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Citation

Noorda, R. A. (2015, December 9). *ReForm*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/36549>

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Title: ReForm

Issue Date: 2015-12-09

Chapter 2: ReForm BODY — HYGIENE-PRANA- PRAXIS: The Lebensreform Legacy

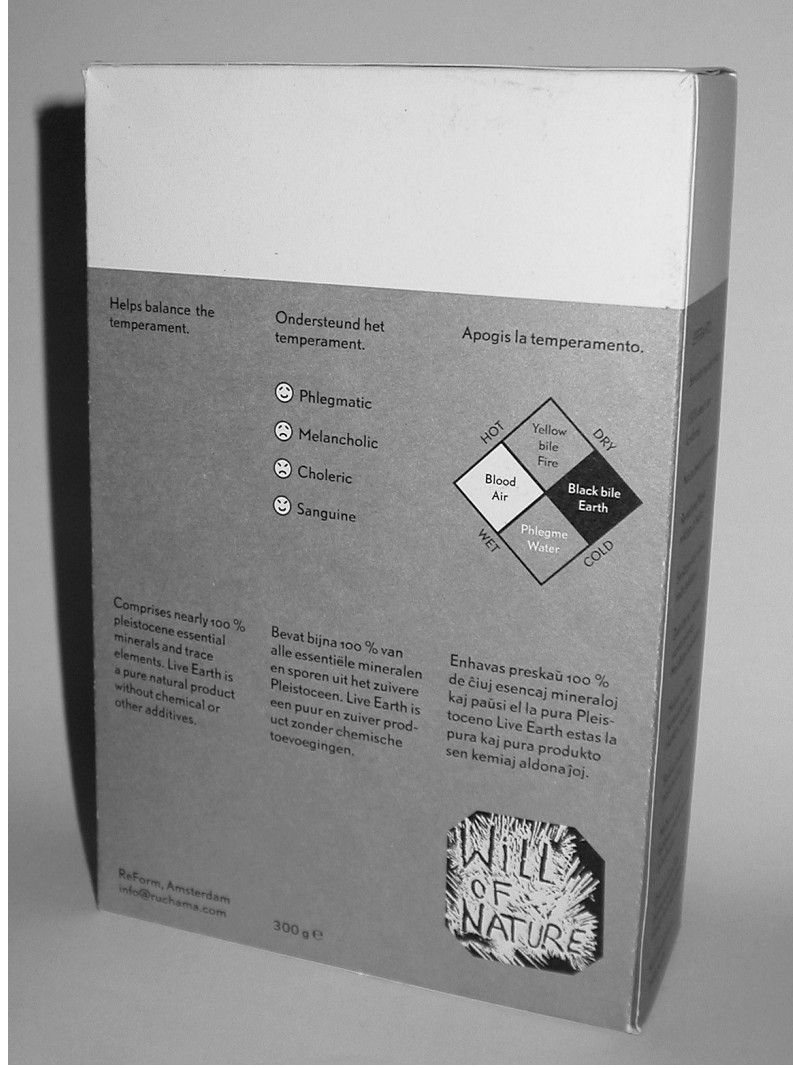


Fig. 2.0. *Bel's Pilgrimage*, Southern Limburg, Ruchama Noorda, Taak, Amsterdam/Marres, Maastricht. Photo: RN. Design by Paul Gangloff.

Chapter 2. *ReForm BODY — HYGIENE-PRANA-PRAXIS: The Lebensreform Legacy*

In this chapter, I set out to explore the contradictory social, political and spiritual legacy of the Lebensreform movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As mentioned before, my fascination with the movement stems from a childhood spent in an Anthroposophical household, and at a Waldorf school in Leiden. Here I absorbed ideas and ideals concerning everything from diet and medical treatments, to clothing and spiritual life. I later realized that such principles were largely alien to the values shared by the people I encountered outside my own community. Growing up in the 1980's, I found that many of my friends—even those educated like me within the Steiner system—were embarrassed by, or hostile to Life Reform utopianism. The movement had become tainted by association with what was by then seen as an unfashionable or outmoded 'hippy' lifestyle, or further back, with Nazi-era 'völkisch' thinking and the cult of 'Blood and Soil'. Later, as I learned how similar ideas and ideals had shaped socialist-inspired art and design movements like De Stijl, Bauhaus, and the British Arts & Crafts movement, I realized that the Lebensreform legacy (and perhaps the history of modernism in general) was more ambiguous and more complicated than was generally accepted. Much of my work and current interests are focused on such ambiguities.

In what follows, I offer a route map through the Lebensreform movement that sets out to avoid flattening the bumpy terrain of history, but instead draws attention to the bends and holes in the road. More an excavation—a dig through the mud of the past—than an overview, it reproduces my own journey through the material—joining up the dots between those ideas, practices and historical personalities that have influenced my thinking, while shaping and inspiring my own work. Throughout the journey, I return again and again to three core concepts that together trace the outline of a modern animistic approach to the body and health issues that emerged first in northern Europe, and later in the USA. Those concepts are hygiene-prana-praxis,

and together they form the organic-conceptual basis for all the work I do. While hygiene and practice are part of a commonplace vocabulary, the term *prana* may be less familiar to the reader. Yet prana—the idea of a unifying vital force animating all of Creation—is at the centre of the Lebensreform world view and is the key to the holistic approach to spiritual and physical ecology. From an holistic perspective, Nature can no longer be studied from a detached or objective external view point, but is seen to function rather as an infinite system of mutually conditioning relationships—as a vast *living* network—in which human beings are themselves intrinsically entangled. The *R* project is my attempt to begin considering some of the possible implications for both art and life (and life as art) of such a radical revision of human being in the world.

Lebensreform

Lebensreform first appeared at various locations across Western Europe, but most prominently in Germany and Switzerland in the late 19th and early 20th century. At its height between 1880 and 1933¹, Lebensreformers were lobbying strongly for what amounted to a cultural revolution that implicated everything from religious, educational and dietary norms (health food/raw food) to agriculture (organic farming), clothing (nudism and ‘rational apparel’ e.g. footwear), sexual mores and alternative medicine. Within certain sections of the arts, the Lebensreform movement and the radical approach to social engineering advocated by its members had become integral to the emergence of the northern European avant-garde. By the early years of the 20th century this commitment to lifestyle transformation motivated not only members of De Stijl, like Piet Mondriaan, but also artists such as Russian born Wassily Kandinsky, author of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910).

¹ 1933 is clearly a loaded and often contested cutoff date, see for instance Kerbs and Reuleke 1998.

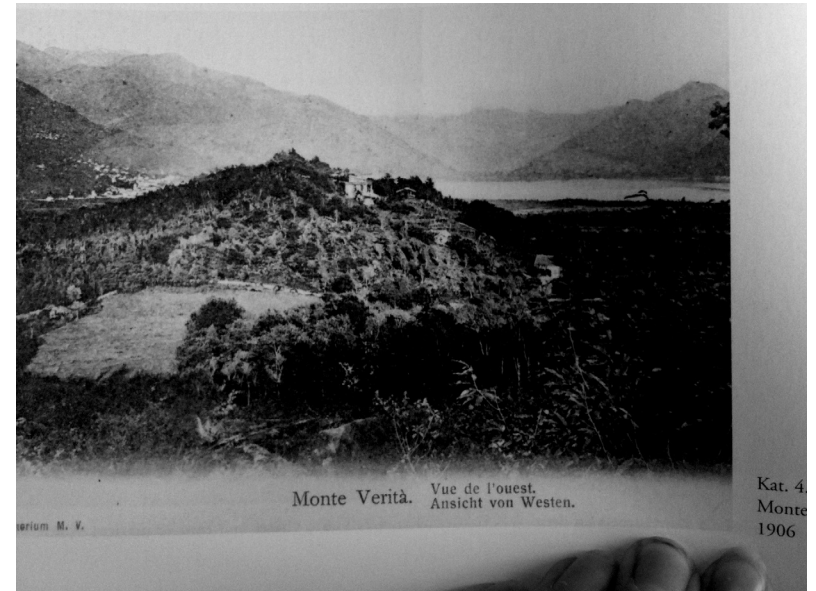


Fig. 2.2. Monte Verità, 1906. Postcard printed by M. V. (Monte Verità Sanatorium Verlag) in *Monte Verità. Berg der Wahrheit*, Szeemann 1978, 50.

Hill of Truth

The centrality of Lebensreform ideas to the formation of the European avant-garde is clearly visible in the history of the Monte Verità colony. Monte Verità can be described simultaneously as the cradle of counterculture (Green 1986) and the grave of the idea of modernity-as-progress. The colony was co-founded in 1900 in Ascona, Switzerland, by Henry Oedenkoven, the son of a prominent Antwerp industrialist; his companion, the pianist Ida Hoffmann and her sister Jenny; along with Lotte Hattemer, the anarchist daughter of the Mayor of Berlin; the German-Austrian poet, ‘nature prophet’ and conscientious-objector; as well as Gustav Graeser and his brother Karl, a prominent publisher of ‘alternative’ literature (Frecot 1978, 57). Monte Verità, which Harald Szeemann once described as ‘the southernmost outpost of a far-reaching Nordic lifestyle-reform...movement’ (Gente 1982, 1), was set up as a cooperative vegetarian colony

according to the principles of primitive anarcho-socialism. The colonists who took up residence on ‘The Hill of Truth’ practiced nudism, promoted dress and dietary reforms, sought to dismantle the idea of private property and traditional divisions of labour, and practiced free love.

