

## Article

# From the Neue Gemeinschaft to Bar Kochba: The Jewish Communitas or the Idea of Jewish Politics as Mysticism

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**Abstract:** This essay uses both published and archival material to reconstruct the ideological and social contexts of Martin Buber's 1909 address "Judaism and the Jews". It suggests that Buber's address became immensely influential because it equated mysticism and politics into one metaphor. Secondly, it shows that Buber imported this idea from debates and discussions that took place almost a decade earlier in Berlin, among the bohemian circle known as the *Neue Gemeinschaft* (new community). Finally, the author hopes to show that the social context can be as crucial to understanding an idea as the ideological context. The question about the functions and potentials of the "community" so central to Buber and the *Neue Gemeinschaft* must be examined, this essay contends, not only conceptually but also as a lived reality. In order to get a glimpse of "the new community", this essay reproduces archival material that testifies not only to what people thought but also what they did, who they were, and how they interacted.

**Keywords:** Martin Buber; communitas; die Neue Gemeinschaft; avant-garde; utopianism; Zionism; German Jewish culture; Gustav Landauer; anarchism



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## 1. Zionism and the Search for Community

In November 1908, Leo Hermann, a young student and the chairman of Prague's Bar Kochba Jewish student association, wrote the already established Martin Buber a letter inviting him to speak at an evening devoted to the "Decline of Judaism". The students, he wrote, wanted to hear Buber discuss the following question: "How can Western Jews return to the fold of the Jewish essence?" (Buber 1991, p. 186). This was the ultimate question for an increasing number of young Jewish men and women, who had grown up in a highly acculturated environment, but nevertheless sought a return to their Jewish heritage.<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber accepted the invitation and came to Prague to deliver what would be the first of three lectures that would shape central European Zionism, later published under the title *Drei Reden über das Judentum* (Buber 1920). Hans Kohn, who was present at the lectures and who would later become a Zionist activist and a leading scholar of nationalism, wrote to Buber shortly after the first lecture: "You know, Herr Doktor, what your addresses meant to us, the members of the Bar Kochba society; however, I may say with certainty that they did not mean for anyone else what they meant for me, since for me they were, in many respects, a turning point" (Ratsabi 2002, p. 35). Upon reading the addresses, Franz Rosenzweig wrote to Buber, "I am amazed to see to what degree you have become the representative speaker and advocate of our generations, mine as well as the one after me". Many years later, Gershom Scholem noted that the three addresses "exuded considerable magic in their time". He added, "I would be unable to mention any other book about Judaism in these years, which even came close to having such an effect ... among the youth that has here heard the summons to a new departure" (Scholem 1976, p. 138).

What was it that so many heard in Buber's address? What motivated so many to action and how? This essay suggests, first of all, that Buber's call summoned the youth

because it essentially equated two highly suggestive notions—mysticism and politics—into one powerful metaphor. More importantly, it will show, secondly, that Buber imported this idea from debates and discussions that had taken place almost a decade earlier in Berlin among the bohemian circle that was known as the *Neue Gemeinschaft* (new community). The importance of the *Neue Gemeinschaft* did not lie in its ideological claims or in the engaging elegance of its prose. The discussions about peace and harmony held among the members of this circle may strike us as banal, perhaps even somewhat puerile. As we shall see, the idealistic musings were consigned to oblivion by the very individuals who took part in the discussions. It is possibly for this very reason that the circle and its writings have received little scholarly attention. Still, as this essay seeks to show through the later work of Martin Buber, the *Neue Gemeinschaft* was, in fact, hugely influential. It shaped Buber's thought in a fundamental way. Apparently, for the individuals who "were there", the *Neue Gemeinschaft* was much more than a set of banal idealistic pieties. It was a life-changing experience (*Erlebnis*). The ultimate objective of this essay is thus to go beyond the ideas and describe it as a social environment, a "scene" for those who shared in the experience.

This essay will also argue that the desire to merge the mystical and the political, which was essential for both the *Neue Gemeinschaft* and Bar Kochba, should be understood in a wider sociological context, that of the "*communitas*". The term, borrowed from anthropologist Victor Turner, refers to a kind of a community, a *Gemeinschaft*, in which all the individuals are free, equal, and spontaneously connected to the whole. In other words, it is a group that functions without hierarchy or intrigue—in fact, one might even say it is beyond politics. Finally, this essay hopes to show that social context can be as important to understanding an idea as ideological context.<sup>2</sup> The following will try to reconstruct not only ideas but also something of the atmosphere in which the ideas of *Gemeinschaft* were developed.

The literature on Buber is in agreement about the importance of mysticism in his thinking. In his pioneering 1978 study of Buber, *From Mysticism to Dialogue*, Paul Mendes-Flohr claimed that "until 1916, when we note the beginning of his [Buber's] dialogical period, all his literary activity, be it as an interpreter of mysticism and folk myths, as a speculative philosopher, or as a Zionist publicist, can be viewed as an elaboration on and refinement of his doctrine of unity" (Mendes-Flohr 1978).<sup>3</sup> Israel Koren takes a more radical position, arguing that "mysticism is an inseparable element of Buber's thought as a whole" (Koren 2010, p. 12). Scholars agree for the most part that the relevant context for best understanding Buber's notion of mysticism is German-speaking, turn-of-the-century Neo-Romanticism and German sociology (Mendes-Flohr 1978). The importance of Gustav Landauer and the *Neue Gemeinschaft* is often mentioned in this context (Schwartz 2006; Löwy 2014; Mendes-Flohr 2019, pp. 502–55). The present discussion does not dispute these conceptions, but offers a more nuanced description of Buber's sources. As we shall see, the real-life social attempt to band together as a community was formative for Buber's Jewish politics.

Buber's appreciation of politics has received little scholarly attention, especially in comparison with the explorations of his thinking on mysticism. Until recently, scholars have tended to describe Buber as a political activist in the spirit of Ahad Ha'am. In this view, Buber promoted the idea that Zionism should concentrate its efforts not on the practical problems of Jewish colonization, but more urgently on the difficulties of awakening a Jewish spirit that had lain dormant for centuries. As Jehuda Reinharz put it, "The Jewish national movement was for Buber, as it was for Ahad Ha'am, above all a struggle for inner freedom and clarification" (Reinharz 1982, p. 174). Recent scholarship offers a more complicated picture, which, importantly, draws on Buber's religious thinking in order to interpret his Zionism. In his monograph *Martin Buber's Theopolitics* (Brody 2018), Samuel H. Brody criticizes prevailing characterizations of Buber's Zionism as cultural or spiritual. For him, Buber's Zionism was "an anarchistic modern translation of biblical prophecy, in which Jewish life has a necessarily political component, albeit defined against the prevailing understandings of politics" (Brody 2018, p. 10). Instead of "cultural Zionism", Brody

suggests the term “theopolitics”, claiming that “Buber’s theopolitics constitutes a different type of answer … to political theology: an anarchist one. Where political theology deploys the power of the divine in the service of the authoritarian state, theopolitics denies any possibility of truly legitimizing institutional human power” (Brody 2018, p. 4). The present study takes its cue from Brody’s characterization of Buber’s political thought. Like Brody’s book, this essay explores the ways in which Buber fuses religious and political thought—here, mysticism and Zionism. Taking a different tack, however, this essay concentrates on Buber’s early ontological and Zionist writings, that is, on the aspects of Buber’s work that Brody chose to “bracket” out of his discussion.<sup>4</sup>

