

## ON THE SHORELINE OF UTOPIA

### BERTOLT BRECHT AND THE TOPOS OF SWIMMING

Hubert van den Berg

Bertolt Brecht's 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' is a unique, singular poem. Not only is the subject of swimming anything but a common subject in German, and even in European, poetry; judging by their poetry, poets are no swimmers. In the context of Brecht's oeuvre as a whole, 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' is quite an exceptional poem, not least since it lacks on first sight any social or political dimension:

#### OF SWIMMING IN LAKES AND RIVERS

1.

In the pale summer when the winds above  
Only in great trees' leaves a murmur make  
You ought to lie in rivers or in ponds  
As do the waterweeds which harbour pike.  
The body grows light in the water. When your arm  
Falls easily from water into sky  
The little wind rocks it absentmindedly  
Taking it likely for a brownish bough.

2.

The sky at noon offers ample calm.  
You close your eyes when swallows pass.  
The mud is warm. Cool bubbles welling up  
Show that a fish has just swum through us.  
My body and thighs and resting arm  
We lie in the water quite at one and still  
Only when the cool fish swim through us  
I sense the sun shining above the pool.

3.

By the evening having grown very lazy  
 With lying so long, each limb begins to smart  
 You have to dash all that with a reckless smack  
 Into blue streams which scatter far apart.  
 It's best to last out until the evening  
 For then the pale shark-like sky will come  
 Evil and greedy over bush and river  
 And all things will assume their aptest form.

4.

Of course you must lie upon your back  
 As if by habit. And drift along.  
 You need not swim, no, only behave as if  
 It's just to the mass of gravel you belong.  
 You should look at the sky and act  
 As if a woman held you, which is right.  
 Quite without great upheaval as the good God does  
 When he swims in his rivers at evening light.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas most of Brecht's *œuvre* is marked by an explicit political engagement, devoted to a critique of capitalist society and politics (and their wrongs), or to the outline of a revolutionary way to overcome exploitation and repression or to both, 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' refers only to lazy swimming, or rather idle drifting and floating in some pond or river on a hot summer's day. As such, the poem seems to possess rather an idyllic and not a utopian character, as far as the qualification 'utopian' implies some reference to an outline of some envisaged or fanciful future social or political order. In itself, the poem does not actually contain any trace of politics or society at all: the scene depicted in the poem is inhabited by just one human subject. Apart from the 'shark sky', the poem contains no reference to the (evil) outside world surrounding the *locus amoenus* of ponds and rivers and their vegetation and fauna.

There are, however, several arguments which favour the assumption that 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' nevertheless possesses a utopian dimension, both in the context of Brecht's *œuvre* and in the cultural context, from which the text originated. And what is more, in the context of Brecht's other work in particular, the poem can be seen as an implicit political statement being part of Brecht's ambiguous reflections on the

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<sup>1</sup> For the original text, see Appendix I.

return to nature that characterized a heterogeneous set of countercultural movements in Germany (and other European countries), which emerged around the turn of the previous century and had their heyday in the first decades of the twentieth century.

*Swimming, bathing and counter-culture*

At the end of the nineteenth century, Germany saw the rise of a wide variety of countercultural movements. These movements were, in part, closely related to the socialist workers' movement. They were, however, to a large extent heterogeneous, diffuse alternatives alongside, but sometimes also intermingled with, socialism. Common to these movements was an often theoretically and ideologically diffuse protest against, and rejection of, hegemonic bourgeois culture and the excesses of industrialized (and urbanized) capitalism in the Wilhelmine Second German Empire. Alongside – for example – the women's movement, a movement pleading for more sexual liberty, the intellectual anti-bourgeois so-called 'Bohemian' sub-culture, there were all kinds of 'reform' movements which – instead of a political or social revolution – pursued a reform of everyday life by opting for a different lifestyle, different food, different clothing, different schools, yet without the ambition of overturning capitalism. Some rejected the fashion(s) of the day and created their own 'reform clothing'; others rejected clothing altogether and turned to 'naturism' (figs. 1-2). Others, but often the same people, rejected conventional food and drink and turned instead to vegetarianism, and to abstention from alcohol and tobacco. And yet others – once more often the same people – rejected conventional religion and turned to new forms of spirituality (theosophy, anthroposophy, etc.).

A common element of these 'reform movements' was a rejection of technology and the pressures of urban life, which caused – in their view – alienation from the true natural nature of man. Instead, they opted for a 'return to nature', not only in the form of natural clothing, for instance, which did not distort the human body (and in particular the female body due to tight corsetry), but also by actually leaving the city – whether on holiday or permanently – and 'returning' to more natural environments, the woods, hills and mountains or the shorelines of the sea, of lakes, ponds and rivers, often on the fringes of the new metropolitan areas which had emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Several of these movements had a clear-cut utopian character, as their participants not only turned their backs on industrialized urban life and the restrictions of bourgeois morality, but also tried to develop an alternative culture and another life beyond the restrictions of contemporary hegemonic bourgeois capitalist society. These movements, defined by some as 'bürger-

liche Fluchtbewegungen'<sup>2</sup> ['bourgeois escapism'], were often more than just an escape from bourgeois normality, as they indeed developed or at least probed a different lifestyle, rejecting the conventions of everyday life ruled to an increasing extent by the rhythm of industrial capitalism and a narrow-minded, repressive bourgeois ethos and morality. Whereas some turned their backs completely on 'civilization' and retreated (as far as possible) to communities far away (Ascona) or just on the edge of the growing metropolitan areas (the Müggelsee and Friedrichshagen near Berlin, Worpswede near Bremen, Schwabing near Munich, etc.), others reserved weekends and holidays to escape for a time from everyday normality into an alternative life.

Relevant in regard to Brecht's poem 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' is the circumstance that the shores of lakes, ponds, rivers and beaches, often on the outskirts of urbanized areas, were popular places to go and gather for those who either followed these movements or were sympathetic to their ideas. Swimming or sunbathing belonged, thus, to the core activities and pastimes of the aforementioned heterogeneous amalgam of counter-cultural movements, albeit only as an argument or an alibi to set aside one's everyday dress (fig. 3).

As such, the German writer Erich Mühsam, himself one of the protagonists of Bohemian subculture shortly after the turn of the previous century, yet involved in political activities in the anarchist section of the socialist movement, made a mockery of swimming and sunbathing as one of the main activities of the apolitical 'vegetarians' of the counter-cultural community on the Monte Verità in Ascona, on the Swiss shore of Lake Maggiore, in a satirical poem included in a critical brochure written by him in 1905 on the alternative settlers in Ascona. Apart from the refusal to consume meat and alcohol, Mühsam's 'Gesang der Vegetarier. Ein alkoholfreies Trinklied' also addresses bathing and swimming:

Wir sonnen den Leib, ja wir sonnen den Leib,  
Das ist unser einziger Zeitvertreib.  
Doch manchmal spaddeln wir auch im Teich,  
Das kräftigt den Körper und wäscht ihn zugleich.  
Wir sonnen und wir baden den Leib,  
Das ist unser einziger Zeitvertreib.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Frecot, Geist and Kerbs, *Fidus*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Mühsam, *Streitschriften*, p. 23. Transl.: 'We sunbathe, yes we sunbathe / Our sole preoccupation / Though we sometimes take time to paddle / That strengthens and cleanses the body. / We sunbathe and immerse ourselves / Our sole preoccupation.'