With roots in the European Land Reform movement and anarchism (prominent Russian anarchists, Mikhail Bakunin and Piotr Kropotkin were both affiliated), the artists and intellectuals who assembled on the Hill of Truth sought to find a ‘third way’ beyond both capitalism and communism.²

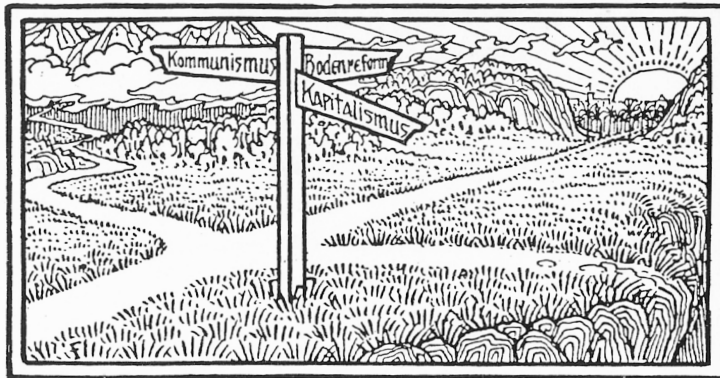


Fig. 2.3. Fidus, drawing on the cover of the *Organ der Deutschen Bodenreformer* (German Organisation of Land Reformers), Szeemann 1978, 8.

² Land Reform developed from 1850 on around the writings of a disparate range of writers, including the American political-economist Henry George (1839–1897), the Austrian journalist, Theodor Hertzka (1845–1927) and the German sociologist and economist Franz Oppenheimer (1864–1943). The Land Reform Movement sought to counter capital accumulation and growing income disparity through expedients such as the Single (land) Tax and the formation of egalitarian land communes and cooperatives in overseas colonies. Hertzka’s ideas, principally elaborated in his utopian novel, *Freiland, ein soziales Zukunftsbild* (1896), exerted a major influence on the thinking of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, who was a close friend.

While from the outset the seekers converging on Monte Verità arrived with competing ideas, agendas and objectives, they were also united by a common commitment to radical experimentation. In its heyday, Ascona’s Hill of Truth functioned as a kind of lifestyle laboratory, dedicated to engineering a comprehensive overhaul of society and culture from the ground up. Apart from a common investment in the ideal of Utopian socialism, the majority of commune members were heavily influenced by esoteric ideas rooted in Theosophy, and many were closely affiliated to occult societies. To take one example, Theodor Reuss, founder of the Ordo Templi Orientalis—the secret society associated with English occultist Aleister Crowley—organized congresses at Monte Verità. At Ascona’s Hill there were congresses organized on topics ranging from woman’s rights, anti-nationalism and sex magic, to a Sun Festival (‘Sonnenfest’). This festival was an outdoor performance/dance festival ‘performed over a twelve-hour span from sunset to sunrise’ (Manning 1993, 77).

My fascination with the Monte Verità commune stems as much from its prophetic or pre-figurative functions as from its (art) historical significance. In photographs, the bohemian residents at Ascona may appear to the 21st century viewer like time travellers transported back to early 20th century Europe, from some 1960’s or early 70’s Californian commune. The parallels between turn of the century and mid-century avant-gardism in the arts and counter-cultural experimentation extend beyond the antiauthoritarian value system spelled out in the written tracts—the budding environmentalism and back to nature manifestoes that circulated in both Ascona and the hippy ‘underground’—to encompass even the details of the commune members’ dress (or undress) and physical appearance—long hair, oriental kaftans and beards for the men; bare feet, diadems and long dresses for the women. And on regular occasions, nudity for both sexes.

Similar parallels can be found in the blurring of art and life, which is a powerful common motif that binds the two groups and cultural moments together despite the distances

in space and time. The parallels, while on the surface merely uncanny, are often directly traceable to research and education, as many 1960's and 70's counter-cultural activists and artists learned about the European avant-gardes while studying in art schools and University Humanities departments. It is possible, in my view, to trace direct continuities between the performance art, experimental choreography and 'happenings' pioneered by US artists like Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer, Vito Acconci and Allan Kaprow in the 60's and 70's, and the experimental art practices, theatrical gestures and disruptive interventions tested and developed decades earlier on the Hill of Truth. Ascona after all, drew many of the most influential artists, intellectuals and revolutionary activists from all over Europe, in the same way that San Francisco, Esalen and Berkeley drew visionaries, poets, musicians and radical thinkers to Northern California from all across America and beyond during the mid-1960's.

One indication of Ascona's significance within the field of art is the legacy in modern dance of Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958). Von Laban (commonly called Laban) set up an alternative arts academy at Monte Verità. His most famous student, Mary Wigman (1886–1973), went on to become a key pioneer in the development of expressionist dance. During his residency at Monte Verità, Laban developed the art of the movement choir, in which large numbers of people move together within a loosely choreographed framework, with space allowed for improvised personal expression. This aspect of his work was related to his spiritual beliefs. These beliefs are based on what appears to be a combination of Theosophical cosmology and the simulated Masonic template adopted by the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O), which Laban had joined in 1914. A notable element of the O.T.O that recalls accounts of induction into hippy cults and communes is the initiatory system in which ceremonial ritual drama was performed.



Fig. 2.4. Laban and his group at Monte Verità, 1914, autochrome photo by Johann Adam Meisenbach, Collection Kunsthaus Zürich.

During the period of the Third Reich (1933–1945), both Wigman and Laban received grants from the Nazi state to develop their work. Laban in particular worked closely with Josef Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda, although his epic piece *Vom Tauwind und der Neuen Freude* ('Of the Spring Wind and the New Joy') was banned by Goebbels in 1936 on ideological and aesthetic grounds before its first public performance (Koegler 1980, 176). Laban's support for Völkisch ideology and National Socialism is itself a subject of scholarly controversy.³ According to dance historian Susan Manning, as dance was becoming gradually more a form of ceremonial display that integrated gymnastics and speaking choirs, 'some of the shared roots of expressionist dance with the neo-romanticism and nationalism of the turn of the century Europe' began to be starkly exposed (Manning 1993, 172). Ceremonial performances of one kind or another mounted at Monte Verità seem to have inspired the 'Thingspiel', a multi-disciplinary outdoor theatre that

3 See Kew, C., 'From Weimar Movement Choir to Nazi Community Dance: The Rise and Fall of Rudolf Laban's Festkultur.' In: *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, vol. 17, no 2, 1999, 73–96.

was popular during the 1930's. 'Thingspiel' was a specially constructed outdoor theatre built for performances, 'völkische' meetings, and for the presentation of theatrical events and propaganda. The 'Thing-sites'⁴ were built in a natural setting, incorporating rocks, trees, lakes, ruins, and hills of some historical or mythic significance. The connection between the experiments at Monte Verità and more contemporary ideas surrounding the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (total art work; an artistic creation that synthesizes the elements of music, drama, spectacle and dance etc.) surfaced explicitly in 1978 with the publication of Szeemann's *Monte Verità. Berg der Wahrheit. Lokale Anthropologie als Beitrag zur Wiederentdeckung einer neuzeitlichen sakralen Topographie (Monte Verità. Hill of Truth. Local anthropology as contribution to the rediscovery of contemporary sacral topography)*. The book was published by Szeemann's own *Agentur für geistige Gasterbeit* (Institute for Spiritual-Migrant-Work). Szeemann's publication is a source of many important references to counter-cultural and alternative lifestyles in the light of the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk and it shaped both the form and content of many of the exhibitions that Szeemann curated from the 1960's on. The tension between utopian social ideals/aspirations and unrestrained libertarianism, between collective imperatives and individual expression can be seen playing out in both Ascona and across the Californian counter-cultural scene. This tension helps to explain the high incidence of schismatic breaks and internal conflicts in both contexts.

In the context of Monte Verità, which had its own large group of anarchist colonists, I shall now turn to a consideration of the commune's sometimes confused political and social aims and its later entanglements with National Socialism. Most of what the Lebensreform movement said and did is not easily placed within one specific political or ideological camp, and this is also the case with the Monte Verità 'laboratory'. However, over the years, scholars such as anthropologist David Aberle in his book *The Peyote*

4 A Thing (assembly) also transliterated as *ting* or *ping* is a historical Germanic governing assembly in an outdoor setting.

Religion Among the Navaho (1966), introduced a typology of social movements which he distinguished into several basic types. 'Transformative Movements', for instance, work towards total change in the social structure by an imminent, or even violent revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. 'Redemptive Movements', conversely are aimed towards inner life—the total transformation of the individual from within. Many religious social movements fall into this latter category. But then there are also 'Reformative Movements' which work within societies' existing orders, and try to alter the society gradually: from within. Today, Aberle's model is one of the most influential social movement classification systems. These last two categories would seem to fit the Monte Verità camp, making it a Redemptive-Reformative Social movement, although here redemption needs to be understood not in the light of the Christian forgiveness of sin, but rather in relation to the Buddhist goal of a release from worldly desires.

Ecology

The most influential artist associated with Monte Verità, with direct links to the Lebensreform movement, was Hugo Reinhold Karl Johann Höppener (1868–1948), who signed his work with the professional alias of 'Fidus'. Höppener was a student of the painter, nature apostle and social reformer Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach (1851–1913), who is seen as a pioneer of both the *Frei Körper Kultur* (Free Body Culture) and Lebensreform movements, and whose agrarian commune 'Himmelhof' (Heaven's Garden) in Ober St. Veit on the outskirts of Vienna inspired the founders of the Monte Verità colony (Szeemann 1978, 142). Fidus's most famous work, *Lichtgebet* (Light's Prayer), was originally an oil painting completed in 1902. It was widely circulated as a print and became an icon of the German youth movement. The image, that resembles a nude version of the central figure in Casper David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (Wanderer above the sea of fog, 1818), was used to promote the combination of health, physical athleticism, and the 'outdoor life' that would feed into both the proto-hippy Wandervogel subculture, and the militarized summer camp

routines of the Hitler Youth. In fact the two strands were inextricably linked. Though the Nazis outlawed the nature-loving Wandervogel in 1933, many of their ideas were incorporated into the Hitler Youth movement.



Fig. 2.5. Fidus, *Lichtgebet*, 1910, oil painting 150 × 100 cm, Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum.

I would argue that the Wandervogel's yearning to get 'back-to-nature' went hand in hand with the pull towards the resurgence of German Nationalism during the Weimar period. To further complicate the picture, some of the Wandervogel groups had Jewish members and there was even a Jewish subdivision of the Wandervogel called the Blau-Weiss (Blue-White), which eventually became a Zionist youth movement (Bertz 1998, 553). Another related trend within the Wandervogel movement centred on male friendship and included, in addition to hiking and

campfire guitar playing sessions, the tolerance for open homosexuality, described by former Wandervogel Hans Blüher in his book, *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen* (1912), which generated much controversy (Brunns 2008, 235).

