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## ReForm

Noorda, R.A.

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**Author:** Noorda, Ruchama

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# Introduction



Fig. 0.0. *Private Prophecy, No Excess*, aluminium sign post installation/photo, 180 × 45 cm, California, Ruchama Noorda, 2015

## ReForm

### Introduction

'R: symbol for medical prescription, abbreviation of Latin recipe, imperative form of *recipere*, "to take" or "take thus". Medieval prescriptions typically instructed the patient to "take" certain materials and to compound them in particular ways. Folk beliefs note similarities between the R icon, the Eye of Horus and the ancient symbol for Zeus or Jupiter.'<sup>1</sup>

'Having read several of your books, I wonder if you could find the time to read my brochure "Le Neo-Plasticisme", which I am enclosing. I believe that Neo-Plasticism is the art of the foreseeable future for all true Anthroposophists and Theosophists. Neoplasticism creates harmony through the equivalence of the two extremes: the universal and the individual. The former by "revelation", the latter by "deduction"... ..It is impossible to bring about an equilibrium of relationships other than by destroying the "form", and replacing it by a new 'universal expressive means.'<sup>2</sup>

In 2008, I was invited by De Lakenhal, a museum in Leiden with a historic collection of works by De Stijl movement, to make an exhibition. Leiden had played an important role in the formation and promotion of the movement's ideals from 1917 onwards.<sup>3</sup> At De Lakenhal, I installed *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* ('Static Progress Monument') in which I combined selected works from the Museum's De Stijl

1 Wikipedia entry, 'Medical Prescription', <14 April 2015>

2 Piet Mondriaan, letter to Rudolf Steiner (circa. 1921–1923) quoted in Michel Seuphor (ed.), *Abstract Painting*, New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1964, p. 83–85.

3 Theo van Doesburg founded the influential *De Stijl* magazine (1917–32) in Leiden.

collection with my own designed ceramic pieces, a Eurythmy dance video and items from my personal collection of Anthroposophical artefacts. The exhibition juxtaposed ideas of progress-through-design against occult elements within early 20th century modernist movements, to produce a space in which the desire for an all-encompassing ideology of transformation was materialized within a subjective historical framework. The exhibition, installed at the beginning of this doctoral project, set the tone and the direction of all of my subsequent research, which is rooted in the fusion around site-specific objects and materials of personal and impersonal histories.

I was born and grew up in Leiden and I knew the collection of de Lakenhal by heart, not only through frequent visits to the museum in my childhood and adolescence, but also through my experience as a security guard in the museum in the late 1990's. I had already developed an interest in the connection between de Stijl's austere-looking straight lines and squares, and the more fluid, liquid figural forms associated with anthroposophy. I had encountered Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy in my early childhood and had been trained in its artistic style as a child educated at de Mareland Waldorf school in Leiden.

In the process of researching these two contemporaneous movements—Neoplasticism (a Dutch abstract art movement also known as De Stijl) and Anthroposophy—I became fascinated by the occult underpinnings of the supposedly ultra-rationalist De Stijl movement. Aesthetically these movements could not appear more different; hazy 'numinous' wet-on-wet water colours versus 'hyper-rationalist' rectangular blocks, primary colours and straight lines, flooded dream scenarios versus hard edge diagrams of a progressive future. Now that I was invited to make a work so close to home in every sense, I felt I wanted to investigate the common ground between these two early 20th century movements which had influenced my formation as a person and an artist. I thus settled on the Lebensreform movement as a research topic that would draw De Stijl and Steinerism together. In addition I wanted

to find connections between my artwork and personal value system, and the spiritual-religious framework I had internalized through my upbringing in both the Waldorf school and the Reformed Church. My parents were open to syncretic 1960's New Age thinking and were strongly committed both to Anthroposophy and Reform Church ideals and beliefs (my maternal grandfather was a prominent Protestant Reformed Church theologian). My work is concerned with processing, analysing and digging into that dual legacy—exploring the terrain of a specifically northern European (post-)Christian spiritual and aesthetic legacy through its passage back and forth between the New World and Europe. I investigate the occult roots of the Anthroposophic and Reform traditions while examining their impact on 20th century avantgardes and consider how aspirations for self- and social transformation were articulated within them.

