

Essay

# Sites of Re-Enchantment: Sacred Space and Nature in Early 20th Century Europe

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**Abstract:** This essay analyses the relationship between healing, nature, and the sacred in the construction of “sacred space” or heterotopias at the beginning of the 20th century in Europe. Two examples of these spaces are provided: the *Kurorte* in Bad Reichenhall, Germany, and the back-to-nature site Monte Verità in Ascona, Switzerland. The focus is on sacred space, alternative lifestyles, and the natural environment through the use of “light and air” cabins and community organization, as described by the founders of the colony at Monte Verità. The healing garden and the *Gradierhaus*—a special type of building designed for breathing salted air—in Bad Reichenhall are explored through the lens of “air cure” and “climate cures”, which became popular in Central Europe at the end of the 19th century. Such buildings and healing sites were designed for the express purpose of healing through disconnection from the chaos of the modern industrial world in order to reconnect with nature and the elements. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, a striking affinity between buildings and the natural environment at these sites is revealed, resulting in a “special” or “sacred” location that is somehow both “in” and “out” of everyday life, capable of ostensibly producing forms of healing in the visitors and inhabitants.

**Keywords:** heterotopia; sacred space; climatic cures; nature; alternative healing; modernity; Monte Verità



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## 1. Introduction

In the 1960s, Foucault developed his notion of heterotopic space in a lecture given to a group of architects (Foucault 1986). He described heterotopic space in terms of a mirror, reflecting back the outside world-space by creating another space that is both not really there and at the same time there.

Between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there (Foucault 1986, p. 24).

Foucault emphasized heterotopias of crisis, sacred spaces of healing in traditional and ancient societies, but also in the modern world, among which he included boarding schools for boys, where puberty could be experienced away from the family (Foucault 1986, pp. 24–25). He further argued that these were in the process of being replaced by heterotopias of deviance, such as the prison and the psychiatric ward. Eventually, the panopticon came to symbolize for Foucault the epitome of a heterotopia of deviance (Foucault 1977).

In recent years, scholars across various disciplines have become increasingly interested in Foucault's ideas of spatiality, as evidenced by the many publications dealing with the subject (Zarkin 2020; Hancock et al. 2018; Palladino and Miller 2015; Smith 2014; Hetherington 1997). As Beckett, Bagguley, and Campbell have suggested, the defining feature of Foucault's idea of the heterotopia is that "it is a space in which a certain type of resistance-practice becomes possible or takes place" (Beckett et al. 2016, p. 172).

In the present article, this suggestion is expanded on by emphasizing Foucault's remarks on the heterotopia as a mirror, as a space not only for resistance practices but as a site where Europeans could become conscious of the implications of modern life by stepping outside of it. This increase in conscious awareness allowed for a potential healing process to take place. By drawing on the qualities of nature and natural living, these new sacred spaces alleviated the affliction and alienation of the people who visited them, in part through the facilitation of a mirroring process. Journeying to these enchanted sites required the visitors to embark on a kind of pilgrimage, leading them away from their normal, mundane lives and across a threshold into another reality, a space of renewal through bathing or climbing mountains—a stark contrast to the dirty, cramped conditions of the cities.

Foucault's insights about an in-between space and the joint experience of crisis and deviance are therefore useful for reexamining the emergence of modern society in Europe at the turn of the 20th century. This period saw the construction of new sacred spaces designed to mitigate and counteract the ill effects of "modernity." Such spaces were intended to alleviate the anxieties and illnesses which came to be associated with modern life. Europeans living in urban areas during the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries bore witness to a bewildering acceleration of advancements in technology, society, the arts, religion, and science, all of which came to be identified as integral parts of being modern. For some, such changes were experienced as trauma and were thought to have sundered the holistic connection between human beings and the natural world, a connection that had existed for millennia (for example, the idea of the micro- and macrocosm, by which everything was believed to be connected from God all the way down to the minerals, metals, plants, animals, etc.; see Lovejoy 1936; Ashworth 1990).