In the same way, swimming is often referred to in images – photos, paintings, drawings, caricatures and cartoons – either in favour of or critical to the alternative cultural countermovement of the turn of the previous century, indicating once more that the practice of bathing and swimming was regarded as part of their ‘core business’ and – in a way – one of their trademarks.

*The (re-)emergence of swimming in the nineteenth century*

Swimming was, however, more than a pivotal activity in these countercultural movements and alternative communities. Although mankind might have been swimming for a considerable time, swimming as a common leisure activity and favourable pastime became fashionable, in fact, only in the late nineteenth century. Before that, at least since the late Middle Ages in Western and Central Europe, swimming was regarded as a dangerous, hazardous and unhealthy activity, not only due to the possibility of drowning, but in particular because the movement (of the naked body) in water was regarded as a great health risk, since water, if polluted, could enter the human body. Swimming was something only for those whose lives did not really count, for soldiers on campaign who had to cross a river at any cost, or for those who liked living on the wild side. When Lord Byron swam a mile across the Hellespont from Sestos to Abydos imitating the mythical figure of Leander, the news went all over Europe. Swimming was not only regarded as dangerous for health reasons, but also seen as immoral. Actually, the first European manual describing swimming techniques, *Colymbetes, Sive de arte natandi*, by the Swiss author Nicolaus Wynmann, published in 1538 in Ingolstadt, was placed on the papal *Index librorum prohibitorum* published in 1545. In the following centuries, swimming in open waters was, in most parts of Europe, prohibited, and frequently prosecuted by state and church authorities, a practice that continued in some parts of Europe into the twentieth century and here and there even down to the present day. Although prohibitions and sanctions did not keep people from swimming, swimming in open waters remained for a long time an activity hidden or detached from the public sphere, rather a form of private excessive behaviour.

This changed only little by little from the late eighteenth century onwards. When, in the course of the Enlightenment and countermovements like *Sturm und Drang* (as well as the Romantics), an initial return to nature can be observed, this return to nature also leads to the increased popularity of swimming among the intellectuals involved. Byron is a salient example, but Goethe also singles out swimming in this context, as he writes about the

German *Sturm und Drang* poets Friedrich Leopold and Christian Stolberg, who regularly went swimming:

Among the extravaganzas which grew out of the notion that we should try to transport ourselves into a state of nature, was that of bathing in public waters in the open air; and our friends, after violating every other law of propriety, could not forego this additional unseemliness. Darmstadt, situated on a sandy plain, without running water, had, it appeared, a pond in the neighbourhood, of which I only heard on this occasion. My friends, who were hot by nature, and moreover kept continually heating themselves, sought refreshment in this pond. The sight of naked youths in the clear sunshine might well seem something strange in this region: at all events scandal arose.<sup>4</sup>

Byron and the Stolberg brothers remained, though, exceptional in their age. In fact, not until the late nineteenth century did the opinion that swimming was a health risk start to lose ground; the moral argument, namely that swimming had to be regarded as indecent, as it was done mostly in the nude, remained in place for many decades to follow. The introduction of (and the obligation to wear) bathing suits as well as the introduction of separate bathing for men and women changed this situation only very slowly in a time ruled by Victorian prudishness. Although, partly in the framework of the aforementioned (organized) countercultural movements, partly maybe in the same spirit, but not with the same outspoken ideological stance, swimming gradually began to be more and more a leisure activity for the masses.

As swimming became more and more popular in the late nineteenth century, the authorities started to lift the ban on swimming and, instead, regulate it. In part, swimming was regulated in the form of swimming halls and newly constructed pools, but also in the form of so-called '*Freibäder*' – a euphemism for stretches of fenced-off shoreline, with clothing cabins, male, female and family sections and thorough supervision, taking care of

<sup>4</sup> Goethe, *Werke*, p. 129; cf. Ross, 'Vom Schwimmen', p. 267. English translation in Goethe, *Autobiography*, pp. 367-368. The German text reads: Unter die damaligen Verrücktheiten, die aus dem Begriff entstanden: man müsse sich in einen Naturzustand zu versetzen suchen, gehörte denn auch das Baden im freien Wasser, unter offnem Himmel; und unsre Freunde konnten auch hier, nach allenfalls überstandener Schicklichkeit, auch dieses Unschickliche nicht unterlassen. Darmstadt, ohne fließendes Gewässer in einer sandigen Fläche gelegen, mag doch einen Teich in der Nähe haben, von dem ich nur bei dieser Gelegenheit gehört. Die heiß genaturten und sich immer mehr erheizenden Freunde suchten Labsal in diesem Weiher; nackte Jünglinge bei hellem Sonnenschein zu sehen, mochte wohl in dieser Gegend als etwas Besonderes erscheinen, es gab Skandal auf alle Fälle.

safety and morality. Often, these *Freibäder* were situated in places where previously 'wild' swimming had become popular, for example on the Gänsehäufel island in the old Danube near (nowadays in) Vienna or around the Müggelsee near Berlin.

These open-air baths in open water might have absorbed many of those who wanted to go swimming. In addition to these official baths, often managed by state or municipal institutions, part of the regulation of wild swimming was – paradoxically – realised by the aforementioned countercultural movements, notably the naturist *Freikörperkultur* or *F.K.K.* movement, which in itself often combined public nudity with an even more rigorous morality (and all kinds of ideological considerations about 'race regeneration'). It did not take very long until *F.K.K.* sections were introduced in the official *Freibäder*.

However, many people not only still avoided the institutionalized public swimming facilities, albeit largely due to the entrance fee and unwarranted rules, regulations and supervision, but did not want to comply with the rigid rules of the *F.K.K.* movement either. They just went swimming and sunbathing somewhere where they avoided the interference of upholders of both official and alternative moral standards creating, thus, niches of their own in natural environments, shielded from the outside world by trees and other vegetation. It is this type of swimming and sunbathing Brecht's poem is referring to.

*The gospel of swimming*

'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' was probably written in the summer of 1919, together with the poem 'Vom Klettern in Bäumen' ['Of Climbing in Trees'], the companion poem to 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' in Brecht's first poetry volume, entitled *Bert Brechts Hauspostille*, published in 1927:

OF CLIMBING IN TREES

1.  
 When you come up at evening from your waters  
 (For you must all be naked. and with tender skin)  
 Climb then in your great trees still higher  
 In the light wind. The sky too should be wan.  
 Seek out great trees that in the evening  
 Slowly and sombrely rock their topmost boughs.  
 And wait among their foliage for darkness  
 With bat and nightmare close about your brows.

2.

The little stiff leaves of the undergrowth  
 Are sure to graze your backs, which you must squeeze  
 Firmly between the branches; thus you'll climb  
 Groaning a little. higher in the trees.  
 It is quite fine to rock upon the tree.  
 But rocking with the knees one can't permit  
 You should be to the tree as his own top has been:  
 A hundred years of evenings: he rocks it.<sup>5</sup>

As Klaus-Dieter Krabiel notes in regard to the *Hauspostille*, both poems were 'die einzigen Naturgedichte und lyrischen Ruhepunkte dieser Sammlung' ['the only nature poems and points of poetical rest in this collection'].<sup>6</sup> Although several other poems also focus on natural phenomena or contain a dominating nature imagery, both poems are indeed the only two in which man and nature exist harmoniously, untampered with by some danger or evil, apart – again – from the sharks in the sky.

