

Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences

in cooperation with

European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism

The Central and Eastern European Network

and

Czech Association for Social Anthropology

Anthropology of Religion, Magic and Supernatural Network

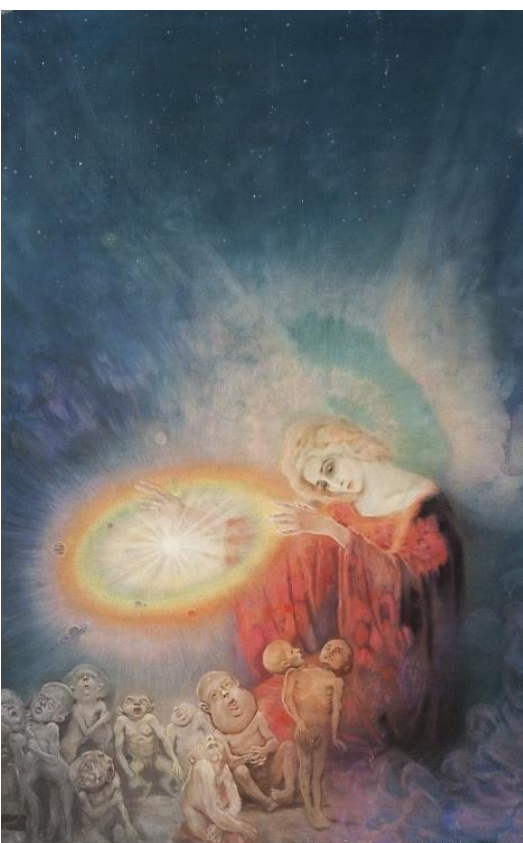
cordially invite you to

## the 4th CEENASWE conference

# OCCULTISM AND POLITICS IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

27 – 29 September 2021

Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00 Praha 6 – Bubeneč



Since the nineteenth century, East-Central Europe has experienced rapid social, political, and economic changes, which caused transformation and transformations in local societies. Rising nationalism culminating in the Revolutionary year 1848, echoes of the Romantic movement, ongoing industrialisation, First World War, the emergence of national states and disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, later followed by the World War Two and establishment of the socialist regimes represent some of the key milestones the region went through. New sciences emerged, and local intellectuals also tried to cope with the impetuses from the discoveries in the Orient. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the rise of occultism and its further spread throughout Europe represented a peculiar reaction to some mentioned milestones. Local states dealt with these occult and esoteric movements differently, from suppression to silent support, and the movements themselves had various ideas about the meaning and aims of nations. At our conference, we wish to investigate the links between the state, power, and occult and esoteric ideas, movements, and key figures more closely in this conference.

CASA

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## Join us

The conference will be streamed via MS Teams – [join us here](#).

Do you wish to attend the conference in person? Please, register [here](#).

In case you cannot join us, no worries. The conference will be recorded and published on the YouTube channel of the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

The conference is organised in accord with the contemporary hygienic restrictions in the Czech Republic.

## Funding

The conference is kindly sponsored by the Czech Academy of Sciences by Strategy AV21 Programme "Europe and the State between civilisation and barbarism" <http://statav21.cz>

## Organizing Team

**Dr Pavel Horák**, Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences

**Dr Karolina Maria Hess**, Centre for the Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University, Krakow

Keynote by Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam), *Esoteric Forms of Nationalism: From the Margins to the Core*

Nationalism, understood both as an ideology and as a variety of concrete political movements, has undoubtedly been one of the major forces influencing the cultural, social and political landscape of Europe in the last two centuries. Several theories have been elaborated by scholars to interpret this phenomenon, which remains one of the most interesting but also complex ones in modern politics. However, despite the growing amount of literature devoted to the subject, not enough attention has been given to the ways in which the history of nationalism has been interlocked with particular aspects of religion, such as alternative spirituality and western esotericism. Not all nationalist authors had esoteric or mystical leanings, but some of them did, and in those cases the relationship between the esoteric beliefs of these authors on the one hand, and their political ideas on the other, calls for analysis and interpretation. In my lecture, I would like to discuss the curious relationship that seems to exist between three different and apparently unrelated phenomena: European nationalism, religious individualisation and Western esotericism. The interpretation of this relationship is based on the examination of a number of case studies, taken from different periods and different countries. These case studies focus on four significant figures of European cultural history: the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), the Italian political activist Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), and the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935). All of them played a significant role in the nationalist discourses of their respective countries, and produced highly sophisticated oeuvres, which, in the case of the three poets at least, were also of extraordinary literary significance. Furthermore, apart from their involvement as intellectuals in the production of nationalist ideology, they were also subjected, especially after their deaths, to a process of iconisation, which turned them into fetishised symbols of national identity. In this lecture I will discuss these different cases and relate them to the interesting triangular connection between nationalism, individualisation and esotericism.

