ReForm

Noorda, R.A.

Chapter 4: ℞eForm Land(scape)

Fig. 4.0. *℞ Home Lab*, Ruchama Noorda, digital photo, 10 × 14 cm, 2014.

Chapter 4.
ReForm Land(scape)

Rhizome

> 'Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non-sign states. The rhizome is reducible to neither the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes two or even directly three, four, five etc. It is not a multiple derived from the one, or to which one is added (n+1). It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the one is always subtracted (n-1). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or ligaments, should not be confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions...Unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight.'
> (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21)

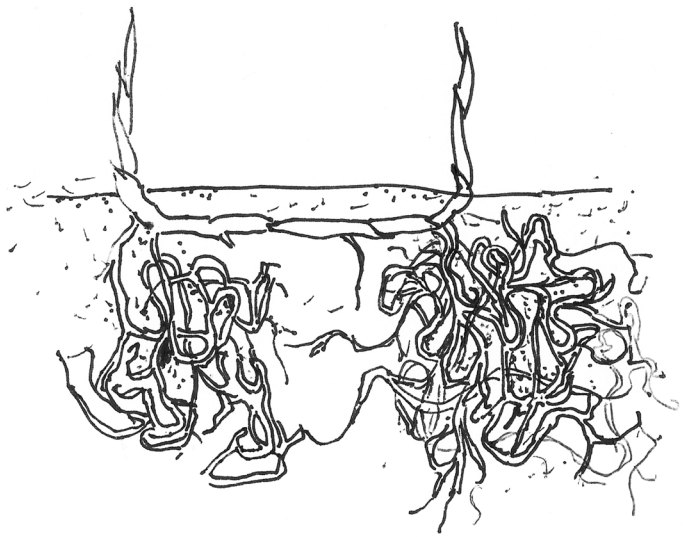

Fig. 4.1. *Rhizome*, ink on paper, 21 × 29 cm. Ruchama Noorda, 2015.

'**Rhizome** n. (botany) A horizontal, usually underground stem that often sends out roots and shoots from its nodes. Also called *rootstalk, rootstock*.' (The Free Dictionary, http://www.thefreedictionary.com)

The philosophical concept of the rhizome as developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*: *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), offers an image of thought in direct opposition to hierarchical, binary systems which Deleuze and Guattari call 'arborescent'. According to Deleuze and Guattari, arborescent systems are modelled on the image of the tree growing primarily upwards in only one direction from a single rooted source. By contrast, the rhizome grows in what appears to be a random, unpredictable way beneath the earth's surface, forming complicated horizontal networks with shoots moving up into the atmosphere at unpredictable points. The rhizome metaphor provides a useful model for thinking/presenting thought differently—making non-necessary connections across disparate fields without imposing a unitary 'coherent' structure. The rhizomatic model seems to make more and more sense in the age of the Internet, social networking technologies and instant connectivity. It opens up a way of organizing material that resonates directly not just with how I think about my work but how I think *through* it—how I go about conceiving and making my work.

℞: the logo I use for my *Live Earth* compressed land(scape) works stands for: Ruchama – ReForm – Rhizome – Research

The R's are linked and interchangeable.

E.g. ReForm is a historical counter-cultural movement/set of movements/an ideal/set of ideals/an ideology of transformation/a discipline/practice (way of being-doing)/a research mode counter-posed against rational conformism. Rhizome-like it flourishes best underground. And like the rhizome it favours nomadic forms of growth and propagation.

My woRk is a Rhizomatic ReForm Research pRoject. I do not apply strict conceptual methods to materials ahead of time. My approach is more para-conceptual—I aim to open up heterogeneous points of entry to the work while allowing the initial idea to remain in development throughout the whole process of making. I do not seek to impose unilinear structures or single-strand narratives on what I end up doing. I always start and end up in the middle, which as Deleuze and Guattari point out, is also the milieu (literally 'the middle place'). I try not to anticipate or control the outcome(s). The 'reading' of the work, its effect on the viewer/audience, its emotional impact or affect are all literally beyond me (℞).

For Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomatic thinking is 'an anti-genealogy' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 31). The line of visionary ReForm heretics I follow equally in this written dissertation and in 'my work' move against the grain of chronology. They crop up in the present as time travellers visiting the future from the past or vice-versa. There is no sequential

history of events to be seen from an external viewpoint but only an underground environment (a milieu) that exists as a unity from which the participating 'fellow traveller' (rather than the 'onlooker' or 'viewer') cannot take a distance, I start in the middle and move out towards the edges. Yet, as Guattari says, this interconnectedness of the social and environmental spheres, (what he calls the 'Ecosophy') never coheres into a holistic structure, because it is essentially heterogeneous and scattered. Broken pieces of the system can grow individually and form new connections like very stubborn weeds growing from an invisible source that pop up randomly after the field has been ploughed. The aim of the Rhizomatic approach I have outlined here is to overcome the division between theory and practice.

Pearblossom Highway

Antelope Valley, California 18 November 2011.
Surely these are the remnants of a ruin or a rebuilt ruin of the remnants of a house. This is a remake of a place, a monumental roadside ruin—an anti-romantic folly—a set design—the ghost of an idea of a garden town. Fast-forward to the present: each day bulldozers extend the invasion of the desert creating monuments for housing developments and shopping malls.

The remnants of communitarian experiments like Llano del Rio in California linger in the desert slowly disintegrating, becoming contemplative road side monuments—warning signs on the way forward.

Fig. 4.2. *Llano del Rio*, Ruchama Noorda, digital photo 29 × 42 cm, 2011.

We pulled into the shoulder on Highway 138, I stepped out of the car, ran across the two-lane highway, and stood between the remains of a pair of blackened chimneys stacks among broken bottles, dirt and creosote bushes. I noticed to one side of the chimneystacks the hollow outline of the foundation of a long gone building filled with rubble and Datura (Jimson Weed). Datura is in the (deadly) Nightshade family. The seeds can lie dormant in the ground for years. They only germinate when the soil in which they are resting is disturbed.

Llano del Rio was an early 20th century cooperative colony designed on the basis of a circular city plan by architect and radical feminist Alice Constance Austin. The colony was founded in May 1914 by a small group of believers led by Socialist Party politician, Job Harriman. It is considered to be one of the most important non-religious utopian experiments in the history of the American west. (At its peak in 1917 Llano supported approximately 1100 (white-only) residents: Harriman believed that ethnic mixing was premature and divisive). Among the more radical, though unrealized design plans put forward by Alice Austin were the kitchenless home and communal day-care areas. Llano Del Rio was situated near a rare and therefore valuable water source, Big Rock Creek. It attracted farmers, unionised workers and

committed socialists who sought a better 'boss-free' cooperative way of life. The community's economy was based on agriculture and the colony produced alfalfa, corn and fruit. Llano also housed a sawmill, dairy farms, a poultry yard, a rabbitry, a fish hatchery and a print shop. The colony had its own Harriman-run newspaper, *The Western Comrade.* The battle over access to a reliable water source was a factor in the colony's decline after the LA County water authority denied Llano's request to build a dam. Ideological disputes, internal rivalries between competing power/interest groups and, no doubt, the demoralizing effects of the unrelenting heat and general isolation helped to speed the decline of Llano del Rio. After declaring bankruptcy in 1918, the colony collapsed, the core of the community relocating to Louisiana. For Southern California based historian and political activist, Mike Davis, Llano del Rio presents an inverted image of 20th and 21st century American capitalist society. In his introduction to *City of Quartz* (1990), Davis' journey through the dark side of Southern California's history and culture, he writes, referring to the Llano ruins (burned to the ground after the colonists departure by local residents): 'The best place to view the Los Angeles of the next millennium is from the ruins of its alternative future.' (Davis 1990, 3)

