

## Abulafianism Among the Counterculture Kabbalists

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s a group of Jewish poets in California became enthusiastic about the mystical texts of Abraham Abulafia, a medieval Kabbalist. His teachings inspired their poetry to such an extent that one might speak of “Abulafianism.”<sup>1</sup> This Abulafianism had its roots in the Beat Generation and the 1960s counterculture. It fundamentally affected the poets David Meltzer, Jack Hirschman and Jerome Rothenberg.<sup>2</sup> However, their interest in Hebrew letter mysticism was not singular. Other poets, such as Jackson Mac Low, Hannah Weiner, Stuart Perkoff and the artists Wallace Berman and Bruria Finkel shared their fascination with certain aspects of Kabbalah. Altogether, Abulafianism marks a shift in American-Jewish poetry, which in the earlier postwar period had hardly ever dealt with religious or mystical issues.

Meltzer, Hirschman and Rothenberg were friends, who shared a background in the Jewish neighborhoods of New York (Bronx and Brooklyn) before they eventually moved to California. As they all came from secular families their sudden interest in Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah – actually, a kind of counterculture Kabbalism – deserves attention.<sup>3</sup> It stemmed primarily from the milieu of hippie culture, of course, where non-institutionalized religion began to be thought of as spirituality, and became pivotal. But there were other influences as well. These included the appearance, at the

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<sup>1</sup> R. B. Gitenstein, *Apocalyptic Messianism and Contemporary Jewish-American Poetry* (Albany: State U of New York, 1986) 133.

<sup>2</sup> Rothenberg moved to San Diego in 1976, but he had been corresponding with Meltzer since the early 1970s. Rothenberg, e-mail to the author, 29 May 1999.

<sup>3</sup> However, Hirschman recalls that since his childhood he had been impressed by the form of the Hebrew letters. See J. Hirschman, “On the Hebrew Letters,” *Tree 2* (Summer 1971): 34–45. Rothenberg was sent to Yiddish school, although his parents were “confirmed non-believers.” Out of a “deep affection” for his pious grandmother he had his *bar mitzvah*. Rothenberg, e-mail to the author, 29 May 1999. Meltzer was *bar mitzvahed* as well, but had to relearn biblical Hebrew when he became interested in Kabbalah. Meltzer, e-mail to the author, 15 June 1999.

same time, of a countercultural Judaism, and a new interest in mysticism among a few Jewish academics. Abulafianism fit in well with all these trends and existed side by side with them.

During the 1960s, countercultural Judaism was striving for a spiritual and progressive reform of American Judaism.<sup>4</sup> In California the charismatic singer Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and the former Lubavitcher Rabbi Zalman Schachter gathered a group of hippie followers in congregations, such as the “House of Love and Prayer” (founded in 1966) or the Aquarian Minyan in San Francisco. Although the poets under discussion here were not clearly affiliated with any of these groups, they likewise rejected both the routinized religion and the cultural assimilation of the older generation. In search for a valid Jewish spirituality, Meltzer, Hirschman and Rothenberg set out to construct a Jewish “counter-tradition” favoring the marginal, if not downright heretical streams of Judaism. Their notions of religion incorporate aspects of magic, shamanism, yoga and other esoteric trends of the day. Rothenberg speaks of the search for a suppressed tradition that goes

from the interdicted shamans (= witches, sorcerers, etc., in the English Bible) to the prophets & apocalyptists (later “seers” who denied their sources in their shaman predecessors) & from there to the merkaba & kabbala mystics, on the right hand, & the gnostic heretics & nihilists messiahs, on the left.<sup>5</sup>

Abulafianism is part of such a reconstruction. What renders it an expressly Jewish phenomenon is its use of Hebrew, which introduces a new feature into American-Jewish poetry whose only precedents are found in the visual arts. Already in the 1950s, Wallace Berman, a Californian painter and friend of the kabbalistic poets, produced collage works integrating large Hebrew characters.<sup>6</sup> He chose *Aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, as his personal symbol and employed it frequently in his art (see figs. 1 and 2). Yet Berman himself was not a “conscious

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<sup>4</sup> See “Countercultural Judaism,” CD-ROM: *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, ed. D. L. Eck (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> J. Rothenberg, “Pre-Face,” *A Big Jewish Book: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present*, ed. J. Rothenberg with H. Lenowitz and C. Doria (New York: Anchor Press, 1978) xxxiv.

<sup>6</sup> See R. C. Smith on Berman in his chapter “Utopia and the Private Realm: Wallace Berman on Career, Family, and Community,” *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995) 212–268. For catalogues of Berman’s work, see *Wallace Berman: Retrospective: October 24 to November 26, 1978* (Los Angeles: Fellows of Contemporary Art, 1978); and *Wallace Berman: Support the Revolution*, ed. E. Lipschuetz-Villa (Amsterdam: Institute of Contemporary Art Amsterdam, 1992).

Kabbalist.”<sup>7</sup> Rather, he and the Beat poet Stuart Perkoff “shared a love for the occult, the arcane.”<sup>8</sup> Perkoff, for example, wrote a beautiful series of poems on the Hebrew alphabet, which pays special attention to the shape and sound of the letters.<sup>9</sup> However, in the context of Abulafianism such a general interest in Hebrew letter mysticism would take on very specific forms.<sup>10</sup>

Abulafia’s esoteric texts and visionary accounts had been suppressed for centuries. They had survived only as a secret tradition until the 1960s. During that decade, the principles of ecstatic Kabbalah revealed in his writings became known to the mentioned group of poets along with other mystical Jewish works. The *Sefer Yezirah* (Book of Formation), an early example of hermetic Hebrew letter mysticism, was translated from French into English by Jack Hirschman.<sup>11</sup> Gershom Scholem, had already completed his groundbreaking work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, in 1941 and knowledge of it was slowly spreading beyond the narrow academic community. Scholem’s book contained a whole chapter on Abulafia and his theories of the prophetic Kabbalah, including several substantial quotations translated from the original Hebrew sources.<sup>12</sup> This book had a momentous impact when poet Robert Duncan first brought it to the attention of David Meltzer and his friends in the early 1960s. Meltzer gives a personal account of the euphoria that accompanied the rediscover of these texts:

We became transformed into bent, mythic, old-time kabbalists. Rolls of revelations and commentary poured out of our caves like Niagara. Most of it was done by letters, yet every so often we’d visit each other and spent night into day turning reality into a midrashic web, a mystic companion shadowing us and our works, overseeing our energies with tolerance. Haunted by time – this time, that time – nagged and inspired by phantoms

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<sup>7</sup> Meltzer, e-mail to the author, 31 July 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> S. Z. Perkoff, *Alphabet*, cover by Wallace Berman (Los Angeles: Red Hill Press, 1973). For a reprint of these poems, see S. Z. Perkoff, *Voices of the Lady: Collected Poems*, ed. and introd. G. T. Perkoff, preface by R. Creeley (Orono, Maine: The National Poetry Foundation, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> For more information about Perkoff and Berman, see D. B. Griffiths, *Beach and Temple: Outsider Poets and Artists of Western America, 1953–1995* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Around 1959 Hirschman began to study the *Sefer Yezirah*, while translating it from the French into English. This is mentioned in an unpublished manuscript by J. Hirschman, *Kabbalah Cyrillicism and the Northern Collective: A May Cadreport 1977–1978*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> G. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: Based on the Hilda Strook Lectures Delivered at the Jewish Institute of Religion, New York*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken, 1946) 136–137, 147–155.

and golems and gilgulim, Jack [Hirschman] embodies the drama of creation. Through speech we often emerged beyond language only to face the black doors of the Hebrew alphabet whose ink we filled new visions with.<sup>13</sup>

### *Abulafia's Teachings*

Abraham Ben Samuel Abulafia, a thirteenth-century Jewish mystic, developed a theory Scholem called prophetic or ecstatic Kabbalah. It was employed to induce ecstatic and visionary states. In order to attain trances, during which the mystic receives visual or aural revelations, various techniques were employed.<sup>14</sup> These techniques are based on Abulafia's philosophical and psychological assumptions. He holds, for instance, that our five senses, through which we perceive the natural forms of the world, prevent us from beholding other, divine dimensions. The divine world is hidden from us because our consciousness is blocked by the natural images filling our minds. To use Abulafia's metaphors, "seals" are imprinted on our consciousness and blind us to other dimensions; "knots" entangle our minds. In order to achieve freedom from such entanglements, Abulafia employs a meditative technique. His method involves the contemplation of abstract objects – the Hebrew letters.