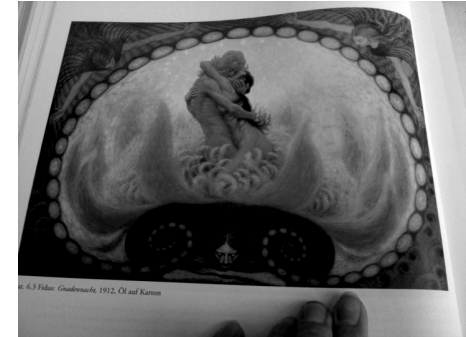


Fig. 2.6. Fidus, *Gnadennacht*, 1912, oil painting on cardboard, 1912. Published in Kennedy 1998, 103.

For me, Fidus's work is not only interesting because he illustrated much of the more memorable printed material produced by the Lebensreform movement, such as magazines and posters thus helping to forge the movement's public image, but also because his work seems strangely contemporary (if somewhat cheesy) in the sense that it would fit into any coffee-shop assemblage of commercially produced 'stoner-art'. In that way it also comes as no surprise that the influence of Fidus's work on counter-cultural iconography continued well beyond his death. For example, it helped shape the 'psychedelic' style of San Francisco based concert poster pioneers like Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse and Victor Moscoso—the artists who provided the images most closely associated with San Francisco's 'Summer of Love' in 1967.⁵ Despite Höppener's interest in Nordic mythology

⁵ The connection between the Wandervogel youth movement and the counter culture of the hippy generation has been pointed out by Gordon Kennedy in *Children of the Sun* (1998). Thus it could be plausibly argued that the Wandervogel movement is in a way the common ancestor of both the Hitler Youth and the Woodstock generation.

and his support for Nazi ideology (he joined the party in 1932), the Nazi regime banned the sale of Fidus's images in 1937 and seized his work on the grounds that it turned Nordic art into kitsch ('Verkitschern der nordischer Kunst': see Szeeman 1978, 141). Fidus remains an ambiguous figure from a political and ethical standpoint. From one perspective he could be dismissed as something of an opportunist and a commercially driven bandwagon jumper, but from another standpoint, he can be viewed as an exemplary and principled advocate for Lebensreform ideals. In *Rasse-Raßlern* (Getting Races Straight), a book published in 1925, Fidus rejected the idea of Germanic racial purity (Hermandt 2011, 208), arguing that Germans are historically a mixed race and suggesting that the concept of purity should be used instead to refer to the 'sun-drenched clarity of the soul',⁶ inherent to all human beings, regardless of their race.

In the 1890's, the artist helped establish a Theosophical lodge in Berlin. In the same year he produced one of Theosophy's most iconic poster images for the Hygiene Congress in Hamburg, which depicted a naked 'Nordic' male figure reaching for the stars while bound in chains. I think this image can be read with equal validity as a symbol of the striving for transcendence that drove the Monte Verità experiment, or as a typical example of the sublimated eroticism and racial ideology of Nazi kitsch. More accurately, perhaps it could be read both ways at once.

⁶ Wikipedia <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidus> <10 March 2014>



Fig. 2.7. Fidus poster for the Kongreß für Biologische Hygiene, Hamburg 1912, 64 × 46 cm (collection Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, cat. no. 637).

Although Fidus's work failed to find acceptance within official Nazi circles, images like *Lichtgebet* seem in line with the Nazi 'Aryan' master race ideal which is generally traced back to '*Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*' (An essay on the inequality of the human races) (1853) by the French aristocrat Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau. However it was the eugenicist Alfred Ploetz who was largely responsible for introducing the term *Rassenhygiene* into Germany with the publication of his book *Grundlinien einer Rassenhygiene* (Principles of racial hygiene) in 1895 (Reuleke 1998, 199). The theory soon gained ground in other European countries and in America in the form of 'racial eugenics', part of the later debunked eugenics bio-social movement pioneered

by Francis Galton, who took his inspiration from his cousin, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Until it was challenged on scientific grounds (and finally discredited in the wake of the Second World War), eugenics was from the late 19th century to the 1930's established as a respectable academic discipline at universities all across Europe and America, with major eugenics congresses held in London and New York. Eugenics influenced public policy in the United States too, many years before the Nazis launched their eugenics program in Germany (Lombardo 2011, 1), and was especially influential in California where compulsory sterilization was introduced as early as 1909, and where the 'Human Betterment Foundation', an organisation devoted to the promulgation of eugenic principles operated from 1928 to 1942.⁷ According to historian Daniel Kevles, the forced sterilization program engineered by the Nazis was partly inspired by the precedent set decades before in California (Murphy 1994, 18). The Eugenics movement could be described as the militant applied-science arm of a larger current of Social Darwinist thought which led, in its most toxic form, to the Nazi 'science' of 'Aryan' superiority, 'Racial Hygiene' and the Nuremburg laws forbidding inter-racial mixing and marriage, which eventually led to sterilization and 'euthanasia' of 'less desired people'.⁸

7 The 'Human Betterment Foundation' (HBF) was an American eugenics organisation established in Pasadena, California in 1928 by Ezra Seymour Gosney. The organisation's stated aim was 'to foster and aid constructive and educational forces for the protection and betterment of the human family in body, mind, character, and citizenship', primarily through the advocacy of compulsory sterilization of the mentally ill and mentally retarded.

8 A practice that was continued in several countries like Sweden, where sterilization on the basis of race or social background, was practiced until 1976. Social Democrats implemented measures to forcibly sterilize 62,000 people, World socialist website, article *By Steve James 19 March 1999*. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1999/03/euge-19m.html> <4 October 2015>

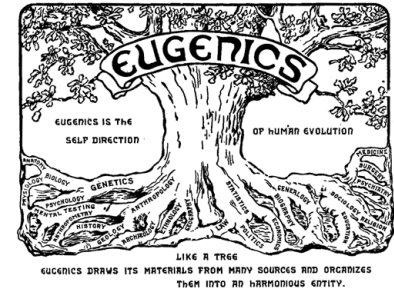


Fig. 2.8. Logo from the Second International Eugenics Conference, New York, 1921⁹

In the 19th century the term 'Aryan' was first introduced as a category amongst linguists seeking to trace the origins of Indo-European languages. The term was only later used by racial theorists like Alfred Rosenberg to isolate and idealize the supposedly unique genetic traits of the 'Germanic' people. The origins of the 'Aryan' concept seem to me to remain notoriously hazy, but Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), the founding architect of the Theosophical cosmology, clearly played a prominent role in the development of the idea. In addition, the theory of Ariosophy, as pioneered by the writer Guido von List and the political theorist Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels in Austria between 1890 and 1930 was also a contributing body of work. While (in the case of Blavatsky) not propagating racism directly, both Blavatskyian Theosophy, and von List's and Liebenfels' ideas on the 'Germanic Revival' (with an emphasis on folk mythologies, paganism and runeology) fed into what would later become the theory of the Aryan super race. During this process, spiritual allegories and metaphors appear to have been interpreted literally—in ways that suited the National Socialist political and cultural agenda.

As a Russian-American occultist working within the Western esoteric tradition, Blavatsky studied Hinduism and traveled to India. In *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* (1856) she describes her travels together with her 'teacher', Takhur

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics#/media/File:Eugenics_congress_logo.png <4 October 2014>

Gulab-Singh. While Blavatsky's account is obviously overstated and is presented in a novelistic form, it appears to be based in part on her travels while based in Kolkata, as well as on her later and unsuccessful attempts to enter Tibet via Kashmir. Blavatsky had used the term 'Aryan' to refer to the 'fifth root race', which for her included people of diverse racial backgrounds and skin colours; though other aspects of Blavatsky's theory of human spiritual and biological evolution were more problematic. For instance there is little that distinguishes a passage like the following, taken from Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), from a tract by a pseudo-scientific Nazi race ideologue like Alfred Rosenberg:

'Thus will mankind, race after race, perform its appointed cycle-pilgrimage. Climates will, and have already begun, to change, each tropical year after the other dropping one sub-race, but only to beget another higher race on the ascending cycle; while a series of other less favoured groups—the failures of nature—will, like some individual men, vanish from the human family without even leaving a trace behind' (Blavatsky 1888, 446).

An enthusiastic student and exponent of non-Western religions, Blavatsky had been drawn to this model of epochal evolutionary cycles by Indian sources. Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement founded in 1875 by Dayanand Saraswati, who believed in the infallible authority of the Vedas, was a likely influence (Nanda 2010, 325). She claimed her writings grew out of the initiation and training she had undergone in Tibet and, though there is no evidence she actually ever visited the country, it is true that Theosophy played a major role in introducing Buddhist ideas and practice to the West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁰ In the passage below Blavatsky downplays the importance of physically visiting what was then thought of as the 'Orient', while at the same

¹⁰ Many sources but see for instance: *The Oxford Handbook for religious Conversion* (Rambo and Farhadian 2014, 473): 'the Theosophical Society, founded by H.P. Blavatsky in the late nineteenth century initiated western popular interest in Buddhism'.

time revealing her belief in the model of 'miasmatic' transmission of disease and illness discussed earlier.

'Really, it is quite useless to go to Tibet or India to recover some knowledge or power that are hidden in any human soul; but acquisition of higher knowledge and power requires not only many years of intensive studying under the guidance of higher mind together with a resolution that cannot be shaken by any danger, and as much as years of relative solitude, in communication with disciples only which pursue the same aim, and in such a place where both the nature and the neophyte preserve a perfect and unbroken rest if not the silence! There the air is not poisoned by miasmas around a hundred miles, and there the atmosphere and human magnetism are quite clear and there the animal's blood is never shed.'¹¹



Fig. 2.9. Theosophical seal (version of emblem of the Theosophical Society, adopted late 19th century)

¹¹ Quote by Blavatsky, year and publication unknown. <http://national-paranormal-society.org/helena-petrovna-blavatsky> <30 September 2014>

Spiritual Evolution

Another source of Nazi racial ideology with its roots firmly in northern European esoteric thinking and in the Lebensreform movement was the Artamanen-Gesellschaft (Artaman League), a German agrarian and völkisch movement dedicated to a 'Blood and Soil' inspired ruralism, which had initially sprung forth out of the German Bund Artam, which was a youth movement related to the Wandervogel movement (Mogge 1998, 187). Active during the inter-war period, the League became closely linked to Nazism, and was eventually absorbed into the Nazi Party. In 1937, Himmler began investigating work of professor Hans F. Günther, who taught human race science, human biology, and rural ethnography at the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg. He claimed that early Aryans had conquered much of Asia around 2000 BC, and that the 'old traditions of the Nordic Hindus' were compromised by the later influx of Buddhism, which 'sapped the courageous soul of the early Hindu wisdom' by introducing an alien 'spirit of resignation' (Günther 1927, 102).