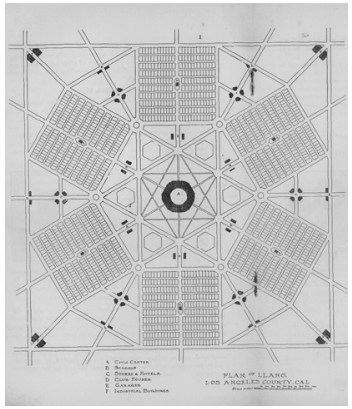

Fig. 4.3. Llano del Rio original city plan designed by architect and designer Alice Constance Austin. http://nothingtosee-herepeople.tumblr.com/post/2709391081l/llano-del-rio-excerpts-from-mike-daviss-city-of <5 October 2015>

Fig. 4.4. *Llano del Rio Colony*, Ruchama Noorda, digital photo 10 x14 cm. 2011.

Diopharma

High Desert Test Sites, *Spectacular Subdivision*, Wonder Valley, California, 2014.

Diopharma was a performance and installation that I mounted on a remote 40 acre site on the Iron Age Road in Wonder Valley in the Mojave desert as part of the group exhibition *Spectacular Subdivision*.[1] In this dioramic makeshift spa environment I ground samples of earth, plant material and fragments of built structures taken from abandoned utopian experimental colonies located in northern Europe and the American southwest and formed them into small, compressed medicinal pills. Utopian sites compacted into pills in this manner included Llano del Rio and Walden. Samples of

1 *Spectacular Subdivision* was curated by Jay Lizo of Los Angeles-based art collective Monte Vista Projects and co-organized by High Desert Test Sites and the University of California Institute for Research in the Arts.

pills from these sites were displayed in plastic zip lock bags alongside large (100 × 150 cm) installed photographs of the ruined chimney stacks of the Llano del Rio commune still standing 130 miles west of the Iron-age site. The virtual chimney, built of photographs, functioned as a two dimensional alchemist oven powered by a solar cell made from photographs taken from inside the chimney: Llano's birth canal.

Fig 4.5. *Llano del Rio*, Richard Hebdige, digital print, 60 × 80 cm, 2014.

Fig. 4.6. *Diopharma*, Ruchama Noorda, 2014.

Text signs on metal poles were dotted round the *Diopharma* site, marking out possible sites of overlap and contradiction between private and communal space.

The installation was built out of materials like gypsum, insulation material, digital prints, aluminium, plastic, clay and plant material. The plasterboard made from gypsum, the backboard, insulation material and wood are all building materials that are used in the type of building which is typical for the fast suburban sprawl that spreads itself in circles around densely populated areas into the middle of nowhere. Subdivisions are pieces of land that are divided into individual lots making them subsequently easier to sell. Speculative development, the buying and developing of unused land without taking account of the environment is a problem in the desert both for the people who end up living there as 'extra-terrestrial invaders' in a desert landscape, and because of the environmental problems caused by the amount of water and energy required to sustain expanding populations in these areas. The *Spectacular Subdivision* exhibition in Wonder Valley engaged and mimicked the logic of real estate development as it has played out in the years since European

settlement began on the edges of habitable space across the Californian desert.

Fig 4.7. *Datura Stramonium*, Ruchama Noorda, digital photo 10 × 14 cm, 2014.

Earth Works and Non Sites

Imagine an ideal, aerial view of the pro-biotic relationships between utopian ideas, human bodies, earthly materials and material sites. Then picture the world as we actually find it…

I set out in this section to map some of those links from the ground up with reference to the work of the influential 1960's American Land Artist Robert Smithson, whose sculptural site-specific 'interventions' and published texts raise questions not just about how we represent landscape as artists but how we interact with it and on it as a species—how we come to occupy even the harshest, most challenging terrain, and the implications and the consequences of our occupancy. For me those questions need to be posed more urgently today than ever. The approach I adopt in my work makes no distinction between the organism that inhabits and the inhabited terrain—together they form the field. Terrain becomes field through the actions (often ritual) performed by *actors* on it. In developing this approach I have both been inspired by and reacted against aspects of Smithson's work.

In his widely circulated essay, *A Tour of the Monuments of the Passaic*, Smithson takes the role of the curious tourist visiting a series of archaeological or historical sites.[2] However, rather than looking only for evidence of the past he sets about imagining the future by examining the soil, taking an inventory of the sites and the materials which make up the landscape. Passaic County, a nondescript suburb of New Jersey is where the artist happened to grow up, though this fact is not considered relevant by Smithson, and is not disclosed in his essay. Invoking the idea of 'ruins in reverse', he presents a series of flat black and white photographs documenting traces of urban development and industrial activity along the river as if taking the reader on an illustrated tour of a significant 'historic' site with the author cast in the guise of authoritative tour guide. In a blankly ironic style, Smithson implies that these 'monuments of Passaic' are on an equal footing with the ruins of ancient Rome and by doing so he keeps complicating the romantic notion of the ruin as a haunted or a hallowed space. For me the landscape represented in Smithson's essay is neither natural nor historical. Instead it is presented in an emotionally detached or 'objective' manner. The text by contrast moves in a diaristic style from highly personal observations to new ways of envisioning time and thinking about nature. The man-made interventions traced across the reworked sand and earth are ultimately presented as trivial and temporary modifications rather than as permanent scars inflicted on a 'virgin' landscape.

2 Smithson, R. 'A Tour of The Monuments of Passaic', *Artforum*, 1967, 45–51.

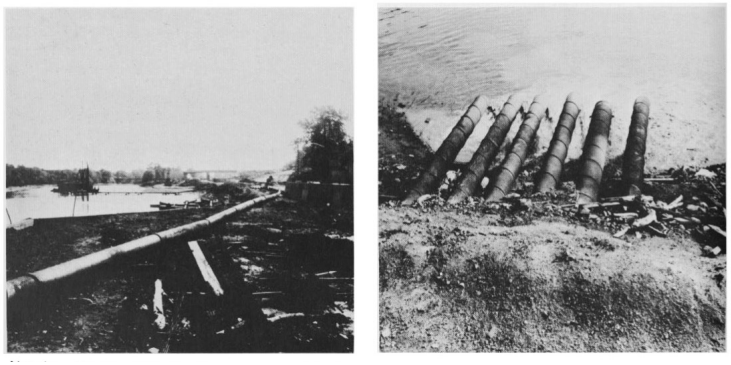

Fig. 4.8. *The Fountain Monument* and *The Great Pipes,* see: Robert Smithson 1967.