Urban life in Paris, London, Amsterdam, as well as Dresden and Berlin, was undoubtedly a shocking and visceral experience. New factories, warehouses, laboratories, together with the technologies that arose in urban centers alongside the new middle classes of businessmen and managers, created a new environment. Thus, the problems that came with urban life, for example, the breakdown of family networks, alcoholism, gambling, prostitution, and illegitimacy, came to be associated with new forms of laissez-faire liberal capitalism, scientific technology, urbanization, and mass industrial production, which increasingly ignored the emotional and spiritual needs of employers and employees alike (on European industrialization and urbanization in the 19th century see Killen 2006; Berlanstein 1984; Thompson 1964).

The sociologist Max Weber famously described this process as the "disenchantment of the world", which expressed the sense of the futility and meaninglessness of life that had afflicted many upper-class males from the late 18th century onwards. It was this epidemic of what came to be called "ennui" that artists and progressives—for example, at new sacred spaces such as Monte Verità—wanted to challenge by marshalling their energies to re-enchanted the world with new styles of music, dance, art, and spirituality, all of which aimed at reforming and revitalizing traditional and outmoded models of social, political, and economic organization (Coudert 2018). The fragmentation and disconnection of modernity

were experienced as a trauma, and in response, some established new colonies and healing sites away from the modern world and urban centers. These new sacred spaces functioned in the sense of Foucauldian heterotopia by remaining outside of the profane world and yet somehow attached to it, confirming to those who visited them that the source of the traumatic evils assailing them belonged, in essence, to modern European civilization.

As my objects of study, I briefly introduce two such sites in Central Europe and describe how they functioned as heterotopic or new sacred spaces. These are Monte Verità in Ascona, Switzerland, and the healing site and *Gradierhaus* in Bad Reichenhall, Germany. Both sites offered visitors an escape from the anxieties of the modern world and a return to an apparently holistic state of connection with nature and the elemental forces of life. At the same time, they offered some of the conveniences of modern society and were able to be accessed without traveling too far from the cultural centers of Europe. Quality of life for these sites was described in terms of a better, more perfect and natural way of living. In this sense, they functioned as new sacred spaces, sanctified areas cut away from the profane world and people. They acted as mirrors, reflecting back to the visitors or inhabitants the problems of the “other space”, the profane realm existing outside of the heterotopia. Those who were not seamlessly fitting into the modern capitalist disenchanting system were seen as potentially defective and inactive, contributing nothing to the profane society. This incessant demand of modern life was experienced by some as a trauma. In order to remain resilient in the face of such trauma, sites such as Monte Verità and Bad Reichenhall, with their closeness to nature and healing gardens, became popular spaces for healing and visiting, but also for enduring.

## 2. Back to Nature

The conviction that nature had restorative properties had become popular in Central Europe as a result of the unhealthy conditions found in industrial cities with their teeming tenements, factories belching smoke, toxic air quality, and polluted water systems. Killen (2006), Radkau (1998), and Cowan (2008) have detailed how nervousness, speed, overstimulation, and anxiety came to be associated with urbanity. Such conditions prompted a counter-movement that came to be referred to as the *Naturmenschen*. This group of mostly young people sought to “return to nature”, promoting natural and cooperative living and lifestyle reforms aimed at simplicity (on the history of the *Naturmenschen* and *Wandervogel* movements in Europe see Williams 2007; Kahane and Rapoport 1997, pp. 47–54; Heineman 1989; Saur 2002; Sharma 2012; McKanan 2018).

While in the past, scholars have characterized such groups as anti-modern and disenchanting with modernity (Bergmann 1970; Mosse 1981; Stern 1961), recently scholars have argued that these groups were often composed of individuals who lacked the ability to cope with the drastic changes engendered by certain aspects of modernity, particularly global capitalism, which in their view turned individuals into mindless consumers caught up in a bourgeois farce of one-upmanship (see, for example, Veblen 1899). Jon Savage describes how rebellious teenagers who wanted to escape the rigid, traditional, and materialistic ideology of their bourgeois parents began joining such movements around 1900 as a means of escaping their oppressive families (Savage 2007). At the heart of these movements was a rejection of what many people saw as the materialism and self-serving morality of the bourgeoisie, with its lack of respect for the creative arts and slavish concern with propriety. Marx had criticized these very same qualities of the bourgeoisie in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), citing “the icy waters of calculation”, which reduce everything—law, poetry, science—to the conditions of wage labor. Marx also described things such as air and natural meadows as having no human labor value, meaning they could not be commodified and existed outside of the capitalist system, which would have greatly appealed to young idealists (Frank 2012).

