

Introduction

THINKING JEWISH MODERNITY

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“MODERNITY,” CHARLES BAUDELAIRE WROTE IN 1859, “IS THE TRANSITORY, THE fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable.”¹ As one side of art, modernity is also one side of history, and thus one side of Jewish history. In all these cases, modernity connotes a state of mind more than it indicates a historical period or structural condition. As a catalyst for late-nineteenth-century critical thinking, modernity takes up the promises, limitations, and failures of the Enlightenment as they reconstitute themselves in a postrevolutionary, bourgeois age. Thinking about modernity involves a complex relation to time, in which the past appears as both distant and relevant, the future at once promising and vague.

Makers of Jewish Modernity offers original portraits of thinkers, writers, artists, and leaders who founded, formed, and transformed the twentieth century and laid down intellectual, cultural, and political foundations for the world ahead of us. These forty-three portraits understand intellectual and political biographies in the context of the life-worlds of their protagonists—in other words, in terms of the mutualities of texts and contexts, space and time, thought and action, inheritance and transformation.

Modern Jewish experience forms a dimension of our post-Enlightenment world. The term “Judaism” is, in English, immediately problematic as a noun alongside of which “Jewish” is the adjective. “Judaism” often connotes religion and religious texts and laws rather than a more fluid category of general cultural and intellectual inheritance. A bagel, as the saying goes, is not the Talmud. The more general category of Jewish culture in relation to the world at large is often referred to by the awkward word “Jewishness.” There is no simple replacement for the powerful and polysemic German term *Judentum*, which strikes the tone and meaning we would engage here. Moreover, it should escape no one that the word *Judentum*, and its implicit claim of a strong religious as well as secular cultural world, came from the nation that subsequently sought to destroy precisely the powerful hybrid that it had nurtured.

Albert Memmi once introduced a distinction between *judaïcité* and *judéité*, whose sense in French is similar to the one that today undergirds a constitutive tension in English between *being Jewish* and *doing Jewish*: “La judéité est la manière dont chaque Juif vit, subjectivement et objectivement, son appartenance au judaïsme et à la judaïcité. La judaïcité est l’ensemble des personnes juives. Le judaïsme est l’ensemble des doctrines et des institutions juives.”² Or put in English: “Jewishness is the way every Jew lives, subjectively and objectively, his or her belonging to Judaism and Jewry. Jewry includes all kind of Jewish individuals. Judaism is all of Jewish ideas, doctrines, and institutions.” This distinction makes it clear that the English “Jewishness,” the French *judéité*, the German *Jüdischsein*, and the Hebrew *Yehudiut* include both *being Jewish* and *doing Jewish*, but they also differ from the latter terms. It thereby may become clear that such qualities as boundaries, varieties, and uncertainties—which are also inherent qualities of modernity—are central to such distinctions.³ A similar way of self-expression may be found in the Yiddish term *Yiddishkayt* as a fusion of experience, often described as the cultural and sensual marrow of “Jewish soul”—thus including imagination and reason, intellectual and emotional languages, performances and reality, difference and commonality. After all, *being Jewish* versus *doing Jewish* distinguishes between the fact of having been born as a Jew versus other connotations—such as, on the one hand, being designated as a Jew by society, a powerful bureaucracy, or imagined attributions of “anti-Judaism,”⁴ and, on the other hand, being Jewish through individual choice and practice, how one’s own understanding is realized in daily life, or through ideas, connections, and opportunities forming what today often falls under the glittering term “Jewish identities.”

Metaphors, formulas, and classifications never form without preconditions and contexts. They help only to bring to the surface—nothing more—complexities, interrelations, or tensions that we thus hope to comprehend. Into the tension between *being* and *doing* as two metaphors and formulas a third element, or spotlight, now interpolates itself, posing a question without a firm answer, but one that remains endless and multifaceted. This is a question of *thinking*. In its focus on *thinking Jewish modernity*, this book turns away from essentializations of “Jewish thought,” “Jewishness,” “Judaism,” or “the Jewish people,” aiming instead to grasp the diverse work of thinkers who have confronted and reimagined the relation between Judaism and the modern world.

Thinking is the concept appropriate to the contributions in this book. As the many readings make clear, thinking is a human practice that endeavors to *imagine* life, to imagine the future and the past, to imagine meaning and performance, or community and society. This includes analytical work but also those affective and performative forms of expression, such as music, art, and poetry, that in turn produce knowledge and meaning. This practice of the imagination is constitutive of the production and performance of what was and is experienced as “Jewish,” what is sometimes also called “Jewish” by the world—including the established Jewish world—and sometimes not. All kinds of categorical gaps open here. In such a manner is thinking a way *into* modernity, which in turn is to be interpreted in all its coincidences, contradictions, and uncertainties. Thinking modernity involves also a call—in part implicit, in part explicit—that not only Jewishness but indeed any doctrine or specific identity position, whether construed as “religious,” “secular,”

or “cultural,” be understood as highly fluid and contingent. They represent the results of the work of human beings to understand their own time and to enact their own lives in the contexts of specific and limited times and spaces.