The poems in the *Hauspostille* are arranged in six 'Lektionen' and an appendix. As far as both 'Vom Klettern in Bäumen' and 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' unmistakably appeal to an – in those days – quite widespread nature sentiment of/in contemporary youth movements, the *Wandervögel*, the *Naturfreunde*, the naturist *Freikörperkultur* and the youth sections of political parties both on the left and right, the first 'lesson' of the *Hauspostille* might seem to be the most obvious section for the poems, since Brecht writes in his 'Anleitung zum Gebrauch der einzelnen Lektionen' ['Instructions for Using the Individual Lessons'], opening the volume:

Die erste Lektion (Bittgänge) wendet sich direkt an das Gefühl des Lesers. Es empfiehlt sich, nicht zuviel davon auf einmal zu lesen. Auch sollten nur ganz gesunde Leute von dieser für die Gefühle bestimmte Lektion Gebrauch machen'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Brecht, *Die Gedichte*, p. 209. English translation in Brecht, *Poems 1913-1956*, p. 29. For the original text see Appendix II.

<sup>6</sup> Krabiel, 'Vom Schwimmen', p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Brecht, *Die Gedichte*, p. 169. ['The first lesson (Rogation) immediately addresses the reader's emotions. Try not to read too many in one sitting. Furthermore, this emotionally-laden lesson should be used only by those in rude health'].

Instead, they are to be found in the second 'lesson', with a different purport:

Die zweite Lektion (Exerzitien = geistige Übungen) wendet sich mehr an den Verstand. Es ist vorteilhaft, ihre Lektüre langsam und wiederholt, niemals ohne Einfalt, vorzunehmen. Aus den darin verborgenen Sprüchen sowie unmittelbaren Hinweisen mag mancher Aufschluß über das Leben zu gewinnen sein.<sup>8</sup>

This intention might also explain why 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' is preceded and not followed by 'Vom Klettern in Bäumen'. Although the most obvious order would have been the latter, as the climbing in trees should be preceded – according to the climbing poem – by swimming under the same pale sky mentioned in 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen', Brecht apparently decided to de-automatize the 'logical' temporal order of the poems, which now do not appear as a sequence but rather as two separate 'spiritual exercises' or, as they were called by Brecht in the late 1910s, as 'gospels'. '... auch Evangelien gab es bei ihm (i.e. Brecht), so nämlich nannte er die Botschaften vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen und vom Klettern in Bäumen, die noch durch mindestens zwei weitere ergänzt werden sollten', as a friend from his youth (from Augsburg), Hans Otto Münsterer, recalled. Münsterer also revealed the personal, biographical background of the poems:

An den heißen Nachmittagen schwimmen wir im Hahnreibach, liegen nackt im Gras der Wolfszahnau oder klettern auf Bäume, wie es in einem der *Evangelien* heißt, das mir Brecht am 11. Juni [1919] dort vorliest. Am 8. Juni sind wir zu fünf, und da hält Brecht Grabreden und Maiandachten, die mit 'Geliebte in Christo' beginnen und so ungeheuer grotesk wirken, daß wir uns vor Lachen im Schilf wälzen, wohingegen der nächste Tag philosophische Betrachtungen auslöst. Brecht stellt fest, daß wir nur der Feuchtigkeit dieses Weltkörpers unser Dasein verdanken, ganz dem Zufall also, zwecklose Kreaturen, Erdklöße, gebildet durch eine unsinnige Laune und die Feuchtigkeit, und doch können wir denken und genießen ...<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169. ['The second lesson (Meditation = Spiritual Exercises) is directed more to reason. The exercises are best read carefully, more than once, never without innocence. The sayings and direct instructions concealed therein may provide some pointers to life itself'].

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Ross, 'Vom Schwimmen', p. 262. ['On warm afternoons, we would swim in the Hahnreibach, lie naked in the grass of the Wolfszahnau or climb trees as in the *Evangelien* (devotions) Brecht recited to me there on 11 June. On 8 June, there were five of us together. Brecht recited eulogies and special observances beginning with the words "Geliebte in Christo", which had such a grotesque effect that we would waltz off laughing into the reeds, whereas the following day would be

Whereas some interpret 'Vom Schimmen in Seen und Flüssen' against this background primarily as an autobiographical reminiscence, most other Brecht scholars completely detach their interpretation of the poem from the *Auenlandschaft* of the Wolfszahnau near Augsburg as place or biographical context of origin. To some extent, they might be right. There cannot be any doubt that the poem as such does not refer specifically to this biotope in particular (and that the poem allows many interpretations, in which the swimming has only a metaphorical character). At the same time, there cannot be any doubt either, that the practice to which the poem, or to which both poems actually refer, the retreat from the nearby city to an idyllic, paradise-like situation (or indeed *into* a paradise-like situation), where one can spend a hot day on the shores of some lake, pond, river or brook, hanging around, swimming and climbing in trees naked was anything but unique for Augsburg or the Wolfszahnau. As previously outlined, in the early decades of the twentieth century (and to some extent still), the same practice was quite common in and around other German cities, be it Dresden, where the Moritzburger Teiche offered the same possibility and were used as such by, for example, the artists of the expressionist painters' group *Die Brücke*; be it Berlin, where notably the Müggelsee and surroundings still function as a myriad of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, where one can escape from urban life into seemingly untampered-with, or at least quite idyllic nature.

And there need be little doubt either that Brecht is actually referring to this more general practice in 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen', which also possesses a programmatic edge in this respect, not only due to its qualification by Brecht as 'Evangelium', as 'gospel' in the memories of Münsterer, but also due to its wording, since 'nur auf den ersten Blick präsentiert es sich als Stimmungsbericht eines lyrischen Ich', as Krabiel notes. 'Die genauere Lektüre zeigt, daß ein identifizierbares Subjekt im Gedicht gar nicht existiert'.<sup>10</sup> Instead, both 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' and 'Vom Klettern in Bäumen' rather have the character of teachings. Whereas the latter addresses an '*Ihr*' ('you', second person plural), the former is even more general in its wording as no one is addressed directly; instead it describes how an anonymous and unspecified third person, '*man*'/'one' should behave best.

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characterized by philosophical contemplation. Brecht reckoned that we owed our existence merely to the dampness of this heavenly body, to chance in other words; pointless creatures, clods of earth, informed by whimsical moods and dampness; nonetheless we have the capacity to think and enjoy ...'].

<sup>10</sup> Krabiel, 'Vom Schwimmen', p. 66 ['Only on first appearances does it present itself as a barometer of a poetic first person. Closer reading reveals that there is no identifiable subject in the poem'].

*Expressionism, pessimism and swimming as a utopian practice*

‘Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen’ and ‘Vom Klettern in Bäumen’ were written at the end of what in German literary history is often referred to as the expressionist decade. Certainly in his early years as a writer, Brecht can also be regarded as an expressionist himself, albeit at a considerable critical distance from many of his fellow expressionists, a distance which is striking in the case of both poems, at least regarding the poetry of literary expressionism. If one compares both poems with the poetry collected by Kurt Pinthus in the anthology ‘Menschheitsdämmerung’ (1920), a first major difference is the fact that most poetry focuses on metropolitan life; nature is rather sparsely represented in the poems collected by Pinthus. But also, if one considers the poems which indeed seem to focus on nature or on natural phenomena, ‘Vom Klettern in Bäumen’ is at least (as far as trees are concerned) in tune with a dozen poems, in which trees are either mentioned in the title or described at large in the text. There is, though, a considerable difference between the idyllic character of ‘Vom Klettern in Bäumen’, and the way in which nature (specifically these trees) is described in ‘Menschheitsdämmerung’. In these poems, the general tone is rather pessimistic, dismal and gloomy, as, for example, in Johannes Becher’s ‘Der Wald’<sup>11</sup> or Alfred Lichtenstein’s ‘Der Ausflug’<sup>12</sup>, both with subjects similar to ‘Vom Klettern in Bäumen’ and ‘Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen’, yet with a completely different atmosphere:

In fact, *Bert Brechts Hauspostille* contains poems like these as well, as for example the poem ‘Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen’, which some relate to the images of the decaying corpse of the murdered Rosa Luxemburg after being dumped in the Landwehrkanal in Berlin, but which in itself seems quite close to ‘Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen’ in as far as it focuses on a drifting human body in the water as well:

## VOM ERTRUNKENEN MÄDCHEN

1.  
 Als sie ertrunken war und hinunterschwamm  
 Von den Bächen in die größeren Flüsse  
 Schien der Opal des Himmels sehr wunderschön  
 Als ob er die Leiche begütigen müsse.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Pinthus, *Menschheitsdämmerung*, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Brecht, *Die Gedichte*, p. 252.