By renouncing the world of tradition, industrialization, and militarism, *Naturmenschen* entered another world, a sacred world, one with an entirely different set of rules and which was “wild” and “natural”, where nothing was off-limits, including male bonding and

homosexual eroticism (Savage 2007, pp. 101–8). Other scholars emphasize the progressive, utopic elements that are part of the “back to nature” phenomenon (Dickinson 2010; Hong 2005), pointing out that there were distinct aspects of these groups that cannot be easily aggregated into a single category (Sharma 2012, pp. 36–54). More recently, Dan McKanan argued that the inheritance of these movements, especially Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical society, is “integral to the story of environmentalism” and challenge “the assumption that concern for wild nature is what defines environmentalism.” It is, therefore, not only wilderness preservation that effectively characterizes environmentalism; rather, such movements that have valued “the possibility that humans can be fully at home in nature” have contributed “actively to ecosystems in which myriad organisms thrive together” (McKanan 2018, p. xi).

One branch of the back-to-nature movement, known as the *Wandervogel* (free bird), was founded in 1901 by Karl Fischer, a student at the Gymnasium Steglitz in Berlin. It began as an *Ausschuß für Schülerfahrten* (committee for school trips) for students to develop outdoor skills and commune with nature through hiking and singing (Williams 2007; Kahane and Rapoport 1997, pp. 47–54; Heineman 1989). The movement rapidly spread through Wilhelmine Germany, and it was influential in the formation of new social values and cultural practices, offering a liberating experience in the face of constraining family and educational institutions (Saur 2002). Savage points out how this movement went hand in hand with a sense of freedom and the desire to return to nature-worshipping paganism (Savage 2007, pp. 101–12). Moreover, this impulse participated in what became known as *Freikörperkultur* (free-body culture), the belief that nudity, especially in a communal setting in nature, accessed a more “natural” way of living. Together these elements reinscribed the natural world as a sacred space, in which freedom, retreat, relaxation, healing, and rebirth all become possible.

### 3. The Monte Verità Sanatorium

At the turn of the 20th century, Monte Verità—or the “Hill of Truth”—in Ascona, Switzerland, became popular among the *Naturmenschen*, *Wandervogel*, and other reformers and spiritual seekers. The area was identified as a space that could be cultivated outside of the profane world. It was one of the innumerable utopic communities founded toward the end of the 19th century, both in Europe and the United States, which were created to combat the growing fragmentation of society under the destructive impact of industrialization and urbanization (on utopian communities see, for example, Muncy 1973; Guarneri 1991; Gandhi 2006; Stites 1991; Beik and Beik 1993). The community was a response to the relentless drive for profit characteristic of a capitalist economic system and the modern cities, which dehumanized and alienated individuals from their work, themselves, and each other.<sup>1</sup>

Nestled in the Alps and overlooking the shores of beautiful Lake Maggiore, Monte Verità was home to an intentional community of nonconforming artists and writers and the site of a Tolstoy inspired, anarchistic, vegetarian, and alternative health sanitarium (for histories of Monte Verità see Bollmann 2017; Landmann 1930; Green 1986; Schwab 2003; Noschis 2011; Kuiper 2013). The colony was established by Henry Oedenkoven and Ida Hofmann, together with Lotte Hattemer, Karl and Gustav “Gusto” Gräser, and several others. Henri Oedenkoven was the son of an industrialist and, therefore, often functioned as a business or entrepreneurial leader. He was a Belgian in his twenties when he acquired the plot of land that became Monte Verità. His lover, a piano teacher from Germany named Ida, was eleven years older. The Oedenkovens developed the community into a fully functioning cooperative with a homeopathy sanatorium and ultimately into a type of spiritual-seeker resort.

The sanatorium was conceived to combat the toxicity of modern life and was established on the grounds not long after the Monte Verità land was purchased. Open wood cabins and other facilities were constructed to offer the experience of immersion in nature to counter the debilitating effects of urban industrialization. In 1904 an Art Nouveau “Com-

munity House" was opened, providing a social meeting space, complete with electricity, running water, a vegetarian restaurant, a library, a game room, and a terrace for nude sunbathing. The colony modeled their orientation to politics, nature, love, and health on the writings of Tolstoy, who was known as the "Man of Truth." Tolstoy's pacifist, abstinent, anarchistic, and nature-loving personal religion served as an inspiration, especially in regard to labor. For Tolstoy, manual labor was the most natural form, and so it was for the community of Monte Verità. Collective ownership of land and combined manual labor were principles of utmost importance.