Although these kind of Übermensch-theories widen the concept of the Aryan race to such extent, by making it more a religious than biological concept, the 'Blud und Boden' (Blood and Soil) theory, later incorporated into mainstream Nazi thinking, was actually based on two factors: ethnicity and homeland. As many scholars have argued, an obsession with ethnicity: folk culture, national origins, the idealization of 'good peasant stock'; and the longing for homeland: for *Gemeinschaft* (social networks) and a simpler, pre-industrial agrarian way of life connected directly to the soil; appear to be recurrent features of German Romanticism. Blood and Soil was one of the foundations of Hitler's concept of Lebensraum: his obsession with the expansion of German territory to the east, the domination/elimination of the Slavic peoples and the settling of conquered lands by German farmers.

I find myself in general agreement with scholars like Peter Staudenmeier (Staudenmeier, 2014) who have argued that the term 'Ecology' — now associated with forms of

environmentalism and holistic thinking—which are commonly regarded as progressive and benign, nonetheless have their roots in evolutionary biology, genetics and ethology (the study of animal behaviour), and have direct links to Nazi ideology. The term itself, however, has a more obscure and ambiguous history than is generally acknowledged. The word *Ökologie* was coined in 1866 by the German scientist and artist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), who inserted his own ideas on race into the theory of evolution, while setting out to popularize Darwin's findings. Haeckel divided human beings into ten hierarchically ranked races, 'with the Caucasian at the top, thus designed for greatness, and the 'primitives' at the bottom, thus doomed to extinction' (Weideman 2005, 87), and based this on ideas surrounding the concept of 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' also known as the recapitulation theory. This theory describes a progressive evolution in which he 'claimed that the development of advanced species passes through stages represented by adult organisms of more primitive species' (Scott 2006).

Today, with growing concerns over climate change, overconsumption and overpopulation, the ecological mind-set is on the rise in the sciences, social sciences and humanities and, increasingly, in the contemporary art world. Examples would include recent exhibitions and publications as organized by Anselm Franke and Diedrich Diederichsen around Californian hippy counterculture, the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, cybernetics and the 'Anthropocene Era'. Originally introduced by Eugene F. Stoermer, the term 'Anthropocene' is used to denote the era in which the earth's natural systems are changing as a result of human actions, dating back to the rise of industrialism in the late 18th century. While it could be argued that debates around the Anthropocene usually reflect a liberal-humanist or anarcho-leftist orientation, there are also militant fundamentalist strands within the contemporary environmentalist movement which are much closer to Haeckel's version.

In Germany for example, a number of environmentalist groups with an extreme right-wing political agenda have recently gained media attention in a way that takes a

different perspective on concepts like ‘local’ and ‘organic’. Since the 1990’s, far-right environmentalists have taken advantage of the cheap farmland made available by the post-Cold War reunification of East and West Germany, establishing themselves in Mecklenburg, as Kate Connolly pointed out in the *Guardian*, ‘in an effort to reinvigorate the traditions of the Nazi Artaman League.’¹² The extreme right-wing environmental magazine *Umwelt & Aktiv, Das Magazin für ganzheitliches Denken Umweltschutz, Tierschutz, Heimatschutz* (Environment & Activeness, The Magazine for Environmental, Animal and Homeland Protection) is believed to receive support from Germany’s far-right National Democratic Party (NPD). The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* has published an article on the ‘infiltration’ of organic farming by right-wing extremists noting the lineage to Nazi doctrines of ‘Aryan supremacy’ and ‘ecological harmony’.¹³

While the Nazis had attempted to appropriate several popular Lebensreform ideas, much of what the movement had pioneered was also suppressed and even forbidden. The emphasis on the outdoor life, physical health and collective performance was gradually translated into Hitler Youth summer camps, mass calisthenics (synchronized physical training) and the *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy) program, while romanticism, the yearning to connect with nature and the Lebensreformers’ skepticism regarding organized religion helped to clear the way for Nazi neo-paganism (Staudenmaier 2014, and Biehl and Staudenmaier 1995). But while most Christian denominations were, with some significant exceptions, tolerated,¹⁴ occult and closed societies outside of the Nazi-Party, such as Freemasonry, Theosophy and Anthroposophy were strictly forbidden in both

12 Connolly, K. (28 April 2012). ‘German far-right extremists tap into green movement for support’, in *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/28/germany-far-right-green-movement> <19 June 2013>

13 Thiele, C. von, and M. Weiss (13 April 2012) ‘Unterwanderung des Biolandbaus durch Rechtsextreme: Idylle in Grün-Braun’, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

14 Exceptions were for instance Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses.

Germany and Occupied Europe, including The Netherlands from 1940–1945. It seems clear that while hermetic societies like the Anthroposophists suffered systematic persecution at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War, a great number of Reform movement practices and ideas have come to be associated in the post War period with National Socialism and tend to be dismissed or demonized as a result. Over the course of time, Lebensreform movement contributions to contemporary environmentalist and ‘alternative lifestyle’ thinking have been suppressed and/or forgotten.

Anthroposophy

Finally I am coming back ‘home’ to consider the legacy of the Life reform thinker that has had the most influence on my personal formation, Rudolf Steiner. Born in Croatia (then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) in 1861, he was a philosopher and social reformer, who developed an esoteric system of belief which sought to reconcile scientific and spiritual forms of knowledge. Initially drawn to Theosophy, he served from 1904 to 1912 as head of the German and Austrian Theosophical Society (which by that time had thousands of followers) but broke with the movement over philosophical differences; differences which became insurmountable when Annie Besant¹⁵ and Charles Leadbeater, the leaders of the society by then based in Adyar, India, nominated the 16 year old Jiddu Krishnamurti from Madras

15 <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91786293/>



as ‘world teacher’, a messiah like figure.¹⁶ In 1912 Steiner formed the rival ‘Anthroposophical Society’ putting man (‘anthrop’) in place of God (‘Theo’) at the centre of his system as the principal locus of wisdom. Steiner also folded Christian beliefs, Rosicrucian references and the Christian pantheon, which was excluded from Theosophy, back into the mix. Steiner was an adherent of the philosophical movement of Phenomenology, the study of the structures of subjective experience and consciousness, founded in the early years of the 20th century by Edmund Husserl (Gebhardt 2011, 53). Steiner believed in the possibility of applying the clarity of scientific thinking to spiritual research and set off to find a synthesis between science and mysticism as based on experience (see for instance Steiner, 1904 and Steiner, 1994). In contemporary anthroposophical circles, the focus has been moved away from experimental investigations into the spiritual world, towards a more hands-on, practical, applied approach in which education (the Waldorfschools/Steinerschools) and Biodynamic Agriculture are the main points of focus.

Since the beginning of the 1920’s, Steiner had been concerned with the negative effects of chemically synthesized inorganic fertilizers developed during the industrial revolution. These fertilizers had brought, along with the increased food production, the wide spread of pests and diseases among plants, and the exhaustion of farmland. The industrial style of farming had introduced the practice of producing or growing a single plant species over a wide area and for a large number of consecutive years, what is referred to as ‘monoculture’. Steiner laid the basis of his biodynamic agriculture in 1924 with an international course in Koberwitz in contemporary Poland. In this course he spoke about ‘a spiritual-chemistry, minerals, natural dung, crop rotation and how to foster a bio-diversity on farms’ (Farkas 1998, 304). Steiner’s biodynamic agriculture differs from many forms of

organic agriculture in its spiritual, mystical and astrological orientation. For example, choosing to plant, cultivate, or harvest various crops based on both the phases of the moon and the zodiac constellation the moon is passing through. In this course he also introduced the use of various herbal and mineral additives like rock powders to improve the fertility of the earth. Soil re-mineralization was supposed to create fertile soils through the return of minerals lost by erosion, leaching, and or over-farming. Steiner prescribed nine different preparations to aid fertilization and to mediate terrestrial and cosmic forces into the soil. These prepared substances are numbered 500 through 508 and are used in homeopathic quantities.

‘501: Stuff crushed powdered quartz into a horn of a cow and bury this into the ground in spring and take out in autumn. Stir about one teaspoon of the contents of the horn in 40–60 litres of water for an hour, creating vortexes in alternate directions. Spray the mixture over the crop during the wet season, to prevent fungal diseases. (It should be sprayed on an overcast day or early in the morning to prevent burning of the leaves’ (Steiner 1924, 97).

The lectures from the International Agriculture course were published in November 1924, and the first English translation appeared in 1928 as *The Agriculture Course*. Biodynamic agriculture is a mystical method of organic farming that emphasizes the holistic development and interrelationships of the soil, plants and animals as a self-sustaining system. The methods Steiner proposed seem to be more closely linked to Naturopathy and Homeopathy than any other form of land-reform that was pioneered in the same time period.