Smithson's notion of geological rather than historical time is tied to his concern with irreversible processes of entropy, a concept that is commonly used to refer to the inevitable decline/loss of momentum in any given system. In the Passaic piece he uses the notion of entropy to reflect critically on the nostalgia — particularly widespread in the 'New World' for a frontier or a lost, unspoiled wilderness — the world before the settlers came. He writes: '...we have to accept the entropic situation and more or less learn how to reincorporate these things that seem ugly. ….It seems that one would have to recognize this entropic condition rather than try to reverse it' (Smithson 1973, 307). Here Smithson seems to be using the vast scale of geological time as a way of countering the anthropocentric human-focused view of history. Here, as elsewhere in Smithson's work, the artist is seeking to put man in his place, not as the Master of the Universe but rather as an ultimately dispensable newcomer on the planet. Smithson's ultimate message seems to be that all man's works, no matter how monumental or 'heroic' will fade away and come to nothing.

Smithson coined the terms 'Land Art' and 'Earthworks' to describe the new genre of art he was interested in making: site-specific contemporary works not containable within white cube space whether in a museum or a gallery. Earthworks are literally bound to the sites they appear in. US based Land Artists like Smithson, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, and James Turrell used heavy industrial machinery and raw materials to make monumental big gesture works often in remote locations. In addition, Smithson introduced the concept of the 'non-site' and set up a dialectic between centre and periphery by transporting documentary and material traces taken from remote sites — the raw material of landscape — into metropolitan galleries thereby creating a dialogue between the 'inside' and the 'outside', the 'art world' and the 'real world'. Piles of earth or stones or film footage of wilderness or undeveloped sites suddenly appeared on the pristine walls and cement floors inside the sanitized space of fancy New York galleries.

The kind of earth-focused body works I am interested in and committed to making, operate on an entirely different scale and appear as somewhat personal, temporal interventions when compared to the monumental gestures of 1970's American Land Art. They exist and are circulated through documentation (video and photography and compressions of actual material) rather than as big footprint sculptural forms or permanent interventions in the landscape. In that respect my work bears a closer connection to the approach to land art developed in the 1960's in the UK. As theatre and performance theorist Christel Stalpaert and art theorist Karolien Byttebier point out: 'The Land Art Movement that emerged in England in the same period tended to be critical of the American Earthworks group for their blunt desire to rearrange the landscape.' (Stalpaert and Byttebier 2014, 74) For English land artists like Richard Long (and Hamish Fulton) the intention was not to forcefully bend nature to artistic aspirations but 'to leave merely subtle traces' (ibid.) in or on the land's surface. Site-specific works also provide opportunities for the incorporation of embodied experience — opportunities, which the viewer can share in by becoming a participant as well as an observer — entering into the landscape and its ecology. It seems to me that a new generation of 'neo'-land artists (contemporary artists who make site-specific work in which the art work and the landscape in which it is set are inextricably linked) are more inclined to follow the example of people like Long i.e. framing/documenting experiences in/with nature; art in an expanded field rather than conceiving land

art as action on a 'raw' terrain. My own work falls clearly into this category. The work I make could be described as a series of temporary site specific interventions and/or invented private rituals. By attempting to merge with the materials and settings in these pieces, I seek to place myself back inside the larger ecosystem.

> ***Quackery***. *A fraudulent claim to medical knowledge, from Quack Dutch 'kwaken', from making a noise like a duck/yelling, from 'kwakzalver', from treating the sick without authority, from pseudo- and paranormal knowledge, from snake oils and the promotion of magical thinking.*

Fig. 4.9. *Diopharma*, Ruchama Noorda, 2014.
Photo: Sinziana Velicescu.

It is the sky that is real in this photograph. Everything else looks fake, staged, manufactured, back-lit: unreal...fluffy clouds behind a photo of a chimneystack held up by wooden sticks. The deep shadows cast across the sand in the foreground look real enough but they could also have been photoshopped in afterwards. At first glance, the chimneystack seems to be part of the landscape but on closer inspection it is clear that it is a photograph, the borders of the card on which the photograph is printed become apparent, and the two horizon lines—the 'interior' and 'exterior' horizon lines don't match up. The entire installation barely holds together in the viewer's eye…instead it barely holds up at all. The 'fact' is it needs to be secured by sandbags because there is only a stage-like foreground to anchor it to….

The Greek word 'diorama' comes from di 'through' + orama 'that which is seen, a sight'. What I like about site-specificity is that it literally brings its own ground with it: in this photograph, I am sitting in the middle of a partway three-dimensional space grinding fragments of the landscape into ever-smaller pieces. Whilst I am grinding the rubble, stones, the bits of plants and trees inside the bowl, the smell intensifies as the moisture stored inside these fragments evaporates and the heterogeneous contents turn into an even brown powder.

Site-Specific art is generally defined as art that takes the actual real world setting centrally into account but at this particular 'site' (i.e. the photograph) I actually feel like I am in a white cube. Everything inside the borders of the photograph appears new, untouched and almost sterile. The desert is not empty but silent; traces of human existence disappear much faster here than in other places. The desert environment is, in reality, full of life (plants and animals that come to life 'invisibly' at night, soil imbued with latent energy). It is Spring, and from the floor of the beige cube, flowers appear suddenly scattered around the site. Through the process of grinding, I compress an entire landscape into the form of a pill you can dissolve inside your mouth.

Diopharma became for me the place where the idea of the idealized site got compacted and mediated via the imaginary of herbal and mineral medicine. The piece distributes and renders portable in a literally compressed form the shattered

dream of social(ist) housing, garden cities, suburban development, and communal living: the subsistence version of utopia that has gone to ground.

Fig. 4.10. *Diopharma,* Ruchama Noorda, 2014.

I chose the form of a diorama in order to bring the archaeological site as experienced in a museum or gallery-like setting back to an actual location in order to complicate the two and three-dimensional experience of place. *Diopharma* is thus an attempt on my part to engage with Smithson's space/non-space dialectic. The work could thus become at one and the same time a documentation of a process of art packaging and the work itself. The classic diorama is usually partly three-dimensional, something of an honestly exposed illusion (a piece of visual quackery). The typical museum diorama illustrates an (imagined) historical event or landscape and in creating a real-seeming perspective, it is an illusion produced by the manipulation of depth perception. The natural background of the site in the Mojave desert's Wonder Valley resembles the painted backdrops one can find in the animal

cages at a zoo or in depictions of the life of 'early man' in Palaeolithic times as represented in a display in a Natural History museum. In these settings the diorama functions to return the specimens (animals or 'early man') to their 'natural' habitats. The painted backdrops work to authenticate the naturalness of the figures in the foreground effectively merging the latter with the former.

Fig. 4.11. *R Home Lab (compressed landscape)*, Ruchama Noorda, digital photo 10 × 14 cm, 2014.