## Programme

### Monday 27 September

19:30 Meeting in an 'old-fashioned' Prague Pub: [Na Slamníku](#), Wolkerova 12, 160 00 Praha 6

### Tuesday 28 September

09:30 A Welcome word, Pavel Horák and Karolina Maria Hess

09:40 *Keynote* Lecture: Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam)

10:40–11:00 Coffee Break

11:00–11:30 György E. Szönyi (Prof. emeritus, University of Szeged / CEU Budapest), *The Vicissitudes of 20th-century Hungarian Adepts from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, through World Wars, Revolutions, Communism to Intellectual Liberation*

11:30–12:00 Rafał T. Prinke (Prof. emeritus, Eugeniusz Piasecki University, Poznań), *Political astrology and nationalisms in 1930s Poland* (ONLINE)

12:30–13:00 Yotam Yzraely (Tel Aviv University), *Questioning the Legitimacy of the State: The Prophetic Politics of Gustav Landauer and Martin Buber* (ONLINE)

12:30 – 14:30 *Lunch break*

14:30–15:00 Pavel Horák (Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences), *How to Magically Edify Nation: The Rise and Fall of Universalia, The Society of Czech Hermetics*

15:00–15:30 Helena Čapková (Ritsumeikan University, College of Global Liberal Arts), Miloš Maixner, *Czechoslovak Nationalism and few comments regarding challenges in research of Czech Hermeticism*

15:30–16:00 Petr Kalač (Documentation Centre of the Czech Hermeticism), *Documentation Centre of the Czech hermeticism: To Preserve a Legacy of the Czech Esoteric Scene*

16:00–16:30 *Coffee Break*

16:30–17:00 Vilém Skopal (University of Pardubice), *On reaching atman or, the inner Divinity. The adoption of Indian material by selected Czech occultists of the 20th century*

17:00–17:30 Alessandro Testa (Charles University, Prague), *The Marriage of High Culture and Lower Culture: Praga Magica from Literary Trope to Cultural Heritage through Popular Myth*

## Wednesday 29 September

09:00 Intro: The Second Conference Day

09:00–09:30 Ivan Souček (Matej Bel University), *Psychotronics and Biotherapy in East-Central Europe: At the Edge of Legitimacy*

09:30–10:00 Julia Gyimesi (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary), *Between Pavlovism and Esotericism. Ferenc Völgyesi and Hypnosis Research in Hungary*

10:00–10:30 Veneta Ivanova (Panteion University of Social & Political Sciences), *Socialism with an Occult Face: Aesthetics, Spirituality, and Utopia in Late Socialist Bulgaria*

10:30–11:00 *Coffee Break*

11:00–11:30 Nemanja Radulović (University of Belgrade), *Esoteric Background of Yugoslavian Messianism* (ONLINE)

11:30–12:00 Jan Ševčík (Masaryk University), *Occultism and Politics in Czech Lands, 1880 - 1951*

12:00–12:15 Karolina Maria Hess (Jagiellonian University), *Remarks on the Notion of Nation in Theosophy and Anthrosophy. Polish Examples*

12:15–12:30 Karolina Maria Hess, Z. Łagosz (Jagiellonian University), *The Apparatus of Oppression against Esotericists in Poland 1944–1989. An Outline of the Research Project*

12:30–14:00 *Lunch Break*

14:00–14:30 Victoria Vitanova-Kerber (Leipzig University), *The People's Republic of Bulgaria's Foreign Cultural Policy of the 1970s – Occult Dimensions of a Socialist Agenda or vice versa?*

14:30–15:00 Miklas-Frankowski (University of Gdańsk), *The Concept of Heresy and an Alternative Model of the Polish Community in Olga Tokarczuk's 'The Books of Jacob'*

15:00–15:30 Nadežda Elezović (University of Rijeka), *Spiritual Art in the Context of Transdisciplinarity and Transnationality* (ONLINE)