This essay employs the term “communitas” to describe Buber’s early theopolitical position, his attempt to merge politics and mysticism within a certain conceptualization of the community. The term was coined by anthropologist Victor Turner in his 1969 book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, which studied ritual in African tribes. The book describes a variety of rites that position individuals outside of the realm of social norms for the duration of the ritual. For example, Turner describes how, during their rite of passage, young people receive special social status. They are no longer “young”, and thus cannot enjoy young people’s privileges, yet until they complete the ritual, they are not considered adults either and cannot share in the responsibilities of adulthood. They are, Turner claims, in a liminal state of social existence, beyond the most enduring of social norms. According to Turner, this special existence affects not only individuals but also the community as a whole. During the liminal phase, in an effort to facilitate the ritual and support those who now exist beyond normative society, the community becomes what Turner calls a “communitas”. It accepts the liminal state of some of its members by giving up, for the duration of the ritual, its own social structure. It is, Turner suggests, “a moment ‘in and out of time’ … which reveals … some recognition … of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (Turner 1969, p. 82). The communitas, in short, is a category that describes a group of people who maintain social cohesion spontaneously, without structures, norms, or hierarchies that otherwise keep it in place.

Martin Buber makes a surprise appearance in Turner’s *The Ritual Process*. Turner knew that his descriptions of rituals in Africa touched upon a much larger social phenomenon. In his book, he thus briefly points out other historical instances for which the communitas may serve as a model. In this context, he mentions “millenarian moments”, the aspirational visions of “hippies”, and the “Franciscan order”. In all cases, groups unite, according to Turner, in their desire to overcome the “jural-political structure” of society and establish themselves as “spontaneous and immediate” communities (Turner 1969, p. 120). In an effort to explain the larger sociological significance of the communitas, Turner also turns to Buber. “Perhaps the best way of putting this difficult concept [the communitas] into words is in Martin Buber’s [words]”. Buber, according to Turner, “uses the term community for communitas” then. Turner quotes Buber saying “community is no longer the being side by side (and … above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons”. Turner finds this observation so apt that he is moved to suggest that Buber “should be regarded as a gifted native informant rather than as a social scientist!” (Turner 1969, p. 114). Turner’s assessment, we shall see, was correct. The communitas was a central motivation in Buber’s early Zionist writings, and nowhere more powerfully than in the first of three talks that would make Buber famous and fundamentally shape the central European Zionism of the prewar era.

## 2. Buber’s First Address: Judaism as an Internal Essence

Even in hindsight, Buber’s addresses are impressive in their scope and ambition. Buber opened his first lecture by raising the very central question of a Jewish secular modern society: “The question I put before you, as well as before myself, is the question of the meaning of Judaism for the Jews”. He adds: “Why do we call ourselves Jews? Because we are Jews? What does that mean, we are Jews? I want to speak to you not of abstraction but

of your own life, of our own lives” (Buber 1996, p. 11). Mostly, Buber notes, these questions elicit two kinds of answers, arguing either that Judaism is a nation or that it is a religion. Buber then asks whether there is a Jewish religion. His answer is negative. “As for inner reality”, he says, “[Jewish] religiosity is a memory, perhaps a hope, but it is not a presence” (Buber 1996, p. 13). As a nation, Buber argues, Judaism exists no longer. “All the elements that might constitute a nation . . . are missing . . . Neither the land [the Western Jew] lives in . . . nor the language he speaks . . . nor the way of life in which he participates . . . belong to the community of his blood” (Buber 1996, pp. 16–17). Buber’s critique is, in other words, unrelenting. Jews, he claims, are essentially barred from Judaism at least so long as it is defined as either a nation or a religion. Individuals are alienated, and the substance that held them together lost its holding power long ago. This is the essence of Buber’s social diagnosis, and it seems telling that his words were so enthusiastically received by his young listeners. It also seems telling that Rosenzweig wrote to say, somewhat begrudgingly perhaps, that Buber’s words embodied the voice of the generations.

However, if neither nationality nor religion holds the promise for the future of the Jewish people, if neither can carry the weight of the millions who no longer share a geography, a spirituality, or a tongue, then how are the Jews to become Jewish? How are they to constitute a community—a Gemeinschaft—in the deepest imaginable sense? Rather than taking up a petrified religion or fighting for an imagined nation, Buber suggests that Jews follow the path that leads inward. The path to Judaism is, Buber insists, a voyage into one’s own self.

When out of our deepest self-knowledge we have affirmed ourselves, when we have said “yes” to ourselves and to our whole Jewish existence, then our feeling will no longer be the feeling of individuals: every individual among us will feel that he is the people, for he will feel the people within himself. We shall thus not view Judaism’s past as the past of a community to which we belong, but shall behold in it the early history of our own lives. (Buber 1996, pp. 19–20)

There, Buber claims, in the interiority of each and every individual, lies the root of the Jewish community. Therefore, only deep personal meditation, an avowal to an inward Judaism, a commitment to one’s own truth, might yield a free and authentic Jewish society.

Buber’s call for inwardness was not only received with enthusiasm. Even among the Bar Kochba students and definitely in the larger circles of German Jewish youth, Buber’s ideas met with resistance and criticism (Hazony 2001, p. 186; Shumsky 2010, pp. 155–81). Nevertheless, in his first address, Buber issued an unmistakable call to action, assigning each and every member of the Jewish youth a quasi-messianic role. He did so explicitly in the very last lines of the first address. “When I was a child”, Buber says,

I read an old Jewish tale I could not understand. It said no more than this: “Outside the gates of Rome there sits a leprous beggar, waiting. He is the messiah”. Then I came upon an old man whom I asked: “who is he waiting for?” And the old man gave me an answer I did not understand at the time, an answer I learned to understand only much later. He said: “He waits for you”. (Buber 1996, p. 21)

Effectively, Buber suggests the messiah is waiting for each and every one of us to finally commit to the building of a Jewish Gemeinschaft. This was Buber’s message, and as we saw, it resonated far and wide. It did so precisely because it turned the social, religious, and political issues at hand into a personal and existential question according each and every individual the power to change the world and recreate society. The political and social project of Zionism—the attempt to revolutionize the existence of the Jewish people and renew the spiritual promise of Judaism—received a unique personal yet communal meaning. Buber charged Zionism with the power of mysticism, arguing for the creation of a Jewish *communitas* that operated beyond “politics”.

Buber’s notion of Jewish *communitas* was, as we shall soon see, the product of another, largely forgotten, community that Buber had frequented when he was still a student. It was a small group of visionaries, who gave their social experiment a name that was quite fitting

and direct: Neue Gemeinschaft (new community). Unlike the Bar Kochba association, which received some scholarly attention, the Neue Gemeinschaft is mentioned mostly in passing by scholars of German culture.<sup>5</sup> Those studying Buber's early thought also mention the group's name in passing. In his seminal work on Buber, Mendes-Flohr analyzes one of the central notions propagated by the Hart brothers in the Neue Gemeinschaft, namely, the idea of the "World-I". More recently, Brody has discussed this idea in the context of Buber's friendship with Gustav Landauer ([Mendes-Flohr 1989](#), pp. 54–57; [Brody 2018](#), esp. pp. 26–28). Neither scholar, however, goes beyond the ideas propagated by the Hart brothers to examine the social reality—the personality, events, and atmosphere—that made these ideas possible. The notion of the World-I and Buber's relationship with Landauer will be discussed below, but the following discussion will set them within the social context of the Neue Gemeinschaft, understanding it as a "scene" of interaction and a "place" where people met to discuss ideas and dream.