In 1907 Steiner wrote an essay entitled ‘Education in the Light of Spiritual Science’, in which he described the major phases of child development. This essay was later to form the foundation of his approach to education. He believed that the development of each child passes through stages similar to the developmental stages of an individual’s species, society or civilization. To develop this theory, Steiner enthusiastically ‘adapted’ Ernst Haeckel’s idea of ‘ontogeny

¹⁶ In 1911, the Theosophical Society had established the Order of the Star in the East, to prepare the appearance of the World Teacher. Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star during a speech at the annual Star Camp at Ommen, The Netherlands, on 3 August 1929.

recapitulates phylogeny', but 'sublimated it to the level of soul and spirit' (Schwarz 1999, 121). The decisive moment in Steiner's career as an educational reformer came in 1919 when he was invited to give a series of lectures to the workers at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart by Emil Molt, the factory owner (Ulrich 1998, 411). This invitation eventually led to the foundation of the first Steiner school for the children of the factory workers. More than a thousand 'Steiner Schools', also known as 'Waldorf Schools' (in honor of the Molt-Steiner connection) are spread across the world today. The idea behind the schools was to prepare society for an imminent, all-encompassing spiritual and social revolution.

With the popularity of the more down-to-earth anthroposophical education, and to some extent also anthroposophical medicine and farming methods, it must come as no surprise that the issues surrounding Steiner's 'spiritual science', as developed from Theosophy at the beginning of the 20th century, has at some points become problematic. The particular branch of 'science-fiction' Steiner developed was built on Blavatsky's Eastern inspired theory of the 'root races'. Steiner, who was also strongly influenced by Goethe's phenomenological and holistic approach to science, in contrast to the reductionist methodology, emphasized the role of evolutionary thinking in Goethe's work. In Steiner's cosmology, humans are in a continuous state of progress; during this evolution they pass through different universes and take residence on several planets (like Mars) before inhabiting planet Earth. In 1994 *De Volkskrant*, a moderate left-wing Dutch newspaper, published an article by the concerned parents of a child attending Waldorf school, who had discovered racial stereotyping during lessons in 'Volkenkunde' (cultural anthropology)¹⁷. These issues were hotly debated, and in 1996, a special committee was appointed to research Steiner's work for evidence of ethnic discrimination. The general public and media which followed the case delved into the occult history of European esoteric

17 Robert Sikkes 'Op Vrije Scholen hebben negers dikke lippen en gevoel voor ritme', *De Volkskrant*, 4 February 1995.

thinking, but the answer to the question of whether anthroposophy is based on a peculiar, and maybe even on an unethical idea of evolution, was left open—which is of course not surprising since Steiner's spiritual cosmology, which he called 'Spiritual Science', is more a form of science fiction than a scientific theory.



Fig. 2.10. *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: RN.

Static Monument to Progress

In September 2008, I installed an exhibition entitled *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* (Static Monument to Progress) in Scheltema, the 19th century former woollen blanket factory in my hometown of Leiden. The exhibition consisted of works from the De Stijl movement borrowed from the collection of Museum De Lakenhal (such as chairs by V. Huszár and W.H. Gispen), items from my own collection of historic artefacts and anthroposophical design, an eurhythmy¹⁸

18 Eurhythmy is an expressive movement art originated by Rudolf Steiner in conjunction with Marie von Sivers in the early 20th century.

video-film, and a number of purpose-built ceramic wheels. All of these elements were linked to early 20th century avant-garde art, design and life reform movements that expressed, in one way or another, a desire for radical social, political and spiritual transformation. The *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* set out to combine historical artefacts and personal objects into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, thereby merging history, personal biography, and reverie in a public institutional space.

Body



Fig. 2.11 *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Brian McKenna.

On display were two pieces from my personal collection of reform artefacts by ADO (*Arbeid Door Onvolwaardigen*, or *Labour by Nonequivalent People*) an early 20th century company based in the Netherlands. The pieces were designed by Ko Verzuu for ADO in 1925. Verzuu designed wooden toys that bore striking stylistic similarities to the furniture designs produced by Gerrit Rietveld and other members of *De Stijl*. The toys were manufactured between 1925 and 1933 in the sanatorium Berg en Bosch in Apeldoorn as part of an occupational therapy program focusing on treatment involving ‘*Regelmaat, Reinheid en Rust*’

ReForm

(order, cleanliness and quiet) for patients suffering from tuberculosis. The original meaning of the three-letter abbreviation ADO was later modified to mean ‘*Apart, Doelmatig en Onverwoestbaar*’ (unusual, efficient and indestructible).



Fig. 2.12 *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Daria Perev.

In the room where a century ago the workers had punched the blanket factory time clock at the beginning of each shift, I installed the *Morele Boekhouding* (Moral Accountancy), a small library comprised of first edition imprints on the topic of karma and reincarnation from my parents’ collection of early 20th century anthroposophical literature. Also a copy of Rudolf Steiner’s *Social Threefolding* (Steiner 1919), which argues for the harmonization of the economic, legal and cultural fields through the application of the principles of ‘brotherhood, equality and freedom’. These ideas were once again circulating widely in ‘alternative’ circles during the 1970’s when I was growing up. In 1977, two years before I was born, the German Fluxus artist Joseph Beuys had exhibited his *Honigpumpe am Arbeitsplatz* (Honey Pump in the Workplace) at the Documenta 6 in Kassel. Beuys was

inspired by Steiner's three-fold social order. With the honey pump he referred to Steiner's organic structure of society that drew parallels to the threefold human organism of head, rhythm and metabolism.



Fig. 2.13 *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Brian McKenna.

Some of the works in *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* made connections between these new spiritual movements and the workings of industrial capital. Examples of such works included a light-box illuminating an article from the *New York Times* in 1941. The article outlined parallels between the automobile and war industry; a number of ceramic car/prayer wheels stacked around an antique desk in a piece entitled *Financiële Zingeving* (Financial Quest for Meaning); and the *Seelen Kalender* (Calendar of the Soul), a little purple booklet issued by the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory which contained a different meditation for each week of the year, written by Rudolf Steiner. Copies of the *Seelen Kalender* were sent to soldiers serving in the trenches during the First World War, along with packs of cigarettes.



Fig. 2.14 *Seelen Kalender* by Rudolf Steiner, Elisabeth Vreede archive The Hague, *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Brian McKenna.

In the video film, the eurythmist Kaya Kitani is shown dancing through a series of otherwise empty buildings. These buildings are loaded with associations with different, sometimes controversial and contested periods in the national (and personal) past. The buildings include the gold safe of the former ABN-AMRO bank; the Art Nouveau head office of the Nederlandse Handelsmaatschappij (The Dutch Trading Society, which later became the ABN AMRO Bank); the Van Heutz Monument, now renamed as the Monument-Indië-Nederland; the 1928 Olympic stadium in Amsterdam; and the small wooden theatre of the Waldorf elementary school I attended as a child in Leiden. For this film, made in collaboration with video-artist Brian McKenna, composer Natalia Domínguez Rangel wrote a piece of music, performed by a string trio.



Fig. 2.15. *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, video piece by Ruchama Noorda in collaboration with Brian McKenna, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008.

The installation *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* illustrates through different media, and in three dimensions, some of the complexities and contradictions involved in history writing/digging-up-the-past that I deal with in this chapter. *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument* constructs a personal/historical mythology. By ‘messing with’ the past—by combining personal items, artworks, ready-mades and images, with links and parallels to movements whose radical social and spiritual agendas sought also to produce an assemblage/Gesamtkunstwerk—a sense of an archaeological historical séance was produced. In the late 1990’s, I had worked as a part-time security guard at the Lakenhal Museum, and as I spent long eventless hours in the company of the artefacts in the Museum’s collection, I became fascinated by the occult underpinnings of the supposedly ultra-rationalist De Stijl Movement.



Fig. 2.16. *Statisch Vooruitgangsmonument*, Museum de Lakenhal/Scheltema, Leiden 2008, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Daria Perv.

Nature Prophets

Another group of Lebensreformers that encapsulates the mix of extreme eccentricity and experimental living I am interested in are the ‘Inflationsheiliger’ (Saints of Inflation). These prophets were sometimes also called ‘Kohlrabi-Heiliger’ (Cabbage Saints), because they often promoted strict vegetarianism. I consider these ‘Saints’ or ‘Jesus look-a-likes on a messianic trip’, as extreme Lebensreformers who connected their political ideas directly to their own physical health, and to the general health of the body of society. During the first years of the Weimar Republic, many barefooted prophets wandered across Germany preaching in the rural areas and market squares of major German towns and cities. In those times of harsh economic recession after Germany’s defeat in the First World War—of hyperinflation, unemployment and economic strife under Weimar, a huge number of wandering prophets took to the road in an effort ‘to free the world of evil’ through their speeches,

and as an ascetic example.¹⁹ As may be the case in times of dramatic social upheaval and crisis, some of these prophets came, like Rudolf Steiner, with fully worked out programs of economic, social and spiritual reform²⁰, while other 'Inflationsheiliger' showed signs of what I think were delusions of grandeur verging on what appears to be paranoid schizophrenic disorder.

19 '...Immediately after the end of the World War, our country was full of saviors, prophets and disciples, of presentments about the end of the world, or hopes for the down of a Third Empire. Shattered by the war... greatly disillusioned by the seeming futility of all the sacrifices...our people at that time were lured by many phantoms, but there were also many real spiritual advances. There were Bacchanalian dance societies and Anabaptist groups...There was also at that time a widespread leaning towards Indian, ancient Persian and other Eastern mysteries and religions...' (Hesse 1956, 10).

20 Rudolf Steiner's pamphlet for Social Three folding 'Die Kernpunkte der Sozialen Frage' (Steiner 1919 GA23) is one of his early and only attempts to shape his social reform ideas into a political argument in response to the catastrophic situation in post-war Germany. At a moment of fruitful social chaos he proposed extensive social reforms through the establishment of a Threefold Social Order in which the cultural, political and economic realms would be largely independent.