15:30–16:00 *Coffee Break*

16:00–16:40 Vladimír Kiseljov (Janáček Academy of Arts, Prague), *Esoteric symbolism in paintings of V. Kiseljov*

17:30–19:00 *Conference Dinner*

## Abstracts (in alphabetical order)

Čapková, Helena (Ritsumeikan University, College of Global Liberal Arts), *Miloš Maixner, Czechoslovak Nationalism and few comments regarding challenges in research of Czech Hermeticism*

Miloš Maixner (1873 - 1937) was a prolific Czech translator and an important occultist who participated in many different groups. He was a member of a Martinist Order, a representative of the Society for Psychical Research, and an associate of the Theosophical Society, and he invested a great deal in translating and publishing key hermetic texts, primarily from French, such as the *Elementary Treatise on Practical Magic*, by Papus (Gérard Encausse, 1865-1916). Further, Maixner became the self-designated voice of the Cosmic Movement in Bohemia, and as the figure responsible for producing the only periodical published outside France devoted to the Cosmic Philosophy of Max Théon/Aia Aziz and his wife Théona, *Kosmické Rozhledy* (Cosmic Views, 1907-1908). Although he was an energetic transnational networker and an active participant in international hermetic study, discourse, and practice, towards the end of his life, he became more and more involved with the anti-Semitic Czech fascist and nationalist movement, and its periodical (both called *Vlajka* [Flag]). This paper will discuss Maixner in the context of the Czechoslovak esoteric network and the nationalist and fascist movement. In the latter part of the talk, some challenges and even obstacles one encounters during research in this field will be examined.

Elezović, Nadežda (University of Rijeka), *Spiritual Art in the Context of Transdisciplinarity and Transnationality*

While during the Cold War the visual languages of American abstract art and the socialist realism signified the opposites of the political ideologies of the Western and Eastern blocs, spiritual art maintained the idea of transnationalism. Primary focus of my presentation is based on a clear articulation of the use of the term spiritual in modern and postmodern art and indicates the transnational context of this art, as it aims to use the term as defined in the early avant-garde. While influence of esotericism on the development of the Modern Abstract Art is derived from self-reflexives Modern Art Theories, spiritual in Modern art is brought into context with the procedures of reduction in the abstract painting and with the procedures of in objectivity. In the context of changes in Art Theory and performing arts practices after the 1960's, the concept of spiritual in art is changing, developing in different directions and diverse and disparate artistic practices. Art practices of Postmodernism and Postavantgarde developed through different art strategies; by appropriating and simulating some of the Eastern and Western religious and mystical traditions are explored within the context of meta-spirituality with special issue of typology of spiritual in postmodern art.

Gyimesi, Julia (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary), *Between Pavlovism and Esotericism. Ferenc Völgyesi and Hypnosis Research in Hungary*

The paper traces the esoteric roots of popular psychology in Hungary by exploring and interpreting the work of Ferenc Völgyesi (1895-1967), a controversial Hungarian hypnotist, physician, psychiatrist and forensic expert. During his long and successful career, Völgyesi published dozens of articles and books, had an exceptionally prosperous private practice, and gained remarkable fame in and beyond Hungary. Not only did his hypnotherapeutic methods receive significant international praise, but so did his research in the field of animal hypnosis and early parapsychology. The paper explores Völgyesi's work and its reception in the context of Western esotericism, drawing on published sources in a range of languages, and the archives

of the Hungarian State Security. Völgyesi was a non-professional agent of the Secret Service of the Hungarian People's Republic, however, it is still not clear to what degree his political involvement was a determining factor in his success. While Völgyesi, on the surface, seemingly built his practice and theory on Pavlov and a materialistic approach towards the human psyche, elsewhere, he constantly expressed his spiritualistic, esoteric worldview. The case study uncovers the cultural, scientific, and esoteric networks from which Völgyesi's theories and practices of hypnosis emerged. It also examines Völgyesi's political involvement and the shortcomings of his theoretical and practical claims.

Hess, Karolina Maria, (Jagellonian University), *Remarks on the Notion of Nation in Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Polish Examples.*

In the paper I will focus on differences in the understanding of nation in Theosophy in the first and second generation of Theosophists, and Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy and its earlier (supposedly Theosophical) form. I will raise some questions about understanding of nationalism, and nation itself, in the discourses of syncretic esoteric circles in Poland at the turn of the 20th century and in the interwar period. The paper will be a basis for a future comparative studies of such circles in the Central and eastern Europe.