### 3. A Bohemian Scene in Berlin: Die Neue Gemeinschaft

Founded in 1900 in Berlin by the brothers Julius and Heinrich Hart, the Neue Gemeinschaft was the name given to a loosely bound social group of authors, intellectuals, and artists. The group rented an apartment and published a journal. It is therefore often understood as a venue for cultural events and a platform from which the Hart brothers propagated their ideas. Its absence from the histories of German culture and literature can be explained by its short-lived success and its founders' rather dull and repetitive prose. The Neue Gemeinschaft was active for almost three years, and was disbanded due to financial problems and discord among its members. It seems, however, that the founders' literary output was an even more important factor in its disappearance. At best, the writings of the Hart brothers reiterated ideas that had been expressed with far greater imaginative thrust by writers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Max Stirner ([Ribbat 1992](#)). At worst, their texts might appear to be formulaic pieces of pseudo-wisdom. This was already observed during the brothers' lifetimes. German-Jewish anarchist and playwright Erich Mühsam noted in his diary how greatly he had once admired Julius Hart and how his writing seemed now, 10 years after the disbanding of the Neue Gemeinschaft, insufferable. "No, I can no longer read a book by Julius Hart", Mühsam wrote in his diary. "I will not let myself be confronted by this thick surge of emphatic tones, of senile verbosity" ([Mühsam 1910](#)). A similar sentiment was expressed in a piece in the satirical newspaper *Der Talg* (The Tallow), titled "On the influence of the Neue Gemeinschaft in the arts". "I", the author notes, "have learned about the aims and goals of the Neue Gemeinschaft in part through multiple many-hour-long speeches and the space allotted on this page is too limited in order to regurgitate this already completely exhausted matter for the inattentive and lazy".<sup>6</sup> The Hart brothers and the Neue Gemeinschaft were thus written off as "non-influential" and "uninteresting", or, rather, unworthy of scholarly attention already during their lifetimes. In this context, Buber offers no respite. The most significant and oft-quoted reference Buber makes about the Neue Gemeinschaft appears in his introduction to the published volumes of Gustav Landauer's letters, which appeared in 1929. There, Buber curtly notes that Landauer took part in founding the Neue Gemeinschaft, "which taught him how a community does not come into being" ([Buber 1929](#), VI).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, this community, its members, and its activities played a more significant role in the development of Buber's thought than it might at first seem.

Although the brothers Heinrich and Julius Hart are largely ignored by contemporary scholars. During the last part of the nineteenth century, they were fixtures in the circles of theater production, literature, and criticism in and around the German capital. Among their more famous endeavors, scholars note the creation of the *Freie Volksbühne* (Free People's Theater) in Berlin and the *Friedrichshagener Dichterkreis*.<sup>8</sup> The brothers also played a pivotal role in a group of young authors, who in the 1880s demanded that the door be closed on the literary styles that emerged in the German romantic and classic periods and that a new, "modern" voice in German literature be developed. As central figures in so many social

and cultural endeavors, they developed notions of communal writing and took part in the publication of one of the first anthologies in the history of German literature, the collection of naturalistic poetry published in Leipzig in 1885 titled *Moderne Dichter-Charaktere* (Schutte 1976, pp. 13–15; Sprengel 1998, pp. 619–23).

It does indeed appear that more than they were “great thinkers” or “great writers”, the Hart brothers were great people. This was, in any case, the impression of the young Erich Mühsam, who arrived in Berlin in order to complete his pharmacy studies and paid a visit to Heinrich Hart.

“The famous man treated me as equal in sort and in wisdom and discussed with me the events that already took place in the Neue Gemeinschaft and those that are planned . . . I was extremely excited about the tremendous plans and also about the man, who although filled by religious enthusiasm explained his ideas so clearly, in such a composed manner, and even with humor”. (Mühsam 2000, p. 29)

In this meeting, Heinrich Hart also encouraged the young Mühsam to forgo his formal education and commit himself to writing. He even invited Mühsam to bring his poetry to the Neue Gemeinschaft. By Mühsam’s account, the encounter with Heinrich Hart, and through him with so many of Berlin’s bohemians, changed his life forever.<sup>9</sup>

The young Rainer Maria Rilke also met the Hart brothers. He, too, was impressed by their composed enthusiasm: “The Harts were real heralds, filled with bright confidence and the belief in their own power. Crowned and festively clothed, these men walked in a triumphal procession, inspired themselves and carried over others with their earnest pathos” (Rilke 1965, vol. 5, p. 371).<sup>10</sup> There is more than a little irony in this description. Still, the Hart brothers here are portrayed as cultural icons, their pathos notwithstanding.

The Neue Gemeinschaft was founded by the Hart brothers, Gustav Landauer, Peter Hille, Bernhard Kampffmeyer, and several other literati friends of the famous *Friedrichshagen Dichterkreis* on February 17, 1900—the 300th anniversary of Giordano Bruno’s death at the stake. His cosmology, the Hart brothers tacitly suggested, lived on in their project. The image that adorned the printed pamphlets and announcements of the group, drawn by Hans Mütszel, evoked the burning of the Trojan ships described in the fifth book of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. The image positions the Neue Gemeinschaft as akin to the founding of Rome by the Trojan Aeneas (see Figure 1).

Many others flocked to the side of the Hart brothers, including socialist–anarchist intellectual Gustav Landauer, publisher Eugen Diederichs, *Lebensreform* painter Fidus, naturalist author Peter Hille, poet Else Lasker Schüler, and, of course, philosopher and Zionist advocate Martin Buber. All of them, and many others, hoped to find something new.

The ultimate goal of the group was, as the name suggests, to initiate a radical social and personal transformation. This is described succinctly on the last page of their main literary publication, *Das Reich der Erfüllung* (The Kingdom of Fullfilment). Under the title “Our community”, the Hart brothers state: “Our community is a community of life and spirit which is invested in the worldview of practical monism, in the perception of the unity in multiplicity, transformation, and rejuvenation, and of the constant becoming and evolvement of all things” (Hart and Hart 1900, vol. 1, p. 91).

The events that were organized by the group were meant to become stepping stones in the creation of the community. Thus, for example, on the evening of the first of September, 1900, members of the group and other guests were invited to the Architect’s House in Berlin in order to hear, among other things, a recitation of the poem “Zur Weihe” by Heinrich Hart, music by Arno Rentsch, and a lecture by Julius Hart.<sup>11</sup> On another evening, members were invited to the observatory in Treptow in order to take part in a guided tour of its astronomical museum and watch celestial objects with its telescope.<sup>12</sup> Daylong excursions to Friedrichshafen outside Berlin were a common activity for the members of the Neue Gemeinschaft.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 1.** Front material of one of the group's pamphlets. Courtesy of the Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2809).

Things changed somewhat when, in 1901, the Hart brothers rented a four-room apartment on Uhland Street in Berlin's Wilmersdorf for the use of their emerging cultural center. The announcement about the new apartment mentions decorated and furnished rooms, a library with books and magazines, sculptures, and works of art. It notes that "drink and food" will be provided, and it invites members and their guests to come between ten in the morning and midnight.<sup>14</sup> MühSAM describes the atmosphere at the apartment with the following words:

Lectures or artistic performances were given twice a week in an apartment that was rented on Uhland Street, however there were comings and goings every day from the early morning hours until late in the evening. It was a club for those escaping the Bourgeoisie . . . Many souls of many different cultures met each other in these rooms amongst paintings by Fidus, sculptures by Franz Metzner, posters by Cissarz and Oskar Zwintscher, and etchings by Klinger. There Peter Hille conducted conversations with Emanuel Wurm, there Karl Henckell deliberated with Felix Hollaenser, and there we saw guests like Ernst Häckel and Élisée Reclus.