My practice continues to evolve from a fundamental sense of solidarity with, and desire for a worldview in which art functions as a practical, spiritual and social *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In the various projects described in the following chapters, I set out to revisit what I believe to be the spiritual, political and aesthetic questions posed in the work of avant-garde Lebensreform-influenced artists like Piet Mondriaan and Wassily Kandinsky. At the same time, I am aware of the historical-cultural gap that separates me, my time and my Europe from them and theirs. My engagement with these figures is partly undertaken as an excavation, or séance—an attempt on my part to reconnect directly with the practices, materials, and organizing ideologies and beliefs that, despite the distance separating us in time, links us in a common lineage. At the same time, I am interested in testing the relevance of aesthetic-spiritual lifestyle experiments as pioneered in the early part of the 20th century, and seeing how those experiments have been reworked since the 1960's and 1970's by American and European artists, and counter-culturalists in today's globalized capitalist conditions. In the research process I revisited questions of genealogy, following in the footsteps of a growing number of historians and

curators who have sought in recent decades to uncover the occult underpinnings of those avant-garde movements including the Symbolists, De Stijl and Der Blaue Reiter, strongly influenced by Theosophy, Anthroposophy and the Lebensreform movement.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, I was surprised to come across Mondriaan's letter to Steiner, which I quoted at the beginning of this Introduction. After spending fourteen years as a pupil in the Waldorf school system, the idea of any kind of natural fit between Anthroposophy and Neoplasticism seemed far-fetched. It directly contradicted my own understanding of Steiner's aesthetic principles (and the fact that Mondriaan's letter went unanswered probably tells us something about Steiner's response to his idea). The hazy spiritualist style of water colour painting that Steiner and his followers produced, and which remained the artistic standard in Waldorf schools when I was being educated, stood in stark contrast to the rectilinear grids and saturated blocks of colour that make Mondriaan's later abstractions so distinct. As I pursued my research, I learned that Mondriaan was deeply influenced by the strands of esoteric thought represented by Steiner and 'Madame' Blavatsky. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) is regarded as the founding architect of Theosophical cosmology. Despite the fact that Mondriaan's engagement with theosophy is well known in art historical circles, I believe that the larger implications of the impact of occult and esoteric thinking, not just on Mondriaan but on modernism in general, have yet to be fully appreciated and understood. By tracing Steiner's commitment to Theosophy,

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, Maurice Tuchman (ed.), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (catalogue: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1986); Veit Loers (ed.), *Occultismus und Avantgarde: von Munch bis 1900–1915* (catalogue: Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, 1995); Jean de Loisy & Angela Lampe (eds.), *Traces du Sacre* (catalogue: Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2008); Serge Fauchereau & Joëlle Pijaudier Cabo (eds.), *L'Europe des esprits ou la fascination de l'occulte, 1750–1950*, (catalogue: Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg, 2011).

as well as Blavatsky and Annie Besant's<sup>5</sup> ideas of world history as a process of spiritual evolution, I ended up immersing myself in the rich history of the Lebensreform movement. Lebensreform has its roots in earlier European occultism and finds its inspirational sources in both Indian religious and mystical practice, and the hermetic/alchemical traditions of medieval Europe.

At its height, between 1880 and the early 1930's, Lebensreform found expression through the Rational Dress movement of clothing reform, health food (vegetarianism and organic farming), natural medicine, educational reform, nudism, and new spiritual movements like Theosophy and the new Christian-Hindu hybrid embodied in Anthroposophy. In addition, the importance of the Lebensreform movement for the European art world, and society as a whole, is most intensely highlighted in the experimental art and lifestyle work undertaken at the Monte Verità colony at Ascona in Locarno, Switzerland. Operating between 1900 and 1940, this residency, retreat, art centre and sanatorium attracted a range of influential European artists and intellectuals including Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, Carl Jung, El Lissitzky, Wassily Kandinsky, Hermann Hesse, Paul Klee, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Frederik van Eeden, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (co-founder of the Dutch socialist movement), Mary Wigman and Rudolf von Laban. For more than fifty years, Monte Verità served as a vital hub of interdisciplinary exchange and as a dynamic incubator for cultural and artistic innovation, new ideas and practices geared toward the development of communitarian ideals, physical, mental, spiritual health and social transformation.