Hess, Karolina Maria and Zbigniew Łagosz (Jagellonian University), *The Apparatus of Oppression against Esotericists in Poland 1944–1989. An Outline of the Research Project*

This is a plan of a research project at the Jagiellonian University – we present it as an introduction to our research, and we hope it'll raise interesting questions and maybe to find a similar topics/relevant research in the area of the CEE.

The aim of the project is to analyze the problem of invigilation of esoteric environments by various state organs in the years 1944–1989, that is, when Poland was under the political domination of the USSR. From 1944, posts of the Citizens' Militia and the Security Office were established in Poland, and in 1956 the Security Service (SB) was launched, the activity of which ceased only in 1990. This body, being an organizational unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was officially to ensure external security of the country, however, like the previous organs, it was an apparatus of repression against all manifestations of the opposition. As the research conducted so far on Polish esoteric groups active in the first decades of the 20th century has shown, some esotericists were strongly involved in political and military activities, as well as in the organization of the Polish Underground State. Theosophists were such a group – so much so that involvement in Theosophical structures was sufficient reason to later be accused of illegal activity, and the people who ran the Polish Theosophical Society were arrested and imprisoned in the post-war years. Obviously, not only Theosophy, but also the esoteric milieu in general, became a doubly suspect element for the post-war authorities – not only because of worldview beliefs deviating from materialism, but above all because of its connections with the conspiracy and well-organized opposition activities. The study plan for 36 months is based on eighteen substantive points covering themes from "Super-Freemasonry", spy nets based on esotericists, The Theosophical Society in the development of the apparatus of the Security Service; wands under a magnifying glass: surveillance of dowzers; subtle radio waves, subtle thought waves: communication, psychics and intelligence; esoteric artists with, and against authorities – to single investigations of Anthroposophists, Astrologers, Clairvoyants, and Psychics. Our project will be summarized by the detailed publications about relations of esotericism and politics in Poland in 1945–1989.

Horák, Pavel (Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences), *The Rise and Fall of Universalia, The Society of Czech Hermetics*.

The Czech lands are well-known among Western esotericism scholars, especially for their significant role in the early modern period with regards to alchemy, magic, and astrology. Nevertheless, the relatively more recent esoteric phenomena from the 20th century Czechoslovakia are less known due to the Iron Curtain and language-barriers. The paper introduces the biggest and most important esoteric society "Universalia" in the Czechoslovak and later the Czech Republic. The society emerged during the 1920s, was dissolved by the Nazi regime in 1942, and subsequently revived in the 1990s. The paper focuses on its interwar activities. By embracing various esoteric means, together with the rigorous education of its members, Universalia was undertaking a bold mission to enhance the nature of the Czech nation. Universalia's leadership wanted to edify the Czechoslovak nation and thus contribute to its spiritual resilience in an atmosphere of the upcoming war. The paper explains Universalia's role in the broader socio-historical context of the time, presents its aims, activities, and the most important representatives. The paper focuses on society's nationalist impulses through analysing its educational vision to change the Czech nation's nature by magical means.

Ivanova, Veneta (Panteion University of Social & Political Sciences), *Socialism with an Occult Face: Aesthetics, Spirituality, and Utopia in Late Socialist Bulgaria*

This paper explores the unlikely infusion of state-sponsored spiritualism into the materialist ideology of Bulgarian late communism. In the 1970s, Minister of Culture and daughter of party leader Lyudmila Zhivkova initiated grandiose state programs to inject the "occult" into Bulgaria's national culture, art, science, and even political philosophy. Inspired by her Eastern religious beliefs, she sought to "breed" a nation of "all-round and harmoniously developed individuals," devoted to spiritual self-perfection, who would ultimately "work, live and create according to the laws of beauty." How are we to explain such a paradoxical lapse into state-sponsored spiritualism in a milieu dominated by materialism as a philosophy and way of life? How did Zhivkova's occultism inform and transform Bulgarian late socialism? In pursuit of these questions, the paper opens with Zhivkova's intellectual and political trajectories, especially her spiritual formation, as I see her religiosity as the cornerstone of her cultural theory and praxis. The second part reconstructs Zhivkova's theoretical apparatus, while the third demonstrates how it was translated into a large-scale aesthetic-spiritual utopia, which posited art, culture, aesthetics, and spirituality as a way to revamp the entire communist project. I contend that as utopian as Zhivkova's vision was, her policies contributed to the liberalization of art and culture in a period that has long been associated exclusively with stagnation and decay. In so doing, I demonstrate that impulses to attach "a human face" to the communist project endured even after the Prague Spring of 1968.

