Greening the City: From allotment colony to ecology park in the novels of Paul Gurk and Günter Seuren

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1. Green utopias, urban ecology and visions of the simple life in the city

Literary and artistic depictions and constructions of the 'simple life', a way of living combining individual self-realisation with harmonious social relations, within the context of a personally rewarding but simultaneously ethically grounded and empathetic interaction with animals and the natural environment, have been a central subject for ecocritical consideration. 'Simple life' texts participate in a pastoral tradition which extends back over two thousand years in Western culture, and are rooted in Biblical depictions of paradise on the one hand, and Greek celebrations of a temporally distant Golden Age or a geographically remote Arcadia on the other. Pastoral is one of the principal ecocritical 'tropes' defined by Greg Garrard in terms of content as "pre-existing ways of imagining the place of humans in nature" and "key structuring metaphors", and in formal terms as extended rhetorical and narrative strategies gathering together "permutations of creative imagination: metaphor, genre, narrative, image" (2004: 2, 7 and 14).

Where they are not mentioned explicitly, the trials and tribulations of the author or his contemporaries are always implicitly present as a background in envisionings of the simple life. The pastoral idyll is a powerful wish-construction: it is often nostalgically projected backwards in time, into the author's childhood or a more remote past, and almost inevitably located in idealised rural surroundings which contrast sharply with contemporary urban life. However, the more complex pastoral texts have always gone beyond mere escapism: Leo Marx and Raymond Williams locate the prime achievement of pastoral in its negotiation between the Arcadian ideals of a life of healthy simplicity and innocent sensual pleasure, and the realities of

political and social life in Western society under the impact of modernisation and industrialisation (see Marx 1964, Williams 1973 and Gifford 1999).

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854) was one of the first books to extend and revitalise the traditional pastoral narrative of retreat from the corrupt and frenetic city to the calm and innocence of the countryside by giving it a proto-ecological dimension. Thoreau's critique of the machine age and anthropocentrism is echoed in a number of late nineteenth-century utopian novels. For example, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) satirised Victorian faith in the ability of science and technology to produce a more egalitarian society and a better world and broke with the technological optimism of previous utopias such as Étienne Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie* (1842). *News from Nowhere* (1890), written by the pioneer ecosocialist William Morris in response to Edward Bellamy's optimistic American bestseller *Looking Backward 2000 – 1887*, was, however, the first major ecologically inspired work to focus on an alternative vision of the city. Writing at a time when the growth of London and the living conditions of the urban poor were of increasing concern, Morris sought to provide a model for the solution of contemporary social problems that went beyond purely rural versions of the good or simple life. His protagonist wakes up in the year 2102 in the regenerated capital of a now deindustrialised nation. Following the overthrow of capitalism and the implementation of a programme known as "The Clearing of Misery", the old slums have been replaced by comfortable houses with ample gardens and surrounding green space. The influence of Morris's ideas may be traced not only in the writings of proponents of the Garden City idea, but also those of town planners such as Lewis Mumford. Many of those engaged in the ecological redesigning of cities in the late twentieth century have shared his hopes and visions. Despite the classic status of Morris's book, in which Kensington is re-wooded, blackbirds sing again in Picadilly, and salmon abound in the Thames, the greening of the city was, however, to remain a marginal literary theme.

Between 1950 and 1990, the proportion of the population in the industrialised countries living in urban areas rose from 50 to 80 percent, the geographer, ecologist and former Head of Environment for the Greater London Authority, David Goode has noted (Gordon 1990: 2). It is estimated

that by 2025 a quarter of the world population will live in cities of over one million. While cities have been the cradle of civilisation, epitomise modernity, and in many respects represent the pinnacle of human creative achievement, life in them is not merely crowded and anonymous, but also often squalid, unhealthy and dangerous. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the city has become a site of unprecedented alienation between humankind and the natural world. “It seems”, Goode writes,