2.  
 Tang und Algen hielten sich an ihr ein  
 So daß sie langsam viel schwerer ward.  
 Kühl die Fische schwammen an ihrem Bein  
 Pflanzen und Tiere beschwerten noch ihre letzte Fahrt.

3.  
 Und der Himmel ward abends dunkel wie Rauch  
 Und hielt nachts mit den Sternen das Licht in Schweben.  
 Aber früh ward er hell, daß es auch  
 Noch für sie Morgen und Abend gebe.

4.  
 Als ihr bleicher Leib im Wasser verfaulet war  
 Geschah es (sehr langsam), daß Gott sie allmählich vergaß  
 Erst ihr Gesicht, dann die Hände und ganz zuletzt erst ihr Haar.  
 Dann ward sie Aas in Flüssen mit vielem Aas.<sup>15</sup>

The image evoked in this poem describes – in the tradition of the Ophelia motif, anything but idyllic or utopian – the girl, who appears some time later on the dissecting table of Gottfried Benn in his sinister *Morgue* poem ‘Schöne Jugend’.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas the idyllic character of ‘Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen’ constitutes a sharp contrast with the majority of contemporary expressionist poetry (and its rather pessimistic evocations of nature), there is a striking congeniality with the subject of bathing as represented in the

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<sup>16</sup> Benn, *Gedichte*, p. 22. English translation in: Benn, *Primal Vision*, pp. 213-214. The original gives:

Der Mund eines Mädchens, das lange im Schilf gelegen hatte,  
 sah so angeknabbert aus.  
 Als man die Brust aufbrach, war die Speiseröhre so löcherig.  
 Schließlich in einer Laube unter dem Zwerchfell  
 fand man ein Nest von jungen Ratten.  
 Ein kleines Schwesterchen lag tot.  
 Die andern lebten von Leber und Niere,  
 tranken das kalte Blut und hatten  
 hier eine schöne Jugend verlebt.  
 Und schön und schnell kam auch ihr Tod:  
 Man warf sie allesamt ins Wasser.  
 Ach, wie die kleinen Schnauzen quietschten!

painting and graphic work of the Dresden-based expressionist artists' group *Die Brücke*. Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Otto Mueller, Max Pechstein and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff in particular went regularly (each summer), from 1909 onwards, to an area with many lakes, rivers and islands some fifteen kilometres north of Dresden, the Moritzburger Teiche, where they retreated with their models and spent their summers on the shores of these lakes, in part in the relative seclusion of the islands, to which they brought their paper, canvasses and other painter's materials on their heads, wading and swimming across the ponds and rivers (figs. 4-5).

These summers at the Moritzburger Teiche resulted in dozens of paintings and hundreds of drawings as well as later wood-cuts, showing nude bathers in a landscape quite similar to the Wolfszahnau, where Brecht recited (and wrote) 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen'. Apparent in the work of *Die Brücke* is the combination of new 'liberated' style and use of colour depicting an idyllic life on the shores of the Moritzburger Teiche, liberated as well from the constraints of bourgeois norms and morals (one point of reference was clearly the paintings of Paul Gauguin) as annunciation and signals of a 'new man' in a new, paradise-like setting. Whereas 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' is formally a quite classic poem and lacks the energetic character of most *Brücke* work, it evokes nevertheless by content the same scenery and can thus be regarded as a literary expression of the same utopian strand which underlies the paintings and drawings from the Moritzburger Teiche as well.

#### *Swimming and politics in Brecht's Baal*

The assumption that the poem indeed possessed a programmatic, utopian character becomes even more obvious if one considers the fact that 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen' might be a singular poem in as far as the main subject was swimming: not just in Brecht's oeuvre, but in German (and European) literature as a whole. However, the subject of swimming can be found in Brecht's other work, in part with an undeniable political dimension.

First of all, the scene described in the poem can be found, as Werner Ross has pointed out, in Brecht's first play, *Baal*, almost with the same wording, written (and rewritten) in the same years as 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen', in two scenes entitled 'Grüne Felder, blaue Pflaumenbäume' and 'Grünes Laubdickicht. Fluß dahinter'.

## GREEN FIELDS. BLUE PLUM TREES

BAAL *slowly coming through the fields*: Since the sky turned green and pregnant, summertime, wind, no shirt in my trousers ...

EKART: Let's go and lie in the river.

BAAL: My soul, brother, is the groaning of the cornfields as they bend in the wind, and the gleam in the eyes of two insects who want to devour each other.

EKART: A mad summer boy with immortal intestines, that's what you are! A dumpling, who'll leave a grease spot on the sky.

BAAL: Only words. But it doesn't matter.

EKART: My body's light as a little plum in the wind.

BAAL: That's because of the pale summer sky, brother. Shall we soak up the warm water of a blue pond? Otherwise the white roads that lead across the land will draw us like angel's ropes up to heaven.

...

## GREEN THICKET. RIVER BEYOND

BAAL *sitting in the thicket*: The water's warm. You can lie like a crab on the sand. And the shrubs and white clouds in the sky. Ekart!

EKART *concealed*: What do you want?

BAAL: I love you.

EKART: I'm too comfortable here.

BAAL: Did you see the clouds earlier?

EKART: Yes, they're shameless. *Silence*. A while ago a woman went by on the other side.

BAAL: I don't care for women any longer.<sup>17</sup>

The question of whether Baal's remarks in the last scene possess a homoerotic dimension, as Ross and Hans-Thies Lehmann have suggested, can be left unanswered (such an erotic/sexual dimension is, however, obvious in the subject of the bathers in the work of the members of *Die Brücke* and other painters as well). Important here is the fact that committing oneself to idle sitting on the shore of some pond, on the sand or on a branch, is part of the consciously anti-bourgeois, or even anti-social deviant behaviour in which Baal indulges without any constraint. Put differently: the gospel of swimming in lakes and rivers is here part of (or maybe more precisely the expression of) an anti-bourgeois attitude, rejecting an ordered life in an

<sup>17</sup> Brecht, *Die Stücke*, pp. 22-23 and 30; Ross, 'Vom Schwimmen', p. 287. English translation in Brecht, *Collected Plays*, vol. 1, pp. 29-30 and 47. For the original text, see Appendix III.

urban context. In the play, this is reflected in a quite anti-social way and – one might even add – in a rather apolitical way.

