

## **Dropping Out and Dropouts: A Vision around 1900 and in the Works of Hermann Broch**

### **An International Symposium on the Monte Verità from August 15 to 18, 2018**

(Congressi Stefano Franscini, Ascona, in cooperation with the ETH Zürich),

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*A Summary by Paul Michael Lützeler and Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer*

Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer from Universität Bern and Paul Michael Lützeler from Washington University in St. Louis organized this international and interdisciplinary conference. Both are experts in the field of Hermann Broch scholarship and at the same time literary and cultural historians. The work of Hermann Broch (1886-1951) is of a multi- and interdisciplinary nature, and any discussion of his writings (encompassing literature, poetics, philosophy, politics, and mass psychology) has to be able to transgress the borders of traditional literary approaches. When planning the conference, the organizers made the decision to put the emphasis on contextualization. They raised the two principal questions: What were the major reform ideas that spread from the Monte Verità during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? And: What impact did their inspirations have on Hermann Broch and his contemporaries? Broch himself never visited the Monte Verità but – as a modernist – was confronted with their provocative ideas in the fields of life style, health, nature, architecture, social philosophy, dance and music but also in the realms of religion and religious studies. In order to get the most out of the contextualization efforts, it was decided that half of the papers would deal with the reform ideas and the reform practices on the Monte Verità in Ascona as well as with the reform inspirations on other writers of Broch's time. The other half of the lectures would then deal with Broch's works specifically.

In the spirit of this structure Paul Michael Lützeler gave his opening lecture about major trends in the reform ideas on the Monte Verità and at the same time indicated how Broch reacted to them. He concentrated on the dichotomy between country/nature vs. city/civilization so typical for the reform movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition he lectured about the prophet-like dropouts of the Monte Verità who either wanted to radically change the ethical orientation or the political structure of the societies in modern Europe. Broch critically dealt with both aspects in his novels: sometimes ironically, sometimes seriously. Lützeler also profiled Broch's indirect and direct relationship to the Eranos Circle around C.G. Jung during the 1930s and 1940s, a group of scholars in the field of comparative religion and myth that met on the Monte Verità for its annual conferences published in the form of yearbooks by Broch's publisher Daniel Brody. – Barbara Mahlmann-Bauer outlined the major philosophical context of the reform movement by dealing with Friedrich Nietzsche's seminal work "Also sprach Zarathustra." With its massive and at the same time general attack on the contemporary culture and its religious roots it was understood by the Monte Verità reformers as an encouragement for their divergent aspirations concerning alternative life styles, especially a life in accordance with nature. Nietzsche's Zarathustra was adored as a "Kultbuch" by Monte Verità readers, for he apparently flattered them to belong to Zarathustra's followers heading for the properties of Nietzsche's "Übermensch", rather than to the ignorant throng. Hermann Broch's approach to Nietzsche's philosophy however was closer to a deconstruction, opposing Zarathustra with the half God and seducer Dionysos. – Martin

Urmann, a comparatist from Freie Universität Berlin, could also point to Nietzsche's impact on the changing orientations in literature, music and art both in Germany and France at the turn of the century around 1900. His reference point was Nietzsches "Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik." – Reverberations of Nietzsche's utopian concept of the „gute Europäer“ were outlined in the contribution by Verena Weduwen, a Ph.D. student in Media Studies at Universität zu Köln. She had a look at the garden city project "Hellerau" in the vicinity of Dresden. This "artist colony" was founded a few years after the Monte Verità project had started. The emphasis there was on architecture and arts and craft, but as far as the modern dance movement is concerned there were overlappings in regard to a new type of choreography. – As far as the broader context of the understanding of a healthy life style (sun bathing, vegetarianism and veganism) on the Monte Verità is concerned it was important to have Martina King speak, an expert in the history of Medicine from Université de Fribourg. She lectured on esoteric medicine around 1900 both outside and inside the medical profession. The metaphors the alternative healers used to describe diseases and holistic therapies point to the imaginative, speculative origins of alternative medicine which owed its attraction to the fact that speculative physicians were ingenious poets.