> that urbanites are fast becoming an egocentric species thriving on human culture alone. People are not only unaware of their natural roots but are becoming divorced from all aspects of the natural world upon which they ultimately depend. And, for those who are aware, it may seem impossible for individuals to do anything about it, caught as they are in the intricate web of the modern city. (ibid. 2-3)

The consequences of this alienation of the population of cities from nature, and ways of retaining contact with the natural basis of life, acknowledging our own embodiment and living sensually and aesthetically rich lives in a constructed environment, should be of central importance for ecocritics today. However, the cultural dimension of urban ecology has until recently been a neglected subject, as Michael Bennett and David Teague comment in the introduction to their book *The Nature of Cities* (1999: 3-14). In America in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, there was little contact between mainstream environmentalists, whose priorities lay in the preservation of wilderness and wildlife, water quality control and land use planning, and social justice activists, for whom the environmental issues that affected urban residents (sanitation, pest control, noise pollution and malnutrition) were of greater importance, not to mention the conditions underpinning these hazards, such as cuts in public services and inequities in public housing policy.[1] Despite the publication of groundbreaking sociological and philosophical studies of urban ecology, ecologically oriented literary critics have tended to perpetuate the negative view of the city as sick, ecocidal and life-denying which underlay Lewis Mumford’s books *The Culture of Cities* (1938) and *The City in History* (1961). The eighties saw a shift in public attitudes towards the city throughout the Western world, a rediscovery of the benefits of city-centre urbanism (sociability, walkability, cosmopolitanism, spontaneity and diversity), and an identification of the placeless sprawl of the suburbs (by the intelligensia, if not

the public in general) as a cultural wasteland and the true enemy of environmentally friendly living. Yet the ecocritical movement, because of its initial focus on nature writing and pastoralism, has only gradually begun to survey the terrain of urban environments, and to adopt and adapt an environmental perspective to the analysis of urban life.[2]

This pattern in American literary scholarship is replicated in studies of German literature. Literary representations of the city, and of Berlin in particular, whose rapid industrialisation, relative lack of civic identity and reputation for provisionality pioneered the experiences of economic modernisation, social differentiation and organisational rationalisation in the German-speaking world, have attracted considerable attention (see Enklaar-Lagendijk and Ester 2000, Siebenhaar 1992, Scherpe 1988, Rölleke 1988, Kähler 1986 and Klotz 1969). However, ecological considerations have rarely been addressed explicitly. Silvio Vietta writes for instance of the dual face of the city as representative site of modernity and of misery, homelessness, fear and metaphysical despair his book *Die literarische Moderne* (1992: 273-318, especially pp. 280f.), but does not discuss ecological issues as such.

Conversely, studies focused on nature and environment have tended to ignore the city. Jost Hermand's *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland* (1991a) is the principal exception. In this ground-breaking overview of visions of the simple life in the German-speaking world, Hermand drew attention to a neglected tradition of utopian thought, expressed principally in the treatises, pamphlets and speeches of politicians, philosophers and scientists, but also reflected in literary essays and novels. His principal concern was with "ernstzunehmende Sozialutopien", i.e. visions of community which reconciled an aspiration to emancipation and self-realisation with consideration for nature and recognition of the need to integrate in its rhythms (p. 19). Such visions involve voluntary self-limitation and collective responsibility alongside varying degrees of imposed restriction of individual freedom and limits to material consumption, in order to husband natural resources and reintegrate humankind into the *oikos* or 'home' of the natural environment.