The Hart brothers were, of course, present.

The always radiant Julius Hart carried himself like a silk-garbed saint as he walked his guests through the rooms of the apartment on Uhland Street, which were decorated by works of Fidus and Metzner . . . kissing men and women, using the familiar form "*Du*", with people who were delighted by him, and forbidding the formal "*Sie*". (MühSAM 2000, p. 30)

Even if the importance of being friendly, encouraging, kind, and interesting is often obscured by time, it should be taken into account. For many young enthusiastic members, for artists and writers, and for aspiring young professionals of turn-of-the-century Berlin,<sup>15</sup> the brothers' most memorable creation, the Neue Gemeinschaft, was a meeting point. This fact is nicely illustrated by Figure 2. It offered cultural events, readings, speeches, and

music, but more importantly for Berlin's bohemians, the group's apartment was a place to see and be seen, to learn, argue, listen, and sound off. Although the Neue Gemeinschaft was not the subject of any famous text and no groundbreaking work was produced by its members, it played a significant social role.



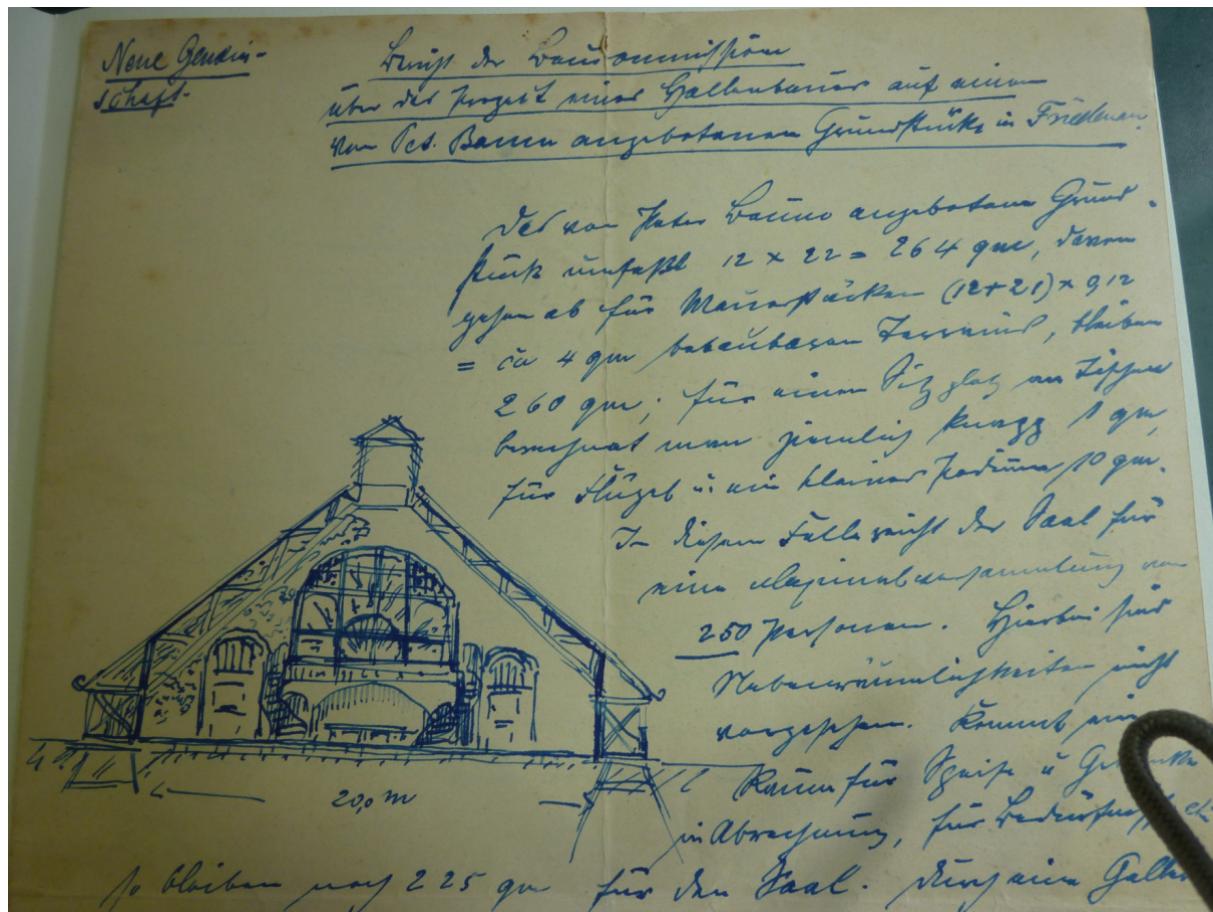
**Figure 2.** An undated image that seems to depict a costume party at the Uhland Street apartment. Courtesy of the Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2827).

Sociologists Darcy K. Leach and Sebastian Haunss describe the notion of "scene" as a "*network of people* who share a common identity and a common set of subcultural or countercultural beliefs, values, norms, and convictions as well as *a network of physical spaces* where members of that group are known to congregate" (Leach and Haunss 2009, p. 259). Kimberly Creasap goes as far as to argue that "scenes are works-in-progress. They are never final, but always coming and going. The processes of 'making a scene' through challenges to who 'belongs' in public . . . spaces, rituals like music and protest, and everyday practices— are political work" (Creasap 2012, pp. 123–24). The apartment of the Neue Gemeinschaft in Berlin provided a "place" for a social counterculture "scene" between 1899 and 1903 in this precise sense. In the rhetoric of the group, it was the launching pad for a revolution.

The apartment, however, was only the initial phase of the Harts' much grander attempt to revolutionize society. In fact, plans to create a farming commune outside the city existed from the very beginning. The building to house the commune had even been sketched (see Figure 3). The sketch also reveals something of the communal fantasy.

In 1902, the group managed to rent a large villa overlooking a lake southwest of Berlin (Schlachtensee). There, they finally practiced communal living outside the city and close to the land, offering daycare for the families and working space for artists and writers. In order to sustain themselves, rooms in the house were rented out to visitors who hoped to immerse themselves in nature and artistic creation. The diet offered by the kitchen was strictly vegetarian. However, about a year after moving into the villa, the project was disbanded and the members who had not already left went their separate ways. The

private archive of the Hart brothers still contains many traces of the legal and financial complications that remained in the wake of the collapse.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 3.** Bericht der Baukomission. Courtesy of the Stadt- und Landesbibliothek Dortmund (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2864).

#### 4. World-I: Notions of Eclectic Monism

The central ideas of the Neue Gemeinschaft were disseminated in a journal titled *Das Reich der Erfüllung* (The Kingdom of Fulfillment) with the subheading (*Flügelschriften zur Begründung einer neuen Weltanschauung* ("Pamphlets on the Establishment of a New Worldview"). The journal printed lectures and poems that grew out of the events. Most of the essays were penned by Julius and Heinrich Hart. Only two volumes appeared, published by the influential Eugene Diederich's publishing house<sup>17</sup> printed using a fine Fraktur typeface, with the different headings adorned by wood carvings of Fidus's naturalistic illustrations of plants, branches, and flowers (see Figure 4) (Hart and Hart 1900, 1901). The different articles carry names like "Of higher knowledge" (*Vom höchsten Wissen*), "Of enlightened life" (*Vom Lebens im Licht*), and "For the consecration" (*Zur Weihe*). Thus, in every aspect of its appearance and in all its appearance, these pamphlets express the belief in a grander, truer, and more profound existence.