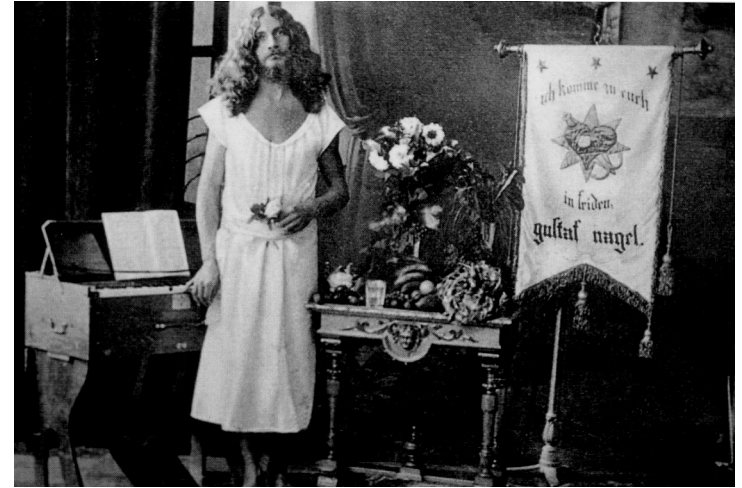


Fig. 2.17. Portrait of gustaf nagel, from the Lebensreform archive of Stephan Dillemath.²¹

One of these more eccentric spokesmen was gustaf nagel (1879–1952), who wrote his name using lower case letters. Nagel studied in northern Germany as a salesman, but sometime during the late 1880's, he fell seriously ill and began suffering from persistent catarrh and chronic allergies. While seeking treatment for his condition, he became a convert to the methods of Doctor Kneipp, who extolled the curative powers of water through hydrotherapy in the late 1800's. Soon nagel was following a strict vegetarian diet and adopting a look that closely resembled the way Jesus is portrayed in conventional biblical illustrations. He grew his hair long, stopped wearing shoes (even in winter) and started wearing a robe, at times even just a Tarzan-like loincloth, which (barely) covered his genitals. He eventually dug himself a hole in the ground under a rock to live in. Nagel gradually came to believe that the source of his ill health was nothing less than industrial civilization in its entirety. In 1898 he walked to Berlin from Saxony-Anhalt and started proclaiming his new found faith in the natural way of life, often attracting large crowds on a subsequent walking itinerary that

21 <http://www.lebensreform.info/>

took him through south Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, and eventually Palestine and Jerusalem. The wandering preacher promoted the beneficial power of sunlight, sun worship and fresh air as life-enhancing alternatives to industrially produced pharmaceuticals and invasive surgery. Nagel visited Monte Verità several times from 1902 onwards where he inspired the colonists with his raw food diet²² (Szeemann 1978, 63). In 1910 he went on to found the Paradise Temple Annex Sanatorium on the Arendsee in order to develop and promote natural curative practices.²³

Nagel publicized his beliefs and his own persona by means of postcards that he sold on his nomadic tours. In 1924 he formed a political party, The 'Deutsche Mittelstands Kristliche Folkspartei' (German Middleclass Christian Folk Party) that promoted living peacefully in nature.²⁴ The party joined the parliamentary elections for the Reichstag in 1924 and 1928, but did not get much support. After Hitler took power, Nagel returned to the streets and bars of Berlin to bring his message of love, spiritual faith, natural living and peace, and later also to declaim the increasingly inhuman treatment of Jews under National Socialism. Between 1943 and 1945 he was imprisoned in concentration camp Dachau, and after World War Two the wandering cabbage saint was confined to a locked ward in a psychiatric hospital where he died in 1952.

Some of the Inflation Saints such as the charismatic Gustav Gräser lived almost until the start of the 1960's to see the international spread of 'alternative' lifestyles and thus served as living links between the two waves of life-reform. The image of the charismatic sandal wearing 'long haired,... nature lover, pacifist and vagabond-outsider' (Mileck 1977, 27) as an avatar of Lebensreform persisted through till the end of the 20th century and beyond. Herman Hesse's inner-directed cosmology had been greatly influenced by his encounters with Gustav Gräser, whom he had met at Monte Verità. The author of wildly popular esoteric novels such as *Siddartha*,

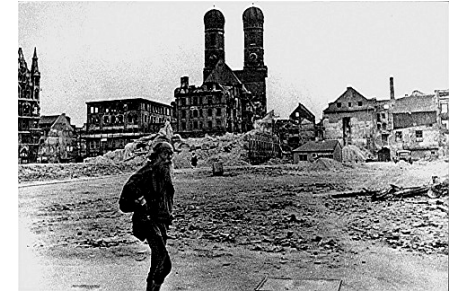
22 From a letter by architect Walter Hofmann to his wife Hedwig Hofmann in Szeemann 1978, 63.

23 It was later demolished during the Nazi era.

24 <http://www.arendsee.de/gustav%20nagel.html> <15 March 2014>

The Steppenwolf and *The Glass Bead Game*, in turn inspired the 1960's counter-culturists of the hippy movement. Hesse also documented a mud cure he had taken under Gräser's supervision at Ascona, in which 'he lay buried in earth up to his armpits for a whole day' and 'lived naked and alone in a primitive hut' (Mileck 1977, 27).

Fig. 2.18 Gustav Gräser, Munich 1945. Photo from Strange Flowers, <https://strangeflowers.wordpress.com/2012/10/12/dress-down-friday-gusto-graser>



In the 1960's and 1970's, as the American and European counterculture gained momentum, there was renewed interest in both Hesse's visionary fictions and Gustav Gräser's ideas. By the time of his death in 1958, Gräser himself had become something of a mascot for the budding organic movement in post war Germany.

It seems that those aspects of Lebensreform that were focused on the body and physical health found an especially receptive audience in the United States where naturopathy soon flourished from the seeds of the European Nature Cure movement. 'Although the nature cure has its roots in empirical folk medicine' (Krabbe 1998, 77), the 'father' of Naturopathy is considered to have been Adolf Just (1859–1936), a businessman and founder of the Junborn Sanatorium in Eckertal, Germany in 1895. The therapeutic regime Just promoted sought to reconnect the human organism to the natural world. The therapy focused on the buried instincts we share with other animals, sublimated under normal circumstances for the sake of 'civilization'. Just's theory and

practice was rooted in direct observations of animal behaviour, including the hygiene and grooming routines of other species in the wild.

‘...whoever has carefully watched animals at their bath and has observed the pains they take to rub or cool the sexual organs in the mud (or water), easily takes the hint of nature and comes to see what the natural bath for man ought to be...’ (Just 1895, 17).

Among the naturopathic methods like hydrotherapy (the water cure) recommended by Just was the ‘healing earth’ method, later manufactured as a commercial product called ‘Luvos-Heilerde’ by Luvos Just GmbH & Co, the company Just founded in Blankenburg (it is still available in dehydrated package form in ‘alternative pharmacies’ all across Europe). Luvos healing earth is medicinal clay that can be applied internally and externally, and the health benefits range from skin purification, detox and colonic health, to cholesterol reduction.

The healing as described in Just’s most influential reform manual works at both the spiritual and practical (physical/corporeal) levels (though as a Naturopath, the spirit/body split was of course non-existent for Just):

‘It must rather be assumed that nature prescribes a bath for the preservation and strengthening of his highest physical and spiritual powers’ (ibid.).

He becomes more specific as he continues:

‘Men have, indeed, always had an instinctive longing for baths, and even if the inner voice no longer plainly indicates the right kind of bath, everyone still feels a need to cool the abdomen, the anus, and the sexual organs by means of water’ (ibid.).

Just cites Goethe and the bible extensively in his most influential work *Kehrt zur Natur zurück! Die wahre naturgemäße Heil- und Lebensweise. Wasser, Licht, Luft, Erde, Früchte und*

wirkliches Christentum, enlisting their support in his condemnation of late 19th century urbanized industrial society:

‘The feet are in a certain sense for man what the roots are for plants. Man draws vital energy and strength out of the earth through his feet. Jesus also attached a great deal of importance to the practice of going barefooted; He Himself was also barefooted, and He gave to His disciples the command: “Carry neither shoes.” —Luke 10:4. He avoided the cities with their foul air, their luxury and effeminacy, their moral degradation; he took up his abode mostly in the desert and in the mountains’ (ibid. 93).

I see a similar mix of mystical beliefs and contemporary societal critique mark many North American religious movements such as the LDS, Latter Day Saints Church (also known as the Mormons) founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith (1805–1844). According to Smith’s revelations, still regarded as Holy Scripture by many of his followers, Jesus of Nazareth journeyed to America after his resurrection to found a society based on pure Judeo-Christian principles (shorn of all ‘Greek’ influences imported during the early history of the Catholic Church). In the late 1820’s, Joseph Smith built his occult-Christian belief system (with roots in the Christian Primitivist movement) in part on information derived from ‘scrying’ —a practice involving the interpretation of reflections cast within a dark enclosed space by sets of glossy ‘seer stones’ (Scrying is a form of ceremonial or folk magic, which was quite widespread in early 19th century America). The visions produced through scrying are now deemed to be the effects of a hallucinatory state caused by perceptual

deprivation, also known as the ‘Ganzfeld Effect’.²⁵ Smith would place the stones inside his hat, thus blocking out the light, before squinting at them to obtain his visions. Other parallels between LDS practice and the Lebensreform movement include dietary and dress rules, as well as codified prohibitions in the case of Mormonism, in a book called *Word of Wisdom* (Angel Moroni/Joseph Smith 1835). Mormons, for instance, are advised to eat meat only sparingly and to refrain from coffee, tea, alcohol, and tobacco. Smith’s followers regarded tobacco as a medicinal herb suitable only for healing ailing cattle.

When Just cites Goethe as an authority in support of his health regime, I would argue he is not only reproducing oppositions at the core of German romanticism between Science and Nature; he also invokes, via Faust, a European Mystical or ‘hermetic’ tradition that sets out to affirm the superior truth of transcendental knowledge over scientific methodologies and ‘rational’ thought processes. Seen in this light, I believe that Just’s work could be interpreted as a manual for a counter-Enlightenment movement/tendency, based on the abandonment of rationalism in favour of vitalism and magic. The Faust quotes in Just’s Lebensreform manual place this tendency firmly within a tradition of alchemical practice concerned with the transmutation of the soul. In *Kehrt zur Natur zurück!* (1895) (Return to Nature!), Just propagates treatments that seem based on the four classical elements of earth, water, air and fire. Besides the medicinal clay therapy (earth) and hydrotherapy (water), Just writes about the health benefits of camping and sleeping outside in direct contact with the earth as well as walking bare footed. He recommended nudism so the body could be exposed

25 The Ganzfeld Effect is a phenomenon of perception caused by exposure to an unstructured, uniform stimulation field. Research by psychologist Wolfgang Metzger (1899–1979) established that when subjects gazed into a featureless field of vision they consistently hallucinated and their electroencephalograms changed. The adepts of Pythagoras might have retreated to pitch-black caves to receive wisdom through their visions. Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganzfeld_effect <10 May 2014>

simultaneously to air and (via sunbathing) fire. In addition he promoted the ‘light-and-air cottage’—a structure designed to let in as much light and air as possible in order to fight the evils of ‘Miasma’ (Just 1895, 293).