In D*iopharma* I deliberately avoided this merging of perspectives. By grinding soil and building debris samples into homogenous organic matter and presenting the results in neutral 'natural' therapeutic pill form, I set out to make both the terrain and the history that secures it easier to swallow. I wanted to offer the possibility for visitors to the site to unite with the landscape by taking it (all) in. Once the outside is inside a merger occurs. The work is in part inspired by the exaggerated health claims of products and 'miracle cures' like 'superfoods': a finely ground powder of algae or

wheatgrass added to a glass of water which is presented to the public as the path to instant health.

On the other hand, I was interested in playing with and on the packaging of convenience and superfoods and the promise of immediate access to transformative experience commonly made in the marketing of 'miracle cure' pharmaceuticals. In *Diopharma* I aimed to offer passers-by 'instant landscape'—a concentrated dose of vitamins and minerals distilled from the earth which, once ingested, are brought back to life again inside the body.

Fig. 4.12. *Diopharma*, Ruchama Noorda, 2014.

In a review of the *Spectacular Subdivision* show for *Artbound* (8 April 2014), an on-line journal sponsored by LA public TV station KCET, local desert studies scholar and fellow-artist, Kim Stringfellow mentioned that my 'performative project…seemed to channel the mail-order health quackery of early 20th century desert healer and self-proclaimed minister Curtis Howe Springer of Zzyxx fame'.[3] The reference here is to the now abandoned Zzyzx health resort built in 1944 outside Las Vegas, not far from Wonder Valley in the Mojave desert by Springer, a radio evangelist and medicine-man. Dubbed the 'King of Quacks' by the American Medical Association in 1969, Springer offered mineral water and mud-cures, and created a gas-heated 'hot'-springs-spa, which he attempted to pass off as the genuine article. Springer offered plant-based miracle cure potions over the radio in return for donations.[4] Prior to making my work I was unacquainted with this history; Springer serves as a connecting bridge back to Benedict Lust, the 'father of Naturopathy' discussed earlier in this dissertation. Lust (1872–1945), a follower of Doctor Sebastian Kneipp and Adolf Just, was one of the most influential advocates for the Lebensreform movement in America.

3 Kim Stringfellow 'Spectacular Subdivision: The Art of Home', 8 April 2014, www.kcet.org <4 October 2015>

4 Cecilia Rasmussen 'Zzyzx: An Unlikely Home of Hucksterism and Miracle Cures', June 16, 2002, http://articles.latimes.com/2002/jun/16/local/me-then16 <4 October 2015>

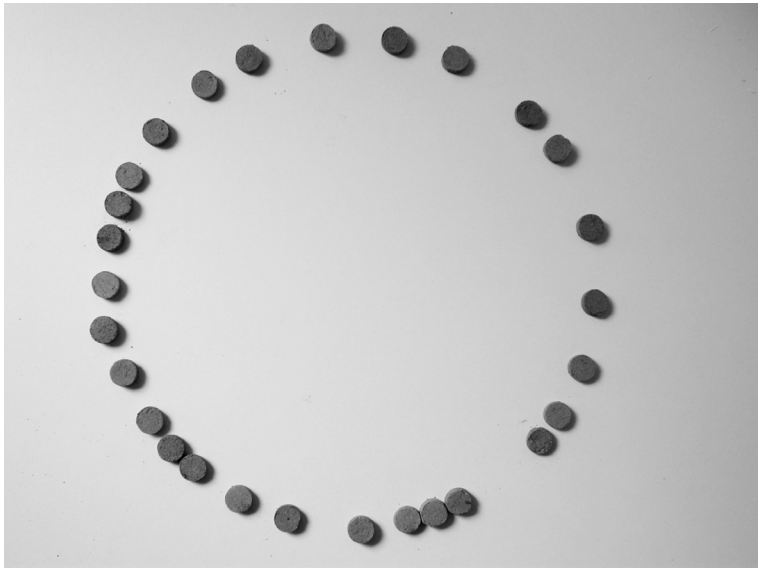

Fig. 4.13. *℞, Compressed Landscape*, Ruchama Noorda**,** installation at Galerie van Gelder Amsterdam, 2014.

Ingredients: ruins, sand, soil, plant material and dirt (may contain traces of gypsum, nuts, cement, gluten, animal products, and micro-organisms)

PHARMACA:
- pacifism
- antimilitarism
- political nudism
- anarchism
-
- self sufficiency
- common property
- free love/sexual reform
- teetotalism
- equal wage
- asceticism
- the feet en plein air
- vegetarianism/raw food, granola
- ••

SIDE EFFECTS:
- water shortage
- poor soil
-
- bankruptcy
- jealousy
-
- by creating a functioning socialist community within the larger society of capitalism, the larger society would gradually convert to socialism
- weed/unwanted plant
-
- all-encompassing ideology
-
- issues associated with instinctual need for survival, safety, grounding, family, security, boundaries, arrogance selfishness and greed.
-

Comprises nearly 100 % of essential minerals and trace elements.

Compressed Landscape

On returning to the Netherlands in the spring of 2014, I brought the Llano del Rio and Wonder Valley pills back home and combined these earthy medications with personal photographs, drawings and related material taken from magazines. I exhibited these at the Van Gelder Gallery in Amsterdam (28 June – 3 July 2014). The exhibition was titled *℞*. Here I created a kind of pro-biotic compost fed from a wide variety of data. Until the beginning of the 20th century, a prescription labelled ℞ contained a set of detailed instructions written by a qualified practitioner compounding the prescribed medications. But as medications have become pre-packaged and industrially manufactured, the term 'prescription' now usually refers to an order that a pharmacist dispenses and a patient passively imbibes. The pills were presented to visitors as instant art-works, to be taken with water. They were packaged with a fact-sheet: a guide for overcoming the dualistic split between mind and body, the collective & individual aspects of human existence and refer at the same time to the history of psychotropic drug taking in New World wilderness settings: the idea of people 'spacing out' in a remote, 'psychedelic' desert landscape. The installation revolved around naturopathic beliefs concerning the essential properties of materials. I was seeking to mimic the medieval alchemist intent on turning base metal into gold in order to (℞e)-activate the vital spark (élan vital) present in the soil collected from (failed) Utopian sites.