This predicament poses considerable challenges. It may remind us overall of the image conjured by Franz Kafka in a posthumously published aphorism: the search for the true way proceeds by way of a rope which is wound tightly just above the ground, and which therefore seems intended more to make one stumble rather than to be traversed. The protagonists in this book—alongside, it is important to note, their portraitists—are witnesses to this balancing act, as they themselves feel their way toward a not-quite-tangible future. To many of these figures it was not so important whether this future would bear the name “Jewish” or some other name, but rather that this way and this balancing act themselves might one day be read as one or more modern Jewish experiences. It is this *conditio humana*—this rope wound tightly just above the ground—that may today be recognized and described as the *conditio Judaica*. The contributions collected in this volume therefore do not present an overview but seek rather to demonstrate the strenuous and abiding effort of tripping and tightrope walking, of being, doing, and thinking, of the forcefields connecting *Jewishness* to *Judaism* to *Jewry*, or *Jüdischsein* to *Judentum* and *Judenheit*, or *judaiçité* and *judaism* and *judéité*, or *Yehudiut* to *Yahadut* to *Yehudim*. Achieving one’s own life, however, requires a strenuous practice of thinking, and will continue to require it—within the struggle, to use Kafka’s terms, among “sin, suffering, hope, and the true way.”⁵



Judaism (and its analogues in other languages since its epigenetic phrasing and migration from the German *Judentum*) has been understood for the most part as a doctrine of religion, not of philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, or the arts. However, it is important to understand that “religion” itself is a post-emancipatory construct of the nineteenth century derived from previous uses of the term—and, as such, is construed as a social and cultural concept of modern society.⁶ This is likewise the case for terms such as “history” (*Geschichte* in German), “science” (*Wissenschaft*), “culture,” or “secularization”—once they were condensed into notions and ideas in the time of early Enlightenment to the nineteenth century.⁷ The political and intellectual realities in the twentieth and twenty-first century’s multilateral topography correspond to a previous change in terms, codes, and linguistic images; this may indeed reflect a centuries-long multiseular shift in Western philosophy since the seventeenth century, a movement from thinking in terms of logic to the episteme and the modern dispute over epistemic definitions. Since Søren Kierkegaard, Jewish and non-Jewish writers alike have filtered their denominational and religious traditions through an epistemic grid—they wanted to strip away the exclusivity of its origin from a particular religious community in order to make the contents of their own intellectual tradition and beliefs philosophically, publicly, and universally understood, a task now appearing globally in the call for dialogue and intercultural understanding.⁸ Similarly but in a different context and contrast, the same is true regarding Zionist thinkers.⁹ What we have before us, then, is a not always conscious linguistic transcoding of the semantics of “Jewish” itself. What is called “Jewish” shifts here—from the “law” of the Jewish legal system to “culture”

and “history,” to “philosophy” and national “politics”—while a historicizing and secularizing of Jewish hermeneutics, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, is involved with and within these codes.¹⁰ These transcodings often enough go in the reverse direction again, from philosophy and the culture of secular societies to the law of new tribal or ethnic segregations, shaping the debate about the determinability of “Jewish” in various—and even antimodernist—versions of modernity.¹¹ It is through this shift of concepts, and the emergence of new or rediscovered narratives, that Jews worldwide are required to anticipate, envision, and enact history anew. They are drawn into a political positioning with respect to questions of human rights and minority protection, whether they now like this share of responsibility or not.¹²

The codes of any transformation can generally be read in the shifting episteme (or epistemes) and semantics that arise, from the late nineteenth century to the present day, in the course of the ramifications of syncretism and globalization. More and more people of different backgrounds live ever more closely together, and increasing knowledge seems available to them. The juxtaposition or spectrum between tribal and cosmopolitan modes of life also leads, in Jewish modernity, to different modes of self-awareness—and inescapably to a pluralistic, diversified world of being, doing, imagining, and thinking Jewish. What then constitutes “Jewish modernity” or one of its versions, the different codes and semantics that seem to be claimed as “thinking Jewish,” are laid down, established, canonized, restricted, and criticized depending on the perception and projection. Jewish modernity cannot be grasped as a unity, but can first be made visible only as a manifold and often conflictual multiplicity. To sum up, language and epistemic transformations, along with natural philosophy, political thought, social environment, and modes of life, constitute decisive factors supporting the concept best expressed by the varieties of Jewish modernity. Thus one can consider, borrowing from Jacques Derrida, all these ways of life as alternatives, and hence speak of them in the plural as “Judaisms.”¹³

Therefore, a term like *thinking* is construed here as a human practice toward the construction of various modernities, paths of imagination, and choices that make sense for both individual and collective expectations of being and acting in the world. No unambiguous definition of *Judaism* can therefore be given. Already in the talmudic intellectual edifice, as Daniel Boyarin and Michael Walzer have shown, a very diverse corpus of biblical interpretation, an “exclusive, divinely sanctioned heterodoxy,” can be detected, but no semantic determinability and no unambiguous exegesis of the text of the canonical Scriptures are at hand.¹⁴ This indeterminacy of tradition holds—since Baruch Spinoza—all the more for the discourse of modernity and secular thought, whose episteme is stamped by uncertainties and displacements. The epistemes and semantics that persist when it comes to descriptions of Jewish “religion” generally—alongside such subcategories as “Orthodox,” “Haredi,” “Reformist,” “Liberal,” “Conservative,” “Reconstructionist,” or “Humanist” Judaism—derive from a historical context quite removed from the realities to be encountered in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁵ “Orthodox,” for example, is a postemancipatory concept under which very different influences are summarized today—anything but a unity of doctrine, this term serves the preservation of privilege and power. The discovery of mysticism, too, as a dimension of Jewish modernity, alongside its popularization in the global media today, is patently contingent on modern plays of images and imagination. The same is the case for masculine and

feminine imagery of God, since a redefinition of epistemic construction of sex and gender in Jewish and non-Jewish feminist theology enhances a general understanding that is not limited to “masculine” metaphors.¹⁶ Even allegedly modern concepts, like the metaphor of “blood”—of blood as a mythical medium of differentiation and essentialization as found in the writings of such nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jewish male authors as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Uri Zwi Greenberg—have become deeply questionable today. Cultural ideas about genetics have been, since Ludwig Fleck, debunked by science itself as fictions, after they had previously and for a long time been vehemently asserted as socially relevant.¹⁷