Kalač, Petr (Documentation Centre of the Czech Hermeticism), *Documentation Centre of the Czech hermeticism: To Preserve a Legacy of the Czech Esoteric Scene*

Researching the various esoteric activities in the past of the Czech lands was complicated until the end of the 20th century since this specific field of study was not in the scope of interest of professional historians. In 2001, Mr Petr Kalač founded the Documentation Center of Czech Hermeticism (DCCH), which, for 20 years, has been trying to fix this deficit. The long-term intensive activity of the DCCH was able to return the topic of the Czech esoteric reference to academia while also helping to increase the mass media interest in this field. Furthermore, DCCH mapped the broad scene of modern Czech esoteric activities and made it available for comprehensive international research. The results of this work are available on: [www.dcch.grimoar.cz](http://www.dcch.grimoar.cz). Apart from a brief presentation of the most important results of the

Documentation Center of Czech Hermeticism, Mr Petr Kalač will present the most interesting archival pieces of the Czech esoteric scene since 1892, which marks the beginning of the era of modern Czech esoterics, to the present.

Kiseljov, Vladimír (Janáček's Academy of Arts, Prague), *Esoteric symbolism in paintings of V. Kiseljov*.

Vladimír Kiseljov is painter, performer, set designer, director and writer. He will present a projection of paintings with commentary on their spiritual symbolism. Vladimír Kiseljov's expressive paintings aim to convey his synesthetic perception of the world – the author perceives music and all other sensorial perceptions in color, thus connecting all the senses of the viewer with his paintings – colors, philosophical meaning, music, movement, space and time. He uses his own symbolics, rooted in Hermetism, Rosecrucian, Christian, Nordic and Buddhist philosophy. He unites all those types of religions in his own vision of spirituality. He is the author of his own artistic style – Synesthetism. Graduate of Kunstuniversität Graz, SŠUŘ Brno and JAMU Brno. He has realized over 100 solo exhibitions – including the International Biennale of Modern Art in Florence, Prague Quadrennial 2015 (the largest international exhibition of scenography), in Berlin, Vienna, Leipzig, Edinburgh, Copenhagen, Munich, Linz, 3 times in Prague at the Gallery of Critics, in Brno at Wannieck and Richard Adam Gallery, etc. Kiseljov has written and published two books with his paintings and texts – *The Mysteries of Richard Wagner in Paintings* (2013) and *The Mysteries Inscribed in Faces* (2019). He also dedicates himself to the creation of murals (in 2015 he painted the largest mural in the Czech Republic with an area of 600 m<sup>2</sup> in Tišnov, Brno). Other murals of his can be found in Florence, Copenhagen, Edinburgh or Prague. In 2018, he was awarded the "Goldene W" prize for his artistic and scientific endeavour associated with the work of Richard Wagner. In 2018, together with the Macl + Luňáková team, he took part in the international theater festival in Casablanca, Morocco, with a painting performance combined with projections, winning the award for interaction. He carries out unique musical–painting performances together with excellent musicians (Hansjörg Albrecht, Milan Al Ashab, Michael Bártek, Eduard Šístek, Ludmila Pavlová, Petr Kolař, Jaroslav Svěcený, Jan Ryant Dřízal, etc.) His exhibitions are curated by Mgr. Vlasta Čiháková Noshiro Ph.D., Aleš Seifert, Alena Ochepovsky Bartková, Jiří Tichý and others. Among the admirers of his work stands out the noble lady Meda Mládková from the Kampa Museum. [www.vladimirkiseljov.com](http://www.vladimirkiseljov.com)

Miklas-Frankowski, Jan (University of Gdańsk), *The concept of heresy and an alternative model of the Polish community in Olga Tokarczuk's 'The Books of Jacob'*