Fig. 2.19. *Bel Water*, 2013, Ruchama Noorda, design by Paul Gangloff. Photo: RN.

Miasma was thought to be a noxious form of ‘bad air’, responsible for respiratory illnesses like tuberculosis. It was believed to be a toxic, life-denying atmospheric substance that lurked in damp basements and sewer systems. Throughout the 19th century the medical profession was divided on the basis of the causes of diseases such as tuberculosis—some factions supporting the theory of ‘contagionism’ whereby disease was thought to be spread by touch, while others promoted the idea that diseases were air-borne (the ‘miasma’ theory). Florence Nightingale, for instance, who campaigned successfully for many far-reaching health

reforms was convinced by the Miasma theory and believed clean air was the most important prerequisite for creating and maintaining hygiene (Bostridge 2008).

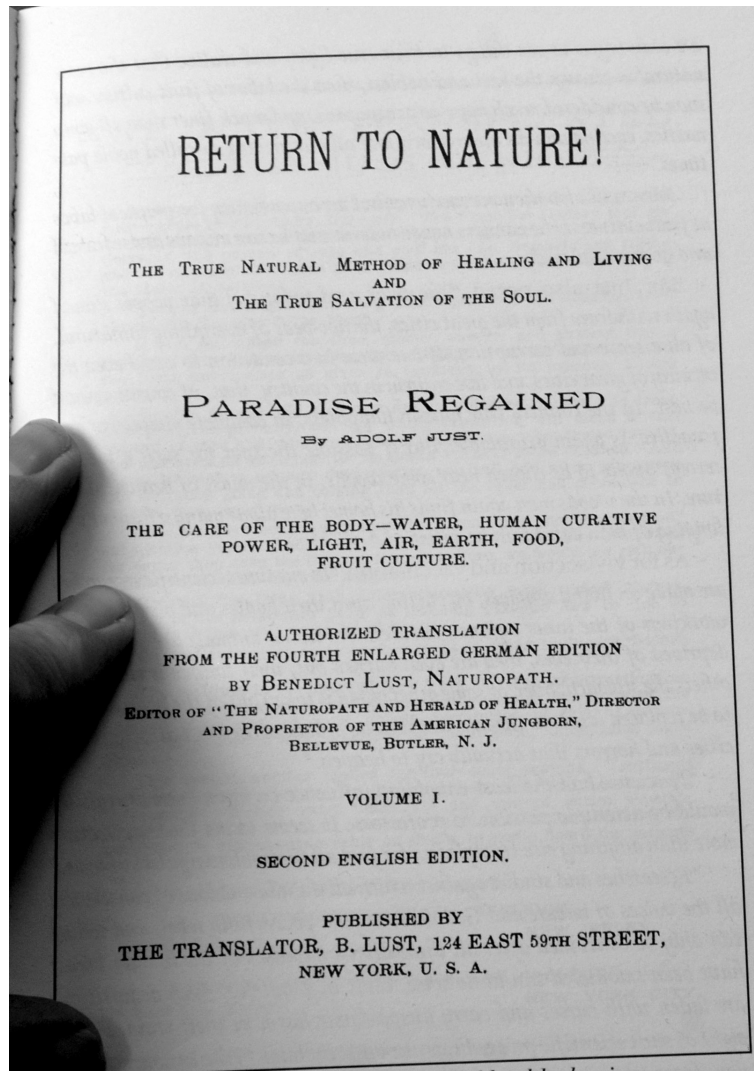


Fig. 2.20. Title page of *Return to Nature*, Adolf Just 1896.

Kehrt zur Natur zurück! can be regarded as, in essence, a collection of treatments for diseases of affluence. By bundling together a range of treatments and remedies promoted by the Lebensreform movement, the book functions as a practical manual or survival guide for followers of this influential social movement. The Lebensreform movement classified its medical lore according to the principle of self-healing as 'Naturheilkunde' (natural healing). Just condensed the approach into a single line: 'Everybody should become once again one's own doctor.' (transl. Lust, Just 1903, 240) Elsewhere, statements like: 'Our globe is a body in which a powerful life has been stirring from the very beginning which no amount of human unreason could disturb' (Just 1903, 102), can be placed in the tradition of 'Vitalism'. Vitalism held a prominent place in most traditional medical philosophies and healing regimes in both the East and West and can clearly be seen at the core of the writings of Hippocrates, the founding figure of the western medical tradition. The belief in the vital spark, or 'prana' (the life force) implies a holistic view of nature that embraces all living creatures. This influential work was translated into English in 1903 for an American public by Benedict Lust, (1872–1945), a German born waiter working in New York. The book appeared in English as *Return To Nature! The True Natural Method of Healing and Living And The True Salvation Of The Soul: Paradise Regained*. Of note is Lust's insertion of the reference to the title of a famous work by 17th century English poet, John Milton—absent in the original German language—which would have been familiar to most English speaking readers.



LOUISE LUST, N. D.

Fig. 2.19 Louise Lust (Aloysia Stroebele) 1907.²⁷Fig. 2.20 Benedict Lust, photo from *Naturopath*, February 1927.²⁸Fig. 2.21. Adolf Just, 1896, photo from the official Luvos website.²⁹

26 http://www.ndhealthfacts.org/wiki/File:3.1_LouisaLust.jpg <21 May 2015>

27 <https://nursemyra.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/benedict-lust.gif> <21 May 2015>

28 <http://www.luvos.de/Heilerde/Adolf-Just-Wiederentdecker-der-Heilerde> <21 May 2015>

Lust converted to natural medicine after undergoing hydrotherapy treatment for tuberculosis as administered by Doctor Sebastian Kneipp (1821–1897) at his clinic in Bavaria. His condition improved and Lust returned to the United States to spread the word of Dr. Kneipp's 'miracle cure'. He coined the term 'Naturopathy' to refer to the philosophy underpinning Kneipp's approach. Lust, in our day remembered as the 'Father of Naturopathy', became one of the most influential advocates for the Lebensreform movement in America. His wife Aloysia Stroebele (1869–1925) was also a powerful figure in the early years of naturopathy. Originally a German immigrant from Sigmarinen, Stroebele had studied in London with Arnold Rikli (air and sun therapy) and Louis Kuhne (hydrotherapy). While Stroebele's importance tends to be downplayed in Lebensreform histories in favour of her husband, it seems clear from contemporary accounts that she herself was a key figure in the movement. In addition to setting up naturopathic sanatoriums in New Jersey and Florida, and the first naturopathic college in New York, Aloysia Stroebele was the author of the *Practical Naturopathic-Vegetarian Cook Book*. It contains an attack on the American diet and the damaging effects of what are now called 'white carbs' that could have been written today: 'A large part of food among Americans is composed of white flower, sugar and butter. People who are living on such stuff are gradually starving themselves to death' (Stroebele 1907, 40).

Along with her ban on meat, the recipes in Stroebele's cookbook seem to have been an attempt to translate aspects of ancient Indian Ayurvedic diets into a version that was adaptable to western eating habits. As it developed, Naturopathy became linked to an animistic approach to health in which the idea of a unifying vital force is seen at work in the centre of the universe. In this sense, naturopathy can be seen an anti-modern project that aims to put the soul back into the material. However, naturopathic practitioners and entrepreneurs also took full advantage of modern industrial production and marketing methods. Just's mud treatment, for instance, was packaged and sold in dehydrated 'convenience' form that functioned like instant cake

mix. 'Just add an egg!'²⁹ (or in this case water)...to activate in your own home the primal energy of a healing force that is present in the soil and in all plants, animals and humans. In animism, the human organism becomes one with the planet and no clear boundary exists between the self and the rest of the world.

I would argue that in a fungal or bacterial network, contagionism (contact) becomes a form of embodiment. The alchemists' ideal of merging macrocosm and microcosm translates into the naturopathic ideal of an embodied nature in which one is centred within an infinite network connected to all living things. Nature is no longer reduced into parts to be studied from an 'objective' viewpoint, but is viewed instead from within an ecosystem that embraces the entire universe. I am fascinated by this holistic approach which is central to the Lebensreform movement. A movement whose members were, by the end of the 19th century, expressing a desire, not just for spiritual transformation, but for practical reforms and direct political action. All the cures that are described in this chapter form a practical manual for Life Reform.

29 Betty Crocker cake mix TV commercial, 1950, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ts9HLWh2ql < 3 October 2015>



Fig. 2.22. *Bel's Pilgrimage*, 2013, Southern Limburg, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Moniek Wegdam.

Live Earth, Idols and Embodied Landscape

In *Bel's Pilgrimage* (2013), I explored the idea and the iconography of the nature cure in the context of a choreographed performance walk. This artwork was an orchestrated walking tour over a distance of 11 kilometer through the countryside of Southern Limburg in the Netherlands. The pilgrimage had no other purpose than the road itself; it was a meditation undertaken by the feet, as well as an enacted metaphor as produced by a body in motion. The walk explored the relationships between time, distance, geography, the body and the mind. The act of walking in *Bel's Pilgrimage* was a collective performance choreographed over an area and in time: with a scripted hiking guide and a specially designed map, participants were led through an area that is known for its sights of religious devotion and rare flora and fauna. During the walk, stories about local piety were interwoven with information on contemporary and ancient industrial pollution that left its traces in the environment. The zinc pollution in the area had, for instance, created a tangled history in which the chemical element both

functioned as a poison and a cure. Prepackaged 'Live Earth' (Medical Clay) made from local Loess that comprises nearly 100% Pleistocene essential minerals was available to the walking public.