According to Abulafia, the Hebrew characters consist of pure and abstract forms that lack reference to the mundane world. Hence he employed the Hebrew alphabet for his "science of the combination of letters" (*hokhmah ha-tseruf*). One technique, "skipping and jumping" (*dillug* and *kefiza*), involved the associative transposition of Hebrew letters according to certain rules. This method seeks to bring about an expansion of consciousness. If adapted to art, the letters may set off associations, not unlike automatic writing. The poet Jack Hirschman, who had earlier been influenced by French Surrealism, provides us with a contemporary example: "As Leah, Lilith, Lily, London, Lynn, Love, & etc –

<sup>13</sup> D. Meltzer, *Six* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow P, 1976) 137.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed description, see the studies by G. Scholem, A. Kaplan and M. Idel, the current world authority on Abulafia. See, for instance, M. Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrines*, diss., Hebrew U, 1976 [Hebrew]. However, the results of Idel's research were not yet available in English at the time of Abulafianism. For studies in English, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends* (1946), 119–155; M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. J. Chipman (New York: State U of New York P, 1988); M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (New York: State U of New York P, 1988); M. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. M. Kallus (New York: State U of New York P, 1989); A. Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1982). Short summaries and translations from the sources may be found in D. R. Blumenthal, "The Abulafian Transformation," in *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader*, vol. 2: The Philosophic-Mystical Tradition and The Hasidic Tradition (New York: Ktav, 1978) 37–79.

simple associations, I know, but we do not understand how rapidly these memories or links appear when the inspiration is a hieroglyph.”<sup>15</sup>

Another ecstatic technique concerns specific ways of transmuting the letters of the names of God. According to certain combinatory rules, the consonants and vowels of the Hebrew names of God are transposed. For instance, the consonants of the name *Adonai*, 'DNY (אָדֹנָי), are split up into pairs of two consonants each, which are then alternately combined with the five Hebrew primary vowels. The last two consonants (N and Y) in the name *Adonai* would then generate the following sounds: NOYO, NOYA, NOYEI, NOYI, NOYOO etc. (נֵי נֵי נֵי נֵי נֵי).<sup>16</sup> Words are broken down into letters and then recombined in such a way that their semantic function is destroyed. Carrying no verbal meaning, they become pure sound. That is why Abulafia draws parallels between the permutation of letters and music. Abstraction is supposed to lead to spiritualization; the pronunciation of non-semantic words divests the mind of any meaning. This emptying of consciousness then prepares the mystic to receive visions from God.

Once Meltzer, Hirschman and Rothenberg were introduced to Abulafia, they arranged to translate some of the original texts. Apparently the close friendship between Meltzer and Hirschman and their intense correspondence were the catalyst for this project. Bruria Finkel, an Israeli-born American artist, prepared the literal translations from the manuscripts. She continued to be preoccupied with the work of Abulafia long after the other poets had gone on to something else. With discipline and devotion she translated four more books by the mystic.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, her subsequent art was inspired by the study of Abulafia's texts (see fig. 3a):

Through the translation/study process she became more and more preoccupied with the symbology of the circle/wheel/mandala. Thus from this immersion in mystical language came the structure and format for her current installation of bronze sculpture and paintings on paper, *The Divine Chariot*.<sup>18</sup>

However, only the early collaborative translations were published in David Meltzer's Kabbalistic journal *Tree*<sup>19</sup> – after Hirschman had put Finkel's versions into verse. The intention of these publications was to make

<sup>15</sup> J. Hirschman, “On the Hebrew Letters,” *Tree 2* (Summer 1971): 38.

<sup>16</sup> Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, vol. 2, 59–64.

<sup>17</sup> B. Finkel, e-mail to the author, 26 January 2001.

<sup>18</sup> M. Wortz, *Bruria* (n. p.: Bruria, 1985) n. pag. For further illustrations, see the exhibition catalogue, *Bruria: An Homage to Abraham Abulafia*, Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum, June 3 – August 18, 1985 (n. p.: n. p., 1985).

<sup>19</sup> This bi-annual journal (1970–1978) was edited and published by Meltzer. Each volume was dedicated to a theme of Jewish mysticism.

Abulafia's writings available to an interested English-speaking readership. By juxtaposing Abulafian texts with contemporary poetry Meltzer hoped to create an American-Jewish version of the Kabbalah. His goal was "to bring back or restore, most surely to continue" the "English-American Kabbalah received via translation into language complexly reduced from Kabbalah's primary source: Hebrew."<sup>20</sup> In fact, it seems that the publication of visionary texts by Abulafia had a domino effect. The ensuing "Abulafia craze" culminated in two further anthologies by Meltzer with Jewish mystical texts, *The Secret Garden* and *The Path of the Names*,<sup>21</sup> various translations by Harris Lenowitz and Jerome Rothenberg from the original manuscripts for the anthology *A Big Jewish Book*,<sup>22</sup> and a great number of poems alluding to the ecstatic Kabbalah.

Of particular relevance was the translation of passages from Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Ot (The Book of the Letter)*.<sup>23</sup> This text represents Abulafia's only surviving prophetic work.<sup>24</sup> It was published in Hebrew in the last century by the Austrian scholar Adolph Jellinek, but only became available to a modern readership through Hirschman's translation. In the *Sefer ha-Ot* Abulafia records his ecstatic visions. This text is characterized by an extremely complex poetic structure, which partly accounts for its appeal to contemporary poets.<sup>25</sup> Thus, translating Abulafia's writings would become a poetic challenge.

One of the main difficulties of such a translation project lies in representing the formal particularities of Abulafia's Hebrew poems. For ex-

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<sup>20</sup> Meltzer, *Six*, 139.

<sup>21</sup> D. Meltzer, ed. *The Secret Garden: An Anthology of Texts from the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (New York: Seabury P, 1975); D. Meltzer, ed. *The Path of the Names: Writings by Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia*, trans. and adapt. B. Finkel, J. Hirschman, D. Meltzer and G. Scholem, Tree Texts 4 (Berkeley: Tree Books, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> Rothenberg's anthology, *A Big Jewish Book*, contains several pieces by Abulafia. On this see "Abraham Abulafia: How He Went as Messiah in the Name of Angel Raziel to Confront the Pope," 305–306; "Abraham Abulafia: *From The Book of the Letter*," 383; "Abraham Abulafia: *From Life of the World to Come: The Permutations*," 390–391; Abraham Abulafia: "*From Life of the World to Come: Circles*," 400–406. A shortened version of the anthology was reprinted in *Exiled in the Word: Poems & Other Visions of the Jews from Tribal Times to Present*, ed. J. Rothenberg and H. Lenowitz (Washington: Copper Canyon P, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> "From: The Book of The Letter: Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia," [Tree 1 \(Winter 1970\): 139–148](#); and "From: The Book of The Letter: Abulafia," [Tree 1 \(Winter 1970\): 152–153](#).