Among the moderns, the questionable nature of such categories have gone unrecognized by some, have been suspected early on and recognized by others, and were simply ignored or even fought by others still. Mordecai Kaplan, for example, stipulated that both universal values or “ethics” and the diversity of “folkways” were part of “Judaism as a Civilization,” and were thus opposed to ideologies of blood and race.¹⁸ Similarly, Franz Boas formulated his rejection of the alleged biological foundations of anthropological hierarchy based on eugenic fantasies of “race” and “color” by emphasizing the significance of language skills for human intercourse.¹⁹ To be sure, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries spawned political and ideological versions of biological or institutional ways of *being Jewish* as well as social and cultural ways of *doing Jewish*, thus bearing witness to the radical diversity among the claims and interpretations of the Jewish past and future. Feminism has added a key strand to this diversity of human and Jewish experiences. The history of modern Western feminist movements and their so-called waves or struggles—including the drive to enfranchisement; women’s liberation in social and economic life; the inclusion of Jewish secular women among thinkers, shapers, and pioneering activists of feminism; the prominent place of women in activist Palestinian Zionism and the early state years, including women soldiers and officers; and the rabbinical ordination of women—has included an explicitly Jewish dimension.²⁰



Jewish modernity possesses a largely European heritage. It negotiates between the universalisms of the Enlightenment and their potentials—opportunities, threats—and of cultural absorption. The emancipation and reclamation of the Jewish Enlightenment has long been considered the decisive moment in the history of diasporic Judaism. After centuries of oppression and persecution, an atmosphere of toleration, philosophical deism, and entrepreneurial inclusion originating in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, and taken up in a few other places,²¹ led to the Jews finally gaining civil status in a certain number of countries during the nineteenth century. They glimpsed the possibility of getting “out of the ghetto”²² in Western and Eastern European topographies, and of a more or less complete incorporation into the societies constituted within nation-states. But to summarize thus would be to do violence to a process that was far more complex, and whose rhythms and modalities differed profoundly from country to country—from one end of Europe to another, but also from one social milieu to another. The central dynamic, what became the dominant trait of nineteenth-century modernity, was a pressured integration, the predicament usually referred to as “assimilation.” Assimilation affirmed the belief that the specificity of Jewish culture was not incompatible with national cultures.

Thus the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, which accompanied the assimilation movement in the German world during the last decades of the eighteenth century, saw itself as an undertaking of modernization. Inspired by that undertaking, the developing *Wissenschaft des Judentums* tasked itself with applying to history and to texts from the Jewish tradition that historical-philological approach whose rules were at that moment being formalized within German historiography. At the same time, the establishment of academic studies of Jewish and Islamic heritages in Hungary sharpened the correlation between *Wissenschaft* and tradition, as is evident in the scholarly writings of Ignác Goldziher and his educated Southeastern European contemporaries.²³ But again, it is important to not simplify or reduce a movement—the will to leave the cultural ghetto—that was not uniform, for its effects were varied and at times contradictory. Many aspects of Eastern European Jewish communities would continue to be contrasted against the experiences of those in the West. The same is true, in a similar but later and not comparable manner, for Mediterranean Jewish cultures.²⁴

In France, the universalism of the rights of man—a heritage of the Revolution of 1789—is generally understood as a guarantee of access into civic equality and into the distinct culture of *laïcité*. With generous intentions, a thoroughly lay policy put Jewish identity in a potentially awkward position. Wasn't Jean-Paul Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive*,²⁵ published in 1946, still controversially understood as some kind of threat to Jewish identity? In Germany, the relative absence of revolution funneled national modernity into the post-Kantian articulations of secularized Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*). Judaism became itself "Protestant" in style and argument, as evident in the practices and aesthetics of the Reform movement. Literal conversion was an option as well, as is obvious in the cases of the descendants of Moses Mendelssohn as well as in paradigmatic voices of all three German Enlightenments: German, Jewish, and German-Jewish.²⁶ On the other side of the nationally inflected universalisms, Jewish modernity faced and considered the attractions of particularity, including sacred and secular models, as well as the strong hybrids of the sacred/secular dialectic such as nationalism itself. The diverse roles of Jews in these attempts at self-exploration and imagined ethnicity, world-discovery, or relecturing on Jewish traditions allowed for their activity as scholars, artists, critics, political propagandists, and cultural mediators.

World War I, with its millions of dead, its massive destruction, and perhaps even more so the absurd logic that commanded it, was responsible for a profound, pan-European moral crisis. The optimistic century of progress was violently called into question as modern civilizations realized that they, too, were mortal, as Paul Valéry lamented in 1919. "We see now," he wrote, "that the abyss of history is deep enough to bury all the world. We feel that a civilization is fragile as life."²⁷ This dark prophecy evidently came even truer in World War II, particularly for the Jewish people, as well as others, who were singled out for destruction. Did genocide not place the very means of modernity—"an attempt at social engineering"—at the service of mass extermination, as Zygmunt Bauman has suggested?²⁸ Generally speaking, the conviction that modern reason is inseparable from barbarism (Walter Benjamin), the assertion that the "dialectic of enlightenment" fuses reason with violence (Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno), would henceforth undermine the innermost hopes so long placed in modernity.

Jewish experience lies at the heart of these upheavals. The creation of the state of Israel marks a major shift in its intention to usher in a new future. It also compels the other Jewish communities of the world to rethink their status, their project, as well as their relationships to the new national entity. At the very moment that the trust placed in two centuries of progress is called into question, it becomes necessary to substitute it with other founding values and endow it with other hopes. The reinvention of Jewish tradition will thus have been one of the characteristic features of the twentieth century, although for many of those who undertook to find it in canonical sources, the meaning would now seem unattainable.