Fig. 2.23. *Live Earth*, 2013, Ruchama Noorda, design by Paul Gangloff. Photo: RN.

The path followed the meanderings of the Kundalini snake³⁰ along sites that functioned as positive and negative organic poles. The hiking guide came with a map of the area in which the figure of Asclepius led the participants through twelve successive stadia. The walk was dedicated to the pagan god Bel. This big-eared demigod is immortalized on the altar in the church of Holset and described in the fanciful history of the area by the local priest at the height of the romantic era. The walk was punctuated by alternating stops at mud sites, sources of therapeutic healing clay and healing wells.

30 In Yogic practices and scriptures the concept of Kundalini is an energy that is described as being 'coiled' at the base of the spine, represented as a sleeping serpent waiting to be awakened.

A 'caretaker' in uniform was stationed at every significant point on the route to guide the travellers to healing wells and help them to apply the medicinal clay.



Fig. 2.24. *Bel's Pilgrimage*, 2013, Southern Limburg, Ruchama Noorda. Photo: Moniek Wegdam.

A grotto and birthing pool made from compacted recycled garbage (though from a distance resembling finery/filigree) was erected in a field at the point where many roads intersect to form what appears on the map as a six-armed star. A hole was dug in the earth directly in front of the grotto and half filled with baptismal muddy water. The tangled history of the region was symbolized by two examples of local flora and fauna: 'het zinkviooltje' (the zinc violet) and the vroedmeesterpad (a toad). The violet has adapted itself to the polluted circumstances which are caused by mining and thrives in the region. Likewise, the vroedmeesterpad, which, like other amphibians, has suffered serious population decline in the Anthropocene era, survives in the area. The violet and the toad functioned in this work as the positive and negative organic poles that link up to form an electrically charged natural/unnatural circuit across the 'holy ground' of Southern Limburg.

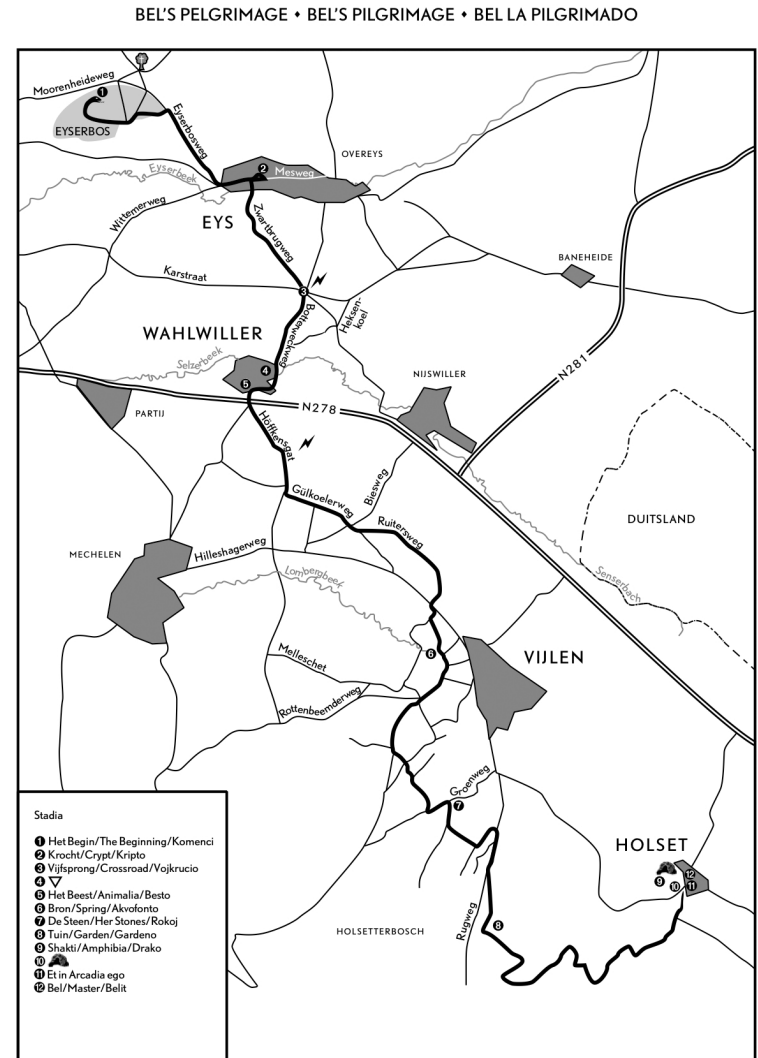


Fig. 2.25. Map of Bel's Pilgrimage, 2013, Southern Limburg, Ruchama Noorda. Design by Paul Gangloff.

Occult Dunghill

I now return to the instinctive hygienic ideas of the naturopath Adolf Just and his therapeutic regime that sought to reconnect the human organism to the natural world, by focusing on the buried instincts we share with other animals, but sublimated under normal circumstances for the sake of ‘civilization’. Geophagy, the practice of eating earthy or soil-like substances, exists in animals in the wild and also in humans, most often in rural or preindustrial societies, but apparently also among children and pregnant woman. It was reported as quite common in the south of the United States amongst slaves (who were nicknamed ‘Clay Eaters’) and poor whites in the South-Eastern United States (Wayne Flint 1979). I came across a psychological hypothesis, which is centred on the cravings reported by clay eaters, although the researchers’ attention was directed mainly towards pregnant women and their emotional states. Here, geophagy was attributed to feelings of misery, homesickness, depression, and alienation (Henry and Matthews Kwong 2003, 355). Could it be that Western cultures may have continued the practice of geophagy, but under the guise of vitamins and minerals?

The German homeopath Wilhelm Heinrich Schüßler discovered in the 1860’s that the body contains twelve basic mineral salts by researching the ashes of a cremated body: Calcium fluoride, calcium phosphate, iron phosphate, potassium chloride, potassium phosphate, potassium sulphate, magnesium phosphate, sodium chloride, sodium phosphate, sodium sulphate, silica calcium and sulphate³¹. When the NASA space program was studying remedies for rapid bone depletion in zero-gravity, a number of companies were asked to develop calcium supplements, of which apparently none were as effective as a reddish clay found in California. Dr. Benjamin Ershoff of the California Polytechnic Institute demonstrated that the consumption of clay counters the effects of weightlessness. He reported that the calcium in clay is absorbed

31 11. Mai 2010 Schüßler-Salze, Die heilsamen Zwölf, Colin Goldner, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wissen/teil-schuessler-salze-die-heilsamen-zwoelf-1.854997>
<14 March 2014>

more efficiently and that clay contains some factor or factors other than calcium which promotes improved calcium utilization and/or bone formation. He added that little or no benefit was noted when calcium alone was ‘added to the diet’ (Ershoff 1964, 48).

To conclude: ‘reform’ would literally stand for a beneficial change and for the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt, and unsatisfactory in human life, or simply a reversion to a pure and original state. What I find interesting about reform movements is the way in which they tend to start off as subversive and anti-authoritarian, only later to become more dogmatic and authoritarian themselves. In my ReForm research, I dig deep into the layers of the ‘occult dunghill’, an excavation that, although often interrupted by cases of reverse stratigraphy which mess with the archaeological sequence, is an attempt to gain excess to those subconscious levels of muddled thinking which I assume to be the sources of inspiration. My ReForm research is a test site in which I investigate reform movements and ideals both in their ambiguity and earnestness. Along the way I tend to find undigested elements that I expose or want to reuse in my work. My ReForm research is primarily conducted hands-on, in and through the production of artworks that refer back to and comment on my historical research. Where appropriate, I have attempted to mimic Life Reform practices and techniques directly as if following a culinary recipe, but in every case I did this in the manner of a cook who, after assembling the basic ingredients and getting a broad idea of how to proceed, feels free to improvise and innovate.

I have demonstrated that the Lebensreform movement, with its experimental approach to art and life, was both a progressive as well as conservative program. I think that, within this Anthropocene era, it is necessary to try to understand these tendencies and dig up some of the dirt in order to discover how Lebensreform appears at the cradle of numerous influential developments—some of which were problematic to their very core. It is also necessary to ask the question: why an international humanist-liberal and anarcho-leftist land-reform movement, that was involved

with discussions on the legitimism of privately owned land, colonialism and fighting capitalism through the founding of cooperative colonies, lead to the disastrous foundation of the Blut-und-Boden ideology?

There is general agreement among historians that a longing for *Heimat* (homeland) and *Gemeinschaft* (an organic sense of communal belonging) and a simpler, pre-industrial agrarian way of life connected directly to the soil, is itself firmly rooted in the soil of German Romanticism. I would argue that with the mass migration of people from agriculture and the rural life to the city and the factory, the soil might well have gradually become reclassified in the period of rapid industrialization and urbanization as mere 'dirt': a substance with 'unclean' connotations. Disconnected from the land, people may have become distanced from the properties of the soil, the dirt in which our food is grown. The topic of alienation from the material conditions of food production is a theme that is once more widely discussed today, for instance, in the eat local/slow food movements.³² Other aspects, like the Lebensreform's involvement with national romanticism, that during National Socialism eventually lead to claims of primacy and superiority, are condemnable at the very least, because they led to defining people culturally and racially to a specific geographical terrain: a homeland and its pre-genetic concepts of race. But I have come to the conclusion that this same alienation and fear of urbanization merely tends to reinforce racial and racist ideas, because whereas village culture is characterized by common bloodlines, intimate relationships, and communal behaviour, the city tends to foster detachment, anonymity and *Gesellschaft*. The inventor of 'local' and 'organic': the Völkische movement in Germany, was not only a populist movement but also the synonym for the proletariat. Together with a love of the fatherland concept, such movements combined sentimental patriotic populism with a revolt against modernity. In 1979, in his well-known book *La condition postmoderne*

32 The local food movement focuses in addition to the creation of self-reliant food economies and also on overcoming the distance between food producers and consumers.

the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard claimed to have laid the 'grand narrative' to rest, but now at the end of Postmodernism, and in the middle of the Anthropocene era, the view that modern culture was infected by a narrow rationalism—a naive faith in progress—becomes again significant, and leaves a necessity to redefine ecology and its network of relations between soil, plants, and humans.