**Figure 4.** Adorned title page of the essay “Of higher knowledge” (*Vom höchsten Wissen*).

The first article published in this context was titled merely “Entrance” (*Eingang*). In its opening lines, the Harts explain the predicament of the era. These lines read as follows:

For four centuries, the European man of culture sought to overcome the medieval existence and to create a human way of living. The work on the new existence has advanced only slowly; there are ruins of the old scattered, barring the pathways. The medieval spirit controls most of us in our religious, national, and social life as well as in our thinking, desire, and sensitivities.

The search for the new *world-picture* [Weltbild] has been ongoing already for three centuries now. It will be different from the great majority of our intellectual inheritance, the traditions of religion and morals . . . as the outfit of a child is different from the form of a man. (Hart and Hart 1900, vol. 1, p. 1)

After 300 years of searching, the “European man of culture” stands, according to the Harts, on the precipice of a new age, which will be different from anything known before. The history of thought, of religion, and of society, they claim, can teach hardly anything at all.

Nevertheless, the authors devote many long paragraphs to discussing and rejecting all the major trends of philosophical thinking of their time. Idealism, empiricism, romanticism, and classicism all share, the Harts argue, a similar essential characteristic, which makes them irrelevant for the new era about to dawn. “All the problems of our thinking, feeling, and action”, the Harts note, “constitute only one single primary problem” (Hart and

([Hart 1900](#), vol. 1, p. 9). All the different aspects of the “old” worldview see in the world an infinitely divided multiplicity of individual beings, essentially unattached and disconnected. In the essay “Of higher knowledge”, the Harts explain:

The old world-view [Weltanschauung], which we must overcome, confronts us with an endless profusion of different singularities, in an inexhaustible multiplicity of religious teachings, philosophical systems, and scientific creeds and explanation attempts. It is fragmented into countless moral teachings, which are in fierce opposition to one another . . . ([Hart and Hart 1900](#), vol. 1, p. 8)

All previous attempts to discover some underlying essence, idea, or principle have always been undone by the actual act of searching, defining, and differentiating. “The opposition, which in our popular religion and popular conception appears as the opposition between God and world, between soul and body, world and self, self and other repeats itself in all our philosophies only in different aliases or with different concepts” ([Hart and Hart 1900](#), vol. 1, p. 8). The problem of dualism, in other words, persisted despite an entire history of thought that aspired to solve it.

The solution offered by the Hart brothers is one of extreme monism, and as such it belongs to a specific discourse within the modern German intellectual tradition ([Jacobsen 2005](#)). In its most rudimentary form, this solution proposes seeing through the plurality of existence and recognizing in it a single, all-encompassing essence. This is indeed the argument advanced by the Hart brothers, who claim that “everything is transformation, and so we must learn to understand the world as a transforming-being and as an appearance of transformation”. It is for this reason that the Harts suggest that “one and the same thing is always in every instant something else” ([Hart and Hart 1900](#), vol. 1, p. 26). This, then, is not a specific set of philosophical prescriptions, which unfolds through a careful consideration of facts, propositions, and definitions. Monism aims to overcome such specificities, demonstrating in a different way the same principle—that the distinction between the multitude and the one is an illusion that must be overcome. The Harts argue that “We have overcome the contradictions of our thinking the moment that we recognize that they are not at all contradictions, but rather they confirm one another excellently” ([Hart and Hart 1900](#), vol. 1, p. 23). Overcoming the problem of dualism, it turns out, is a mere matter of perspective.

This philosophical position sounds somewhat absurd. Its historical importance and influence can only be recognized when taken in its own social context. The elements discussed above—the monistic ideas of the Hart brothers, their prose and self-management, the musical events they facilitated, the adorned texts, and the designed apartment frequented by bohemians and artists—belong together. They were all part of a larger and rather serious undertaking: to live a life free of contradiction here and now. In many ways, the Harts anticipated some of the major trends in the contemporary New Age movement ([Hanegraaff 1997](#), pp. 62–62, 331–33). The Hart and their events were, perhaps unsurprisingly, shrouded in an ambience of sanctity. In a letter to his future wife Hedwig Lachmann, Gustav Landauer described his experience at an evening among the members of the Neue Gemeinschaft in the following words:

The excursion of the Hart-commune to Friedrichshagen took place finally on Wednesday after Pentecost with about seventy participants. It was a wonderful moment full with religious feeling [Stimmung] when we camped in a beautiful spot on the lake’s shore; a magnificent evening light from the lake, beetles, storm-clouds in the sky and the sound of distant thunder as Heinrich Hart recited his poem, which was followed by a longer, more serious address, drawn from the depth by Julius Hart. Life life! resonated from the words of both brothers, and nature called back at us with the same words.<sup>18</sup>

In hindsight, it may appear that this experiment was a failure. Very little of the envisioned harmony was realized and the project was disbanded. The visionaries who initiated it and their ideas were largely forgotten, but it would be a mistake to judge this project by such a

definitive criterion, for in fact, the ultimate objectives of the Neue Gemeinschaft were well beyond the reach of human beings. However, as an experiment, it was uniquely successful, for it had, after all, touched the lives of those involved and left in them the imprint of “an experience”. Less than 10 years after the project’s demise, the publicist and writer Anselma Heine summed up her experience in the Neue Gemeinschaft with the following words: “That all this could have been dreamed up and become real, even for a short period of time, that adult men and women, authors . . . dared such a colorful and lively attempt of communal life . . . is the remaining asset of the Neue Gemeinschaft, which will be with us forever, long after the venture itself crumbled and sank into our everyday life” ([Heine 1911](#), p. 689). Heine’s statement is elegiac, but it brings to mind Victor Turner’s observation of the *communitas*. The *communitas*, Turner insists, is a temporal social phenomenon. It cannot last, but its importance is unquestionable.

### 5. Gustav Landauer at the Neue Gemeinschaft: Through Separation to Community

Born to Jewish parents in Karlsruhe in 1870, Gustav Landauer was a publicist, an author of fiction, a literary critic, an editor of the organ of the independent socialist faction titled *Der Sozialist*, an activist in socialist circles, and a leader of union labor. Like Julius and Heinrich Hart, he was involved in the *Freie Volksbühne* in Berlin and was a member of the *Friedrichshagener Dichterkreis*. Together with them, he founded the Neue Gemeinschaft. In 1918, Landauer accepted the invitation of Kurt Eisner and joined the revolutionary government in Munich that had formed after the capitulation of the German *Kaiserreich* at the end of the First World War. Gustav Landauer was murdered in jail in May 1919 by members of the *Freikorps*, the paramilitary militia that stormed Munich and overran the fledgling republic.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Landauer was involved in a series of difficult disputes within his own party, within the editorial board of the journal he edited, within the international socialist movements, and as a union leader in Berlin. By 1900, much of Landauer’s political activism had failed to attain its goals. Disappointed and betrayed, he turned away from direct activism that year, opting for a more romantic and conceptual understanding of anarchy ([Lunn 1973](#), pp. 75–123). As Landauer’s biographer, Eugene Lunn, asserts: “in the late 1890’s Landauer’s social base was to become narrower and narrower, and by the end of the decade he found himself in political isolation” ([Lunn 1973](#), p. 75). Landauer’s isolation no doubt reached a climax in 1899, when he was imprisoned for six months for criticizing Berlin’s chief of police ([Maurer 1971](#), pp. 44–45; [Lunn 1973](#), p. 127). During his months of isolation, Landauer immersed himself in the writings of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhardt, which he then brought to bear on his lectures in the Neue Gemeinschaft, which will be discussed shortly. In April of the same year, *Der Sozialist*, which Landauer edited, ceased ([Nettlau 1984](#), pp. 225–76).