In the light of the central position that the Hill of Truth (Monte Verità) has come to occupy in my personal mythology as a 21st-century anarcho-mystic, I have chosen to call my research 'ReForm', in order to reference simultaneously the social-political aspirations of the Lebensreform movement, the Reformation of the 16th century, and the literal

<sup>5</sup> Annie Besant (1847–1933) was a British Theosophist, Socialist and Women's Right activist.

processes of compounding: the transformation and physical re-forming of materials that are essential to any art practice, and on which I focus explicitly in my own work and what I refer to as the alchemical component. In Dutch, the word *Reform* refers to the *Lebensreform* movement and, via the related Reformwinkel (German: Reformhaus), an organic retail chain that still operates across parts of northern Europe, to the 'alternative' flower power culture of the 1960's, 1970's and after. The Reformhaus brand was the forerunner to the now globalized 'organic' food/'natural' health and beauty product markets and, despite the mainstreaming of organic 'brands', I would argue they still carry a lasting echo of the other-worldly idealism of the original Life Reform Movement.



Fig. 0.1. [www.trademarkia.com](http://www.trademarkia.com) < 5 June 2015 >

In addition to developing and marketing organic products, *Lebensreform*, rooted in a combination of European 'back to nature' romanticism and Eastern mysticism, was first and foremost a counter-cultural movement, and was characterised by a powerful, all-encompassing critique of industrialisation and urbanisation. As such, *Lebensreform* thinking and practice might be said to contain a fundamental critique of industrial capitalism and to offer a set of alternative or oppositional values. Such values were resonating as the century progressed, for better or worse, with both left and right cultural and political trends, with both socialist and National Socialist tendencies.

The lineage that links *Lebensreform*, and connected the Wandervogel movement of the 1920's through the figure of the longhaired German immigrant 'Nature Boy' to California's hippies of the 1960's, tends to be regarded

as relatively nonthreatening.<sup>6</sup> But the influence applied by Steiner's advocacy in 1924 of mystical 'biodynamic' farming methods on early formulations of the Nazi 'blood and soil' doctrine is harder to connect with the 'politically correct' self-image of today's growing mainstream environmentalist movements. In *Ecofascism* (2011) (co-authored with Janet Biehl) and *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (2014), American historian Peter Staudenmaier makes a convincing case for placing *Lebensreform* and Anthroposophy in the category of movements that contributed key components to National Socialist 'Nordic' mysticism and ideologies concerning the invented superiority of the 'Aryan' race (a concept first introduced by Blavatsky).<sup>7</sup> While Anthroposophy was banned by the Nazis in 1935 because of its 'close contact with foreign freemasons, Jews and pacifists', and the Waldorf system of 'individualistic and human-oriented education'<sup>8</sup>, the similarities with National Socialist thinking and the support of prominent Nazis like Rudolf Hess continue to cast a dark shadow over the entire movement and its history. These associations with anti-democratic, xenophobic and racist ideologies have caused many of the utopian elements rooted within *Lebensreform* to have been overlooked and gradually forgotten since the Second World War.

It is this conflicted and controversial legacy of the *Lebensreform* movement that I seek to uncover and to reflect upon in this dissertation and through my art: installations, performances and publications completed during my research over the past years. The artworks, interventions, 'pilgrimages' and performances presented under my ReForm category grounded in the written research and the project as a whole — both the writing and the ReForm

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Gordon Kennedy: *Children of the Sun: A Pictorial Anthology From Germany To California 1883–1949*, (Nivaria Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Though it should be noted Blavatsky included the Jewish people within the Aryan category.