<sup>24</sup> Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Professor Idel, in conversation with the author (Jan. 1999), emphasized the poetic complexity of Abulafia's writings.

ample, part IV of the original text is characterized by a pattern that requires three or four words in every line.<sup>26</sup> However, rather than keeping the column-like pattern of the original in his translation, Hirschman imbues the text with his own style by spreading the lines like cadences. This can be seen in the following quotation in which Abulafia refers to himself by the name Zechariah or Raziel<sup>27</sup> and hints at his vocation as a prophet:

And Adonai said to  
Zechariahu the Messenger,  
Raise your voice  
with the tongue

of your pen<sup>28</sup>

Hirschman's "stepped" lines are a device that adds emphasis to the passages he believes to be especially significant. Moreover, it "loosens up" the columns of the text. Other sections, which in Jellinek's edition appear in bold letters, appear in capital letters in Hirschman's translation. Frequently these parts allude to Abulafia's biography, such as his trip to Rome, which may have been somehow related to certain messianic ideas that Abulafia held. As Scholem elaborates:

In the year 1280, inspired by his mission, he undertook a most venturesome and unexplained task: He went to Rome to present himself before the Pope and to confer with him 'in the name of Jewry.' It seems that at that time he nursed Messianic ideas.<sup>29</sup>

However, when Abulafia arrived in Rome, he learned that Pope Nicholas III had just died. The Franciscans then imprisoned Abulafia for twenty-eight days. After his release he traveled through Italy.<sup>30</sup> Here is an excerpt from Hirschman's translation:

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<sup>26</sup> Becoming aware of such patterning, Hirschman, in fact, adapted this device to his own poetry. For instance, the poems "Testament" and "The Golden Fork" are written in columns which only contain four words per line. See J. Hirschman, *Black Alephs: Poems 1960–1968* (London: Trigram P, 1969) 128, 130.

<sup>27</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 127.

<sup>28</sup> "From: The Book of The Letter ...," *Tree* 1: 145. The quoted passage is also reprinted by Rothenberg in *Big Jewish Book*, 383.

<sup>29</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 128.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

AND BEHOLD THE  
 MESSENGER WAS  
 CALLED BUT HE  
 DID NOT COME  
 FOR THE 12  
 STOPPED ENTRY  
 AND YDVD  
 ARRANGED WITH  
 THOSE WISE IN  
 WAR TO DEFEAT  
 HIS ENEMIES  
 TOTALLY BEFORE  
 THE ADVENT OF  
 HIS REVELATION<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the exact circumstances of the mystic's visit to Rome were, the trip certainly was significant for Abulafia's self-image. Hence it is not unreasonable to employ capitalization to emphasize such autobiographical sections in the translation of his writings. However, it seems that Hirschman got this idea from scrutinizing Jellinek's edition rather than the original manuscript, for only Jellinek's printed edition reproduces these respective passages in bold Hebrew letters. Hirschman transposes this device, turning the bold letters into capitals in English; the manuscript itself has no such marks.<sup>32</sup>

Such creative misunderstanding is indicative of the entire enterprise of Abulafianism, revealing what could be an unbridgeable gap between the contemporary American-Jewish poet and the mystical medieval text. Nevertheless, one can try to overcome this historical and cultural distance. The use of anachronisms seems to serve this purpose. For example, Hirschman renders the word "magic" as "magick."<sup>33</sup> This corresponds to its usual spelling in occult literature. At the same time it implies the translator's contemporary interpretation of the medieval Hebrew term. Clearly, Hirschman's enterprise is poetic; he does not lay claim to an academic and literal rendering of the text. Rather, these versions are composed in the *spirit* of Abulafia, a spirit that, for the counterculture Kabbalists, seems to resonate with surrealism and letterism and other trends in poetry. As Rothenberg suggests:

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<sup>31</sup> "From: The Book of The Letter ...," [Tree 1: 145](#).

<sup>32</sup> Professor Idel confirmed this observation in a conversation with the author (Jan. 1999).

<sup>33</sup> See "From: The Book of The Letter ...," [Tree 1: 147](#).



[Abulafia's] practice of a systemic & concrete poetry also closely resembles the 20<sup>th</sup>-century lettrism of Isidore Isou, the asymmetries & nuclei of Jackson Mac Low, & the blues kabbala improvisations of Jack Hirschman, all of whom he may have influenced.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the countercultural objective is not a striving for academic accuracy. Rather the goal is to incite Abulafian ecstasy and to revive visionary power in contemporary culture. Here is a passage from Hirschman's translation which will give the reader some idea of the visionary and poetic power of Abulafia's writings as it was transformed by contemporary poets. The opaqueness of his poetry becomes apparent as well:

And I heard the great difference  
 between my soul and my spirit  
 and rejoiced the great joy in Him, knowing  
 my soul lives with her color's  
 red reflection like the ink,  
 and the war in the heart between the blood  
 and the ink was very great  
 and the blood was from the air  
 and the ink from the earth  
 and the ink triumphed over the blood  
 and the sabbath came over all  
     the days of the week  
 and my heart rested  
 and I gave praise with my mouth  
     to the Name of YDVD  
 and thanks with my heart to YDVD  
     forever!<sup>35</sup>

### *The Fascination with Abraham Abulafia*

Why were the counterculture Kabbalists so strongly attracted to the figure and work of Abulafia? Besides the poetical quality of his work, his appeal arises from two general tendencies: a certain distance from orthodoxy, and a bohemian lifestyle. In the 1960s, alienation from institutionalized Judaism was a widespread phenomenon among American Jews, particularly among the younger generation, to whom it was "devoid of meaning and authentic religious experience."<sup>36</sup> This has par-

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<sup>34</sup> Rothenberg, *Big Jewish Book*, 406. Hirschman elaborates some of his ideas on the connection between Surrealism, Kabbalah and politics in his booklet *KS [Kabbala Surrealism: An Essay]* (Venice: Beyond Baroque Foundation, 1973).

<sup>35</sup> "From: The Book of The Letter (Sefer ha-Ot): Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia," trans. J. Hirschman, *Tree 1*: 153.

<sup>36</sup> "Spirituality," *On Common Ground* (CD-ROM).

allels in Abulafia's distance from the Jewish authorities of his own time.<sup>37</sup> His prophetic writings are potentially heretical, because they emphasize individual visionary experience over the established Jewish tradition. Realizing this, the rabbis put Abulafia under a ban, considering him a heretic. He was even accused of claiming messianic status.<sup>38</sup> The Abulafian tradition was repressed and his handbooks on the attainment of ecstasy were not printed; Idel speaks of "[t]he refusal of Kabbalists and printers to publish Abulafia's literary works."<sup>39</sup> Altogether, rabbinic and kabbalistic authorities had "ambivalent attitudes towards Abulafia in different periods."<sup>40</sup>

Given this background, it is not surprising that such a marginalized character inspired poets who were rebelling against the political, religious, academic and artistic establishment. It is indicative that the poem "Abulafia's Circles"<sup>41</sup> portrays the mystic as mad messiah, shaman and poet and puts him in a line with other Jewish heretics and subversive poets (see fig. 4). In an imaginary conversation, Meltzer humorously addresses the mystic as "Abulafia, you skunk" and "Abulafia, you punk."<sup>42</sup> The same poem contains many references to the Kabbalist and his writings. Abulafia's kabbalistic world could be taken to represent some kind of oppositional mystical culture—a counterculture. His esoteric theory was just right to provide a suitable jargon for an allusive and esoteric discourse among a group of friends. (By the mid-seventies Hirschman had moved towards an equally idiosyncratic type of Marxism that he claims was motivated by his study of Kabbalah.<sup>43</sup> At that

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<sup>37</sup> A. Berger, "The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia: A Tentative Evaluation," *Essays On Jewish Life and Thought: Presented in Honor of Salo Wittmayer Baron*, ed. et al. J. L. Blau (New York: Columbia UP, 1959) 59.

<sup>38</sup> Berger, "Messianic Self-Consciousness," 55–61; Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 140–141.

<sup>39</sup> "Only a very small proportion of his total oeuvre has been printed, and even this small number has had the misfortune to have been printed with many mistakes. It follows from this that in almost every case one needs to refer to the manuscripts [...]" Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 2. It should be noted that Idel's detailed research on Abulafia's teachings and his impact on the development of Kabbalah was not available at the time of counterculture Kabbalism (in the later 60s/early 70s). Despite the mystic's excommunication, Idel argues that Abulafia attained "a position in the foremost ranks of Jewish mystics." Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> J. Rothenberg, *Abulafia's Circles* (Milwaukee: Membrane P, 1979). Republished in J. Rothenberg, *Vienna Blood & Other Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1980) 69–90.