The political isolation Landauer experienced during this period is palpable in his famous contribution to the community he helped found.<sup>19</sup> Landauer was a pivotal figure in the Neue Gemeinschaft. He was among its founding members, and together with the Hart brothers, one of its most active leaders. As we shall see, Landauer devoted all his intellectual and political zeal to the project. It would indeed seem that after so many different failed endeavors, he conceived of this project as an attempt to revolutionize not from the bottom up but using the power of the elite. It was there that he chose to deliver one of his most important philosophical reflections.

Perhaps the best-known textual product of the Neue Gemeinschaft is Gustav Landauer’s seminal lecture “Through Separation to Community”. This text may very well be understood outside its social context. Clearly, however, it sets out to addresses many of the central concerns of the community that he founded with his friends Heinrich and Julius Hart. It describes the isolation of this group from the rest of society in terms of social reform. According to Landauer, those who have devoted themselves to spiritual contemplation are paving the path to a revolution that will redeem the rest of humanity, but it should be clear that here Landauer does not discuss any group or any form of isolation. Despite the level

of abstraction he employs, he is talking about the very real and very specific concerns of his community. The Neue Gemeinschaft was not a mental experiment, but a social one, and the questions it evoked were real and concrete. The self-absorbed artists and intellectuals, the poets, and the dreamers of the Neue Gemeinschaft were neither idlers nor underlings in a society that rejected their ideals, but the masters of a social world to come.

The question that Landauer poses in his “Through Separation to Community” is none other than that of isolation. He broaches this problem in the very first lines of his lecture: “For those of us who see ourselves as part of the vanguard, the distance to the rest of humankind has become enormous” (Landauer 2011).<sup>20</sup> Landauer does not refer here to the distance between the educated elite and the uneducated classes. Rather, he refers to the abyss that has formed between the “enlightened few” and the great majority of men and women, whom Landauer names the “mass-individual”. “The scope and place of the mass-individual is determined”, he argues, in compliance with the Marxist dogma, “according to hereditary forces that operate on him from within and from without: he finds himself belonging to a family and to a certain social class, he allows himself to be pumped up with certain knowledge and certain faith ...”. However, he claims, a small group of activists has arisen and unchained themselves from the harsh realities of society. Among those are “socialists and anarchists, atheists and Gypsies, nihilists and romantics” (Landauer 2011, p. 132), who have taken to the road in order to infuriate the masses and wake them to political action. Most have failed, given up, become cynical, or succumbed to non-radical politics. Those who remain, Landauer claims, are few, but they see the political truth directly. These few are now separated. “It is . . . this realization that we have conquered through suffering and struggle: we are too far advanced for our voice to be understood by the masses. We grasp life too directly for people to find the way to us . . . in their everyday confusion” (Landauer 2011, p. 133). Thus, the essential question of this anarchist, thinker, and activist was about the gap between the ones anointed with wisdom and the rest of humanity, or in other words: How can the Neue Gemeinschaft become a model for humanity without losing that which makes it radical?

Landauer argues succinctly that the path to reunite the enlightened and the masses necessarily passes through radical separation and inwardness.

We are not allowed to descend to the masses; we must lead the way and that might initially seem as if we are going away from them .... If we separate ourselves thoroughly, if we as an individual sink ourselves most deeply in ourselves, then we will eventually find in the innermost kernel of our hidden being, the most primal and all-encompassing community: with human-kind and with the universe. (Landauer 2010, p. 133)

Separation, in other words, is a drastic turning away from society. It entails, essentially, rediscovering the nature of the self. There, Landauer argues, in the innermost part of individuality, man discovers the universe and his fellow man in its truest sense, that is, as a permanent and determined phenomenon.

Landauer ties this fundamental insight to a complex philosophical discourse. In “Through Separation to Community”, he mentions Kant, Berkeley, and Nietzsche, yet a careful reading reveals that the two most decisive voices in this text are the voices of Max Stirner and Meister Eckhart. Rarely discussed today, Max Stirner (1806–1856) had, according to David Leopold, “an immediate and destructive impact on contemporary left-Hegelianism” including on the development of Karl Marx (Leopold 2011). In his major work, *The Unique Individual and His Property (Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum; 1844)*,<sup>21</sup> Stirner questioned the validity of all the institutions of human society and all its organizing ideas. Institutions and ideas, he argued, exist only as means of domination; therefore, the only solid base for future existence is the ego. In his work, therefore, he called for a new era of extreme egoism, arguing that the individual must overcome all the institutions of social existence, indeed all the notions and all concepts that enslave it, and turn to its only true substance—the ego. Stirner’s philosophy was well known to anarchists at the turn of the

century and much debated also among the members of the Neue Gemeinschaft (Bruns 2000, pp. 354–55).

Radical doubt, which Landauer terms “skepticism” and draws from Stirner, serves here only as one facet of his project. It is a condition for radical seclusion, but it does not explain the rediscovery of community upon which Landauer insists. The second and more dramatic feature of Landauer’s argument is a meditation on extreme inwardness, that is, the mysticism of community. In his address to the Neue Gemeinschaft, Landauer bases this second step in the existential move from separation to community on the writings of the Dominican theologian, philosopher, and mystic Eckhart von Hochheim, also known as Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327).<sup>22</sup> Landauer played an important role in the modern reception of Meister Eckhart, being the first to translate a selection of Eckhart’s works from the original Middle High German to modern German (Eckhart 1903).

In his address to the Neue Gemeinschaft, Landauer underscores the absolutely crucial role that Eckhart’s mysticism plays in his own thinking. It is through Eckhart’s mystical and theological mediations that Landauer finds the essential link between individuality and community.

An old master, the great heretic and mystic Eckhart rightfully said that if we can thoroughly perceive a small flower, as it is in its essence, we could also perceive with it the entire world. He himself has pointed out that we can never achieve such absolute perception from the outside, with the help of our corporeal senses. “God is always ready, but we are completely unprepared; god is close by us, but we are far away from him; god is inside, but we are out; god is at home, we are strangers. And he shows us the way ...”. (Landauer 2011, pp. 135–36).

In Landauer’s telling, this way leads from Stirner’s extreme skepticism, through radical individuality and Eckhart’s mysticism, to the discovery of a community in the innermost facet. “There is no other way”, Landauer argues (Landauer 2011, p. 147).