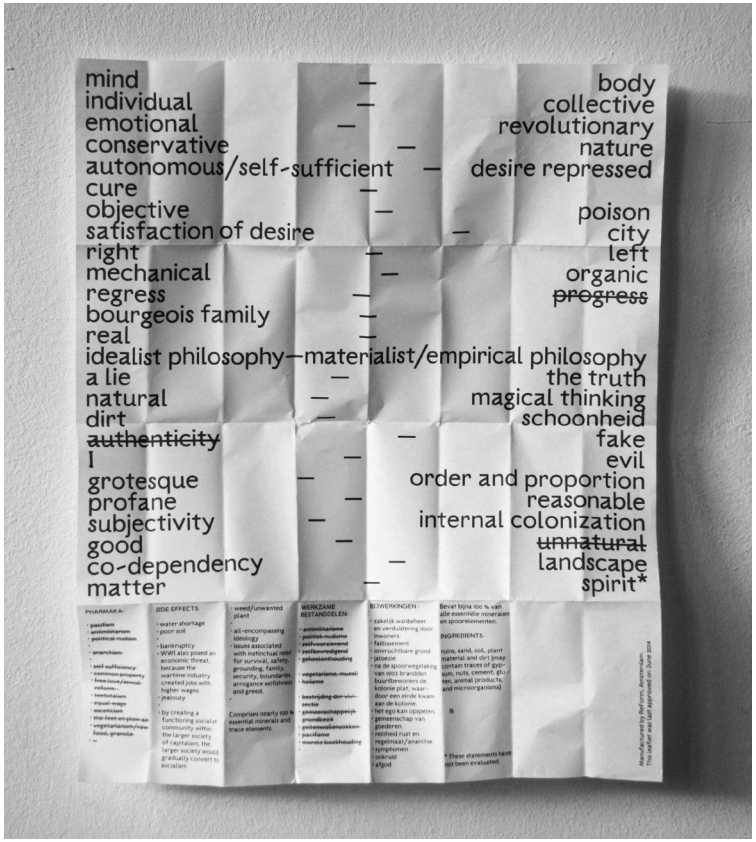

Fig. 4.14. *R* bijsluiter (instruction leaflet), 27 × 33 cm, 2014. Design: Paul Gangloff.

Land Development

Hortus Conclusus, 213 S Dean, Marfa TX was a roadside monument mounted in the backyard of a former hardware store in Marfa, Texas, and positioned 6 feet from a public highway leading to an intersection. The piece was made on-site over a six day period in June 2013 from local dirt, water, paint and paper. The adobe bricks were compacted from the soil dug out to form the hollow in front of the structure, which was later painted blue. In medieval iconography the Hortus Conclusus is the mystical garden of the mother goddess modelled on the womb (Scheck 2008, 98). The text is from *Discourse on Social Inequality* (1754), Jean Jacques Rousseau's denunciation of private property. The work is documented as a twenty-three-step program for land development.

Fig. 4.15. *Hortus Conclusus, 213 S Dean, Marfa TX*, Ruchama Noorda, 2013.

In Texas there is practically no 'public land', because even the most desolate sweeps of desert are private and protected by the toughest trespassing laws because nearly all land is privately owned. The percentage of private land in

Texas is greater than in any other state. The exceptions are roads and highways that connect the individual pieces of land or sites that have been either bought (military bases) or donated (Big Bend National Park). The piece of land that I could use was situated behind a fence and I spent seven very warm days digging into the stony ground and forming bricks by mixing the soil with buckets of water. I took the soil, mixed it with water and placed it into brick size moulds. On the sixth day, just as I had applied the text written on a piece of paper and had sealed it with some tape and mud, it started to rain, filling the basin with water.

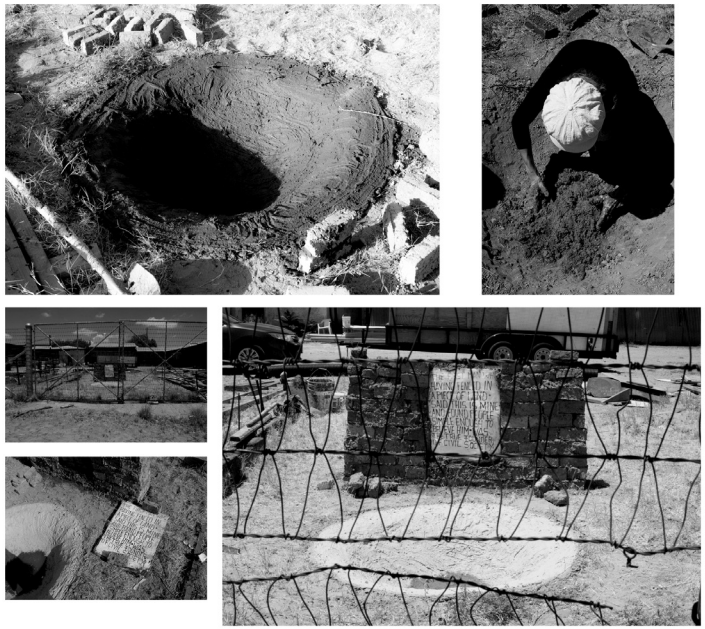

Fig. 4.16. *Hortus Conclusus, 213 S Dean, Marfa TX*, Ruchama Noorda, 2013. Photos: Paulien Oltheten

For Rousseau, man in his state of nature is essentially an animal like any other, but he has a free will, an ability to choose. The Romantic idea of the Bon Sauvage as a happy 'savage' man fallen from paradise connects to the attempt of almost all reform movements at some moment to overcome the system of private property and to experiment with alternative organisations of land use and ownership. According to Rousseau, modern people may have established Civil Society, but with it established divisions in the natural world. This is where 'evil' starts, like the fall out of paradise. The original source and basis of all inequality is the division of land.

Fig. 4.17. *Hortus Conclusus, 213 S Dean, Marfa TX*, Ruchama Noorda, 2013. Photos: Paulien Oltheten

The New World, California and Lebensreform

For many Europeans the United States, the American West, and in particular the desert form the ultimate place to imagine a new beginning or a definitive ending on an individual or collective-species basis. The desert landscape is often conceived as a *tabula rasa* (the Latin word *'deserta'* means

'empty' or 'forsaken' place). On this clean slate, successive cohorts of artists and secessionists of one kind or another have projected their fantasies of renewal and apocalypse. I first went to California in 2011 to research the legacy of utopian/dystopian lifestyle questing and experimentation that is still associated with the state's population, and to further explore the documented connections between the European Lebensreform movement and California's hippie counterculture.

The romanticised idea of the American southwest had also already become popularized by German writers like Karl Friedrich May (1842–1912). In May's adventure fiction the Germanic looking protagonist Old Shatterhand — hero of a succession of May novels — goes west and comes in contact with Native Americans. He befriended Winnetou who embodies the romanticized Nordic ideal of the noble savage. The drawing of Winnetou for the cover of Karl May's *Winnetou III*, drawn by the German painter Sascha Schneider in 1904, has surprising similarities to the painting *Lichtgebet* (1902) by Fidus (see ch. 2). Whereas *Lichtgebet* became the poster nude for the sun worshipping Lebensreformers, this European-American version also embodies the European fantasy of going back to nature and back to the basics of 'wild nature' and 'wild people'.

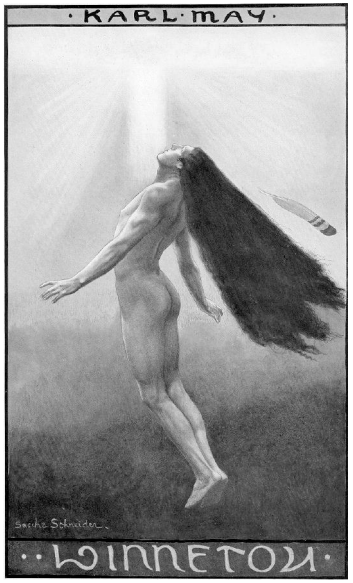

Fig.4.18. Book cover of Carl May's *Winnetou III* by Sascha Schneider, 1904.