<sup>8</sup> BAK (German Federal Archives) R4311/822, quoted in Uwe Werner, 'Anthroposophy in the Time of Nazi Germany', <http://www.thebee.se/comments/articles/Werner1.htm> < 4 October 2015 >

artworks — are simultaneously historical and personal. They embody an excavation, at one and the same time, of my own formation and of the darker aspects of modernism, a movement that is still oftentimes, despite all the evidence to the contrary, presented as homogeneous and straightforwardly linear, progressive and rationalist. As with other European-based contemporary artists and writers, such as Austrian artist Martin Beck and the German curator Anselm Franke,<sup>9</sup> who are interested in uncovering the roots of the 1960's and 1970's counter-cultural utopianism, this archaeological project which, in my case often involves literal excavations, has taken me to California. In the course of research trips to California between 2011 and 2014, I have made several soil-based works, which set out to implicate alternative medicinal/ Naturopathic practices and the concept of land ownership and private property. To give one example, I approached this by compressing dirt, plant fragments and building debris, collected on the ruins of an early 20th century socialist commune in the Mojave desert, into a digestible pill form (I will elaborate on this in chapter four *ReForm Land(scape) — Consuming Sites*)

From the late 1970's onwards, several prominent curators and contemporary artists have made works and exhibitions exploring the history and legacy of the Lebensreform movement in Europe. In 1978, Harald Szeemann curated an on-site exhibition at Ascona entitled *Breasts of Truth*, based on historical documents, photographs and significant objects from the original Monte Verità colony. Szeemann presented the exhibition as 'archaeological research into *the metropolis of alternatives*' (Szeemann, 1978. It. RN). A contemporary practitioner of archive-based artwork<sup>10</sup> in this area who has significantly influenced my approach is Stephan Dillemath. His work addresses the continuing impact of the Lebensreform

9 Anselm Franke, *The Whole Earth Exhibition*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2013. [http://hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p\\_87732.php](http://hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_87732.php) < 4 October 2015>

10 *Lichtmenschen im Sumpf der Sonne — Studien zur Lebensreform* (Sun people in the Slush of the Light — Studies on the Reform of Life), London's LUX Magazine 28, 2002.

'lifestyle' and he was generous enough to allow me access to his elaborated Lebensreform archive.<sup>11</sup>

An important aspect of my ReForm research involved conducting collectivist experiments in the form of collaborations with fellow artists in the Civic Virtue collective. Between 2009 and 2014, the members of the group: Brian McKenna, Geirthrudur Finnbogadottir Hjorvar, Gijsbert Wouter Wahl and myself, participated in a series of residencies in The Netherlands, Italy and Germany that resulted in a number of collective statements, exhibitions and performances.<sup>12</sup> The group was drawn together by a shared interest in the unifying ideologies and aesthetics of historical social movements, with a particular focus on iconographies of power and (public) virtue. In the final project, organized shortly before the group's dissolution in the fall of 2013, we created consecutive installations on the grounds of the former artists' colony at Worpswede in Saxony (*The Gewebe Project* at Künstlerhäuser Worpswede) and at the Stadthausgalerie in Münster (*CV VI.2 — Immergo Identidum*) that dealt with the history of the Münster Anabaptists rebellion in 1534–5.

As I hope will become clear from what follows, the Lebensreform movement was not some sudden trend or the product of a temporally or geographically isolated subculture, rather, it was deeply rooted in earlier European movements. This can be deduced from its countless similarities with certain, mainly Christian, heretical sects and communities of faith which developed in the early modern period in Europe. Examples include the Anabaptists in 16th century Amsterdam and Münster during the Radical Revolution, and the English Diggers, Puritans and Quakers from the around the mid 17th century English Civil War period. The various

11 And to which I also contributed some of my own research into Dutch strands of life reform.

12 CV III — Office of Propaganda, Hinterconti, Hamburg, 2012.  
CV IV — After the Butcher, Berlin, 2012.  
CV V — the Cloth of Vittoria, Kunstverein Milano 2012.  
CV VI.2 — Immergo Identidum, Kunsthalle/ Stadthausgalerie Münster, 2013.



histories, competing ideologies and aspirations of these diverse groups have all fed directly into this dissertation and into my artworks, which together comprise the present body of research. Resemblances between these diverse religiously inspired movements include a predilection for pacifism, communal property, various forms of civil disobedience and the direct experience of spirituality with no mediating authority.