The point at which urban ecology features most significantly in Hermand's book is in his account of the practical initiatives in urban reform at the turn of the twentieth century, though he also touches on proto-ecological

visions of the urban environment at the time of the French Revolution, and the laying out of parks in German cities from the eighteen-twenties on. *Grüne Utopien* also contains a brief discussion of 'Netzwerk', a scheme associated with the 'LETS' (Local Exchange Trading Systems) concept of barter and cash-free exchange of services, and the 'Projekt kooperativer Lebensgemeinschaften' of a student group in West Berlin in the second half of the nineteen-seventies.[3] Ebenezer Howard's influential book on garden cities, *To-Morrow. A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898) prompted Bernhard and Paul Kampffmeyer, Heinrich and Julius Hart, Wilhelm Bölsche, Gustav Landauer and others to found the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft in 1902, and provided the impetus for housing projects in Dresden (Hellerau) and Essen. Heinrich Hart, first President of the Association, saw the country as retrograde, conservative and divorced from cultural and technological progress, while the city was conflict-ridden and feverish, its cultural and technological advantage too dearly paid for by the suffering of generations. Neither was, however, dispensable, and a fusion of their respective positive attributes essential:

> Die Städte sind notwendig wegen der kulturellen Aufgaben der Menschheit, die nur dort, wo ein reges geistiges wie wirtschaftliches Miteinanderleben und -streben möglich ist, gelöst werden können. Andererseits bedarf der Mensch der dauernden Berührung mit dem Mutterboden, mit der Natur, eines Lebens in reiner Luft und hellem Licht, wenn er nicht verkümmern und hinsiechen soll. Die Vorteile von Großstadt und Land müssen verbunden sein, um jedem einzelnen ein natur- und vernunftgemäßes Leben, der Gesamtheit aber eine Kultur von innerer Kraft und möglichst schrankenloser Dauer zu sichern.[4]

Garden City initiatives, which were based on private ownership, and remained a largely middle-class phenomenon, were complemented by the founding of a series of colonies, most of which were rural, but some urban. Among the best known were the Obstbaumkolonie Eden and the Neue Gemeinschaft, both on the outskirts of Berlin, and the artists' colony Monte Verità, located in warmer climes on the shores of Lago Maggiore. Ulrich Linse has collected key documents from this *Siedlungsbewegung*, which represented a revolt of the intelligentsia against urbanisation and the mass society, in the volume *Zurück, o Mensch, zur Mutter Erde* (1983). The urban and rural colonies founded between 1890 and 1933 harboured in the eyes of their proponents the potential for social and political regeneration, and shared, at least in the initial

stages, ownership of the land and the means of production. However, few lasted more than a matter of years, and as a social experiment they reflected an illusory search for simple solutions to the painfully experienced complexity of economic circumstances.[5]

Hermand's discussion of the city is significant for its reversal of the polarities of previous academic discourse, which had been highly criticial of the longstanding cultural tradition in Germany vilifying the city and idealising the country. Klaus Bergmann's landmark study of Agrarian Romanticism and Anti-Urbanism in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century (Bergmann 1970), for instance, presented an overwhelmingly negative account of the perspective on the city by cultural critics of the period. Following in the footsteps of Fritz Stern and George Mosse, Bergmann identified the praise of country life and the denigration of the metropolis as distortions of reality whose baneful influence played a part in the rise of National Socialism. Describing his book as "a contribution to modern research into prejudice" (see pp. 361-6), he interpreted anxious opposition to the city, a response to the wave of urbanisation unleashed by the industrial expansion of the *Gründerjahre*, as a key dimension of cultural pessimism and anti-modernism in late nineteenth-century Germany. Notwithstanding his careful distinctions and balanced presentation of politically ambivalent figures such as Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, Friedrich Lienhard, Heinrich Sohnrey and the young Paul Schultze-Naumburg, Bergmann's overall narrative is one of nineteenth-century Agrarian Romanticism leading directly to Blood and Soil ideology. Ideas first formulated by Riehl and members of the *Heimatkunst*- and *Heimatschutzbewegung* were taken up by Langbehn and Spengler, and found their logical conclusion in works such as the NS-ideologue Hans Günther's *Verstädterung – Ihre Gefahren für Volk und Staat vom Standpunkte der Lebensforschung und der Gesellschaftswissenschaft* (1934).

