



## “CHOSEN” Conference, 10 December 2008, 11.00 – 18.00

11.00 – 11.15

**Opening remarks**

11.15 - 12.00

**Yoav Kenny – *Messiah Now! Giorgio Agamben and the Messianic Time of the Political***

Yoav Kenny is writing his PhD in political theory at the School of Philosophy at the University of Tel Aviv. His Master's thesis dealt with the relationship between time, law and sovereignty in the works of Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben.

Although in recent years the political theories of the contemporary Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, have become widespread in intellectual and artistic circles, the primary role that Messianism holds in his theories does not receive due credit. This talk seeks to explore the Jewish origins (Kafka, Sholem, Benjamin) of Agamben's perception of Messianism and to consider how it is used to describe the contemporary political condition of the West.

12.00 - 12.45

**Dr Agata Bielik-Robson – *The Apocalyptic Breeze: Nihilism as a Messianic Strategy***

Agata Bielik-Robson is a philosopher and professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

The aim of the presentation is to give a short philosophical outline of the Messianic idea in Judaism, which influenced many revolutionary and anarchic movements in the history of the West, both Jewish and Christian, religious and secular. Most of all, I would like to emphasise the highly specific internal link that connects Jewish Messianism with a certain version of the nihilistic attitude, which results in all sorts of antinomian strategies, aiming at shaking the metaphysical structure of the world and bringing it to its violent, apocalyptic end. This, as Gershom Scholem calls it, is the “apocalyptic breeze” which

“airs the well-ordered house of Judaism”.

By using the abstract foil of the Messianic idea delivered by Scholem, I would like to juxtapose two modes of Messianic thinking: Jewish and Polish. I want to show how Jewish Messianism influenced the political writings of the most famous Polish Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, and to suggest that the difference between these two Messianisms lies precisely in their attitude towards the issue of nihilism: while Jewish thinkers tend to show in this matter a considerable daring, Polish writers, who, because of their Catholicism, remain within the frame of providential metaphysics, usually refrain from a full embracement of the nihilistic and antinomian strategies and appear in contrast rather timid.

12.45 - 13.30

**Magda Raczyńska-Pustoła – *Flies or Butterflies: The legends of workers' participation in Poland***

Magda Raczynska-Pustoła is a sociologist, art theoretician, author of numerous articles about art, culture and politics published in various newspapers, magazines and online publications (e.g. Obieg, Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita, Krytyka Polityczna), as well as of essays to the catalogues of art exhibitions (e.g. 'Enthusiasm' in the Whitechapel Gallery, 'You won't feel a thing' in Dresden Kunsthaus). She collaborates with the Wyspa Institute of Art, Obieg and Krytyka Polityczna. She completed her MA in Contemporary Art Theories at the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College, and most recently her PhD in Sociology at the Department of Sociology, Warsaw University.

1989: a pseudo-event or a fleeting moment of social transformation? And what happened to participation? Using narrations appearing in Polish literature, I will try to see if it really makes any sense to criticise Slavoj Žižek's argument about the false nature of the 1989 revolution and the instrumental use of the workers' commitment.

13.30 - 15.00

**Lunch break**

15.00 - 15.45

**Roe Rosen – *Georges and Jacob, Justine and Joanna***

Roe Rosen is an artist and author. He teaches art at the Midrasha School of Art at Beit Berl College and at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. Justine Frank (1900-1943) is a Belgian Jewish artist and an author of pornography. Her first European retrospective will open in January 2009 in Extra City in Antwerp, the city of her birth.

In this presentation, Roe Rosen will offer a first rough sketch of an essay on a fake artist by a fake scholar: Joanna Fuhrer Ha-Sfari, who examines certain motifs in the art and pornographic writings of Justine Frank, such as incest and the dictionary, through comparative reflections on the Polish-Jewish Messiah, Jacob Frank, and the French thinker, Georges Bataille.

15.45 - 17.00

**Adam Lipszyc - *Into Edom's field, to Poland: Jacob Frank as Educator***

Adam Lipszyc works at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. His main interests include the philosophical consequences of psychoanalysis, 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish philosophy and the thought of Walter Benjamin.

Jacob Frank, the eighteenth-century charlatan and would-be Messiah, bequeathed us a fascinating volume of notes entitled *The Book of the Words of the Lord*. The document opens before its reader a world in which scandalous megalomania is intertwined with Frank's religious genius. Out of the narrative, which combines motives of an esoteric treatise and a picaresque story, there emerges an antinomian doctrine of the Simpleton-Messiah who breaks the laws of this world, as well as a vision of Poland as a realm which is to play the crucial role in the economy of redemption. However, it is also worth looking at the book as a document which throws light on the starting point of Jewish modernity and presents the exodus out of the traditional space "into Edom's field, to Poland", the exodus which does not annihilate Jewish identity but transforms it into a highly paradoxical figure, as it doubles the condition of exile and superimposes the images of the House of Bondage and of the Promised Land.

17.00 - 18.00

**Panel discussion**