<sup>42</sup> D. Meltzer, "Abulafia," *Yesod* (London: Trigram, 1969) 23.

<sup>43</sup> Hirschman, letter to the author, 30 March 2000.

time his new interest in Cyrillic replaced his earlier fascination with the mystical quality of the Hebrew letters.<sup>44</sup>)

Furthermore, several elements in Abulafia's teachings suited the bohemian lifestyle of the counterculture Kabbalists. They saw an affinity between Abulafia's beliefs and their own issues and found ways to combine them. The following poem, for example, brings together the antiwar movement, occultism, Yiddish studies, Kabbalah, drugs, public revolt, Zen-Buddhism, the Beat movement, homosexuality, existentialism, suicide and the Abulafian meditation:

[...]  
 Pacific Venice last wave from Viet  
 yiddishist returned to the kabbala  
 John has fled in rosicrucian glory  
 peyotl public gong relations aflute  
 Wallace makes violent static messages  
 where are all the bohemians gone?  
 Allen first gut a guru of the fall  
 out to innocent streetboy terror and  
 nightly chants of syllables abulafian  
 my promise to suicided Jack Epstein  
 [...]<sup>45</sup>

Another source of affinity lay in the lack of extreme asceticism in the Abulafian method. This is unusual as "radical asceticism is a widely used method for attaining ecstatic states."<sup>46</sup> Because it assumes that the inner struggle takes place between the imagination and the intellect, and not between the body and the soul, Abulafia's Kabbalah does not require physical denial. Similarly, Hirschman, Meltzer and Rothenberg nurture a kind of mysticism that includes the sexual experience, interpreted in terms of the *unio mystica*.<sup>47</sup> This notion is especially relevant to Meltzer's writing on Abulafia, where he frequently joins letter mysticism and sexual intercourse. In the poem below, for example, sexual ecstasy is compared to the mystical occurrence of speech and light visions – Abulafia blended with "Jehovic tantric stirrings."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> For examples of the esoteric use of Cyrillic, see J. Hirschman, *Lyrripol*, Pocket Poets Series 34 (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Hirschman, "Eluardian Elohehu for Allen Ginsberg," *Black Alephs*, 123.

<sup>46</sup> Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 143. Idel further comments on this phenomenon in his subchapter, "The Absence of Asceticism." Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 143–144.

<sup>47</sup> "The term 'union' (Hebrew: *ihud*) is parallel to the Latin *unio*, being used to refer to that state in which the human soul or its intellect cleaves to an external object, making the two of them into one." Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 124.

<sup>48</sup> D. Meltzer, *Isla Vista Notes: Fragmentary Apocalyptic Didactic Contradictions* (Santa Barbara: Christopher Books, 1970) n. pag.

[...]

God crowns spine's tree,  
 unwinds vertebral knots.  
 Light spreads thru flesh I  
 carry to our bed,  
 your loins spread  
 to accept the alphabet  
 I stutter into your womb.<sup>49</sup>

The inducement of trances through letter permutation must have appealed to poets who had their roots in surrealism (Rothenberg, Hirschman) and the Beat culture (Hirschman, Meltzer) and who likewise were set on the exploration of new states of mind through drugs, meditation and shamanism. Moreover, there are remarkable parallels between Abulafian meditation and Yoga regarding breathing instructions.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the 1970s a contemporary made the following observation:

All across the United States, as well as in Western Europe and Israel, people in groups, or studying alone, have begun to search the Torah as well as the mystical texts for insights into meditation, breathing, chanting and even yoga-style exercise. "Abraham Abolafia, a medieval Spanish Kabbalist, did yoga," a chiropractor tells me excitedly.<sup>51</sup>

This statement resonates with the adoption of Far Eastern practices among some Westerners beginning in the 1960s and continuing to the present day. The fascination with different states of mind also fueled the preoccupation with "madness." What the "madman" and the vatic poet aspiring to prophecy share is scientifically labeled an "hallucinatory" experience; it can also be caused by drugs. Hence Meltzer and Hirschman often speak of the mystical experience in terms of drug-related imagery, such as cracks or blasts.<sup>52</sup> The image of the mirror also occurs in the visionary account of Abulafia's disciples.<sup>53</sup> But whereas the medieval text does not mention the breaking of the mirror, the contemporary adaptation of this image describes a traumatic rather than an ecstatic

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<sup>49</sup> D. Meltzer, "Letters & Numbers," *Knots* (Bolinas: Tree Books, 1971) n. pag.

<sup>50</sup> Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 249.

<sup>51</sup> C. Ascher, "The Return of Jewish Mysticism: Try It, You'll Like It," *Present Tense* 17.3 (Spring 1980): 37.

<sup>52</sup> In conversation, D. Becker suggested to me that "cracks" and "blasts" are drug-related motifs.

<sup>53</sup> "And if sufficient strength remains to force oneself even further and draw it out still farther, then that which is within will manifest itself without, and through the power of sheer imagination will take on the form of a polished mirror." Quoted in Scholem, *Major Trends*, 155.

experience (the fracture is also indicated by the visual splitting of each line):

Dive into the mirror – O My God  
 my head – head of my tribe  
 cracked in half – at last  
 split apart – twinkly splinters  
 face glass-shat – smashed  
 rainbow glaze – good [...]⁵⁴

*Abulafia's Prophetic Kabbalah as Source and Model*

The considerable knowledge of Abulafia's life and work that was acquired by Meltzer, Hirschman and Rothenberg affected their poetry in many ways. Most obvious are the great many allusions to Abulafia's biography and writings. These references may vary from straightforward quotation to covert hint. But whereas Rothenberg and Meltzer often offer some background information in commentaries or annotations, Hirschman employs Abulafian terminology without considering the uninitiated reader. The following poem, for example, has many words unknown to the non-Hebrew speaker; they sound beautiful and mystifying, but also test the reader's patience:

by mivta by  
 miktav by mahshav  
 for nothing ever is lost  
 by mahshav by miktav by mivta  
 everything upheld  
 every smell of deep  
 earth as a child  
 every white mittyblouse

every street  
 seen by mivta pain  
 tasted by miktav every  
 knee laceration youth incarnation apt  
 arm pit old smells crying  
 done dead or aborted  
 by mahshav  
 upheld<sup>55</sup>

Reading Scholem offers the solution to the "riddle" in this poem. He explains that Abulafian letter permutation must proceed in a certain order: the pronunciation (*mivta*) of the transmuted words is followed

<sup>54</sup> Meltzer, "Abulafia," 22.

<sup>55</sup> Hirschman, "Hymn," *Black Alephs*, 40–41.

by the act of writing them down (*miktav*); finally, they are merely imagined intellectually (*mahshav*).<sup>56</sup>

Hirschman's reluctance to provide the reader with these clues is in accordance with the esoteric code of Abulafianism. First and foremost, the counterculture Kabbalists are writing for themselves and for other contemporary Abulafian disciples and members of the Kabbalistic in-group. Francis Landy's review of Hirschman's book *Black Alephs* severely attacks this hermetic jargon. Landy contended that the fusion of Kabbalah and contemporary poetry fails, because it lacks the necessary traditional context. He writes:

[...] – these are all products of a failure of language, however sincere and dedicated is the author's search for a new one. The Kabbalah may make an alternative language for the alternative society, but it is one that is peculiarly difficult, virtually impossible to adopt today. Jack Hirschman can never be a Kabbalist; he can dabble in it, he can exploit it for images – but always as a stranger. His voice is still that of an American Jewish poet, with no secret language to help him.<sup>57</sup>

This remark touches on the more general question concerning the validity of mysticism without orthodox praxis. An early attempt to deal with this issue in a Jewish context can be found in Herbert Weiner's popular book *9½ Mystics*.<sup>58</sup> The author argues that the contemporary impulse to go beyond the narrow confines of the individual self represents a vital human need and therefore should be acknowledged by the religious establishment. He compares the longing for mystical experiences to the need for spice. According to this analogy the Torah is the meat, the ecstatic experience the salt. Nowadays, many souls need a "strong" diet, i. e., a lot of salt: "In short, it is time to increase the proportion of salt to meat. [...] This generation does have a problem. It needs stronger medicines in order to be 'turned on.'"<sup>59</sup> Besides, I would argue that despite the acknowledged lack of an affiliation with traditional Judaism, the appropriation of the ecstatic Kabbalah and its adaptation to contemporary needs produces some exciting texts. Whether the discipleship of the countercultural poets is ultimately of a religious or artistic kind is difficult to establish and varies from poet to poet.