My paper will be an attempt at representing the literal vision of the interreligious and social transgression of Frank's heresy in Olga Tokarczuk's 'The Books of Jacob'. Therefore I will try to analyse her book as a project of an alternative model of the Polish community as well as an alternative model of Polish history and the Polish collective memory. Alfred Whitehead said that religion is the deepest sort of loyalty to the world. For Tokarczuk it is also the deepest sort of contestation. Each heresy represents an idea of change to the world. Deconstruction of an existing faith leads immediately to new ideas for life and society. It leads to a contest of the old concepts and their replacement with the new ones. The appearance of heresy is always revolutionary and terrifying. According to Tokarczuk a change of the perception of the religious order is at the same time a challenge against all human order. The heresy undermines the obviousness of current law, and leads to a rebellion. Jacob Frank started his mission in Smyrna from a discussion about the dark side of God. The thought of God's imperfection or absence or disinterest in the Creation changes the view of the world and of the other people. It also changes the accountability for disciples' actions. For Tokarczuk it is the most fascinating factor



in the story of Jacob Frank. The mystic experience – the descent of the Holy Spirit (Ruach ha-Kodesh) on the group of people in a religious trans becomes the foundation of a great rebellion with its transgressive structures and institutions.

Prinke, Rafał T. (Eugeniusz Piasecki University, Poznań, Poland) *Political astrology and nationalisms in 1930s Poland*

Modern astrological revival reached Poland relatively late. After a few rather unsuccessful attempts, it was only in 1927 that serious astrology took hold with the first handbook (published in Toruń) and the first volume of the astrological calendar (published in Bydgoszcz), which was afterwards published annually until the outbreak of World War II. Every volume contained numerous articles, among which the editor and publisher of the calendar, Franciszek Augustyn Prengel (1899-1945), inserted his own political predictions and horoscopes of major politicians. The co-author and publisher of the handbook was Alfred Ulkan, who was a close friend and disciple of the well-known German astrologer Ernst Tiede (born in Kaniczki, East Prussia), became Prengel's greatest rival and eventually enemy. Tiede was an Ariosophist and National Socialist who seems to have influenced Ulkan with his views through regular contributions to "Przegląd Astrologiczny" [Astrological Review] published in Toruń. The situation became even more tense as the war was approaching. Prengel published fierce attacks on Ulkan in his monthly "Niebo Gwiazdziste" [The Starry Sky], including nationalist arguments and calling him "a German". Ulkan replied in his periodical questioning Prengel's sincerity and astrological abilities. Shortly before the war Jan Starża-Dzierzbicki, an astrologer from Warsaw, criticised Prengel in a popular daily for his political predictions, which -- according to Dzierzbicki, himself a mundane astrologer -- had rarely proved correct. Prengel sued him for libel but the war did not allow the court to settle the matter. Possibly for their anti-German astrological publications, Dzierzbicki was killed by Germans at the beginning of the war, while Prengel was sent to Dachau, where he died in April 1945. It is sadly ironic that the last issue of "Niebo Gwiazdziste" for September 1939 contained an article by Zygmunt Koehler, Prengel's main collaborator, entitled "The War Among Astrologers".

Radulović, Nemanja (University of Belgrade), *Esoteric Background of Yugoslavian Messianism*

In interwar Serbian culture an intellectual movement emerged, called differently by its propagators- panhumanism, neo-Messianism, Indo-Slavic humanism, new humanism - but it could also be described as Yugoslavian messianism. The main argument is that Slavs (especially South Slavs of the new state formed in 1918) have a special world mission, to make synthesis of West (Europe) and East (India at first place) giving thus birth to new humanity, unification of all nations in peace but also obtaining harmony with the entire creation, cosmos, nature, leading to expectations of cosmic and ontological changes. While partially understandable at the background of older Slavic messianism, this movement had some original aspects, including bringing in the esoteric elements. The key figure in that sense is London-based esotericist Dimitrije Mitrović, who was a kind of movement's guru. There is strong influence of Theosophy on Mitrović's, and subsequently panhumanists' macrohistory but even more interesting is that they formed a kind of closed circle dedicated to esoteric practices (exercises) following instructions given by Mitrović- a fact so far unmentioned in research. We will present the circle's inner, esoteric side, as based on archive material and will endeavour to see the relation between the authors' esoteric practice and their public vision of national identity.