The Life Reform traditions I refer to, and with which I align myself, sprang out of an underground of heretics, anarcho-mystics, free thinkers and nature-anarchists. They sought to build a new order by appealing to the higher authority of the spiritual world over the hierarchical, corrupt and worldly dictates of church and state. I have sought to channel and mobilize the spirit of that long history of confrontation between heresy and orthodoxy, dissidence and legitimated authority, while striving throughout to remain aware of the dangers of extremism and self-righteousness. Therefore, I have tried to keep some distance from the faith driven positions and personae I inhabit and invoke. For instance, I recognize that for all their initially subversive or anti-authoritarian character, many of the radical historical religious movements I am referencing degenerated over time—sometimes rapidly—into rigid and intolerant dogmas, a pattern I acknowledge, comment on, and at times parody in the art projects as much as in the writing.

Among the many conflicts and contradictions within the traditions of religious dissidence and civil disobedience I identify, work on and play with, is the tension between self-isolation/individual 'transcendence' (for example, Thoreau's *Walden*, 1854; Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, 1841; gustaf nagel's *Mein Testament*, 1920), and communal organisation and co-operative ideals as realized in communes like Monte Verità at Ascona, van Eeden's Walden in Bussum, and Llano del Rio in Southern California.

Another issue I set out to address with the benefit of hindsight, is the position of women within the various oppositional religious/Reform movements. While the iconography

of revolt and revolution has many identifiable charismatic female martyrs and female leader figures, from Jeanne d'Arc to the figure of La Liberté with her Phrygian cap, women artists and designers were notoriously underrepresented and overshadowed by males in Lebensreform no less than in De Stijl. The female form was objectified and idealized in the often kitschy prints of official Lebensreform artists, such as in de the work of the German visual artist Fidus (1868–1948). Throughout my work, I return to this iconography in order to retool and revise it, for example, in the figure that recurs in many of my installations of Liberty holding up a monkey wrench. In my performance pieces I often position myself anachronistically as an actor out-of-time, for instance, as an animated character from a Lebensreform bass-relief, a worker from a therapeutic spa displaced first to the desert (*Diopharma*), and then some months later to a gallery in Amsterdam (*R*), or as a member of a group of orange monks or nun-witch hybrids street-cleaners sweeping the streets of Amsterdam's red-light district (*Redemption Value*, Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, 2014).

#### *Experiment*

Lebensreform is, as the name suggests, focused directly on altering human lifeways. Throughout this project I have tried, on and off and as far as has proved practicable and possible, to live critically according to Lebensreform principles—embracing vegetarianism, teetotalism (periodically) and eating only organic products, grounding my feet in 'rational' footwear, practicing yoga and meditation, limiting material consumption and spending lengths of time in natural and/or wilderness settings. I believe in natural medicine, organic farming, bare foot apostles and political nudism. In my practice I recycle elements of Reform pedagogy, arts, crafts, dance, dietary proscriptions and ritual practices in performance and installation works that both engage and challenge contemporary communitarian and counter-cultural aspirations, practices and beliefs. By highlighting the mystical and magical elements within the Reform tradition along with other undigested and 'irrational' material, my works set out to perform a literal and figurative séance-function, excavating the repressed and buried histories within the Modern

in ways that set out to complicate hard and fast distinctions between progressive and conservative social and artistic movements.

The influential figure of Madame Blavatsky<sup>13</sup>, occultist, feminist and mother of Theosophy, therefore of invented traditions,<sup>14</sup> and what is now called ‘New Age’ thinking, hangs over the entire project from start to finish as an impenetrable enigma, as both visionary seer and charismatic fraud. The proclamation cited below, taken from Blavatsky’s 1877 opus, *Isis Unveiled* functions as a unifying mantra: ‘Our voice is raised for spiritual freedom, and our pleas made for enfranchisement from all tyranny, whether of Science or Theology’. (Blavatsky 1877, 41) Each of the four chapters in this dissertation treats the idea of *ReForm* from a different angle, in a sequence that relates the subject matter to the following categories: *ReForm the Subconscious*, *ReForm the Body*, *ReForm the Collective* and *ReForm the Landscape*. The chapters contain descriptions and documentation of a total of seven art projects completed as part of my doctoral research.

13 Fig. 0.2. H.P. Blavatsky in 1877, New York.  
Photo: The Blavatsky Archives.



14 Invented traditions are so called new and non ‘authentic’ traditions, Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983.