Part of the contextualization effort was to look for "dropping out" phenomena in the works of writers that Broch was familiar with. Alexander Honold from Universität Basel dealt with Robert Musil's novella "Grigia" and could show that the author represented in "Grigia" both a collective as well as a personal "state of exception" during a crisis situation caused by World War I. – Yahya Elsaygha teaches German literature and culture at Universität Bern and is an expert on Johann Jacob Bachofen whose "Mutterrecht" provided a utopian ideology to those dropouts who detected the origin of a disintegrating civilization in the establishment of patriarchal order and in the decline of maternal authority. He demonstrated the impact of Bachofen's "Mutterrecht" on Hermann Hesse, a writer whose novels are filled with dropout figures. Their aspirations are in part influenced by the understanding of gender and the opposition to patriarchy. – Hesse's novels were admired by Emmy Hennings as demonstrated by Irmgard Wirtz, director of the Swiss Literary Archives in Zurich. She is the co-editor of Hennings' collected works (including the rich correspondence between Emmy Hennings and Hesse). Hennings, the wife of Hugo Ball, had spent time during the First World War on the Monte Verità where she belonged (like Hesse himself) to the group of pacifists around Gustav Graeser. – Franz Werfel's novel "Stern der Ungeborenen" was written between 1943 and 1945 in American exile. Anna-Verena Ruth from Universität München, could show that Werfel's novel is a utopian book envisioning mankind in about 100.000 years from now: People are living in a conflict free culture that has little in common with the regimented societies of the 1940s, involved in a world war and defined by antagonist political ideologies. – Two presentations were included in the conference program that were devoted to post-war author (Max Frisch) and a contemporary writer (Christian Kracht). Both lectures dealt with figures that were dropouts when the reformers populated the Monte Verità. Julia Röthinger from Universität München analyzed the unusual encyclopedic project of the Swiss recluse Armand Schulthess who plays a central role in Max Frisch's story "Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän." It was a real surprise for all listeners when they had the opportunity to admire Schulthess' weird 'ready mades' which Harald Szeemann managed to save in the recently rearranged museum in Casa Anatta. – Friedrich Vollhardt from Universität München, and Astrid Dröse from Universität Tübingen, presented a lecture about

August Engelhardt as fictionalized by Christian Kracht in his novel "Imperium." Engelhardt was one of the sandal prophets who started a colony on a South Pacific island (at the time part of the German imperial colonial system), believing that sunshine and coconuts are all human beings need for their health and happiness. One of Engelhardt's forerunners was Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach, whose radical life style was imitated by Gusto Graeser, as Vollhardt explained.