Skopal, Vilém (University of Pardubice), *On Reaching Atman or, the Inner Divinity. The Adoption of Indian Material by Selected Czech Occultists of the 20th Century*

The paper focuses on the question how Czech occultists of the 20th century understood Indian term atman. The answer shall contribute to the understanding of how material from Indian thought systems has been adopted by Western authors. There is a consensus among occultists that atman is the Divine substance in humans. Therefore, the following question is: What is the divinity within humans? This topic was partially inquired by Milan Fujda (2010, in Czech). He shows that the conception of substantial identity of Divinity and humans in occultism is to be understood as the reaction to a particular movement within secularism described by P. Berger as the radical transcendence of God. The Protestant demand on evangelical simplicity removed multiple ways of how the sacred might enter the world while, at the same time, kept the Divine grace as the only mean. When also Divine grace lacks its credibility as a way how sacred enters the world, the process of secularism is finalised. Fujda shows that occultists opposed this process by formulating the conception where Divinity is not radically other but is within every human being. Therefore, the conception stems from intra-Christian discussion on a relationship between God and humans. Nevertheless, despite this observation Fujda applies a problematic assumption regarding the adoption of Indian material when he claims that Czech occultists used this material to oppose secularism. In other words, the interchangeability of Christian and Indian conceptions is presupposed by Fujda. As shall be shown in the paper, this presupposition is rather problematic because it distorts Indian conceptions in a peculiar way.

Ševčík, Jan (Masaryk University), *Occultism and Politics in Czech Lands, 1880 - 1951*

The paper will present the author's research on the history of Czech Occultism in the years 1880 - 1951. As such, it will analyze interactions between the Occult movement and contemporary political groups. The paper will discuss the contacts between Occultists, Freemasons and politicians close to T. G. Masaryk and E. Beneš. It will also mention the Brno-based Ariosophists. Occultism as a worldview motivating a political activity will be illustrated by the life and work of Jan Kefer. Further, the paper will address the pro-Democratic and state-building influence of the Universalia society on the Czech Occult movement in the late 1930s. Contacts between Czech occultists and the local Fascist movement will be exemplified on the examples of Pravoslav Lexa, Otakar Čapek and Felix Cámara. The analysis will continue with the life of Arvéd Smíchovský and the question of collaboration between the Czech Occultists and the Nazi or Communist regime. Finally, the paper will describe the trials of the 1950's - particularly those with the so-called Green International - in which the Psyché society was involuntarily included.

Souček, Ivan (Matej Bel University), *Psychotronics and Biotherapy in East-Central Europe: At the Edge of Legitimacy*

While considering esoteric movements in East-Central Europe it is important to mention evolution of the psychotronics discipline that was intended to be the successor to parapsychology, understood as being the field involving research into the energetic and informational possibilities of the psychic aspects of living organisms. Biotherapy, as a medical branch of psychotronics, represents a specific form of healing, based on the manipulation of energy fields of the human body, in order to reconfigure the inner energetic structure and cure various kinds of diseases. During the socialist period, every kind of folk healing method became the target of a propaganda campaign, drawing attention to the superstitious and anti-scientific character of such techniques. By focusing on development strategies of the psychotronics movement and attitudes of various state bodies towards representatives of the movement in the former Czechoslovakia, the article analyses larger contexts of efforts to legitimize

paranormal phenomena based upon a constructed dichotomy between rational and irrational, sacred and secular, religious and scientific.

Szönyi, György E. (Prof. emeritus, University of Szeged / CEU Budapest), *The Vicissitudes of 20th-century Hungarian Adepts from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, through World Wars, Revolutions, Communism to Intellectual Liberation*

My paper initiates a new, longer-term investigation with which I plan to engage during the coming few years. My main research-focus in relation to Western Esotericism has mostly been the early modern period and I have only occasionally touched upon esoteric phenomena in the cultural history of modern Hungary. Another interest of mine – esoteric themes in modern fiction – has led me to the project aiming to map occult and esoteric currents and the story of their most important representatives in 20th-century Hungary. Their works and testimonies encompass the genesis of modern esotericism in Hungary but their careers also demonstrate the catastrophic watershed caused by Fascism and the second world war, only to be continued during the communist era. My present paper will focus on three such outstanding searcher for a holistic enlightenment: Ervin Baktay (1890-1963), Béla Hamvas (1897-1968), Mária Szepes (1908-2007). All three of them developed their philosophy after WW1, all of them were influenced by Theosophy and Indian mysticism, all three of them were scholars of various fields of the humanities at the same time were writers of "belle lettres," poetry as well as fiction. After WW2 all three were looked at with suspicion and became silenced, however they also found ways of expressing themselves and gather disciples in various interesting ways. The presentation will be based on their own published writings, while the Hungarian cultural contexts will be sketched up by the help of the contemporary mass media, daily and weekly papers and more intellectual periodicals. In a later phase of my project, I will turn to archival materials, their remaining manuscripts and correspondence, too.