## 6. Martin Buber’s Address at the Neue Gemeinschaft: Old and New Community

Very little is known about Martin Buber’s social involvement in the Neue Gemeinschaft. The personal archive of the Hart brothers, which included the papers of the Neue Gemeinschaft, mentions Buber only sporadically. The Hart brothers are mentioned very briefly in Martin Buber’s personal archive. The most substantial source about his participation in the Neue Gemeinschaft to date remains Hans Kohn’s 1930 biography of Martin Buber. Unfortunately, Kohn, like most other commentators, focuses on the ideas, but reveals little about the events, interactions, and relations among the group’s members. Nevertheless, there is no mistaking the tone Kohn uses in his description of the Neue Gemeinschaft. “The generation of the turn-of-the-century”, Kohn writes, “found its expression in the Neue Gemeinschaft .... It was here that the yearning for a new era lived and brought together youth that searched within itself for a greater humanity ...”. (Kohn 1961, p. 28). Kohn writes that between 1899 and 1900, Buber came into close contact with the group. He also suggests that the Neue Gemeinschaft was an entry point to a wider intellectual scene. Thus, for example, Kohn mentions the fact that it was here that Siegfried Jacobsohn, a publisher and critic, “discovered” the young Martin Buber (Kohn 1961, p. 30). It was also here that Buber met Gustave Landauer for the first time. “The encounter with the six-year-older friend”, Kohn suggests, “became a milestone in his [Buber’s] life” (Kohn 1961, p. 29; Brody 2018, p. 19). With all his perceptiveness, Kohn says nothing about the intellectual affinity between the Neue Gemeinschaft and Buber’s views on Zionism, explored in these pages. Kohn, who, as noted above, was a member of Bar Kochba and present at Buber’s lectures, was in an ideal position to identify such an affinity. However, there is no evidence to suggest that he did.

The only substantial document that ties Buber to the Neue Gemeinschaft is an address Buber gave to the group. The address, titled “Old and new community”, which was slated for publication in the third installment of the group’s organ *Das Reich der Erfüllung*, was published only posthumously because of the group’s untimely collapse. In his lecture,

Buber sought to face the concrete obstacles of the new community to which he belonged. No less importantly, his lecture was an apologetic continuation of the work of Gustav Landauer, whom Buber greatly admired. Buber, a young student of sociology at the time, was clearly eager to reconcile the fundamental assumption that the study of society contradicted the ideological essence of the Neue Gemeinschaft. It must be stressed again that from Buber's perspective, and from the perspectives of his friends, the tension between the scientific presuppositions and the monist ideologies were anything but an analytical practice. Rather, they constituted a real and present problem.

The purpose of Buber's "Old and new community" is to distinguish between two kinds of social forms: the one we know and the one coming into being. The new community is clearly a *communitas*. Reminiscent of Hart's distinction between old and new worldview, Buber argues here that the new community represents a radical break from the old one. Whereas the "old community" is dependent upon a common purpose that unites its members, the new one is completely whole. "What is the goal of the new community [*die Neue Gemeinschaft*]?" Buber asks in the opening of his lecture. "It has itself and life [as goals]" (Buber 2013, p. 61). Thus, he effectively argues, the concepts and ideas that define the science of society—the idea of a common goal, for example—are unfitting to describe the new community as Buber, Landauer, and the Harts understand it. In sociological terms borrowed from Ferdinand Tönnies, Buber describes the new community as "antisocial" and driven by the will to live.<sup>23</sup> The notion of "life" must be understood here, therefore, not in any biological sense, but as a sweeping metaphor for the creative and unifying power that exists in each and every individual, common to it and the universe. The term "life" is used here in the most esoteric sense. It may also be understood as the antithesis of any of sociology's central concepts. "The goal of the new community", Buber argues, "is Life (*das Leben*). Not this life or another . . . but life *itself*. Life—released from all boundaries and concepts, which are strange stilts for those who find earth to harsh and wild" (Buber 2013, p. 61). The community, in other words, is the location of human life, in some original, unrestricted, and redeemed sense. "Life and community", Buber insists, "are two sides of the same being" (Buber 2013, p. 62).

The essential sameness between life and community is not an issue of intellectual conception, but a reality to be experienced. It is the source of *communitas*. If life were an idea or a concept, then it would become no less tyrannical than any other notion of community that already exists. Thus, Buber argues, the community of life goes beyond thought and defies conceptualization. In order to emphasize this point, Buber reminds his listeners what Landauer argued in the same context only months earlier. "If we separate ourselves thoroughly", Buber quotes Landauer, "if we as individuals sink ourselves most deeply in ourselves, then we will eventually find in the inner most kernel of our hidden being the most primal and all-encompassing community" (MBW 2.1. n.d., p. 63). Life and community are, in other words, an experience. This is Buber's interpretation of Landauer, and it is indeed in his attempt to reiterate Landauer's discussion in the Neue Gemeinschaft that Buber coined the notion that would define his early thinking (Flohr and Susser 1976, 46 fn. 24; Huston 2007, pp. 33–35).

"In quiet, lonely hours all our endeavors seem meaningless. There appears to be no bridge from our being to the great Thou (*dem grossen Du*) we felt was reaching out to us through the infinite darkness. Then suddenly came this *Erlebnis*—and like a mysterious nuptial festival we were freed from all restraints and we found the ineffable meaning of life". (Flohr and Susser 1976, p. 46)

According to Buber, therefore, the seemingly concrete experience of life and of community is an *Erlebnis*, a mystical experience. Put in Victor Turner's terms, Buber here speaks here of the *communitas*.

## 7. The Communitas and the Jews

Almost 10 years separate Buber's address to the members of the Neue Gemeinschaft and the one he held on a dark and cold evening in Prague in front of the young Bar Kochba

students, but it would seem that nothing of Buber's vigor and excitement was lost. The theory Buber presented was essentially the same. In Prague, as in Berlin, Buber argued that a community—in the most profound sense of the word, a *communitas*—is within reach and that the path leading there is one of extreme and dedicated inwardness. However, in 1909 in Prague, Buber seemed far less concerned by the assumptions of the new science of sociology. One is hard-pressed to find even the slightest trace of the apologetic tone central to his discussion at the Neue Gemeinschaft. Buber's definition of the essence common to the individual and the "community" is a more significant transformation. In 1900, Buber named this essence "life itself", but in 1909 it was "Judaism". No less significant was the replacement of "the individual" as the agent of redemptive action with "the Jew". This statement is nothing less than a radical transformation. By suggesting that Judaism can serve as the primal ground on which Jews can live a fulfilled, authentic, even redeemed life, Buber reoriented the entire intellectual project, which he presented to the Neue Gemeinschaft. In his address in Prague, Buber effectively charges the idea of "Judaism", "the Jew", the notion of community, and the concept of mysticism with an entirely unprecedented meaning. Moreover, through the enthusiastic response to this address, it may be assumed that these notions, as they are constructed here, were not only compelling but highly suggestive.

More generally, the idea that community can function spontaneously is not unique to Buber's Zionism. It expresses a universal desire. *Communitas* is borrowed from anthropological research undertaken in Africa among distant tribes, but the issue discussed here is patently modern. Some people experience modern society as broken. Individuals often feel anonymous and forgotten in big urban centers. Governments may appear aloof and indifferent as they exude power through bureaucratic mechanisms with rules and procedures no one seems to fully understand. "Politics" is often used as a derogatory term denoting scheming and dishonesty. In this context, it is only natural that people would crave a sense of belonging, which is immediate. The Neue Gemeinschaft was a social experiment like others of its kind.

The Neue Gemeinschaft was similar to other social experiments in central Europe around the turn of the century and in the first part of the twentieth century. The youth movement, like the *Wandervogel*, the *Lebensreform* movement, and Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, shared some fundamental characteristics with the Neue Gemeinschaft and Buber's early Zionism. Their many differences notwithstanding, they all hoped to prioritize the "human being" before modern technology and scientific advancements to provide, for example, healthy food rather than merely abundance. They also sought to somehow overcome modern urban bureaucratic life with a more immediate, spiritual, and emotionally fulfilling kind of existence. Some groups, like those discussed here, wanted to form the conditions for creating a "community".