Young Gershom Scholem's experience offers a telling example.²⁹ Born in 1897 to an average, bourgeois, assimilated family in Berlin, he despised the inconsistencies in, and persistence of, Jewish rituals and references now emptied of their meaning. In terms that evoke those of Franz Kafka's *Letter to His Father* (1919), he denounced the contradictions of a family—and its wider milieu—that was capable of preserving superficial attachments to tradition, but not of understanding it, let alone conveying its significance. Thus, in 1913 he chose to immerse himself in an intensive study of Hebrew, the Bible, the Talmud, and canonical Jewish texts, dedicating his life to the belief that it was possible to rediscover a living Judaism, to “revive the dried bones of German Jewry.”³⁰ As striking as it may have seemed, Scholem's experience was in no way isolated. It was shared in various forms by some of the most brilliant German intellectuals of his generation. Franz Rosenzweig, for example, advocated “dissimilation” (as opposed to assimilation), in which he contended that the only way the Jewish people could remain true to themselves would be to recognize the perseverance and tenacity in their long history. Many others endeavored to denounce, with Scholem, the “troubling and tragic illusion” of an ostensible Judeo-German “symbiosis” in which Jews had chosen a fallacious modernity, one that never gained them any recognition in return for having opened themselves up to the dominant culture. But in turning their backs on a model that appeared exhausted, these men did not renounce modernity. Rather, they sought to create different versions that would make room for the specificities of Jewish experience so that their expectations could be fulfilled.

From Hermann Cohen (in the late nineteenth century) to Emmanuel Levinas (in the second part of the twentieth), the immense effort of rereading, questioning, and interpreting serves to decipher the meaning of this tradition for the present. Yet the thread of tradition is also broken for the twentieth century. Such was the lesson of Kafka and Benjamin; and after the Jewish catastrophe in World War II, it was picked up and magnified by Hannah Arendt, Paul Celan, Primo Levi, Jacques Derrida, and others. As Stéphane Mosès writes: “This is to grieve for truth, but at the same time steer clear of absolute shipwreck and the engulfing of everything, including shattered debris. This means recovering and rethinking, in new contexts, the pieces that resurface. In an age that can no longer believe in the truth of tradition, the only way to salvage memory is to tell the story of its disappearance.”³¹ Is it any wonder, then, that the reaction to the lengthy process of assimilation and secularization that characterized the nineteenth century was the rebirth of a Jewish messianism, whose expressions were multiform, but which still chose to break with the progressivist and cumulative conception of modernity in order to emphasize the possibilities of the present—that which Benjamin calls “now-time” (*Jetztzeit*)—and the promises it conceals, those of a history we do not expect?

The explosive and genocidal twentieth century reshuffled all Jewish options: political, intellectual, religious, social, cultural. In Europe, the fragile identity combinations of the post-Enlightenment world were irretrievable after 1945. Jewish life in Europe finds itself increasingly nonindigenous: Jewish life in France is increasingly North African in its demographic trends; in Germany, where it begins on an appreciable scale only after 1989, it is increasingly Eastern European and recently Israeli. Most generally and globally, and most relevant to the structure of this book, Jewish modernity after 1945 becomes a function of a tri- and even multilateralized world, with centers of gravity in Europe, Israel, and North America. In the United States, the “melting pot” principle, the pragmatist philosophy of pluralism and the emergence of a “post-Christian nation” (Harold Bloom),³² enabled a relatively stressless alchemy of “Americanness” and “Jewishness” in a mode not available in most European societies or in the Israel of today. Meanwhile, for Jews in Canada, as well as for the country’s many other minorities, the new political doctrine of “multiculturalism” has shifted to an ongoing negotiation and management of diversity.³³ Such privilege has claimed a price in a certain moral sentimentality: the tendency, as Peter Novick argued, to claim moral victory from other people’s murder or survival and then to shape that moral victory into an existential loyalty to the state of Israel.³⁴ Israel was in turn able to persuade a majority of American Jewry that it spoke authoritatively and exclusively on behalf of “the Jewish people,” the secular replacement of the Jewish religion and one that, for the reason just stated, found compatibility with American identity.



Israel, whose political culture in the 1950s denied continuity with its European past and most specifically with Holocaust victimhood, came, by the 1970s, to rely exactly on the latter for its legitimation in general and for the legitimation of its military ideology, politics, and practices more specifically. Furthermore, from a historical perspective, not only did Israel have a European past, but political Zionism has been European from its genesis, and Israel has always perceived itself as a bastion of European civilization in the backwardness of the East, or a “villa in the jungle,” as recently put. Drawing on the great revolutions that swept the European continent in 1789 and 1848, shaped by romanticism, nationalism, and socialism, and galvanized by modern political anti-Semitism, Jewish nationalism—in other words: political Zionism—came into its own in the later nineteenth century. The idea of Jewish nationhood was thrust into modern history not by scientists or technocrats, nor by industrialists or social reformers, but rather by theorists and poets—by thinkers, writers, artists, journalists, and educators in Russia and Eastern and Central Europe, who reimagined their own as well as their people’s Judaism and Jewishness. By so doing, these protagonists imagined a new era and formed a positive vision for themselves and their people, acting as innovators and conveyors of new ethics and frameworks of life, establishing ideological and political movements in times of crisis and upheaval, transforming the value systems of their communities, and playing a major role in the process of their modernization. A minority discourse within the Jewish world, political Zionism struggled for dominance in a crowded and militant European Jewish arena of assimilationists, national-cultural autonomists, socialist Bundists, folk-diasporists, Orthodox Agudists, Yiddishists,

and a plethora of other factions. Ultimately, Nazism and Stalinism led to the demise of this ideological and cultural rage.