The new community was directed by "Truth and Freedom of Thought and Action" (Hofmann 1906, p. 3). In 1913, Henri Oedenkoven codified a "Statuten der individualistischen Cooperative von Monte Verità", detailing through 58 different clauses the beliefs and practices of the colony, everything from modes of exchange, use of resources, and gender equality to philosophies about nature and vegetarian diet. By 1916, *Mitglieder* (members) of the "Social—Vegetarisch—Anationale Gesellschaft" received an *Ausweis* (identification card) as proof of membership.

The second statute concerning the purpose (*Zweck*) of the colony makes it clear that cooperation and simplicity were central to Oedenkoven's vision of an ideal community, a stark contrast to the dog-eat-dog world of modern capitalism:

*2. The purpose of the Cooperative is to create settlements where there are better living conditions; where one can achieve greater prosperity with less work; where, through a simple life, without luxury, but with the maintenance of comfort and real progress, one is freed from the crushing burden of material labor under which society sighs today;*<sup>2</sup>

The ninth and tenth statutes dealing with women and children illustrate the colony's unusually progressive vision:

*9. Every married man who joins the Cooperative with his wife undertakes to grant her complete independence, in particular free disposal of the capital she has invested in the Cooperative and any income that may result from the Cooperation.*<sup>3</sup>

*10. In the spirit of the Cooperative, the child belongs to itself from birth. However, the Cooperative recognizes the mother's right and makes it her duty to care for and raise the child until it is legally of age. The mother can also transfer her rights to the child to someone else.*<sup>4</sup>

As these statutes demonstrate, Monte Verità participated in the Europe-wide upsurge in progressive reform movements dealing with everything from marriage reform to schemes to improve education, restore the environment, and create more efficient workplaces.

Mainstream newspapers, even some fellow anarchists, lampooned the colony and its inhabitants in print, referring to them as "turnip apostles" (Barlösius 1996, p. 94). Comments in local newspapers reveal the Oedenkovens firing back with their own responses. In 1907 they responded to an article in *La Meuse*, which they felt had discredited the community, defending the vegan diet and the practice of nudism within the colony, as well as the advising of women to "leave their corsets", as integral to the health regimes, and should not be seen as some type of decadence (Oedenkoven-Hofman 1907). Two years later, Henri Oedenkoven responded to another piece in *Le Figaro*, which had published "erroneous information" (*renseignements erronés*) concerning the colony of Monte Verità (Roven-Hofmann [sic] 1909). He clarified that "living in harmony with nature in no way means returning to the state of primitive nature" (*vivre en harmonie avec la nature ne veut nullement dire retourner à l'état de nature primitive*). Rather, the goal of the colony was to make use of the progressive elements of civilization while "observing the laws of nature for our health" (*observant les lois de la nature pour notre santé*). By ignoring "all the needs created by luxury" (*tous les besoins que créent le luxe*), which included overeating, smoking, and filling one's house with useless "artless trinkets" (*des mille horribles bibelots inutiles et sans art*), they could enter a state of simplicity and provide for their own needs, while still enjoying life in the afternoons after a day of manual labor. He concluded: "we claim that an organized life in this way gives us more health, more satisfaction and allows us to evolve

more quickly" (*Et nous prétendons qu'une vie organisée ainsi nous donne plus de santé, plus de satisfactions et nous permet d'évoluer plus rapidement*).

Ida Hofmann-Oedenkoven published a pamphlet in 1906 entitled *Wahrheit ohne Dichtung* (Truth without Poetry), in which she recounted the origins of Monte Verità as one of young, spiritual enthusiasts seeking a healthy, natural life away from Bourgeois insincerity and luxury consumerism: "Within the existing social organizations, which stifle every individual movement in people and force their strength and natural dispositions in the service of those in power, a free development of people striving after liberation is unthinkable" (Hofmann 1906, p. 3). Ida turned Monte Verità into a type of health center containing everything one needed to seek an alternative way of life, and she ran the colony as a for-profit resort, with Henri assisting in expanding the grounds. By her own account, she felt this was a necessary and effective strategy. The colony of Monte Verità was envisioned as a sacred space amid the natural elements—including the element of natural human labor and sociality—offering an alternative to an unhealthy modern existence.