In that context, Brecht had rather mixed feelings about his debut play and its protagonist. A play which can be seen as a first extensive examination of the counterculture of expressionism and the anti-bourgeois youth movements of the period, in which Brecht's own stand is marked in part by sympathy for, in part by critical rejection of their politically rather unreflected move against or away from society, Brecht distinguished on the one hand praiseworthy and subversive elements: 'Baal the provocateur, the worshipper of things as they are, living life, his own and other people's, to the full. A lot could be got out of his "do whatever is fun", if handled properly', as he writes on 11 September 1938 in his *Arbeitsjournal*.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Brecht, who had already been a member of the revolutionary workers' and soldiers' council in Augsburg in the November revolution of 1918 and soon became a convinced communist, albeit not a servile soldier of the party leadership, had to reject the egotistical character of the revolt by the 'BÖSEN BAAL DEM ASSOZIALEN'.<sup>19</sup>

*Against the commodification of nature*

The poem 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen', understood as 'gospel', might suggest that at least Brecht regarded this element in Baal – the turn towards nature – in a positive way and not primarily as an expression of the anti-social dimension of Baal's revolt against bourgeois society. This assumption seems to be confirmed by two other, later texts by Brecht: the script of the film *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt*, which he wrote together with Ernst Ottwalt in 1931-32, and the first story of 'Herr Keuner', 'Herr K. und die Natur' from the same years.

The short story, or rather statement by Mr K. on nature reads as follows:

Asked about his attitude to Nature, Mr K said: 'Now and then I like to see a few trees on coming out of the house. Particularly because they achieve such a special degree of reality by looking so different according to the time of day and season. Also, as time goes on we city dwellers get dazed by never seeing anything but use-objects, such as houses and railways which, if unoccupied, would be empty, if unused, meaningless. Our peculiar social system allows us to regard even human beings as such use-objects; and so trees, at any rate for

<sup>18</sup> Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, pp. 23-24. English translation in Brecht, *Journals*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Brecht, *Journale I*, p. 323. English translation in Brecht, *Journals*, p. 18: BAD BAAL THE ASOCIAL MAN.

me, since I am not a carpenter, have something soothingly independent about them, outside myself, and as a matter of fact I hope that for carpenters, too, they have something about them which cannot be put to use'.

(Mr K also said: 'We must make use of Nature sparingly. Spending your time amidst Nature without any work, you may easily fall into a diseased condition; you are seized by something like a fever').<sup>20</sup>

Leaving Keuner's remark on the realism of trees aside, Keuner's (and Brecht's) main argument seems to be that nature resists commodification and exploitation or can at least be regarded as a sphere which is not (completely) ruled by commodification and exploitation. As such, nature can be regarded as being in opposition to capitalism (it might be noted here that in *Baal* nature, and in particular the trees in which Baal is climbing and sitting, are threatened in another scene by lumberjacks; in other words by economic exploitation). To some extent reminiscent of Brecht's instructions for the *Hauspostille*, Keuner is also warning, however, against the immanent danger of an overdose of nature 'without work', in other words detached from the sphere of capitalist production and labour, as it might cause a morbid, feverish condition. What Keuner (or Brecht) exactly means by this condition is left obscure. However, looking at the case of Baal (and in contemporary society the case of the anti-bourgeois youth movements like the *Wandervogel*, who turned towards nature instead of fighting the wrongs of capitalist society) this condition might well have been close to or even another face of Baal's anti-social dimension: a retreat into nature instead of participating in the struggle for a better society. This retreat was in classic Marxist terms dubious and questionable, but nevertheless 'utopian' (though with a negative connotation) (see fig. 6).

#### *Swimming and the politicization of the proletariat*

Swimming, bathing and beach life also play a central role in the film *Kuhle Wampe*. The film initially shows the hardships of the proletarian family Bönike in the course of the Great Depression of 1929. The main breadwinner, the son, has become jobless and is not able to find new employment. To escape from the hopeless situation, he commits suicide. As a consequence, his parents and sister are ruthlessly thrown out of their apartment since they are unable (or, as the judge maliciously suggests in his verdict, unwilling) to pay their rent. They have to take refuge in a holiday camp on the outskirts of Berlin, on the shore of the Müggelsee, called *Kuhle*

<sup>20</sup> Brecht, *Kalendergeschichten*, p. 102 (English translation in Brecht, *Tales*, p. 94). Original text in Appendix IV.

*Wampe*. Here a process of politicization sets in, in the course of which the daughter, Anni, and her friend Fritz become more and more involved in the communist movement that offers not only a clear analysis of the socioeconomic and political situation, but also a 'scientific' alternative to capitalism, among other things in the famous 'Solidaritätslied', written for the film by Brecht with music by Hanns Eisler (and sung in the film by Ernst Busch and some three thousand proletarian sportsmen and women).

The holiday camp functions as a focal and turning point in the narration, when apolitical leisure and excessive drinking in the course of a (forced) engagement party – 'Im Leben Kuhle Wampes spielen kleinbürgerliche Probleme noch eine große Rolle' [Life at Kuhle Wampe is governed by the problems of the petit bourgeois] – is replaced by political activity, initially in the form of a mass sport celebration – 'Ganz andere Probleme beschäftigen die Massen der Arbeitersportler am Wochenende' ['Very different problems trouble the massed proletarian sportsmen and women at the weekend'] (like the previous German line, a voice-over cut by the producers to prevent the film from being banned).<sup>21</sup> The actual hinge in the political turn is represented by two consecutive sequences focusing on swimming in different forms. First, there is a scene which had to be cut from the film. In the censor's report, the following summary remained:

Es wird ein Zeltlager an einem See gezeigt. Zwei junge Leute gehen ohne Badeanzug ins Wasser baden. Einige Mädchen ohne Bekleidung folgen ihnen. Man sieht die Gruppe ins Wasser gehen, im Wasser sich aufhalten und aus dem Wasser kommen.<sup>22</sup>

This sequence, which had to be cut from the film, is followed by the sport celebration, an enormous manifestation, including motor and boat racing as well as swimming, now with bathing suits and not as leisure, but – as a 'Sportlied' by Brecht indicates – as an exercise for the political struggle:

Kommend von den vollen Hinterhäusern  
Finstern Straßen der umkämpften Städte  
Findet ihr euch zusammen  
Um gemeinsam zu kämpfen.  
Und lernt zu siegen!

<sup>21</sup> Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*, p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80. ['The scene shows a lakeside camp site. Two young persons without bathing costumes go into the lake. Several girls in a state of undress follow them. As can be seen, the group moves into the water and spends some time there, before coming out again'].

Und lernt zu siegen!...<sup>23</sup>

After the matches and an agitprop performance, a moment of relaxation follows:

438. 2.7 m. medium shot. The theatre group is packing instruments on the stage.

439. 6.4 m. medium shot. Kurt and Gerda are standing next to a man selling newspapers; Kurt is reading a brochure called 'Birth Control'; he buys the magazine 'Factory and Union'; they move on

Kurt: [*returning the brochure*] I have that one already.

440. 3 m. full shot. A large group of athletes is sitting in a meadow; others are standing around them; they laugh as a young woman tries to stand on her head

441. 1.7 m. medium shot. Women athletes are sitting on the grass and laughing; one of them eats an apple; a second one takes it and eats it

442. 2.5 m. medium shot. Swimmers are lying on the grass, two are reading the newspaper

443. 1.7 m. medium shot. Many parked bicycles, some leaning against trees

444. 1.6 m. close-up. Front wheels of racing bicycles

445. 2.1 m. medium shot. Empty rowing boats in the water

446. 1.1 m. medium shot. Sterns of three paddle boats

447. 9 m. medium shot; high, oblique angle. Three young men are lying on the grass, their heads bent over a book; one reads aloud

Young man: Listen, I'll ad it again now: 'A real state,' says Hegel, 'and a real state government emerge only when there are already distinct classes, when wealth and poverty increase greatly and when the situation is such that a large number can no long satisfy needs in the accustomed way.'