Rothenberg, for instance, has his own particular way of relating to tradition. He commonly "over-writes" his sources and thus transforms

<sup>56</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 135.

<sup>57</sup> F. Landis, "Review of *Black Alephs*," *Turtle* 2 (Autumn 1971): 65–66.

<sup>58</sup> See Herbert Weiner, *9½ Mystics: The Kabbala Today* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

medieval texts into contemporary poems. One of Rothenberg's texts is based on an Abulafian manual. Its instructions concern the preparations that should precede the performance of letter permutations. Abulafia recommended that the mystic adept:

adorn his house with nice decorations, the most important that he has, and with kinds of spices which have a nice fragrance. He also should have shrubs and fresh grass in the house. These are very good because, having secluded himself, his vegetative soul, which is connected with his vital soul, shall find pleasure in all these things. He should then advance to playing music [...] and [...] he should make music with his mouth and voice, [chanting] psalms of song and of the desire for the Torah, in order to give pleasure to the vital soul [...]. Then, at that time and afterwards, sit and take ink, pen and paper in your hand and start to permute letters, quickly and in great passion [...], because all this is necessary in order to separate the soul, to cleanse it from all the forms and material things which previously were part of it [...].<sup>60</sup>

In his palimpsest (over-writing of another text), Rothenberg assimilates this passage to his own poetics and interprets it in terms of current avant-garde activities, happenings and events that were popular in the 1960s. (Note that in the modern poem "desire for the Torah" becomes "The Book of Law," a subtle indication of contemporary antinomianism):

#### WORD EVENT

He sits in a house whose walls are decorated with fresh vegetables, praying & singing psalms, & reading from *The Book of Law*.

Then he begins to move the letters that he sees, until they make new words & sounds.

Quickly he jumps from word to word, letting the words form thoughts in any order.

Finally he drops the words out of his mind: word by word until he thinks of nothing.

Freed from thought, the consonants dance around him in quick motion. Forming a mirror in which he sees his face.<sup>61</sup>

At least two readings of this poem are possible. If one knows Abulafia's teachings, one can imagine that the text describes a mystic who transmutes letters until he reaches a trance. Otherwise, one might infer that the poem's protagonist is an experimental poet who shifts around words and letters in the process of composition or in the performance of sound-poetry. By creating texts with such double meanings, Rothenberg

<sup>60</sup> Al-Botini quoted in Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, vol. 2, 72–73.

<sup>61</sup> J. Rothenberg, *Poland/1931* (New York: New Directions, 1974) 73.

subtly turns the mystic practitioner into a poet. Thus, the mystic *is* a poet and the poet *is* a mystic.

The avant-garde poet Jackson Mac Low actually composes poems by employing “non-intentional methods,” i. e., permutations and chance operations. From 1967 onwards he performed “word events” precisely like those outlined in the above poem. Mac Low first read Scholem in the early 1950s and was especially impressed by the exposition of the teachings of Isaac Luria and Abraham Abulafia.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, his own poetic experiments utilized some of the techniques described by Scholem. Mac Low elaborates:

In 1961 I also began producing ‘Word Events’: performances in which speaker-vocalists freely improvise without scores with the sounds of the letters in a particular word, phrase or name. They not only say or sing the separated letter sounds but also regroup them into words (mostly other than those in the original ‘seed’), of which they also may make phrases and sentences.<sup>63</sup>

The score for such a word event is a poem by Mac Low:

A WORD EVENT FOR GEORGE BRECHT

A man utters any word, preferably one without expletive connotations. He then proceeds to analyze it, 1st, into its successive phonemes; 2nd, into a series of phonemes representable by its successive individual letters, whether or not this series coincides with the 1st series.

After repeating each of these series alternately a few times, he begins to permute the members of each series.

After uttering various permutations of each series alternately several times, he utters phonemes from both series in random order, uttering them singly, combing them into syllables, repeating them &/or prolonging them *ad libitum*.

He ends the event by pronouncing one of these phonemes very carefully.<sup>64</sup>

Here again, there are intriguing parallels with the Abulafian technique. According to ecstatic manuals the Abulafian meditation climaxes when the adept, in a trance, is allowed to pronounce the name of God. At this

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<sup>62</sup> “J. Mac Low: Interviewed by Kevin Bezner,” *New American Writing* 11 (Summer/Fall 1993): 109.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>64</sup> J. Mac Low, *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books, 1986) 134.



point the mystic may ask of God whatever he or she wishes.<sup>65</sup> It is therefore significant that Mac Low ends his description of the event with the pronunciation of an unknown sound rather than a divine name. In the sense that such a “permutation poem” approaches the effect of music, it demonstrates the connection between Abulafian meditations and music.<sup>66</sup> Hence Rothenberg relates Abulafia’s practice to

the mystical poetry of our own time  
 on loops of tape  
 white noise that contains  
 all colors  
 [...]<sup>67</sup>

### *Letter Visions*

What all these texts share is a peculiar Abulafian imagery – knots, seals, black ink, white flames, blood, mirrors – metaphors and symbols drawn from the sources. Yet at the heart of this stock of images are the black shapes of the Hebrew letters and their appearance in a mystical vision. Abulafia and his disciples report such abstract letter visions as a result of their ecstatic technique and take them as the mark of mystical enlightenment. In the writings of the counterculture Kabbalists, the Hebrew letters acquire a personal and spiritual meaning. Hirschman asserts: “I associate them [the letters] with the inmost meaning of my life, the visible bridges between past and present, as well as prophetic events of the future.”<sup>68</sup> Just like the medieval mystic, Hirschman employs the ecstatic Kabbalah in order to gain letter visions, but his revelations come in the form of poetry:

He sees them  
     small, a roachcrawl  
                     over the body of a Daleth  
 holy as a big old psalm<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, the avant-garde poet Hannah Weiner claimed to be able to see letters on her forehead and in the air (see fig. 5). In *The Clairvoyant Journal* she transposes her visions of English words into writing by using different kinds of script. Capital letters, italics and normal typography are employed to convey the different voices that Weiner sees/hears in her vision. Here is a short excerpt from Weiner’s book:

<sup>65</sup> Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, vol. 2, 77.

<sup>66</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 133–134.

<sup>67</sup> Rothenberg, “Abulafia’s Circles,” *Vienna Blood*, 77.

<sup>68</sup> Hirschman, “On the Hebrew Letters,” *Tree 2*: 38.

<sup>69</sup> Hirschman, “The Letters,” *Black Alephs*, 34.