I am particularly interested in a tradition of male characters in the Lebensreform movement that had developed an eccentric version of primitivism. An example is the German gustaf nagel (1874–1952). Nagel had become a vegetarian and adopted a look that combined Jesus and Tarzan. This meant that he grew his hair long, discarded his shoes and dug a hole in the ground under a rock to live in. Nagel was convinced that the source of his ill-health was an allergy to civilization.

Fig. 4.19. gustaf nagel, postcard Arendsee b. Seehausen Altmark.

In California, Father Yod (James Edward Baker 1922–1975) was the charismatic cult leader of the *Source Family*, which was a typical example of a hippy 'Love' community. It was centred around a successful health food restaurant in the Hollywood Hills in the 1960's and early 70's. Baker represents for me the antipode to the dystopian Manson family, which was run by Charles Manson.

Fig. 4.20. Father Yod (James Edward Baker) during his audition for 'Tarzan' https://newtopiamagazine.wordpress.com/2014/01/16/mongrel-patriot-review-isis-aquarian/ <20 November 2015>

Fig. 4.21. Father Yod as cult leader Ya Ho Wha of the Yod-family. http://elretrovisorazul.blogspot.nl/2015/03/el-padre-yod.html <20 November 2015>

Baker moved to California from Ohio to audition for the part of Tarzan in a Hollywood movie (Hundley 2007). While he did not get the role, he stayed on in California and eventually became the God of the Source family, the ultimate paternal leader archetype of the 1970's commune movement. He called himself Ya Ho Wha (Yahweh), referring to Himself as God the father. In 1957 he opened three health food restaurants on Sunset Boulevard: The Old World, The Aware Inn, and later when these were closed: The Source Health Food Restaurant.[5]

Baker had travelled to India with Yogu Bahjan, whom he considered his spiritual mentor. He claimed to have had an epiphany there, convincing himself he was destined to be the father of the Age of Aquarius. His teaching however was based on the kabala, tantric sex, some form of Theosophy and a mix of western and eastern mysticism. There were group sessions of Kundalini yoga; Rosicrucian workshops and the Source Family dressed up 'as American Indians, ancient Egyptians and Freemasons.'[6] Father Yod was an able businessman and managed to create a health food enterprise that supported almost a hundred followers. At one time Father Yod owned a Rolls Royce, ten Volkswagen vans for communal transportation and thirteen spiritual wives, while participating with other Family members in various polygamous groupings. From the accounts it seems that in his patriarchy the women had to have sexual relationships with men. They reached God only through men who took the role as the middlemen between men and God.

Initially I was drawn to Santa Barbara on the central coast of California because of the historical associations, the city and surrounding area have with the Lebensreform movement and its American offshoots. These include experimental art-and-lifestyle communities founded in the Montecito hills in the early 20th century by wealthy Europeans, mid-century nudist colonies, beatnik wine cults and hippy communes in the area around Mountain Drive. The city of Santa Barbara is a major hub of today's California-based New Age, 'slow food' and 'wellness' movements and has a high concentration of

5 Re-Visiting Father and the Source Family [Cult Leader Jim Baker] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6ms7YTCh10, <14 March 2015>

6 Ibid.

commercial spas, meditation, yoga and 'spiritual health' businesses. The city was also home to one the first organic food store in California (established in 1934 by the German born Hermann Friedrich Sexauer).

The library at University of California Santa Barbara houses an extensive archive of esoteric and wisdom tradition literature with special collections on comparative religion and counterculture history. Additional regional resources include the Pacifica Graduate Institute which specializes in Jungian depth psychology studies and is located on the former Max Fleishman estate just outside Santa Barbara, and the nearby town of Ojai, which houses the Krishnamurti Center, former home of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1988). This Indian mystic was 'discovered' by prominent British Theosophist and self-described clairvoyant, Charles Leadbeater at Ayar in India in 1909 and he became the messiah of the theosophical movement.

My visit to Santa Barbara in 2011 proved to be very productive and I was invited by the Art Department at UC Santa Barbara to give a presentation on my research and art work during this time for a large student and faculty audience, as part of the regular Arts Symposium Visiting Speakers series.[7] I have been exploring the cross traffic between European and West Coast 20th and 21st century counter-cultural movements ever since.

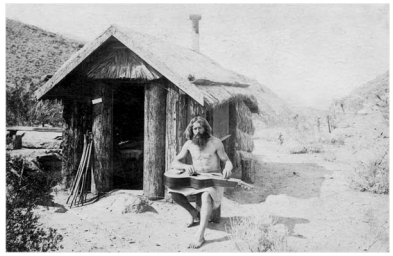

Fig. 4.22. Bill Pester, Palm Canyon, California, 1917, in Kennedy 1998.

7 Department of Art, University of California Santa Barbara, Colloquium, 11 October 2011.

My main area of interest is the connection between the 1960's Californian 'flower power' and the early 20th century Wandervogel and 'Nature Boy' movements based in Germany and the Low Countries. These historical links involved not just a traffic in ideas, therapeutic practices and alternative living arrangements, but also an exchange of personnel, as key figures in the Lebensreform and organic food movements migrated to the US and settled there as immigrants, often finding a positive reception from elements within the local population. In tracking these connections, I began excavating strands of mystical and Theosophical thinking, which until quite recently have tended to be repressed or marginalized in most of the canonical published histories of modernism.

When the American counter-cultural historian Gordon Kennedy published his book, *Children of the Sun, A Pictorial Anthology From Germany to California 1883–1949* (1998), he traced the origins of the hippy movement to the influence on American culture and the attitudes towards nature of a set of German immigrants, who arrived with a strong commitment to Lebensreform ideas, and who went on to settle in California in the 1930's and 40's. Kennedy's book did not go down well in alternative New Age publishing and practicing circles. In fact it was rejected by nearly all the alternative bookstores in California, including the Esalen Institute, the famous spiritual centre and retreat in Big Sur. Since its foundation in 1962, Esalen has played an important role as head office of the New Age and Human Potential Movement that grew out of the counter-cultural milieu around San Francisco throughout the 1960's. *Children of the Sun* created a stir on the alternative scene by showing, often through iconic Lebensreform images, a direct connection between what tended to be seen as Nazi-affiliated Lebensreform elements and the early hippy culture in California. This culture, with a few notorious exceptions (e.g. the Manson 'Family'), tended to pride itself on being generally 'progressive'. In an online interview with Brian Chidester, Kennedy states that the preferred genealogy for California hippy culture was the link with the Beat generation (Chidester 2012). According to Kennedy, his largely visual argument based on vintage

photographs of long haired sandal wearing Nature boy Lebensreformers, appeared to be provocative in New Age circles, because it complicates the stereotype widespread in American media of German perpetual commitment to 'ruthless efficiency' and 'military values' during the first half on the 20th century. He argues that in the immediate post World War Two period, German culture was typically portrayed as suspect and the German people as 'enemies of democracy'. While many members of the American counter culture in the 1960's were familiar with, and warmly responsive to the works of 'alternative' German writers like Herman Hesse, they were on the whole less comfortable with the legacy of the National Socialist commitment to 'eco-fascism' and Blood-and-Soil ideology. As Kennedy notes: 'This odd wrinkle in American history meant that … (alternative book stores) … could no longer tell their customers that the Beat Generation alone had set the stage for the hippies. And the very thought that their "Summer of Love" was preceded by a whole generation of naked forest-dwelling Germans… seemed unthinkable' (ibid.).