## Chapters:

**Chapter 1: *ReForm SUBCONSCIOUS (Muddled Thinking)***—Internal Colonization—Unrealistic Dreamer—American Walden—(Sub-)Consciousness—Enclosed Garden—*Asocialen-Private-Prophesy-Detox*—Dirt.

The first chapter, *ReForm SUBCONSCIOUS (Muddled Thinking)*, deals with the subconscious in relation to Reform practices in recent history. It combines the account given by writer and psychiatrist, Frederik van Eeden of his attempt from 1898 to 1907 to establish a socialist commune on his estate in Bussum in the Netherlands, with documentation of *Asocialen - Private Prophesy - Detox*. This was a mud hut and mud bath installation I built on a ruined campground in Diepenheim, Overijssel in October, 2012. Van Eeden’s socialist utopia and the vision of cooperation on which it was based, contrasts sharply with the experiment in solitude and self-sufficiency conducted by American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau near Walden Pond in rural Massachusetts fifty years earlier. The conflict between these two versions of ‘back to nature’ utopianism—one cooperative and socialist, the other ‘anti-social’ and secessionism—runs throughout the history of the Lebensreform movement. It forms a major source of tension and concern within both this dissertation and the artworks described here as part of the *R* project. The conflict played out in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the battle between social reformers and the ‘asocial’ (marginal or ‘lumpen’) classes, between the Cleanliness, Order and Quiet programme of social housing advocates<sup>15</sup> and the unsanitary habits of the disobedient masses or the ‘dregs of society’ living at the end of a low lying-delta in the muddy terrain of the Netherlands. Mud as a foundational material creates trouble for modernity’s gridded out future. The story of the Dutch version of Walden is interrupted throughout by extracts from van Eeden’s *Dream Diary*, a pattern that is reflected in the chapter’s title.

15 The ‘Woningwet’ of 1901 was a series of laws and legislations that were taken in the Netherlands in order to improve housing and end unhealthy slum living.

**Chapter 2: ReForm BODY—HYGIENE-PRANA-PRAXIS: The Lebensreform Legacy** — Lebensreform — Hill of Truth — Ecology — Spiritual Evolution — Anthroposophy — Static Monument to Progress — Nature Prophets — Live Earth, Idols and Embodied Landscape — Occult Dunghill.

The second chapter, *ReForm BODY—HYGIENE-PRANA-PRAXIS*, focuses on the legacy of the Lebensreform movement by tracing the continuous influence of Lebensreform practices and thinking on today's alternative health and organic farming movements. The text refers to the growth of Naturopathy, nudism and the counterculture of the body. Through the work of 19th and early 20th century German thinkers such as Adolf Just and Sebastian Kneipp, I track the emergence of a post-Christian animistic approach to health issues in which the idea of a unifying vital force (prana), stirring the entire universe, gives rise to a holistic approach. In this methodology, nature can no longer be studied from a detached or objective external viewpoint, but is seen instead as part of an all-encompassing, inter-linked system of *ecology*. Here I discuss the legacy of Theosophical and Anthroposophical ideas and beliefs that manifested in a variety of early 20th century experimental movements and subcultures from Monte Verità to naturism, from the Wandervogel and Hitler Youth movements to Mondriaan's *neoplasticism* and the idealized Nordic iconography of artists like Fidus. By adding my own ReForm-inspired objects, drawings and statements to items taken from the Lakenhal Museum collection, my exhibition-installation *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* (Static Monument to Progress, 2008), described earlier in this introduction, I was attempting to literally *think through* and complicate an already complex and muddy heritage. At the end of this chapter I confront the irrational and contra-modern tendencies within the Lebensreform movement, by taking up and taking on the pathological practice of Geophagy: eating earth and soil.

**Chapter 3: ReForm COLLECTIVE: Countering (Individual) Culture** — Civic Virtue — The Gewebe Project: Weaving/Worpswede — The Collapse of Civic Virtue — Full Immersion, Co-Knowledge and Hydrotherapy — *Redemption Value* — A Note On The Colour Orange.