[...] MEET [sic] OUT OF THE FREEZER in pink letters about 18 inches off the floor *negative red letters* it's not HIGH ENOUGH Neither are the *negative* words about 10 inches off the bedroom floor The words in the living room are eye level higher I can't stand it TABLECLOTH 45 degrees the bedroom must be the least BEAUTIFUL *honest room enough* COUNT 1 2 3 COUNTING says forehead [...].<sup>70</sup>

Weiner has suffered from schizophrenia since the early 1970s, but nevertheless was able to transform hallucinatory experience into experimental writing. It is thought-provoking that Rothenberg views her poetry as the contemporary embodiment of the ecstatic Kabbalah: "the words are/ circles/ Abulafia & Hannah Weiner."<sup>71</sup> He comments:

Weiner's journals – contemporary – arise from an experience of word-visualizations reminiscent of those of the traditional poet-mystics: 'I see words on my forehead... [...].' With this the reader can compare, e. g., the appearance of the Hebrew letters [...] as 'great mountains,' or the oral manifestations to the Kabbalist Joseph Caro (1488–1575) of a *maggid* (heavenly messenger) [...]. The lack of a similar context for Weiner's experience, etc., is a condition of our time – on which no further comment.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the lack of religious framework in which these words and letters can be embedded, the Hebrew characters are employed to create powerful artistic effects. That is why the counterculture Kabbalists depict the visual quality of the Hebrew letters on book-covers, title pages, in collages, photographs and drawings (see fig. 6). Abulafianism favors the letters of the Tetragrammaton – *Yod, He, Vav* – as well as the letter *Aleph* which, according to Abulafia, plays a major role in the permutations of the names of God (see fig. 7). The collage by Hirschman entitled "THE REVOLUTLOINS"<sup>73</sup> is an example of this (see fig. 8). It shows five circles with spokes so that they look like suns or wheels. These circles consist of Hebrew letters and are reminiscent of Abulafia's circles published in *A Big Jewish Book* (see fig. 9).<sup>74</sup> Abulafia and his disciples employed such mandala-like devices composed out of letters for the achievement of intense concentration. Rothenberg explains:

Abulafia's poetry of permutations [...] here takes the form of nearly 200 circles, consisting of a discourse on meditation, a set of instructions for specific permutations, & the permutations of the letters themselves. [...] In

<sup>70</sup> Hannah Weiner, "Mar 7 SIGNAL," *Clairvoyant Journal, 1974: March – June Retreat* (New York: Angel Hair Books, 1978) n. pag.

<sup>71</sup> Rothenberg, "Abulafia's Circles," *Vienna Blood*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Rothenberg, *Big Jewish Book*, 410.

<sup>73</sup> J. Hirschman, *Cantillations* (Santa Barbara: Capra P, 1974) 33.

<sup>74</sup> Rothenberg, "Abraham Abulafia: From Life of the World to Come: Circles," *Big Jewish Book*, 400–406.

this way the disciple is led into the circle, must follow their message as an act of concentration.<sup>75</sup>

Circles also occur in Abulafia's mystic records, where he describes visions of circles and revolving wheels ("REVOLUTLOINS") and other geometrical forms. In the collage the circles are linked to other forms: dark torsos with their arms spread to the left and to the right; the circles constitute the heads and arms of these bodies. On the right-hand side is a large black-colored wig evoking the sexual appeal of a long-haired woman ("REVOLUTLOINS"). The other black shapes in the collage represent the "bodies" of the letters. Similarly, the Abulafian adept is reported to have visions of Hebrew letters standing around him as if they were human beings.<sup>76</sup> Rothenberg turns this powerful image into a scene of ecstatic dance:

[...] circles  
 everywhere  
 the bodies mass around the flame  
 begin the round dance  
 & explode  
 red alephs  
 yellow yods  
 blue hum of ayins  
 [...]<sup>77</sup>

The acts of shuffling around letters in meditation, or dancing to the music of drums as practiced by shamans, both equally initiate trances. Indeed, Abulafia's method reflects "those types of approaches which Mircea Eliade, the scholar of comparative religions, would designate as 'shamanistic.'"<sup>78</sup> It is precisely this role of the visionary shaman and healer that Rothenberg attributes to Abulafia. Just as the shamanistic initiate undergoes an imaginary stage of physical dismemberment, the Hebrew words are torn apart and atomized into single letters.

### *Further Permutations*

Although Abulafia focuses primarily on the permutation of Hebrew, he also allows the use of other languages for letter transposition.<sup>79</sup> There is therefore no reason why Abulafia's technique should not be practiced in English. Transmutation can take different forms: permutation of the

<sup>75</sup> Rothenberg, *Big Jewish Book*, 405–406.

<sup>76</sup> Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 31.

<sup>77</sup> Rothenberg, *Vienna Blood*, 77.

<sup>78</sup> Idel, *Mystical Experience*, 17.

<sup>79</sup> Idel, *Torah, Language and Hermeneutics*, 22.

names of God, permutation of biblical verses and permutation as free association with the effect of “loosening” the mind. Meltzer employs some of these methods in his poem “David’s Song.” Presumably, the speaker is King David, the sensuous king, adulterer and predecessor of the Messiah, but also David Meltzer, the poet permuting the letters of his own name. DVD stands for the Hebrew consonants of that name. Abulafia’s technique can lead to the *unio mystica*. Meltzer provocatively elaborates this concept in English, so that the mystic actually becomes one with God:

[...]  
 My name is the sound of God’s sperm  
 God’s seed in the name of your flesh  
 In the blood roaring through your veins  
 In the cells of micro-lunar infinity  
 God’s seed pumped into earth  
 Pumped into the full moon  
 A giant luminant sperm wheel  
 God speaks seed  
 DVD  
 VDV  
 DVD<sup>80</sup>

One could argue, on the one hand, that this passage trivializes the mystical experience or that it is downright blasphemous. On the other hand, Meltzer must be given credit for attempting to translate the ecstatic Kabbalah into the language and experience of the counterculture. The poem continues with a series of associative transpositions of the name David:

DVD	[David]
JAH	[acronym for Jack Hirschman; allusion to name of God]
YOD	[Hebrew letter]
VAU	[Hebrew letter]
VEH	[second consonant permuted; nonsense word]
KEH	[first consonant permuted; nonsense word]
KAW	[second consonant permuted; Hebrew letter]
MEM	[Hebrew letter]
NUN	[Hebrew letter]
OHM	[mantra]
TAU	[Hebrew letter; reference to “tao”] <sup>81</sup>

This list sums up many important features of countercultural Abulafianism. It suggests a strong subjectivity grounding itself in an inspirational

<sup>80</sup> D. Meltzer, *Luna* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow P, 1970) 62.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

or mystical experience. For our Abulafian poets, the “mystical” includes intense sexual or poetic moments. These can be initiated by permutations of various kinds or by other ecstatic techniques. It explains the allusion to OHM, which functions as a mantra in Far Eastern meditation practice, while TAU alludes to Taoism. Abulafia’s teachings, then, are interpreted in terms of countercultural spirituality. Abulafianism in its entirety therefore represents a Jewish manifestation of the revived esoteric interest originating in the 1960s youth culture.

### *Conclusion*

Despite its marginality, Abulafia’s teachings and methods have fertilized American-Jewish poetry. Through Abulafianism the Hebrew language acquired (for a while) a special status among a certain group of American-Jewish poets. For them Abulafia’s writings became an object of mystical and magical study. This had an impact on the imagery of their own poetry, while their avant-garde experiments were underscored by Abulafia’s permutation technique.

The examination of their writing reveals that each poet gives a slightly different focus to the material. Meltzer seems to be interested in the subversive and spiritual possibilities of Abulafia’s teachings and in transferring these to the present; his poems draw parallels between Abulafian ecstasy, tantric spirituality and pornography. Hirschman’s fascination is with the most esoteric and occult aspects of kabbalah; his own poems are equally hermetic. Since Hirschman studied oriental calligraphy as a young man, the visual character of the Hebrew letters appeals to him especially. Both, Hirschman and Meltzer, are engrossed with the parallels between mystical and drug-induced states of mind, while Rothenberg interprets Abulafian meditation practices against the background of shamanism. He goes furthest in exploring the similarities between kabbalistic teachings and contemporary poetics. In doing so, he employs a wide range of poetic devices.

Retrospectively, the new awareness of the Hebrew language and Kabbalah constituted a new type of American-Jewish poetry – Kabbalistic poetry. It draws on marginal and mystical Jewish traditions; Abulafianism is one of its early instances. The poetry of the counterculture Kabbalists played an important part in developing a new kind of Jewish (literary) identity. Reading, translating and editing Abulafian texts provided a major incentive for this project.