In this dynamic environment, non-European religions (including hybridizations such as Theosophy and Anthroposophy), radical new expressions of political ideology, and alternative understandings of the human mind and how it worked (e.g., psychoanalysis)—came together and coexisted in the same cultural space. Traditional dogmatic religious beliefs were rejected wholly or replaced with occult and Asian religious teachings or radically re-interpreted to the point that they no longer resembled what had previously been taken as orthodox doctrines. Taoism was particularly important for the Monte Verità community and the surrounding environs. In 1907, Hesse came to Monte Verità and spent time living with Gusto Gräser, who was then staying in a nearby cave, and there he learned about Taoism and was inspired to travel to Asia (Mileck 1977, p. 45). Drawing on the work of German Protestant theologians and Indologists Richard Wilhelm and Julius Grill, who had published commentaries on Taoism ideas and eventually translations, Gräser was able to write his own idiosyncratic version of the Tao te Ching entitled *Tao. Das heilende Geheimnis* (Gräser 1979).<sup>5</sup> Access to such ideas enabled a theory and praxis of esotericism to exist on the mountain through a reimagining of social and religious life, which attracted hundreds of important thinkers and artists, including Mary Wigman, Isadora Duncan, Else Lasker-Schüler, Wassily Kandinsky, Hans Arp, Stefan George, Hugo Ball, among many others.

Through an emphasis on the connection with nature, maintaining a simple vegetarian diet, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, nudity, and the transgressing of marriage and partnership norms, Monte Verità was experienced as a counter-image to the profane activities of the cities. Inhabitants of and visitors to the colony entered into "free" marriages that rejected the ideals of monogamy, wore simple "reform" clothing, especially loose-fitting pieces without corsets for women, and bathed nude in direct sunlight for health benefits. The function of this heterotopic space was, therefore, something like a utopic dream, articulated by its founders and lived out by the inhabitants, a socialist experiment to provide the perfect type of cooperative, and, most importantly, a non-capitalist society. In Foucauldian terms, it represented an in-between space that mirrored the urban centers and revealed to inhabitants and visitors their own need for healing, provided to them by the combination of nature and heterotopic space.

#### 4. Bad Reichenhall

Like Monte Verità, the healing site and the lavish gardens that covered the grounds in Bad Reichenhall, Germany, represented an antidote to the unhealthy hustle and bustle of modern industrialization and Western life. Up until the 19th century, Reichenhall was a mostly isolated town in the Alps between Austria and Bavaria known for the extensive salt mining activities that had taken place since the time of the Celts (Kurlansky 2003, pp. 52–60). This changed as the tourism and travel industries developed, making the mountainous frontiers of Central Europe more accessible to the bourgeoisie and the working class (on histories of Bad Reichenhall see Rosenbaum 2014; Lang 2009; Vogel 1971; Pfisterer 1988; Hofmann 1999).

A further element of this change was the popularization and medical legitimation of “climatic therapy” (*Klimatherapie*), nature cures, and “Balneology” (natural spring water cures) by medical doctors, all of which were available to guests and prescribed by on-site physicians at Bad Reichenhall (Frank 2012, p. 205; Lindsay 1887). The little spa town was so popular prior to the outbreak of the First World War that it drew upwards of 10,000 guests per tourist season (Rosenbaum 2014, p. 30).

Since the end of the 18th century, saltwater had been used across Europe as a medical treatment for curing various ailments, including the use of specially designed saline baths. (Lang 2009, p. 576). Additionally, the use of climatic therapy gained in popularity following the success of the German doctor Alexander Spengler (1827–1901), who emigrated to Switzerland and subsequently transformed the sleepy little town of Davos into a success story of climatic therapy by treating and healing his patients of respiratory illness (Ferdmann 1990; Frank 2012, pp. 186–90; Bruck 2004). Spengler had, in fact, invented the idea of *Klimatherapie* in Davos in the 1860–70s, opening the first sanatorium *Kuranstalt Spengler-Holsboer* in 1867/8. He became a doctor in the small village and helped to transform it into a *Klimatherapie Ort* (a climatic health resort), convinced that the fresh mountain air and natural environment would not only cure his patients but protect them against various forms of respiratory illness such as tuberculosis (Bernard 1978, p. 113; Spengler 1869).

