of the artists' unsure identity and are often combined with masochistic traits, just like in the poetry, short prose, performances and happenings of Tibor Hajas whose oeuvre seems to manifest the incapacity of dealing with his own Jewish origin. On the other hand, the prose of György Kozma constructs a personal familial mythology based on Hasidic Jewish tradition, while the partly theoretical texts of Miklós Erdély can be interpreted through cabbalistic thoughts.

János Major's Neo-Avant-Garde iron etchings either represent a historical event in connection with Jews, such as the Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel, which was also adapted in a film of Miklós Erdély, or use the representative techniques of the anti-Semitic propaganda, through which its ideas are criticized in a highly self-critical way as he applies these techniques on his self-portrait as well.

In the paper I would like to give a perspective on the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde movement by analysing its works of art that deal with the Jewish tradition while criticizing both the anti-Semitism of World War II, both the post-war taboos concerning the events of the recent past.

**Eszter Vilmos**, Master of Arts at the University of Pécs (Faculty of Humanities, Modern Hungarian Literature). BA Thesis in 2014 on the Approach to Contemporary French–Hungarian Poetry Translation Through Translation Theory, Literary History and Modern Hungarian Traditions of Literary Translation.

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