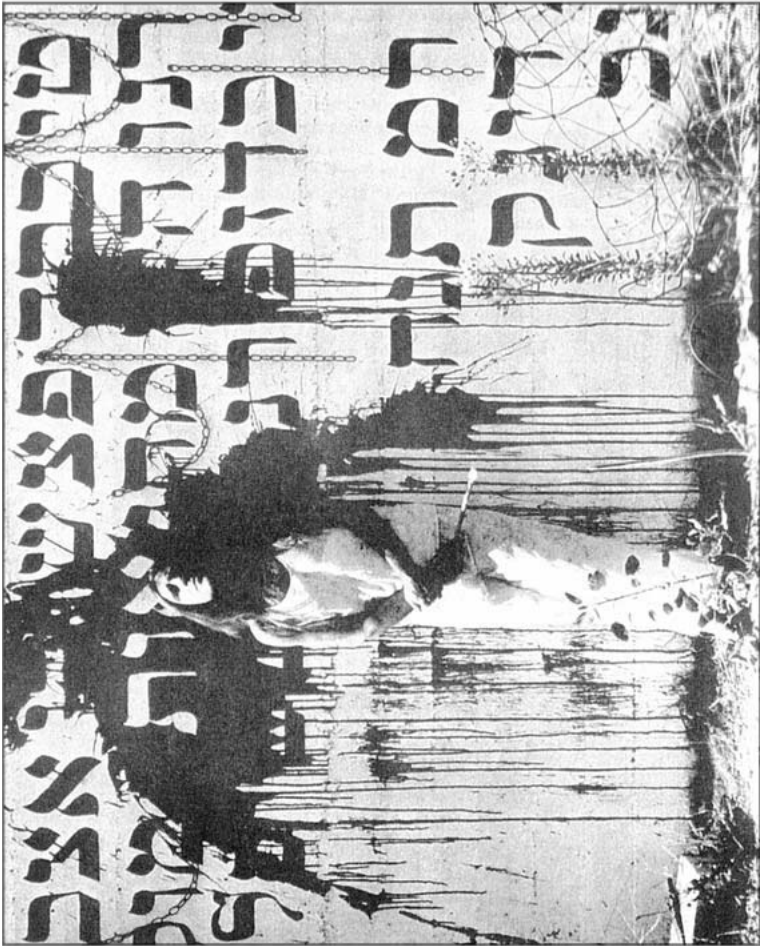


Fig. 1: *Photographic work by Berman*  
*Reprinted, by permission from David Meltzer, from Tree 5*  
*(Summer 1975): 210.*

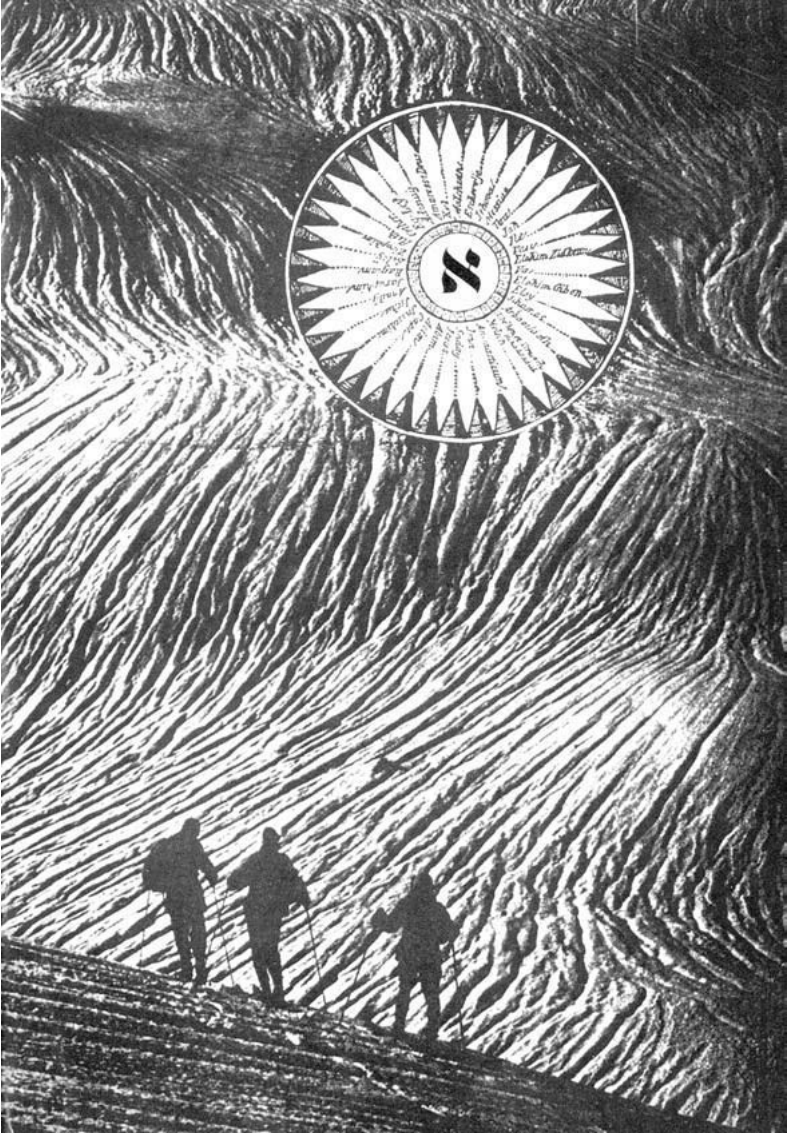


Fig. 2: Artwork by Berman for Perkoff's book  
Reprinted, by permission from Tosh Berman, from *Alphabet*.

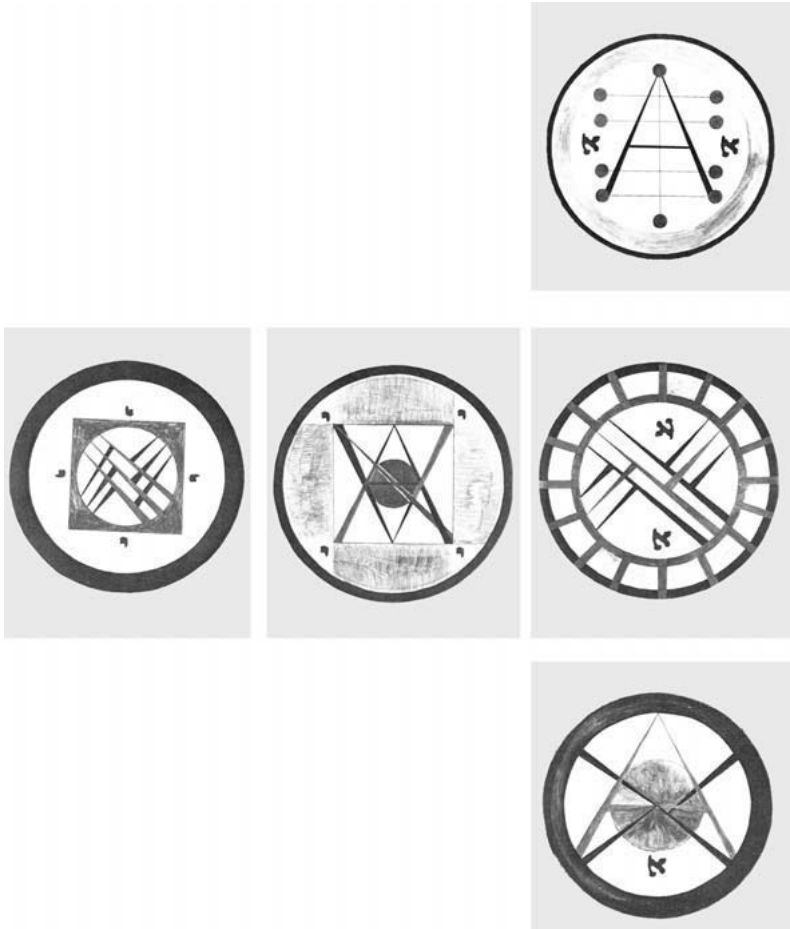


Fig. 3a: “Permutations on the Letters Alef + A” by Finkel  
Reprinted, by permission from Bruria Finkel, from Bruria [catalogue].