The third chapter, *ReForm COLLECTIVE: Countering (Individual) Culture*, examines the problems and difficulties associated with the idea(l) of the collective as a vehicle for social, spiritual, cultural and/or economic transformation. The history of Lebensreform includes many examples of failed social experimentation as groups of people brought together by a common desire to put socialist or anarchist principles into practice within a circumscribed space become sooner or later beset by internal divisions and schisms or fall prey to the inherent instability and apocalyptic tendencies of charismatic movements. The central contradiction dealt with in this chapter is between the aspiration on the part of committed individuals to promote a collaborative or cooperative ethos within a circumscribed space and on a small scale and the principles of competitive individualism and private property enshrined in the institutions of the larger societies in which they are embedded.

The chapter weaves back and forth between a meditation on these historical attempts at realizing social utopias at different times and the documentation of two collaborative projects completed back to back in the fall of 2013 by Civic Virtue, the four person artist's collective which I helped to found in 2009 and of which I was a member until 2014 when we disbanded. And the last project of Civic Virtue which involved the construction of a primitive loom on the grounds of the artists' colony in Worpswede in Lower Saxony founded in 1895 by Fritz Mackensen and which four decades later was called by Hitler the National Centre for German Nordic art.<sup>16</sup> The result of this project was the exhibition *Immergo Identidum: Civic Virtue*, which was a collective response to the

<sup>16</sup> 'Chamberlain, L. 'From Art as Life to Blood and Soil', <http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/4506/full> <4 October 2015>

idea of religiously inspired counter culture. The exhibition took place at the Stadthausgalerie in Münster, located close to both the Platz des Westfälischen Friedens (Westphalian Peace Square) and the cathedral. Today, the iron cages are still hanging on the cathedral's façade in which the dead bodies of the Anabaptist rebels were exhibited.

**Chapter 4: *ReForm Land(scape)*** — Rhizome — Pearblossom Highway — *Diopharma* — Earth Works and Non Sites — Compressed Landscape — Land Development — The New World, California and Lebensreform — Nature Boys: California's Wandervogel — Portable-Digestible Landscapes.

The fourth chapter, *ReForm Land(scape)* draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome in order to chart a network of subterranean connections linking disparate times, events and places. It maps the back and forth migration of Lebensreform ideas, values, and social and aesthetic experiments between northern Europe and the American southwest from the early 20th century to the present, in the wake of the 1960's and 70's U.S. hippy movement. The focus of this chapter falls back onto the ground itself: the soil on which history gets made, whether that be Bussum's Dutch mud, or the dry desert dirt on which the short-lived socialist colony of Llano del Rio (1914–1918) and Garth Bowles' present day Boulder Gardens commune in Pioneertown were erected. The research and artworks dealt with here were completed during several trips to California (and in one case, Marfa Texas) undertaken since 2011 and gives a description of *Hortus Conclusus*, a mini roadside monument piece I installed on private land in Marfa in the spring of 2013. This piece sets out to bridge the distance between European radical traditions and American land-art in a different way from the 'compressed landscape' works: a sign with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous text on the origin of private property was mounted on a dried mud structure. This structure was made out of the dirt which was removed to create the mud bath hollow directly beneath it.

I explored the historic roots of the hippy movement in German Romanticism, neo-paganism, health reform and 19th and 20th century back-to-nature movements through archival research in southern California. I made a series of collectable-digestible 'compressed landscape' site-specific works in the Netherlands and in the Mojave and Chihuahuan deserts in the American southwest, using fragments of built structures, and earth and plant material collected from the ruins of Llano del Rio and van Eeden's Walden. I manually ground and compressed these materials into pills that were then vacuum-sealed in pharmaceutical-style plastic packages. This happening was both a re-enactment and a magical act in which belief and faith played a major role. The pills were distributed to members of the public in an improvised 'alternative' pharmacy mounted at an exterior location in Wonder Valley, California. (*Diopharma* was part of the *Spectacular Sub-Division* group show, 6-4-2014 organized by High Desert Test Sites and the University of California Institute of Research into the Arts, and some months later at Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam, 28-6-2014). The compressed earth pieces make historic commune sites portable and at the same time make land art digestible to the general public. They turn the doctrine of 'blood and soil' on its head by making people eat dirt from 'sacred' commune sites. In doing so, the consumer becomes at one with the site.