448. 2.9 m full shot. in front of a tent Anni and Fritz are lying on the grass, resting on their elbows; they are looking straight ahead; Fritz looks over to Anni; behind them another man is lying in the same posture, reading a newspaper that another one is reading as well over his shoulder; in the background are worker-athletes standing, lying and talking.<sup>24</sup>

Returning now to 'Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen', the similarity between the subject of the poem and the first swimming scenes in *Kuhle Wampe* is obvious. Whereas the lazy drifting and idle floating in the poem has little in common with the subsequent swimming competition (it is

<sup>23</sup> Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*, p. 58. English translation in Brecht, *Brecht on Film and Radio*, pp. 242-243: 'Coming out of the crowded flats / The darkened streets of embattled cities / You come together / To struggle together. / And learn to win. / And learn to win ...'.

<sup>24</sup> Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*, pp. 63-65. English translation in Brecht, *Brecht on Film and Radio*, pp. 244-246. German text in Appendix VI.

surely not a poem on sport, as Werner Ross believes) and the following – still heavily political – relaxation on the meadows after the event, the first *Nacktbadeszene* is related to the poem in two ways.

The scene can not only be interpreted as still being part of the apolitical and escapist return to nature – away from metropolitan life – in the form of the holiday camp on the shores of the Müggelsee as part of the same sub-culture and counterculture, which also constitutes the immediate cultural background of ‘Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen’. The images also show a remarkable affinity and similarity with a trend in photography in the early twentieth century, combining outdoor and nude photography, in which nude people are shown standing, sitting or playing either on the waterside or standing, sitting or swimming in the water, which could be found in publications of the *Freikörperkultur* movement as well as in organs of youth organizations, some of them political (figs 7-10).

Since the sequence in the uncensored film is immediately followed by sporting competition (including swimming), the first deleted sequence might also be regarded as a kind of preparation for the competition or at least as a move in the right direction.

As indicated already, the release of the film met considerable resistance from the censor, who tried to ban the film as being immoral and subversive. Whereas most film critics regarded this interference as an attack on the freedom of expression, in particular of artistic expression, Brecht noted that the censor was ‘weit tiefer in das Wesen unserer künstlerischen Absichten eingedrungen als unsere wohlwollendsten Kritiker’<sup>25</sup> [‘much more firmly entrenched in the essence of our artistic intentions than our most benevolent critics’]: the intention was to make a revolutionary film and the reactionary censor understood this intention. What is interesting here is the fact that one of the sequences that caused the most opposition from the censor was the nude bathing scene. Moreover, one might deduce from Brecht’s remarks that he still regarded this bathing, the same bathing as in ‘Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen’ as a consciously subversive act, maybe not revolutionary in the sense of Marxist communism, but nevertheless definitely utopian. Yet, it was an expression of a utopianism which was nonetheless a product of a historical period, the early twentieth century, which was almost at its end. In the late 1930s, no less, Brecht wrote (in his famous ‘An die Nachgeborenen’):

Was sind das für Zeiten, wo  
Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist

---

<sup>25</sup> Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*, p. 96.

Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!<sup>26</sup>

A consideration, though, which might already have gone through Brecht's mind when compiling the *Hauspostille*, in which 'a talk about trees' is already an exception, together with his poem about swimming. After the war, when the Swiss writer and architect Max Frisch showed Brecht, visiting Zurich, new working-class housing estates and the building site of a large swimming park at the Letzigraben, Brecht wrote on 11 June 1948 in his diary:

FRISCH gave me a guided tour through municipal housing estates with huge blocks of three- and four-room flats. the house-fronts face the sun and there is a little greenery between the houses; inside 'mod cons'(bath, electric cookers), but all very tiny, these are prison cells, little rooms where the commodity called 'labour' can recover its strength, upgraded slums. Frisch then showed us the site where he is building a big municipal swimming-pool for the city. it is a pleasure to look at the plan, but that pleasure evaporates at the sight of the building itself. These giant pools for thousands make the poem in the 'devotions' ON SWIMMING IN LAKES AND RIVERS a recollection from history.<sup>27</sup>

Whether Frisch's swimming park indeed turned the poem into a historical reminiscence might be doubted, since people are still swimming in the Zürichsee. The poem is, however, undoubtedly a historical reminiscence, namely as a utopian point of convergence, where oppositional and alternative movements, political, social, artistic, and cultural in a wider sense, once met: somewhere at the start of the twentieth century.

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<sup>26</sup> Brecht, *Die Gedichte*, p. 723. English translation as 'To those born later' in Brecht, *Poems 1913-1956*, p. 318: 'What kind of times are they, / when A talk about trees is almost a crime / Because it implies silence about so many horrors'.

<sup>27</sup> Brecht, *Journale II*, p. 271. English translation in Brecht, *Journals*, p. 391. German text in Appendix V.

## APPENDIX I

## VOM SCHWIMMEN IN SEEN UND FLÜSSEN

1.

Im bleichen Sommer, wenn die Winde oben  
 Nur in dem Laub der großen Bäume sausen  
 Wie die Gewächse, worin Hechte hausen.  
 Der Leib wird leicht im Wasser. Wenn der Arm  
 Leicht aus dem Wasser in den Himmel fällt  
 Wiegt ihn der kleine Wind vergessen  
 Weil er ihn wohl für braunes Astwerk hält.

2.

Der Himmel bietet mittags große Stille.  
 Man macht die Augen zu, wenn Schwalben kommen.  
 Der Schlamm ist warm. Wenn kühle Blasen quellen  
 Weiß man: Ein Fisch ist jetzt durch uns geschwommen.  
 Mein Leib, die Schenkel und der stille Arm  
 Wir liegen still im Wasser, ganz geeint  
 Nur wenn die kühlen Fische durch uns schwimmen  
 Fühl ich, daß Sonne überm Tümpel scheint.

3.

Wenn man am Abend von dem langen Liegen  
 Sehr faul wird, so, daß alle Glieder beißen  
 Muß man das alles, ohne Rücksicht, klatschend  
 In blaue Flüsse schmeißen, die sehr reißen.  
 Am besten ist's, man hält's bis Abend aus.  
 Weil dann der bleiche Haifischhimmel kommt  
 Böses und gefräßig über Fluß und Sträuchern  
 Und alle Dinge sind, wie's ihnen frommt.

4.

Natürlich muß man auf dem Rücken liegen  
 So wie gewöhnlich. Und sich treiben lassen.  
 Man muß nicht schwimmen, nein, nur so tun, als  
 Gehöre man einfach zu Schottermassen.  
 Man soll den Himmel anschauen und so tun  
 Als ob einen ein Weib trägt, und es stimmt.  
 Ganz ohne großen Umtrieb, wie der liebe Gott tut  
 Wenn er am Abend noch in seinen Flüssen schwimmt.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Brecht, *Die Gedichte*, pp. 209-210:

## APPENDIX II

## VOM KLETTERN IN BÄUMEN

1.  
 Wenn ihr aus eurem Wasser steigt am Abend –  
 Denn ihr müßt nackt sein, und die Haut muß weich sein –  
 Dann steigt auch noch auf eure großen Bäume  
 Bei leichtem Wind. Auch soll der Himmel bleich sein.  
 Sucht große Bäume, die am Abend schwarz  
 Und langsam ihre Wipfel wiegen, aus!  
 Und wartet auf die Nacht in ihrem Laub  
 Und um die Stirne Mahr und Fledermaus!