Any uncomplicated notion of a simple genealogy that suggests a purely 'nativist' origin for the hippy counter-culture in America was rendered even more problematic by the fact that, according to Kennedy: '(t)he Lebensreform lifestyle … appealed strongly to young American Jewish men like (proto hippy "Nature Boys") eden ahbez[8] and Gypsy Boots who had turned their backs on everything Judeo-Christian and instead embraced this new form of radical German paganism transplanted onto American soil' (ibid.).

Nature Boys: California's Wandervogel

Long before a generation of tie-dye utopians arrived on the scene, a number of prominent Lebensreformers found their way to the United States and especially to the Golden State. They often spread their ideas through practical and health based enterprises such as health cures, health food stores and restaurants. Often these places were also centres for distributing radical ideas imported from Europe. Such a place was for instance the Eutropheon, a vegetarian raw food restaurant established in Los Angeles by John and Vera Richter in 1917. John and Vera Richter were immigrants from Germany and strong advocates of Lebensreform philosophy. One of California's most famous Nature Boys, eben abhez, first encountered the nature boy philosophy when he got a regular gig playing the piano at this health food store on the Laurel Canyon Boulevard in Los Angeles.[9] This restaurant thus functioned as the living link between the interwar Wandervogel movement and the Californian nature boy subculture.

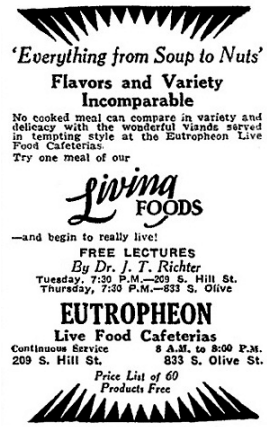

Fig. 4.23. Advertisement of the Eutropheon Live Food Cafeteria. Illustration from article by John Whitaker http://restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com/2014/02/02/back-to-nature-the-eutropheon < 5 April 2015>

Afterwards, Sexauer also opened a health food store in Santa Barbara in 1934 (Sexauer Natural Food Shop on Anapamu Street). Prior to his arrival in the USA around 1908, Sexauer had for instance already been an enthusiastic

8 ahbez's best friend, Robert Bootsin, a fellow Nature Boy who called himself Gypsy Boots, is widely acknowledged as the inventor of the smoothie.

9 G. Kennedy and K. Ryan, 'Hippie Roots & The Perennial Subculture'. Hippy.com. <29 November 2014>

Wandervogel. The Wandervogel movement was a freewheeling movement that had its origins in a hiking club established by Herman Hoffmann in Berlin in 1901, for German youths between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Backpack-wearing youngsters intent on communing with nature roamed the countryside, camping in groups often for two to three months at a time, in the 1920's and early 1930's.

Similar movements arose elsewhere in Europe and the United States at the time. In 1907 in Britain, Robert Baden-Powell, a retired British army officer formed the Wolf Cub, Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements. These movements were devoted to teach young people, most of whom now lived in cities, wilderness survival skills, communitarian ideals of public service and a love for the outdoors. The British military establishment were alarmed by the poor physical condition and lack of discipline among working class youths conscripted for military service during World War One. The fate of the British Empire seemed to rest on the physical and spiritual/psychological reformation of the masses and this was to be achieved through organisations modelled on a military template like the Boy Scouts. Hitler Youth was formed in 1922 with a similar agenda, to strengthen the national stock through systematic reform, toughening up individuals, offering through the state and voluntary organisations an alternative educational framework to the school and the family. The new emphasis on physical education, mass calisthenics, health and beauty went hand in hand with the neoclassical idealization of the human form which defined Nazi aesthetics. The European communist parties had a similar movement, the Woodcraft Folk which followed a similar program of strengthening bodies, building character by camping in the great outdoors and teaching an appreciation of nature. The National Socialists sought to promote Nazi ideology through an ideology of survival of the fittest and warrior code, whereas the communists inevitably used the Woodcraft movement to promote communist ideals, such as service to the collective, the virtues of self-sacrifice for the state and the value of labour. The Lebensreform and Wandervogel movements can be seen as an alternative or oppositional version of these larger scale efforts.

Fig. 4.24. Heidelberger Wandervogel, photographer unknown, 1907, Archiv der Deutschen Jugendbewegung, Witzenhausen

As Kennedy notes, Sexauer's health food store also served as a bookstore and meeting place for like-minded pre-hippy non-conformists, and became a place where people could congregate, to read and buy uncensored radical books on health, politics and economics (Kennedy 1998, 159). Sexauer's shop closed in 1966, the year before San Francisco's storied Summer of Love, when the image of the hippy lifestyle in the Haight-Ashbury district suddenly went global. Sexauer considered himself a philosophical anarchist, a radical pacifist and a 'theoretical nudist' (ibid.). Theoretical nudism represented the belief that nudism would serve not just to de-stigmatize and demystify the spectacle of the naked figure by banal repetition, but to actively de-eroticize it. Thus miraculously redeeming humanity by reverse engineering the fall of man and the ignominious exit from the garden of Eden. Sexauer was arrested and imprisoned several times for his radical non-conformist ideology and lifestyle, the first time for refusing to be drafted into the military in 1900, and the second time

in 1941 when Sexauer (who never anglicised his name) was interned, along with thousands of other Germans labelled as enemies of the United States, then on the verge of joining the war against Germany. As a life-long pacifist and conscientious objector, Sexauer had been heavily influenced by Leo Tolstoy's writings on non-violence and passive resistance to the state. Another important source were the writings of American Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau on civil disobedience, which had also helped shape the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King (King 2005, 149). The heart of Tolstoy's doctrine centred on the linked ideas of universal love and moral self-improvement.

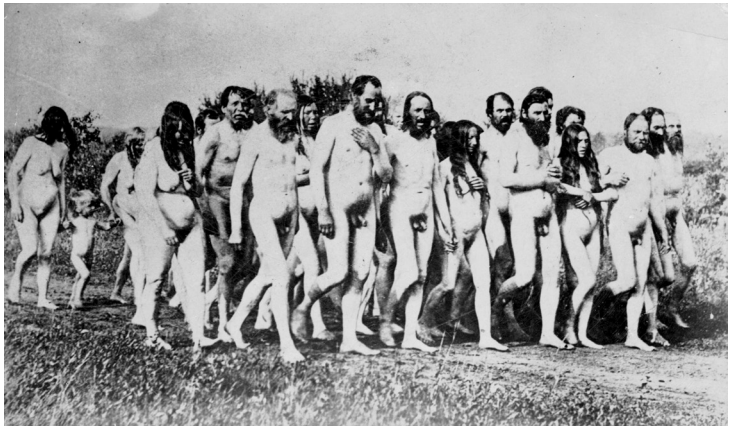

Fig. 4.25. Doukhobors, in Canada (nude protest), 1906. Photo: Phillip T. Timms. Vancouver Museum and Planetarium Association Fund.