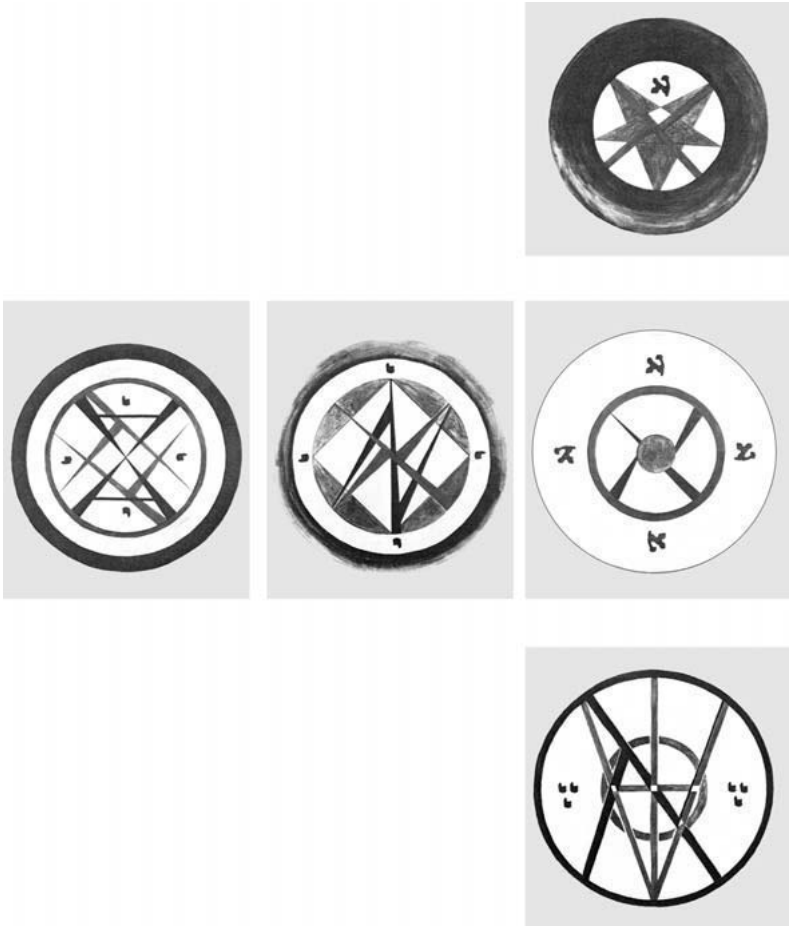


Fig. 3b: “Permutations on the Letters Alef + A” by Finkel  
 Reprinted, by permission from Bruria Finkel, from Bruria [catalogue].

ABULAFIA'S CIRCLES  
JEROME ROTHENBERG

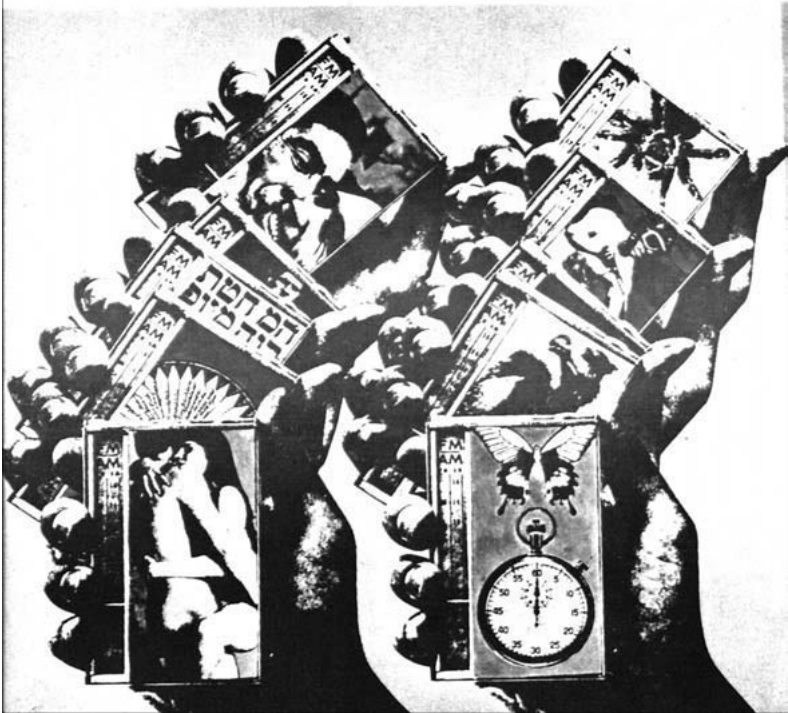


Fig. 4: *Verifax collage by Berman: Bookcover of Abulafia's Circles Reprinted, by permission from Tosh Berman, from Abulafia's Circles.*



Fig. 5: *Bookcover for Clairvoyant Journal*

*Reprinted, by permission from Tom Ahern, from Clairvoyant Journal*

# KNOTS



DAVID  
MELTZER

Fig. 6: *Bookcover for Knots by Meltzer*

*Reprinted, by permission from David Meltzer, frontispiece of Knots.*



Fig. 7: Vav-angel by Meltzer

Reprinted, by permission from the author, from *Six*, 10.



Fig. 8: Collage "REVOLULOINS" by Hirschman

Reprinted, by permission from the author, from *Cantillations*, 33.

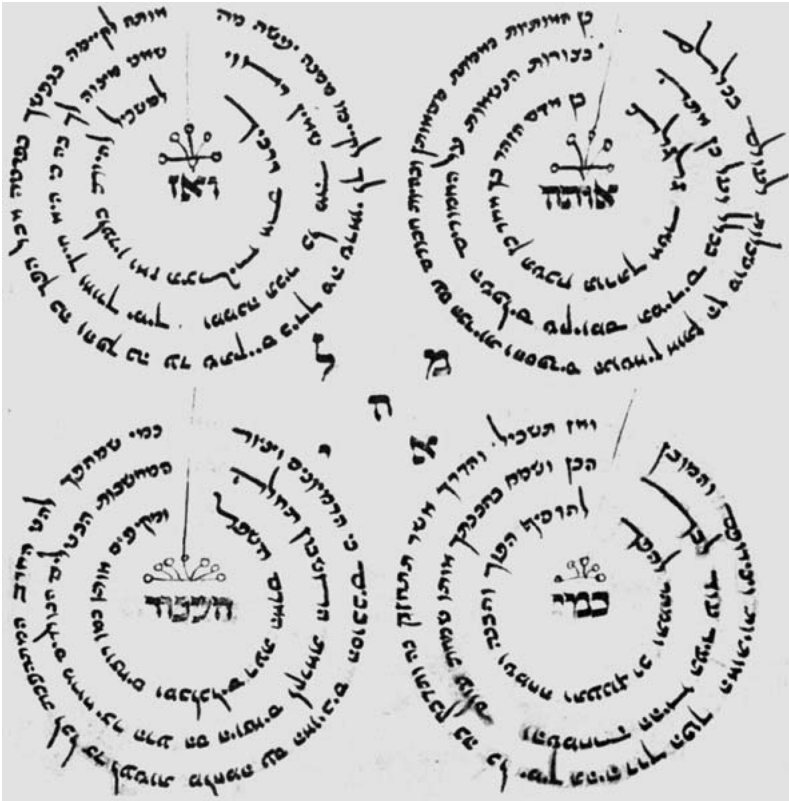


Fig. 9: *Abulafia's Circles* (medieval manuscript)  
Reprinted, by permission from the editor, from *A Big Jewish Book*,  
402–403.