2.  
 Die kleinen harten Blätter im Gesträuche  
 Zerkerben euch den Rücken, den ihr fest  
 Durchs Astwerk stemmen müßt; so klettert ihr  
 Ein wenig ächzend höher ins Geäst.  
 Es ist ganz schön, sich wiegen auf dem Baum!  
 Doch sollt ihr euch nicht wiegen mit den Knien  
 Ihr sollt dem Baum so wie sein Wipfel sein:  
 Seit hundert Jahren abends: er wiegt ihn.

## APPENDIX III

## Grüne Felder, blaue Pflaumenbäume

BAAL *langsam durch die Felder*: Seit der Himmel grüner und schwanger ist,  
 Juliluft, Wind, kein Hemd in den Hosen! [...]  
 EKART Sollen wir uns nicht ins Wasser legen?  
 BAAL Meine Seele, Bruder, ist das Ächzen der Kornfelder, wenn sie sich unter dem  
 Wind wälzen, und das Funkeln in den Augen zweier Insekten, die sich fressen  
 wollen.  
 EKART Ein julitoller Bursche mit unsterblichem Gedärm, das bist du. Ein Kloß, der  
 einst am Himmel Fettflecken hinterläßt!  
 BAAL Das ist Papier. Aber es macht nichts.  
 EKART Mein Leib ist leicht wie eine kleine Pflaume im Wind.  
 BAAL Das kommt vom bleichen Himmel des Sommers, Bruder. Wollen wir uns  
 von lauen Wasser eines blauen Tümpels aufschwemmen lassen? Die weißen  
 Landstraßen ziehen uns sonst wie Seile von Engeln in den Himmel.

...

Grünes Laubdickicht. Fluß dahinter

BAAL *sitzt im Laubwerk*: Das Wasser ist warm. Auf dem Sand liegt man wie  
 Krebse. Dazu das Buschwerk und die weißen Wolken am Himmel. Ekart!  
 EKART *verborgen*: Was willst du?  
 BAAL Ich liebe dich.

EKART Ich liege zu gut.

BAAL Hast du die Wolken vorhin gesehen?

EKART Ja. Sie sind schamlos. *Stille.* Vorhin ging ein Weib drüben vorbei.

BAAL Ich mag kein Weib mehr ....

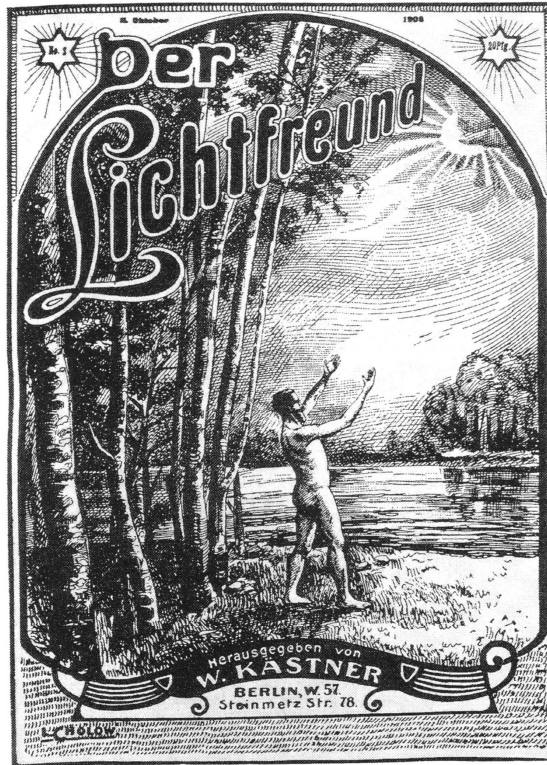
#### APPENDIX IV

Befragt über sein Verhältnis zur Natur, sagte Herr K.: 'Ich würde gern mitunter aus dem Haus tretend ein paar Bäume sehen. Besonders da sie durch ihr der Tages- und Jahreszeit entsprechendes Andersaussehen einen so besonderen Grad von Realität erreichen. Auch verwirrt es uns in den Städten mit der Zeit, immer nur Gebrauchsgegenstände zu sehen, Häuser und Bahnen, die unbewohnt leer, unbenutzt sinnlos wären. Unsere eigentümliche Gesellschaftsordnung läßt uns ja auch die Menschen zu solchen Gebrauchsgegenständen zählen, und da haben Bäume wenigstens für mich, der ich kein Schreiner bin, etwas beruhigend Selbständiges, von mir Absehendes, und ich hoffe sogar, sie haben selbst für die Schreiner einiges an sich, was nicht verwertet werden kann'.

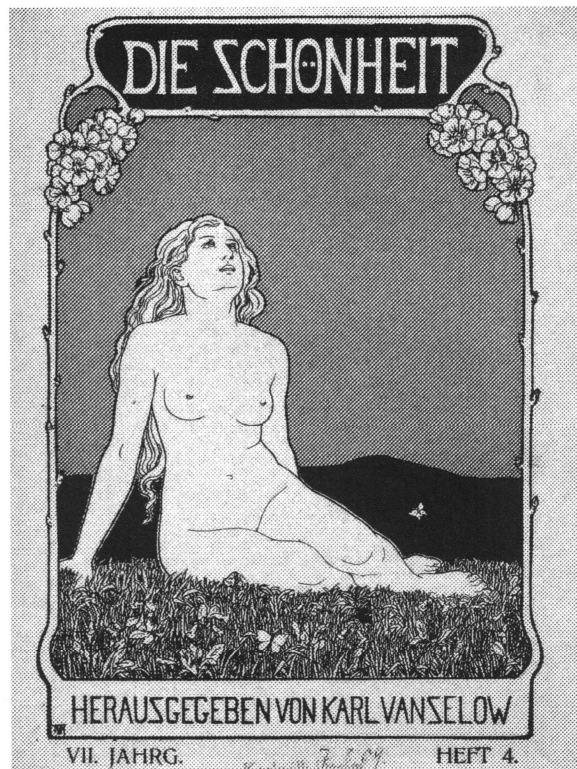
(Herr K. sagte auch: 'Es ist nötig für uns, von der Natur ein sparsamen Gebrauch zu machen. Ohne Arbeit in der Natur weilend, gerät man leicht in einen krankhaften Zustand, etwas wie Fieber befällt einen').