It was the early Zionists' aim thoroughly to transform Jewish consciousness as well as the material conditions of Jewish life—to create and invent the Jewish people anew and to reclaim its territorial and temporal space, its language, and its very model of the human being. This mind-bending project was not immune to contradictions. While imagining a totally brave new world and human being, it drew no less on the romantic idea of a return to the distant past, of the restoration of the mythical golden age of ancient Jewish sovereignty in Zion/Palestine. Biblical narratives, tales, and lessons impregnated twentieth-century Zionism and Zionist history, and shaped it. The conquest of the land was thus to be perceived as a replay of the ancient conquest led by Joshua. The very ingathering of the Jews in newly invented Zion would be a replication of the Exodus from Egypt and the return to the land from the Babylonian exile. Indeed, the Babylonian syndrome has defined Zionism all along. Although the Palestinian voluntarist branch of Zionism, in its effort to restore ancient Hebrew domination, declared and established Hebrew as its sole, exclusive spoken and written language, Zionism, and also Zionists/new Israelis from all continents and lands, continued to speak in some seventy distinct dialects, experiencing and expressing at once their profound differences in origin, upbringing, culture, customs, and faiths. Unlike Hebrew literature, Israeli literature and scholarship continue to be written in a multitude of languages.

Israel's later, statist policy of the melting pot would amount to no more than a heroic, yet short-lived, attempt to repress these differences and to level the multitude of hierarchies, shades, and nuances assembled by the Zionist revolution. Socialist and capitalist, liberal and Marxist, religious and atheist, orthodox and anarchist—Zionism, to be sure, had been all of these. While displaying an all-against-all tumultuous and ongoing struggle of ideas and ideologies, all vying for prominence and influence, Zionism has also encouraged strange partnerships. It is, for instance, big, private Jewish money that financed the most original and innovative social and cultural experiments in Palestine/Israel in the first half of the twentieth century: the kibbutzim and other agricultural cooperative sorts of communities. Chaim Weizmann was said to take pride in another uncanny match created by Zionism, represented by those “poor Galician immigrants” who arrived in Palestine with no clothes but with “one hand holding Marx's *Capital*, and in the other, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*.”³⁵

The realization of the Zionist ancient-futuristic utopia (*Altneuland*) required that those poor immigrants and especially their progeny to be born in Zion and become the “New Man” or the “New Hebrew” imagined by the Zionist revolution. The model of the French and other revolutions of recent times, a new interest in the human body, and novel theories of sexuality and eugenics, together with influential Nietzschean ideas, were all borrowed by early Zionist thinkers in their quest for the new Jew. Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life) and its assertions of vitality, will, power, and myth, along with the dismissal of tradition, equipped abundantly the new discourse of the Zionist thinkers. Nietzsche's “new man” and “superman” (*Übermensch*) served the early Zionists, the followers of Herzl among them, in their imaginings of the Zionist “new man” or the “new Hebrews” as against the inherited archetype of the “diaspora Jew.” In the last decade of the nineteenth

century, while residing in Bern, Switzerland, Micha Yosef Berdichevsky, one of the most complex and compelling Jewish intellectuals of his time, wrote to a friend: “I am a Nietzschean . . . and know only might, power, power!” The neurologist and social critic Max Nordau, the cofounder, with Herzl, of the World Zionist Organization, coined the term “muscle Judaism” (*Muskel-Judentum*) as a counterpoint to the stereotyped Jewish body, allegedly ravaged by centuries of “degenerate” (*entartet*) life in the diaspora, to which Zionism was for him the only possible political remedy. Zionism meant in this context physical and mental robustness, normalcy, beauty, self-discipline, responsibility, cleanliness, and steady marriage. “The future generation shall not be small and weak, beaten and sickly as is this dwarfish generation,” the Russian Jewish publicist Reuben Brainin said, reflecting on this version of modernity. “Rather shall a strong and mighty generation arise, a generation of giants, a generation which shall inculcate new physical strengths and new mental capacities which we never imagined—a generation of the ‘superman.’”³⁶



Fin-de-siècle, antisemitic Vienna, a crossroad of many trends and trades, offered the stage for the inception of two major modern movements, both emblems of Jewish modernity: Freud’s psychoanalysis and Herzl’s political Jewish nationalism. Contemporaries and major agents of modernity, Freud and Herzl were intrigued by yet reluctant toward one another’s work. One aspired to probe, understand, and heal the individual psyche; the other aimed at the utopian transformation of the collective body, along with the simultaneous regimentation of the individual. While Freud showed dislike for all forms of nationalism and their false myths and promises of salvation, Herzl, hitherto a resolute assimilationist, lost faith in that option and looked for “a permanent shelter for the Jewish people.” Freud worried about the identification of psychoanalysis as a “Jewish science.” In the foreword to the Hebrew edition of *Totem and Taboo*, with which he was very satisfied, Freud wrote, “The reader of this book [in its Hebrew version] will not easily find himself at the emotional standpoint of the author, who is ignorant of the holy tongue and scriptures, who has moved away completely from the religion of his forefathers—as from every other religion—and who cannot share national ideals.”³⁷ The atmosphere in Zionist Palestine (the Yishuv) was in turn rather inhospitable toward the new school of thought and its practices. The Psychoanalytical Society was founded in Palestine in 1933 by Max Eitington, a close disciple of Freud’s, and some of his colleagues from the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute. And although many Jewish psychoanalysts found refuge in Palestine in the 1930s, twenty years later the Psychoanalytical Society still counted only ten members. “The intensive construction which characterizes this place compels us to make our way without prematurely paying attention to our integration in public life,” Eitington wrote to Freud in 1934. “On the whole we have to do here with the same people with similar problems that we dealt with in the past, as religious Jews and Arabs do not count for psychoanalysis.”³⁸ The Zionist “New Man” appeared to be everyman in the eyes of psychoanalysis.