Bergmann acknowledged the presence of ideas on architecture, design and landscape conservation "which may be described as truly modern" (p. 133) and elements of "a new conception of art and environment" (p. 134) in the *Heimatschutz* and Life Reform Movements. He recognised that the Garden City Movement, the principal theoretical and practical initiative in turn-

of-the-century Germany, was driven by sober observation of the human and social impact of the loss of the familiar environment, way of life, traditions and values of the tens of thousands migrating from the countryside to the city (pp. 141-3). However, his main concern remained with what he saw as the unfortunate misconception of the city as “unnatural” and “overcivilised”, as a morally pernicious place of exploitative labour, social misery and juvenile vice, sapping the physical and intellectual energies of the people. Not only Hermand, but also subsequent social and cultural historians such as Linse, Dominick and Rollins have traced a more sympathetic picture of turn-of-the-century conservative critiques of modernisation, arguing that some of the ideas and activities of the rural and urban colonies, and some of the activities of the *Bund Heimatschutz*, anticipated the aims of the environmental movement (Linse 1983 and 1986, Dominick 1992, Rollins 1997).

Friedrich Sengle had already published a brief but admirably balanced article in 1963 on the symbiosis between the idealisation of country life and the vilification of the city in German literature. ‘Wunschbild Land und Schreckbild Stadt’ focused on the ‘myth’ at the heart of the literary treatment of the city/country divide in Germany. Sketching its historical development from Baroque poetry and drama through eighteenth-century idylls and early nineteenth-century village stories to the novels of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, Sengle identified aspects of the cultural representation of city and country which were and are of continuing relevance. Even ‘realistic’ writing on the countryside (*Bauerndichtung*) has seldom been a medium of self-expression for people who lived in the country, he noted. Largely the product of authors themselves situated at a remove from country life, the literature of the urban-rural divide introduced its urban middle-class readership to a form of country life whose exoticism was emphasised through folkloristic detail.

From Baroque to Blood and Soil, writers’ distance from their rural subject matter facilitated a falsifying idealisation of the natural, the original, and elementary man, and a stylisation of country life as a conscious choice of simplicity. Piety, marital fidelity, innocence and health in the country were contrasted with artificial courtly ceremonial and profligate urban decadence. Though not all of this writing is backward-looking, and an emancipatory

potential is visible in the praise of the ‘natural’ in the Enlightenment, where Arcadian dreams and a fascination with the naïve (the *Naturvolk*) were associated with conceptions of natural justice, natural religion and natural morality, the thrust of most of the nineteenth-century village tales and novels (for instance those of Jeremias Gotthelf) was reactionary. Visions of a rural counter-offensive against the sprawling, satanic city were taken up again in the late nineteenth-century *Heimatroman*, where the metropolis was portrayed as a sewer, suppurating boil, or monster. It is the (anarchically classless) site of seduction and doom, the other of the heroic (and usually authoritarian) rural idyll.

Sober, realistic depictions of the metropolis began late in German literature, according to Sengle, with Heine’s and Börne’s writing on Paris. Throughout the nineteenth century the negative image of urban modernity predominated, in a configuration already present in Goethe, Tieck, Eichendorff and von Arnim, who used the natural beauty and individual autonomy in country estates as a foil for the alienation, social misery and political tensions accompanying urbanisation and industrialisation. The depiction of the city in the writing of the Naturalists was deeply ambivalent: they drew attention to urban misery, but at the same time celebrated cities as second nature and cosmic phenomena, imaging them as seas of stone or great beasts. The Expressionists inherited some of this enthusiasm for the city, and used Modernist techniques of poetic montage to convey the intoxication of the individual through the intensity of the experience of life in the metropolis. However, the general profile of the city was overwhelmingly negative. It featured as a sinful Babel, Sodom or Nineveh, or, for instance in Georg Heym’s apocalyptic poem ‘Der Gott der Stadt’, as Baal, a pagan deity representing the atavistic, self-destructive element in modern civilisation. Kafka, who wrote on the fringe of Expressionism, provided an image of the soulless bureaucracy and alienation of modern urban society in *Das Schloß* (1926) whose influence is traceable in many later city novels.