The second half of the program was filled with lectures about Hermann Broch's works. Monika Ritzer from Universität Leipzig showed Broch's early fascination with the two philosophical outsiders Carl Dallago and Otto Weininger. Around 1912/1913 Broch was a reader of (and sometimes contributor to) the Austrian cultural journal "Der Brenner", and Dallago – an admirer of Nietzsche – was considered to be one of its major authors. Dallago's career as a real dropout deterred Broch: He rather decided to reduce his own dropping out fancies to the figures of his novels. – A few years later Broch got involved in Neo-Kantianism and was impressed by Hans Vaihinger's "Philosophie des Als-ob" in which the philosophical idea of "fiction" played a dominating role. This was a passing influence as well, but still had an impact on Broch during the time when he drafted the novel trilogy "Die Schlafwandler" in 1929. Alice Stasková (Universität Jena) interpreted Broch's "Die Schlafwandler" as a project devised to refute Vaihinger's extreme subjectivism and to insist on the necessity of truth and justice as ideas upon which all members of a society may reach agreement. – Florens Schwarzwälder from Universität Bern reminded the audience of Broch's ironic way in the depiction of outsiders and dropouts in "Die Schlafwandler" as well as in "Die Verzauberung" from 1935. Schwarzwälder referred to Lohberg in "Esch" and to the narrator, a country doctor who has fled the city, in what Broch called his "Mountain Novel"). Both figures fail to live up to their "Weltanschauung" which is far from appropriate as a means to cope with reality. – Part of "Die Verzauberung" is the story of Barbara, of a young medical doctor the narrator fell in love with when he was still working in a city hospital. Barbara is a political dropout, a revolutionary communist who commits suicide since she cannot synchronize personal and political goals. Sarah McGaughey from Dickinson College spoke about this story and its impact on the 2012 movie "Barbara" by Christian Petzold. He projected Broch's story on a drama that took place in a hospital in East Germany. – At the time when Broch was writing "Die Verzauberung" he was confronted with authors like Ludwig Klages. Thomas Borgard from Universität München showed how Broch avoided the oppositions about nature and culture ventilated by the "Lebensphilosophie" of the time. In the years following Hitler's usurpation Broch deliberated about appropriate ways for a writer to cope with the danger of totalitarianism. Hitler's extermination policy forced Jewish authors like Broch to emigrate: Writing novels in an ivory tower surely was no longer enough. In 1938 Broch fled from Austria to the United States, and – as Sven Lüder from Universität Jena explained – he tried to combine two major aspirations: to get involved in defending democracy against its totalitarian competitors with the help of his "Massenwahntheorie" and to seek distance and contemplation for his literary endeavours. Lüder referred to Broch's "Autobiographie als Arbeitsprogramm" and to his "Psychische Selbstbiographie" to make his point. – Broch's primary literary contribution during the exile years was his novel "Der Tod des Vergil" that appeared in 1945. – Satoshi Kuwahara from Niigata University had a fresh approach to this master piece. He focused on the "Aussteiger" motives in the novel, in particular on Virgil's philosophical understanding of literature and his growing distance to the court of emperor Augustus. Approaching death appeared to Broch's Virgil as a threshold which allowed a universal view

of how mankind could be saved in correspondence with a wise government and with nature. – Doren Wohlleben from Universität Heidelberg has been working on the relation between Hermann Broch and Hannah Arendt before. This time she pointed to the topic of Jewish mysticism that informed both Broch's "Der Tod des Vergil" as well as his last novel "Die Schuldlosen." Wohlleben reminded the audience of the fact that Hannah Arendt made Gershom Scholem aware of Broch's novel on Virgil, and in 1949 the two men met in New York to discuss Jewish mysticism. – Sabine Müller from Universität Wien grasped the dimension of mythic depth ("Tiefe") with references to different schools of thought: from the Frankfurt School to French Poststructuralism. She could show how important the aspects of "depth" (the descent into deeper spheres of the psyche, the spirit and nature) are in the novels of Hermann Broch in general and in "Der Tod des Vergil" in particular. A 'deep', thorough perception of oneself as part of nature and the cosmos distinguished outsiders from usual citizens, and their representation required a new poetic tools that Musil and Broch developed.

The symposium showed how fruitful the approach of the conference had been. It reminded the audience of the wide-spread drop out behavior and its alternative thinking during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (with the Monte Verità as a major focal point). At the same time the conference spread new light on the somewhat hermetic work of Hermann Broch specifically. Seeing him and his work in a dialogic relation to the life reform movement allowed the participants of this conference to gain new insights.

Due to the wonderful hospitality of Dr. Chiara Cometta, Liliana Cantoreggi and the rest of the Congressi Stefano Franscini team, all participants enjoyed their stay, experienced Monte Verità as genius loci, and expressed their gratitude for the comfort of their rooms, unforgettable meals and excellent service. No place could have served better our purpose of connection to the work of the founders of the Monte Verità colony than the magnificent Bauhaus hotel and its fittingly named Eranos Conference Room. The ETH Zürich and Congressi Stefano Franscini deserve our special thanks for their generous support of the conference.