Bad Reichenhall was also identified as such a “healing space” (*Kurort*), and as the popularity of *Klimatherapie* grew, it gained the reputation of a *Klimatherapie Ort* (Alexander 1911). The Alps were becoming known now not only for their mining activities but as places of restorative mental, physical, and spiritual healing. Fears over polluted versus clean air within the context of increased urbanization sent many 19th century middle-class Europeans rushing to such places in the Alps in search of relief and revitalization (Mikoletzky 1991, p. 394). These developments were made possible due to massive transformations of the natural landscape with the construction of new railways throughout the mountainous heights (e.g., the Semmering railway) (Frank 2012, pp. 193–96; Schivelbusch 2014).

According to Alison Frank, three reasons can account for the draw of central Europeans to the Alps during the second half of the 19th century: They went “in search of a cure from disease (most commonly tuberculosis, but also asthma, other chronic respiratory ailments, heart problems, obesity, syphilis, and a wide assortment of other ills); an escape from the stultifying air of bustling cities; or a fresh environment in which to reinvent themselves” (Frank 2012, p. 200).

Other scholars have shown that at this time, the burning of coal and the lamentable lack of adequate sanitation or crowded and inadequately ventilated housing of the cities were increasingly recognized as major sources of urban pollution. Prior to this, the main sources of pollution were typically associated with human and organic waste products (Thorsheim 2006, p. 195; Barnes 2006). People, especially doctors, scientists, and civil engineers, began to recognize that the air in urban, industrial centers was itself a source of pollutants and germs that caused disease and that the fresh air of the mountains and rural areas was far healthier. Air came to represent a special type of healing not available in the cities, as more and more “aircure towns” (*Luftkurorte*) and “climatic cure towns” (*klimatische Kurorte*) appeared, of which Bad Reichenhall was one of the most popular and successful until the First World War (Frank 2012; Rosenbaum 2014). The important point is that a particular location in nature (high in the previously unreachable mountains) and the specific qualities associated with that location (the naturally occurring elements) was transformed via tourism, medical literature, and technical achievements—but also (perhaps more importantly) by the experience of visitors—into a new sacred or heterotopic space, in which not only healing but a perceived separation from modernity became possible.

From the earliest human history, people have associated healing with springs, wells, and water, as the water washed away dirt and grim and thus symbolized rebirth and regeneration as in baptism. Bad Reichenhall had already been associated at least since the early modern period with this type of sacredness, as can be seen in this statement

from the Chancellor of Bad Reichenhall in 1661: “God created the woodlands for the saltwater spring so that the woodlands might continue eternally, like the spring. Men shall behave accordingly: do not cut down the old trees before the young ones have grown up” (Radkau 2005, p. 23). The aura surrounding Bad Reichenhall (then only Reichenhall) was significantly increased in 1846 when the Royal Saxon tax inspector Ernst Rinck opened the *Kuranstalt Axelmannstein* spa hotel in connection with local pharmacist Matthias Mack. Mack had become the mayor of Bad Reichenhall and was intrigued by the therapeutic properties of saltwater, whey, and other herbal cures, and based on his belief in the power of natural substances to cure disease, he opened his local pharmacy (Rosenbaum 2014, p. 35; Lang 2009, pp. 580–82).

Following this, the spa gardens were laid out in 1868 by the royal Bavarian court gardener Carl von Effner, who designed them to resemble the natural landscape as opposed to a sculpted garden. Visitors could relax in the salt baths as well as stroll through the healing gardens and hike around in the surrounding landscape. More healing facilities followed for drinking whey as well as inhalation and respiration rooms (Rosenbaum 2014, p. 37). Thus, from the beginning, Bad Reichenhall was associated with the healing properties of salt, water, mountain air, and forest trees. Together Rinck and Mack succeeded in establishing Bad Reichenhall as a major international healing site and modern sacred space in which disenchanting “moderns” could be re-enchanting, attracting countless tourists and patients.

Adam Rosenbaum has argued that the primary cause of this exponential success was due to the tourist industry and its “tourist propaganda”, which touted nature as a cure in order to draw people to Bad Reichenhall (Rosenbaum 2014). While this may be true, it is equally, if not more, important to remember the role that doctors and modern medicine played in this process. “Climatic therapy” was, at that time, accepted as a legitimate medical science that could and apparently did prevent and cure various forms of illness, the best example being tuberculosis (Packard 1911; Frank 2012, p. 205).