The concept of "community", as it was developed by the Hart brothers, Landauer, and Buber, belonged at the forefront of a radical social transformation. They argue that the "regular" order of society is inverted. In the "real reality", the rich, connected, and famous are blind and suffering. At the same time, poor intellectuals, misunderstood artists, and simple farmers are the harbingers of hope, truth, health, and spiritual prosperity (Frese 2000, p. 454). In their lives, the members of the community seek to replace the "normal" way of life, which they deem alienating, unhealthy, and restraining, with some form of an "organic", "original", or "real" existence.

It is tempting to consign reformers of this kind to oblivion. The Hart brothers are an obvious case in point. Mostly ignored by the scholarly discussions, they were even ridiculed by their admirers. In retrospect, even Erich Mühsam, for whom Julius Hart and the Neue Gemeinschaft were formative, found the memory and the texts somewhat insufferable. The monistic philosophy propagated on the pages of *Das Reich der Erfüllung* is practically nonsensical. It is difficult to accept that a trivial change in perspective could solve one of the most fundamental philosophical problems to plague thought in the West

from its inception. The scholarly verdict seems to be that since their ideas were nonsensical, their contribution may be overlooked.

Still, as this essay has attempted to show, the Hart brothers and the Neue Gemeinschaft tell a significant historical tale. Here, they were used to represent not an entire intellectual discourse, but a social movement. In reality, we have seen, the idea that a “community” can mystically bond and overcome daily life and politics (in the usual sense of the word) is an immensely attractive one. A number of influential thinkers, artists, and authors were drawn to the concept. Together, they created a complex apparatus—meetings, discussion groups, excursions, and more—in order to advance the idea, to propagate and realize it. They did so because they believed the community could become a reality if enough people believed in it. It did not become a reality—but this made the idea no less appealing. On the contrary, it seems that the social experiment, the Neue Gemeinschaft, changed the lives of those who were present—even if history wrote the Neue Gemeinschaft off as a failure.

One of those who was deeply affected by the “failed” experiment was Martin Buber. Today, Buber is known for many things, but he is primarily understood as a philosopher. Scholars note his involvement in the Neue Gemeinschaft, but mostly in passing. Nonetheless, his Zionist writings point in a different direction: the group’s ideas remained alive within him. They were transformed by place and time, but the signature of the mystical community—of the “communitas”—was still present. The dream of a mystical community, a new community, lived on almost a decade after the demise of the Neue Gemeinschaft in another small group of young enthusiasts—the Bar Kochba association.

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## Notes

- 1 Scholars often refer to this group as the “post-assimilatory generation”, about which much has been written. See, for example, Volkov (2006, pp. 256–87; 1983) and Brenner (1998, pp. 1–35).
- 2 The distinction between the social and ideological contexts follows Cowan (2006).
- 3 Quoted here from Mendes-Flohr (1989, p. 63).
- 4 “In this book … I ‘bracket’ ontology and Hasidism … By ‘bracket,’ I do not mean to downplay the importance of Buber’s philosophical anthropology … I simply mean to set them to the side for the moment, as if in parentheses, to focus on more neglected aspects of his work” (Brody 2018, p. 4). To explore Buber’s anarchism, Brody discusses Gustav Landauer and his influence on Buber. To the degree that this examination is relevant here, it will be discussed below.
- 5 For more on Bar Kochba, see, for example, Gordon (2017), Maor (2010), Shumsky (2010), and Spector (2000, pp. 135–59). The group is often mentioned in other contexts, but has received relatively little sustained scholarly attention. The most comprehensive works on the Neue Gemeinschaft include Bruns (2000, 2001) and Linse (1983, pp. 62–88). The index of the private archive of Julius and Heinrich Hart, which is housed at the City and Regional Library Dortmund, contains an informative introductory essay about the Neue Gemeinschaft written by Thomas Dupke. The index can also be found online at [http://www.dortmund.de/media/p/bibliothek/stlb\\_downloads/handschriftennachlaesse/leben\\_hart.pdf](http://www.dortmund.de/media/p/bibliothek/stlb_downloads/handschriftennachlaesse/leben_hart.pdf), (accessed on 1 November 2022).
- 6 An undated newspaper clipping parodying the Neue Gemeinschaft was collected by Julius Hart and kept together with other newspaper clippings about the Neue Gemeinschaft in his archive (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2889). Very little is known about *Der Talg*.
- 7 This comment serves as one of very few references to the Neue Gemeinschaft that appears, for example, in Buber’s three-volume edition of his letters (Schaeder 1972, p. 61).
- 8 The *Friedrichshagener Dichterkreis* consisted of what is probably the most influential group of naturalist authors and the locus for the development of the turn-of-the-century monism, which is of interest to us here (Fick 1993, pp. 130–56; Jacobsen 2005, pp. 213–328).
- 9 This might very well be the reason that Mühsam is the best source on the Neue Gemeinschaft (Kauffeldt 1983, pp. 51–65).
- 10 It was Lou Andreas-Salomé who introduced the young poet to the Hart Brothers.
- 11 StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2851.
- 12 StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2828.
- 13 One such event took place on 26 June 1900 (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2825).

- <sup>14</sup> The event took place on 13 August 1900 (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2812).
- <sup>15</sup> As Julius Hart's personal address book shows, among the many artists and writers who frequented the Neue Gemeinschaft, one would also find lawyers, doctors, architects, engineers, and teachers (StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2841).
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, "Sprüche für das Haus der 'neuen Gemeinschaft,'" StLB Dortmund, JHN Nr. 2863.
- <sup>17</sup> The first issue was entirely composed by the Hart brothers. The second issue contains an article by Gustav Landauer titled "Durch Absonderung zur Gemeinde" and an article by Felix Holländer titled "Von festlicher Lebensführung".
- <sup>18</sup> Letter from Gustav Landauer to Hedwig Lachmann, 8 July 1900; see [Landauer \(1929\)](#), vol. 1, p. 56). Martin Buber, who edited the two volumes of Landauer's letters after his untimely death, was able to identify the poem and address held that evening next to the lake. This points to the possibility that he was present at the same event.
- <sup>19</sup> "The circle [of the neue Gemeinschaft] attracted Landauer because it provided an escape from his political isolation" ([Lunn 1973](#), p. 143).
- <sup>20</sup> The translations are loosely based on Gabriel Kuhn's abridged version ([Landauer 2010](#)).
- <sup>21</sup> The standard English-language title of this book is *The Ego and Its Own*. However, in order to better convey the thrust of the book in this context I employ David Leopold's more literal suggestion.
- <sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis of Landauer's understanding of Eckhart, including in "From separation to community", see [Hinz \(2000\)](#), esp. pp. 107–72).
- <sup>23</sup> The crux of Ferdinand Tönnies's most influential work, *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*), is a distinction between what he calls "essential will" (*Wesenwille*) and what he terms "arbitrary will" (*Kürwille*). "Essential will" denotes "the will that includes the thinking", and is characteristic of life in the community (*Gemeinschaft*). Arbitrary will, on the other hand, denotes the "thinking which encompasses the will" and is characteristic of social living (*Gesellschaft*) ([Buber 2013](#), p. 61; C. [Bessant 2016](#); [Flohr and Susser 1976](#), p. 53, fn 39).

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