The newly established material-territorial space of Zionism and Hebrew national-modernism, Palestine and/or Israel, has constituted itself as a political and social subject, acting within history and shaping and changing it in the process. For the

first half of the century, or rather until the early 1970s, it was a space of distinct modernity: a place of self-determination, secular rationalism, social experiments, and creative innovation, committed to a vision of justice and equality for all. This revolutionary option of *Tikkun* (mending, or rebuilding) in the life of the Jews was led once again primarily by thinkers, writers, artists, and other cultural agents. The invented Israeli spaces of nation building, social planning, and social engineering in the arts, sciences, architecture, and design, prior to the establishment of the state and well into the second decade of statehood, were mostly imagined, guided, and shaped by European modernism. The city of Tel Aviv, to cite but one example, still reveals one of the densest displays of Bauhaus buildings designed by European Zionist architects in the 1930s and the 1940s. Without belittling the presence and importance of deviationist expressions of nonmodernism or even antimodernism within the Israeli modernist project, one might claim that Western modernism informed and guided the planning, design, and construction of the country, and has been most dominant in giving shape and form to its infrastructures, discourse, print culture, music, and fashion.³⁹

The Jewish catastrophe in World War II and the establishment of the Zionist Jewish state in 1948 impacted the Jewish world and displaced the great drama of the Jews and its principal theaters from Europe to Israel and Northern America. The Jewish question, which in Europe seemed for centuries unsolvable, metamorphosed now into the Israeli or Palestinian question, creating a new and so far unsolved tragedy that has largely—if not entirely—displaced the earlier one. The historical proximity of the Holocaust to the achievement of Jewish political sovereignty, together with the decisive role of the former in establishing and shaping the latter, was to yield a special kind of catastrophic messianism, and a new or new-old myth of destruction and redemption, of powerlessness and empowerment, that was removed from both the historical and the political. The connection of Israeli power and power practices of the Jewish state, especially since the occupation of the Palestinian lands in 1967, with the history of total powerlessness and victimhood of the Holocaust has been dialectical. Memory of the catastrophe would invest local circumstances and the ongoing conflict with alien significance, extracting them from their political and historical dimensions, while the discourse created by the ongoing conflict consolidated and reinforced the role of the Holocaust as the constituent myth of the Zionist-Israeli metanarrative.⁴⁰

As a result, the unprecedented and bold—if imperfect—experiment of existential, political, social, and cultural innovation and creativity that tagged the Zionist endeavor as a modern miracle, claiming Israel as its product and drawing into close alliance principal Jewish communities worldwide, now finds itself gradually shrouded and sinking into a self-made new ghetto, even if a high-tech one, of an old-new Arendtian “worldnessness”—a ghetto defined by fears, isolationism, and devastated public spheres where critical thought, free deliberation, and exchange of ideas are persecuted. This ghetto is also driven by a self-perception of victimhood and politics of unaccounted for violence, where children are being taught, once again, to suspect the world and fear their neighbors. “Slowly slowly children learn to hate,” writes Meir Wieseltier, a leading contemporary Israeli poet: “It takes some time / two-three years at school—to teach a child to hate / a rather simple matter, to be sure.”⁴¹



Modernity — we should, again, better speak of *modernities*, as the term refers to so many and diverse experiences — can be understood, as we have seen, as a border- and contact-zone: as liminal spaces and liminal times, in which rituals of transformation and of renewal and conversion are believed and staged — and this is expressed in a great deal of critique. It is a polyrhythmic sound of different, contradicting voices, a result of its rich diversity.⁴² This in turn implies that modernity, long held to be an eminent overcoming, reinterpretation, and even radicalization of fixed-seeming paradigms, contains within itself that heretical moment we have already mentioned. This does not mean that the moderns lived an existence on the edge of society, although some did indeed so live. But often they were part of a bourgeois culture — whether on the left, right, or center of the political spectrum — and would radically alter this culture itself by creating new disciplines or fields within it. Modernity is therefore characterized, too, by entropy, a tendency to cultural upheavals and challenges. In other words, the pioneering moderns were never able to make themselves immune to illusions; they were partially addicted to them.

Our book therefore pays special attention to those critical spirits who both have recourse to oft-forgotten traditions and simultaneously overthrow the fixed rules and conventional ideals of their times. Many of the “moderns” were often destroyers of paradigms that governed scholarship and thinking in the society of an emancipatory century, as they deemed them incorrect owing to their epistemological inconsistencies, or put them in critical perspective whenever the underlying procedures were insufficiently indebted to inductive principles. Modern critique was therefore directed against evolutionism, the reductionist scheme that regarded history and culture as a linear-progressive development from the “simple” to the “complex.” Others rejected an ideological version of diffusionism, that is, the assertion that culture would always develop gloriously in a monogenetic way, spreading out like a wave from a central point into different regions of a newly discovered world or even — more modestly — into a certain particular culture called Judaism. Instead, methodological skepticism was directed toward all universal standards or attempts at asserting generalized “laws” or deterministic regularity in describing cultural, social, or historical processes that were said to be unavoidable or eternal.⁴³ This placed such liberal thinkers in stark contrast to the kind of early-twentieth-century thinking that Marvin Harris described as “neo-Hegelian racist visions of national souls working their way toward ineffable glories.”⁴⁴