Rosenbaum himself acknowledges this and reports that the number of physicians in residence in Bad Reichenhall increased at the turn of the 19th century, and numerous illnesses, especially respiratory disorders such as chronic pneumonia, emphysema, and asthma, were also apparently successfully treated in connection with these cures (Rosenbaum 2014, pp. 37–38; see also Lang 2009, pp. 596–99). Gynecological issues were additionally recorded as successfully treated (Fuhs 1992, p. 249). This is crucial for understanding Bad Reichenhall as a heterotopia or modern sacred space. These types of spaces, since antiquity, have been associated with—and purportedly manifested—nature-related forms of holistic healing and separation from the “profane” sphere. The sense of separation helped facilitate an experience of spiritual connection to the eternal or divine (Michaëlidēs and Androutsos 2014; Gesler 2003).

In 1899, a neo-baroque royal addition to the spa house was constructed by Max Littmann, which opened to the guests in 1900 (Kantsperger 1990, pp. 61–69; Fühl 1984, p. 84). In the concert hall, concerts could be held in order to treat the visitors with the healing powers of music, another popular “cure” offered at many spas and sanatoriums (Bradley 2010). However, the most impressive feature setting Bad Reichenhall apart from other “climatic cure towns” was the *Gradierhaus* (Graduation House), a 170-m structure built in Art Nouveau style in 1909 by the architect Eugen Drollinger. An impressive edifice designed to harness the elements of gravity, the saltwater from Bad Reichenhall’s saline springs, and the clean mountain air, the *Gradierhaus* created an open-air inhalation system that saturated the atmosphere with briny saline particles and “ozone rich” air, simulating the health-giving climatic conditions of the seaside.

The technology of the “graduation house” had been used since the 16th century, first with stacks of straw, for the process of concentrating unsaturated or low-grade brine through tightly stacked horizontal layers of blackthorn branches (“thorn-stone” [*Dornstein*]); these were brought to Bad Reichenhall from Poland. Treating the spring water in this way raised the salt content of the brine by accelerating evaporation. The procedure involves



pumping the spring water up into the brine troughs at the top of the graduation house, where it trickles down the sides and through the blackthorn branches, collecting in the troughs at the bottom and then pumped back up to the upper troughs again (Piasecki 1998, p. 90). The *Gradierhaus* of Bad Reichenhall contained two graded expanses, one on either side, so that the water could trickle down on the side facing the wind, which carried the salt particles into the air. The *Luftbahn* running along either side was built so visitors could walk at a leisurely pace while inhaling the salt- and movement-enlivened air.

Such a creation was imagined as a corrective to the toxic smoke and pollution generated by urban life and the fast-paced energy of the cities. This heterotopic space thus also represented the idealistic dream of a utopic lifestyle, one that was in harmony with nature, the elements, and the needs of the human body, which required the kind of stimulation induced by brisk walks through the cold alpine air and the salt baths arising from natural mineral springs. These were the basic elements that constituted the so-called “Kneipp Cure”, based on the ideas about the benefits of pure air hydrotherapy championed by the Roman Catholic priest Sebastian Kneipp.

In connection with the natural gardens, the live concerts in the main building, and brisk strolls through the *Luftbahn*, the sanatorium at Bad Reichenhall offered its visitors an encounter with the healing forces of the natural elements. As a 1904 Spa Association brochure touted: “One must not remain in his or her room in Reichenhall; out into God’s magnificent and beautiful nature!” (Rosenbaum 2014, p. 44). A stay at this healing site, especially when one had been diagnosed with an ailment such as neurosis—that most modern of illnesses—was thought to restore equilibrium and a state of resiliency, in which the modern industrial world, the space of the profane, could be entered again and endured. To this day, the healing site at Bad Reichenhall is described in terms of *Stressabbau* or literally an “unbuilding” of stress, a space outside of the ordinary where the tension and strain of the modern profane world could be alleviated.