#### APPENDIX V

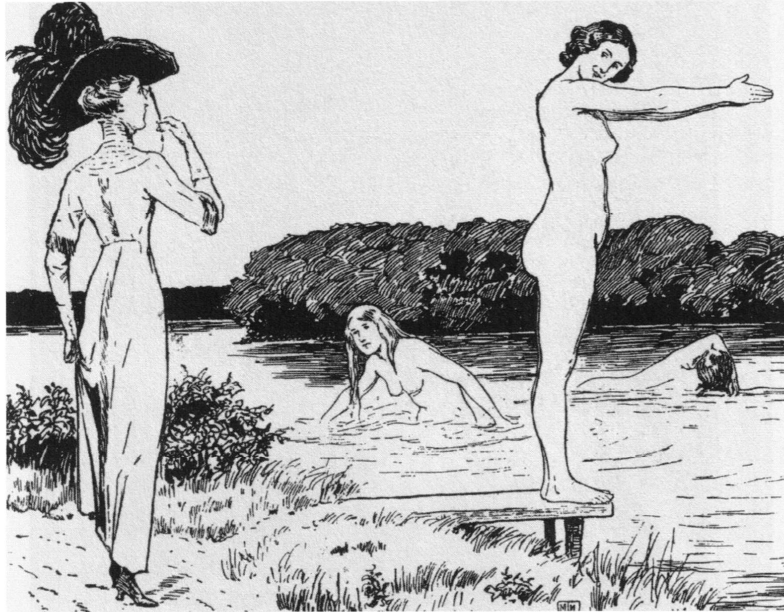
*Frisch* führt mich durch städtische Siedlungen mit Drei- oder Vierzimmerwohnungen in riesigen Häuserblöcken. Häuserfronten zur Sonne gewendet, zwischen den Häusern ein bisschen Grün, im Innern ‚Komfort‘ (Badewanne, elektrische Kochfen), alles aber winzig, es sind Gefängniszellen, Räumchen zur Wiederherstellung der Ware Arbeitskraft, verbesserte Slums. Frisch zeigt uns dann die Baustätte eine großen städtischen Schwimmparks, das er für die Stadt baut. Man sieht noch mit Vergnügen den Plan, den der Bau dann austilgt. Diese Riesenbassins für Tausende machen übrigens das 'Hauspostillen'-Gedicht 'Vom Schwimmen in Flüssen und Teichen' schon zur historischen Reminiszenz.



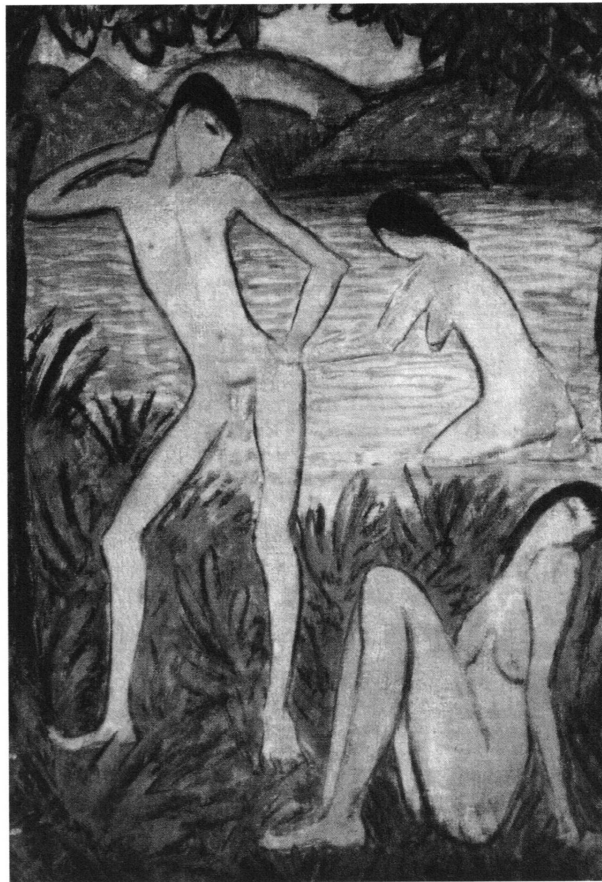
1. Advocating naturism: *Der Lichtfreund* (1908). Reproduced from: H. Bergmann, *Lichtkämpfer, Sonnenfreunde und wilde Nackte. Zur Geschichte der Freikörperkultur in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2000), p. 10.



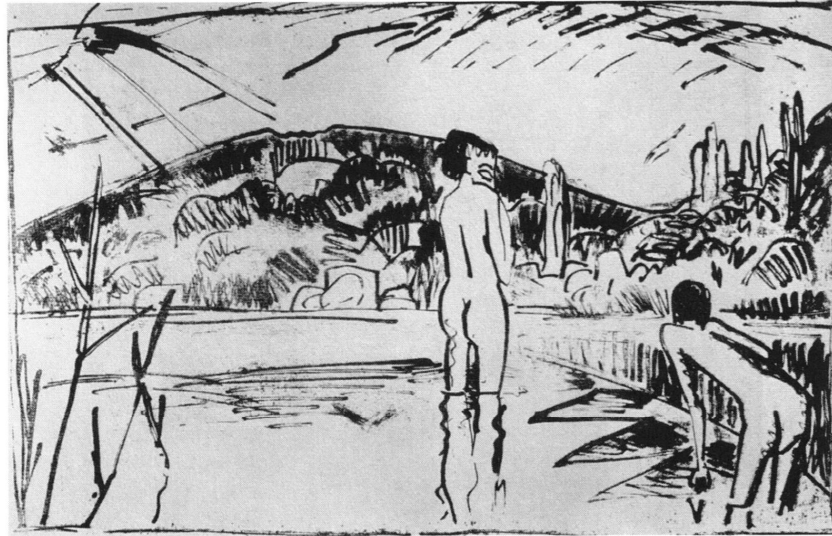
2. Advocating naturism: *Die Schönheit* (1909). Reproduced from: H. Bergmann, *Lichtkämpfer, Sonnenfreunde und wilde Nackte. Zur Geschichte der Freikörperkultur in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2000), p. 10.



3. F. Müller-Münster, *Modepuppe und Naturkinder*. In: R. Ungewitter, *Nacktheit und Kultur* (Stuttgart, 1913). Reproduced from: H. Bergmann, *Lichtkämpfer, Sonnenfreunde und wilde Nackte. Zur Geschichte der Freikörperkultur in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2000), p. 7.



4. O. Mueller, *Die Großen Badenden* (ca. 1914). Kunsthalle Bielefeld. Reproduced from: J. Hülsewig-Johnen and Thomas Kellein (eds.), *Die Badenden. Mensch und Natur im deutschen Expressionismus* (Bielefeld, 2000), p. 21.



5. E. Heckel, *Badende im See* (1913). Kupferstichkabinett. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Reproduced from: J. Hülsewig-Johnen and Thomas Kellein (eds.), *Die Badenden. Mensch und Natur im deutschen Expressionismus* (Bielefeld, 2000), p. 44.



6. *Wandervögel* camping at a shore (1920s). Reproduced from: L. de Vries, *Zo puur in de natuur. Naturisme toen en nu* (Deventer, 1987), p. 69.



7. H.L. von Jan, *Badende Mädchen*. In: *Die Schönheit* (1908). Reproduced from: H. Bergmann, *Lichtkämpfer, Sonnenfreunde und wilde Nackte. Zur Geschichte der Freikörperkultur in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2000), p. 11.



8. O. Mueller, *Mädchen am Wasser* (1926). Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum, Hagen. Reproduced from: J. Hülsewig-Johnen and Thomas Kellein (eds.), *Die Badenden. Mensch und Natur im deutschen Expressionismus* (Bielefeld, 2000), p. 27.



9. M. Pechstein, *Zwischen Schilf* (1910). Brücke-Museum, Berlin. Reproduced from: J. Hülsewig-Johnen and Thomas Kellein (eds.), *Die Badenden. Mensch und Natur im deutschen Expressionismus* (Bielefeld, 2000), p. 33.



10. J. Groß, Photograph. In: H. Surén, *Der Mensch und die Sonne*. (Stuttgart, 1925), p. 47.

## ON THE SHORELINE OF UTOPIA

HUBERT VAN DEN BERG

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