Our book, in the selection of forty-three essays, acknowledges a multiplicity of foci and locations. It includes a fluid and constantly changing topographical dispersion — Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, North America, Latin America, and Israel. This makes clear that *Makers of Jewish Modernity* is also to be understood as characterized by global spaces, conditioned through migrations in historical perspective and the liminal possibilities of communication and of today’s transfers of knowledge. This tri- or multilateralization — which might be understood as the Jewish variant of globalization — has determined the dramatis personae of this book’s editors, authors, and subjects. Its four editors are based in and professionally identified with Switzerland, France, Israel, and the United States. It goes without saying that we have curated the essays that follow for their historical

and empirical accuracy. At the same time, we have arranged the choice of subjects and authors, as well as the “marriages” between subjects and authors, according to the present realities of the trilateralized Jewish world. We hope for coherence in terrains of multiple diversity. Readers will find fresh portraits of canonical European thinkers; unusual selections with vexed relationships to Judaism, whether their own or other people’s; lesser known or even forgotten figures; contemporary figures whose Jewish relevance may outperform their canonical status; and the occasional portrait of a complete antimodernist, and yet at the same time also an idiosyncratic modernist, like Rav Kook. In some cases, thinkers are portrayed by scholars strongly identified with them; in other cases, the association may be profound but previously unarticulated. We have also striven, it is important to note, for gender balance in the rosters of both subjects and contributors.

The thinkers analyzed and the scholars who write share these convictions and thus a working understanding of modernity as an objective and subjective condition, a condition of both world and self in which the knowledge and transformation of either or both remain essential but elusive human necessities. Modernity and Judaism remain in flux, and the thinking here is strong, free, individual, and indeed idiosyncratic in its voices. These are tense readings, living thinking, intimate dialogues between author and subject—with us as close, active ushers or, rather, “matchmakers.” This book is not, to be blunt, a series of encyclopedia entries. We make no claim of exhaustive coverage or of a historical or geographical survey. Our volume is thereby an invitation: Call it alchemy or call it marriage, we have been interested in inspiring a new and unpredictable dynamic between writer and subject, and it will follow that every reader will enter a debate as a third position—as a third thinker and participant in the project.

Notes

1. Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature* (New York, 1972), 403.
2. Albert Memmi, *La Libération du Juif* (Paris, 1966), 35f.
3. On its emergence, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1999).
4. See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York and London, 2013).
5. Franz Kafka, *Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Peter Höfle (Frankfurt, 2008), 1343.
6. This was recognized by Max Wiener, a contemporary of Max Weber; see Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* (Berlin, 1933).
7. Reinhart Kosselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft, Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1979), 109–29.
8. Jürgen Habermas, “Politik und Religion,” in *Politik und Religion: Zur Diagnose der Gegenwart*, eds. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf and Heinrich Meier (Munich, 2013), 298f.; Hermann Levin Goldschmidt, *The Legacy of German Jewry* (New York, 2007), 236–43.
9. See Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover and London, 1995).
10. This also holds, by the way, for modern Islamic hermeneutics, which would definitely be taken into account in an analogy to Judaism and in historically situating the context of Jewish Reform in the nineteenth century.
11. Compare Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Oslo and London, 1996). Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London, 1991).

12. On the rise and fall of the international minority protection system, see Congrès Juif Mondiale, *Protocole du Premier Congrès Juif Mondial, Genève 8–15 août 1936* (Geneva, Paris, and New York, 1936); World Jewish Congress, *Unity in Dispersion: A History of the WJC* (New York, 1948); Caroline Fink, *Defending the Right of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge, 2006); Erwin Viehhaus, *Die Minderheitenverträge und die Entstehung der Minderheitenschutzverträge auf der Pariser Friedenskonferenz 1919* (Cologne and Würzburg, 1960); Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizers of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law (1870–1960)* (Cambridge, 2001); “Genf,” in *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur*, ed. Dan Diner (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2012), 2:411–17.

13. Jacques Derrida, “Abraham, l’autre,” in *Judéités: Questions pour Jacques Derrida*, eds. Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly (Paris, 2003).

14. Compare Daniel Boyarin, *Den Logos zersplittern: Zur Genealogie der Nichtbestimmbarkeit des Textsinns im Midrasch* (Berlin, 2002), 43; Michael Walzer, *In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven and London, 2012).

15. Some thinkers today therefore plead for a “postorthodox” development, which would take its bearings from the fluid epistemes of religious practice in everyday social life.

16. Using masculine and feminine metaphors for “God” is a vehicle to remind followers that gendered descriptions in theology are beyond gender but have been hermeneutically used many times to legitimate and privilege elitist power and prerogatives. Instead, today in modernity, engendering Judaism became an important contribution to progress *inclusive* Jewish ethics and theology. Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (New York, 1990), is the first book of Jewish feminist theology ever written. Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* (Oxford, 2003), is the first full-length feminist theology of the Holocaust. See furthermore Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Boston, 1998).

17. Ludwig Fleck, *Erfahrung und Tatsache: Gesammelte Aufsätze [1927–1960]* (Frankfurt, 1983). Also see Eva Jablonka and Marion J. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions: Genetic, Epigenetic, Behavioral, and Symbolic Variation in the History of Life* (Cambridge, 2005); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge/London, 2000); Veronika Lipphardt, *Biologie der Juden: Jüdische Wissenschaftler über “Rasse” und Vererbung 1900–1935* (Göttingen, 2008); John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven and London, 1994); Caspar Battegay, *Das andere Blut: Gemeinschaft im deutsch-jüdischen Schreiben 1830–1930* (Cologne, 2011).

18. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (1934; Philadelphia and New York, 1981), 180. See David Biale, *Not in Heaven: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought* (Princeton and Oxford, 2011), 176–180.

19. Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (1928; New York, 1962); Boas, “Aryans and Non-Aryans,” in *The American Mercury*, New York, June 1934, 219–23.

20. Kalpana Misra and Melanie Rich, eds., *Jewish Feminism in Israel: Some Contemporary Perspectives* (Hanover, 2003); Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (Hanover, 1993).

21. Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (New York, 2001); Yosef Kaplan, ed., *The Dutch Intersection: The Jews and the Netherlands in Modern History* (Leiden and Boston, 2008); David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven and London, 1995).

22. Jakob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770–1870* (Syracuse, 1973).

23. Peter Haber, *Zwischen Tradition und Wissenschaft: Der ungarische Orientalist Ignác Goldziher, 1850–1921* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2006). This also holds, by the way, for modern Islamic hermeneutics, which would definitely be taken into account in an analogy to Judaism and in historically situating the context of Jewish Reform in the nineteenth century. See Ottfried Fraisse, *Ignác Goldziher’s monotheistische Wissenschaft: Zur Historisierung des Islams* (Göttingen, 2014).

24. David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford and New York, 2011), 562–620.

25. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris, 1946).

26. See Carola Hilfrich, “Lebendige Schrift,” in *Repräsentation und Idolatrie in Moses Mendelssohns Philosophie und Exegese des Judentums* (Munich, 2000), 41; David Sorkin, *Moses Men-*

Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment (London, 1996); Willi Goetschel, *Moses Mendelssohn und das Projekt der Aufklärung*, in *German Review* 7 (1996): 163–75.

27. Paul Valéry, “La Crise de l’Esprit” (1919), in *Oeuvres*, I, (Paris, 1957), 988.

28. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, 1989).

29. Gershom Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem: Jugenderinnerungen* (expanded edition; Frankfurt, 1994); and *Tagebücher, 1913–1917* (Frankfurt, 1995).

30. Gershom Scholem, “Youthful Days with Zalman Rubaschoff” (1963, in Hebrew), quoted in David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1979), 71.

31. Stéphane Mosès, “Judaïsme, modernité normative et modernité critique,” in *Un retour au judaïsme* (Paris, 2008), 63 [translated by editors]. See also Stéphane Mosès, *L’Ange de l’histoire: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem* (Paris, 1992); and Pierre Bouretz, *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism* (Baltimore and New York, 2010).

32. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (London, 1909); William James, *The Philosophy of William James*, ed. Horace M. Kallen (New York, 1925); Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of a Post-Christian Nation* (New York, 1992); Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven and London, 2004).

33. See Ira Robinson, ed., *Canada’s Jews: In Time, Space and Spirit* (Boston, 2013).

34. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York, 1999).

35. Ernest Jones’s letter to Freud, December 7, 1920, quoted in G. Wittenberger and C. Toegel, eds., *Die Rundbriefe des “Geheimen Komitees”* (Tübingen, 1999), 202. See also Eran J. Rolnik, *Freud in Zion: Psychoanalysis and the Making of Modern Jewish Identity* (New York, 2012).

36. David Ohana, “Zarathustra in Jerusalem: Nietzsche and the ‘New Hebrews,’” in *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma*, eds. Robert Wistrich and David Ohana (London, 1995), 38–60. On the New Hebrews, see Doreet LeVitte Harten and Yigal Zalmona, eds., *Die Neuen Hebräer, 100 Jahre Kunst in Israel* (Berlin, 2005). On Berdichevsky in Switzerland, see René Bloch and Jacques Picard, eds., *Wie über Wolken, Jüdische Lebens- und Denkwelten in Stadt und Region Bern* (Zurich, 2014), 201–335.

37. Quoted in: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Intermittent* (New Haven, 1991), 14.

38. See Eran J. Rolnik, *Freud in Zion: Psychoanalysis and the Making of Modern Jewish Identity* (New York, 2012).

39. Assaf Cohen and Johanna Asseraf, eds., *Pax Israeliana: Israeli Modernism Index, 1948–1977* (Tel Aviv, 2014). On Tel Aviv, see Maoz Azaryahu and Ilan Troen, eds., *Tel Aviv: The First Century, Visions, Designs, Actualities* (Bloomington, 2012).

40. See Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge, 2005), 167.

41. Meir Wieseltier, *Motza El Ha’iam* (Exit to the Sea) (Tel Aviv, 1981), 2014 [English translation I. Z.].

42. There also exists a readily cited “classical modernity,” which is adopted for design, architecture, and cultural criticism. Still others understand modernity as a period that can only be described through the fragmenting of traditions, the decay of bourgeois rules, and the convulsion of iron truths, as they were still believed during the Victorian era. In contrast, again others describe a modernity of an uncompromising self-exploration, and an unconditional, if not radical or defiant, investigation of the inner and outer world, or in the belief in an ingenious conspiracy, or in the glorification of “art for art’s sake,” or in the fantasies of techno-enthusiasts, or in the projecting of inner fantasies and stereotypes onto society and politics. Even fascism and Nazism have been referred to as “anti-modern modernity.” See Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy. From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York, 2008), 21–51. For today’s appropriate account, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000).

43. Modernist thought often accepted Darwin’s nonteleological and antimechanistic view of evolution, while strongly rejecting Herbert Spencer’s ideas of “evolutionism” and social “progress.”

44. Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York, 1968), 272. See also Herbert S. Lewis, “Boas, Darwin, and Anthropology,” *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 3 (2001): 381–406; and Bernd Weiler, *Die Ordnung des Fortschritts: Zum Aufstieg und Fall der Fortschrittsidee in der “jungen” Anthropologie* (Bielefeld, 2006), 296–365.