## 5. Conclusions

Foucault’s notion of heterotopic space serves here as a useful lens through which to revisit the idea of the “new” or “modern” sacred spaces, which were constructed across Europe at the turn of the 20th century. Notions of “sacredness” and “sacred space” are themselves problematic. These ideas were popularized in the context of Religious Studies by scholars such as Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), Gerard van der Leeuw (1890–1950), and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). Over the course of the 20th century, the concept of “sacred space” was mostly abandoned as scholars criticized its essentialism and argued that the sacred as a category failed to account for cultural and historical conditions. With its binary couplet, the “profane”, the idea of the sacred was thought to represent an essentialist position and to introduce a hierarchy into the theorization of space. Foucault’s reformulation of sacred space as a heterotopia allows for the “specialness” of certain locations to be recast in a new light. For the purposes of this essay, a sacred space is related not only to its close association with nature and healing—as opposed to being connected to the urban and illness—but also with the familiar trope that mountains represent sacredness and are, because of their immensity, closer to the divine. Rudolph Otto’s notion of sacredness was rooted in the idea that the holy inspired terror and awe. This was anticipated by Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Mountains were just the kind of places that inspired awe and suggested sacredness, as can be seen in the romantic mountain landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich, and pilgrims have frequented such places from time immemorial (see Nicolson 1959).

The two examples provided, Monte Verità and the healing site of Bad Reichenhall, acted as spaces outside the profane modern world, where the mental and physical traumas of urbanization, industrialization, and the sheer acceleration of time that marked modernity could be remedied and addressed. The experiences that the visitors had in these enchanted sites confirmed for them, as in a mirror, that such traumas belonged to *that other space*, the urban environments and modern cities. Traveling to a heterotopic place, therefore, represented

a transition to an alternate reality, what the anthropologist Turner (1967) referred to with his concept of “liminality”, which sought to explain how individuals could move from one reality to another, superior reality. To do this, individuals embarked on a symbolic or real journey of pilgrimage that led them away from their normal, mundane lives across a threshold (limen) into a sacred space. The type of spiritual tourism described above recalls this practice of pilgrimage, a modern reimagining of ancient tales about journeys to enchanted spaces—fountains, streams, lakes, woods, mountains, groves, cliffs, and caves—where daring individuals could die to their old selves and be refreshed, reinvigorated, renewed, and reborn.

A visit to such a sacred space could perform a type of healing, granting the strength and resiliency to face the challenges that accompanied the emergence of modern life. In this context, the idea of a modern heterotopia or sacred space is strongly connected to a belief that healing—whether individual or communal—could transpire as part of a journey to and/or a stay at such a sacred space. While Monte Verità and Bad Reichenhall represent two of the most popular locations at the beginning of the 20th century, they are by no means the only examples. Foucault’s heterotopia as a modern sacred space could therefore be expanded to consider other modern sites that served this same function. Not only would this tell us more about how ancient concepts and practices have been reimagined, but more importantly, it would show us how moderns coped with the traumatic social, cultural, and technological changes they lived through.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel famously argued that Metropolitan life paradoxically isolated people, making them insensitive to others in order to maintain (Simmel 2002).
- <sup>2</sup> As posted in the Casa Anatta Museum, Monte Verità: “Der Zweck der Cooperative ist Ansiedlungen zu bilden, wo bessere Existenzbedingungen sind; wo man mit weniger Arbeit grösseren Wohlstand erlangt; wo man durch ein einfaches Leben, ohne Luxus, aber mit Beibehaltung des Comforts und wirklichen Fortschritts befreit wird von der erdrückenden Last materieller Arbeit, unter welcher die Gesellschaft heute seufzt”.
- <sup>3</sup> “Jeder verheiratete Mann, welcher mit seiner Frau in die Cooperative eintritt, verpflichtet sich, ihr völlige Unabhängigkeit einzuräumen, insbesondere freie Verfügung über das von ihr in der Cooperative angelegte Kapital und über aus der Cooperation eventuell sich ergebende Einkünfte”.
- <sup>4</sup> “Im Sinne der Cooperative gehört das Kind von seiner Geburt an sich selbst. Die Cooperative erkennt jedoch der Mutter das Recht zu und macht es ihr zur Pflicht, das Kind zu pflegen und zu erziehen bis es dem Gesetze nach mündig ist. Die Mutter kann ihr Recht auf das Kind auch jemand anderm übertragen”.
- <sup>5</sup> Martin Buber had also translated the parables of Chuang Tse into German in 1910 (Eber 1994).

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