Testa, Alessandro (Charles University, Prague), *The Marriage of High Culture and Lower Culture: Praga Magica from Literary Trope to Cultural Heritage through Popular Myth*

In the cultural history of the Czech lands, the late Romantic period, which saw an impulse towards literary production in both Czech and German, is the age in which the idea of "Magical Prague" if not originated, most definitely consolidated, within the national borders as well as abroad. Ever since, this characterisation has been a well-established and suggestive trope in European high culture, contributing to the symbolic construction of the imagery of Prague as one of the European capitals of esotericism, alchemy, and magic. This trope has been simultaneously feeding on and producing literature, music, and the fine arts for almost two centuries now. Seemingly dormant in the long years of the Normalizace, but well alive abroad, as proven by the publication of Ripellino's renowned book in 1973, the myth of Praga Magica re-emerged strongly during post-socialist times, when the Capital underwent several waves of economic, infrastructural, political, and social changes – also in order to intercept and exploit a growing touristic demand, and to follow the flow of a sustained Europeanisation and internationalisation. In the present, the reconfiguring and also "re-enchantment" of Praga Magica is connected with its touristification, commodification, and heritagisation, among other processes, and also to the popularisation of its charm, which has ceased to be confined in the ivory tower of high culture and has instead become a mass phenomenon. It is in this cultural circulation and interplay that much of Prague's magical aura is experienced by today's wizards as well as traded in today's global markets.

Vitanova-Kerber, Victoria (Leipzig University), *The People's Republic of Bulgaria's Foreign Cultural Policy of the 1970s – Occult Dimensions of a Socialist Agenda or vice versa?*

Socialism aimed for a utopian atheist society, where religion was supposed to become needless and therefore to disappear. Despite the strong anti-religious campaign in 1950s' and 1960s' socialist Bulgaria, religion did not vanish but remained in the periphery of public and private life. That applied not only to traditional orthodox Christendom but also to different theosophical groups and ideas, which became influential in the policy of the cultural minister of the 1970s Lyudmila Zhivkova. Her large scaled international cultural projects like the International Children's Assembly "Banner of Peace" not only aimed at increasing the country's diplomatic prestige but also at popularizing Zhivkova's esoteric conception of the "New Man", based on Nicholas Roerich's Agni Yoga. Deconstructing the popular narrative of a "spiritual vacuum" in socialism, followed by a "religious boom" in the 1990s, I will argue that esotericism not only survived socialism but even thrived in it and – at least temporarily – influenced socialist Bulgaria's approach to foreign relationships.

Yzraeli, Yotam (Tel Aviv University), *Questioning the Legitimacy of the State: The Prophetic Politics of Gustav Landauer and Martin Buber*

With the rise of the modern nation state, Jewish thinkers working within the Central European theological-political discussion wrestled with fundamental questions concerning secularized politics. Unlike the eschatological approach of the more "traditional" theologians, these critics were employing an anarchistic prophetic stance. Although engaged in theology, the representatives of this outlook were not orthodox. They were secular humanistic liberal thinkers with a romantic esoteric and even mystical disposition. They sensed what they perceived as unnoticed overtones concerning the political-theological predicament which liberal philosophy had mistakenly thought was resolved by the separation of church and state, and pursued non-dogmatic solutions, neither orthodox nor secular. Two prominent thinkers of this type were Gustav Landauer and Martin Buber. In their pursuit of a spiritual socialist political model, that which Buber would later label "Utopian Socialism", they were focusing their questions on issues beyond the operative separation of religion from the public sphere. They were questioning whether it was even possible to speak of a secular politics as such, and doubted the very possibility of a secular organization, i.e. the modern liberal nation state, as the organizing principle of the political. Their aim was to underlie the metaphysical logic of human (i.e. not divine) authority, and to trace the origins from which the human derives its understanding of justice. Employing a radical prophetic rhetoric, they searched for encompassing formulas of true political and spiritual liberation. Their exoteric sentiment predisposed them to search for unorthodox theological horizons by which they could legitimize and contextualize the political. Landauer turned to the mystical teachings of Meister Eckhart, while Buber turned to East-European Hassidism and Biblical mythos which consolidated in his Theopolitics. In this paper I argue that this theological aspect of their work is in fact the determining component which renders their politics prophetic.

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