Fig. 4.26. *Leo Tolstoy Barefoot,* Ilya Repin, oil on canvas, 207 × 73 cm, State Russian Museum, 1901.

Towards the end of his life Tolstoy used royalties from *Resurrection (1899)*, his last novel, to help sponsor the passage to Canada of the Doukhobors, a group of Christian socialist farmers who were emigrating to escape persecution in Russia (Alston 2014, 22). Sexauer was also strongly attracted to the mystical strands in Tolstoy's thinking including, especially, the Gnostic belief that 'the kingdom of god is within' not located in some posthumous extra-terrestrial 'heaven'.

In the years immediately after the Second World War, long before the Beat movement gained national momentum with the widespread circulation of texts by people like Jack Kerouac, Allan Ginsberg and William Burroughs, California was home to the Nature Boys, the first proto-hippy drop-out American subculture. The Nature Boys were first-generation European immigrants, mostly from German backgrounds who imported the Lebensreform and Naturmensch philosophies. The Nature Boys renounced materialism and were intent on living simply hand to mouth in rural and wilderness settings while sleeping in caves, tents and tree houses—a mode of existence more suited to the temperate weather in Californian than to the harsher climate of northern Europe (Kennedy and Ryan 2003).

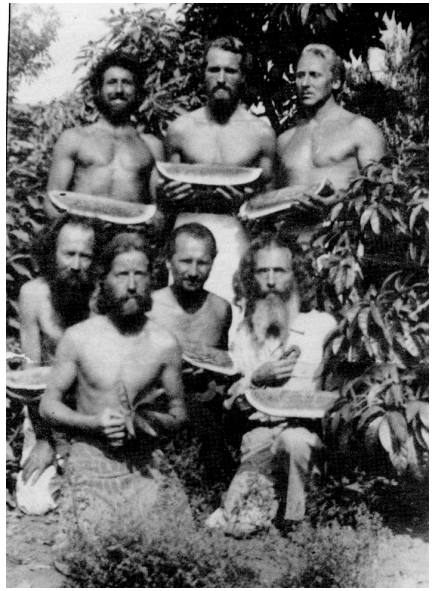

Fig. 4.27. Nature Boys, 1948.

This photograph probably taken by Gypsy Boots, shows a group of West coast Nature Boys in 1948. In *On The Road* Kerouac noted that while passing through Los Angeles in the summer of 1947 he came across the 'occasional Nature Boy saint in beard and sandals' (Kerouac 1957).

One celebrated Nature Boy who featured in *Life* magazine as early as 1948 (see above) and who occasionally visited Sexauer's Santa Barbara store was eden ahbez, the alias (written in lowercase) George Alexander Aberle chose for himself when he hit the road and headed west from Kansas in his teens. Born in Brooklyn in 1908 to a Jewish father and Scottish mother, ahbez was orphaned in childhood and was adopted by a family in Kansas City, where, as a young adult, he worked as a jazz pianist and bandleader. Ahbez was a part-time yogi and full-time mystic who wrote his name in lower case 'because he thought only God and infinity should be capitalized' (Kennedy 1998, 167).

Fig. 4.28. eden ahbez (Nature Boy), *Life Magazine*, 1948.

Ahbez lived with his wife and son in a tent in Los Angeles in the Hollywood hills, pitched directly under the letter L of the Hollywood sign. According to the *Life* magazine article reproduced above, his possessions consisted of 'cooking utensils, a bicycle, sleeping bags for the family and a juicer'. Eden abhez came to public attention in 1948 when Nat King Cole, the only other 'coloured' male, apart from Sammy Davis Jr, admitted to the ranks of the 1950's crooner pack dominated by Italian American singers like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Tony Bennett, recorded ehbez's song *Nature Boy*.

Fig. 4.29. Video still, the song *Nature Boy* by eden ahbez performed by Nat King Cole in 1948, Youtube.

Fig. 4.30 eden ahbez (Nature Boy), *Life Magazine*, 1948.

Cole recorded the song after meeting ahbez backstage at the end of a performance when the strange Christ-like figure appeared as if from nowhere and handed the singer a piece of paper with the composition written on it. Some weeks later Cole began incorporating the haunting ballad into his repertoire. The song which stands apart not just from the rest of the singer's repertoire, but from the majority of the popular music of that era, and which failed to conform in terms of either its form or its content, its lyrics or its length, with the norms of contemporary pop music ballads, soon became a surprise favourite with audiences and was eventually incorporated as a staple of Cole's 'live' performances. However, Cole's producer at Columbia initially declined to record it, and when Cole finally convinced him to change his mind, it took the record company several months to track abhez down to his makeshift home on a Hollywood hillside in order to secure the rights to the song.

Despite its strangeness, the song was a major hit in the US after its release in March 1948. It stayed in the American charts for fifteen weeks, was number one for eight weeks, and eventually Cole's recording of the song sold more than a million copies.

Nature Boy (eden ahbez, 1948)

There was a boy
A very strange, enchanted boy
They say he wandered very far
Very far, over land and sea
A little shy and sad of eye
But very wise was he

And then one day,
One magic day he passed my way
While we spoke of many things
Fools and Kings
This he said to me:

'The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return'.

'The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return'.

[Instrumental]

'The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return'.

Portable-Digestible Landscapes

The focus of this chapter has been once more upon the earth. In this case the ground itself has been shifted, and me along with it, several thousand miles west to California, the home of both Hollywood and hippies. California is the source of an 'image industry' and a counter-cultural movement both of which, I would argue, have had a major global impact. The Californian landscape is probably the most familiar, most photographed, most widely 'circulated' landscape in the world. It has figured as the brightly lit backdrop in countless fiction films since the rise of the American cinema industry in the early years of the 20th century. The Californian landscape has been brought into the foreground as both material site and sculptural form in the Land Art of 1960's and 70's conceptual artists such as Smithson. The projects I describe in this chapter set out to engage with these often conflicting mythologies of the American West, the American art world and the American counter-culture. Thus in this chapter, Bussum's soggy Dutch mud is swapped for the dry soil of the American Southwest. Here the scene switches to the Mojave Desert, the same 'empty' platform on which Joe Harriman erected his socialist commune Llano del Rio in 1914. My site-specific works are in dialogue with these other earlier interventions and I think of them as field works. As I attempt to merge materials with concepts and concepts with settings, the terrain becomes a 'field'. The visitor-viewer is invited to immerse herself within this field and to function as an element within it. The chapter and the projects documented here build on the idea (as both a practice and a metaphor) of the rhizome as developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Following their example, I use the concept of the rhizome derived from plant biology to chart a network of subterranean connections linking disparate times, events and places. I produced a map, available equally to the reader and to members of the public who visit the on-site installations, or witness the performances 'that has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). The field works are also meant to function according to the principles of naturopathy as laid out by Steiner and other Lebensreformers such as Just and Kneipp. The compressed materials taken from historical utopian sites circulate in pill form as 'portable-digestible landscapes' and as pro-biotic medicine. In this way my American works are my attempt to build a living bridge between Old World roots and New World branches and to bring Lebensreform back 'home', where it belongs to the American West as much as to Northern Europe.