After the Second World War, Sengle argues, Romantic anti-urbanism and distrust in modern civilisation continued, but were countered by the snobbish anti-provincialism of a group of city novelists. We need to go beyond such polarisation and myth-making, which has been a barrier to a rational and

moral approach to life, towards representations of social reality in which the interaction between city and country is foregrounded and their interdependence reflected. The quest for literary examples of such "extended urbanity" leads Sengle to Stifter's *Nachsommer* (1857), Keller's *Grüner Heinrich* (1854) and *Martin Salander* (1886), and the poetry of Hölderlin and Arno Holz, but above all to Fontane's *Der Stechlin* (1898), and more recent works such as Heimito von Doderer's *Strudlhofstiege* (1951) and *Die Dämonen* (1956).

The idealisation of the country and the demonisation of the city which Sengle identifies as a constant in German prose fiction have, he argues, played a not insignificant part in the crisis of cultural modernity and the political catastrophes which visited Germany in the first half of the twentieth century: "Much more dangerous than obnoxious realities are false, defeatist conceptions of reality, and literature's responsibility for these should not be underestimated" (Sengle 1963: 631). In the nineteen-sixties, he writes optimistically, prosperity, broadcasting and increased mobility are eroding the divide between city and country. What modern Germany must and can hope for is a literature avoiding the extremes of provincial traditionalism and experimental urban literature, and facing up to its responsibility for shaping public attitudes. I will attempt to show in the following that despite this unhelpful tradition of polarisation between city and country (which, as we know from Raymond Williams, is equally prominent in English literature), and the generalisation, abstraction and simplification of complex issues which characterised turn-of-the-century German literature in particular, modern German writers have been capable of engaging constructively with the problems of urban ecology in their reflections on the city and visions of the simple life.[6]

Friedrich Wolf's play *Der Unbedingte* (Wolf 1960, I: 115-64), one of many forgotten examples of proto-Green thinking discussed briefly by Jost Hermand, exemplifies both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Expressionists' perspective on nature in its vision of radical transformation of the modern city. Written, like Kaiser's *Gas* plays, at the end of the First World War, it resembles them in its stark symbolic expression of both despair and hope, its sweeping critique of modern civilisation and its scepticism regarding

contemporary social reform initiatives. Wolf's protagonist, a young poet living in a Berlin garret, is driven by a vision of return to a primeval form of existence, in which humanity "re-engages umbilically with the Earth" (p. 120). All personal possessions are to be renounced, and all buildings demolished, returning the population to a life as cave-dwellers:

Wir müssen der Erde näher kommen! *Leise*. Wenn ich hier lag… durch vierfach Mauerwerk von ihr getrennt… von Möbeln, Kleidern, Steinen bewacht… erdrosselt; und doch… kitzelnder Fingerspitzen Ziehen… fließende Strähne… Quelle unter dir – *schlägt die Mauer* – Götze! *Wild*. Hinab! (p. 122)

In his efforts to rid humanity of the "dismembering machine" of modern civilisation (p. 132), he attempts to lead the exploited urban proletarians back to the "naked earth" (p. 123), where they can become "more healthy, purer, more absolute" (p. 130). Just as childhood memories of meadows and countryside cannot be suppressed for long in the individual mind, green fields and grazing cattle will one day reappear where the streets and houses of Berlin now stand:

Seht, die Erde ist das einzige Gut, das man nicht fälschen noch knechten kann. Ihr könnt Berlin asphaltieren, daß kein Grashalm mehr wächst… doch über dem Potsdamer Platz – was sind tausend Jahre – werden wieder Stiere äsen! Ihr könnt den Zeitgenossen in Glashallen und auf Stahlplatten züchten… doch plötzlich erwacht die Erinnerung an Land… Wiese… Kindheit... (p. 133)

His quixotic struggle against avaricious land speculators and heartless engineers ends in failure, not least because of the objective material needs of the people. The final act of the play is set in an "Earth Spa": the poet, whose missionary zeal to reform society has fallen on deaf ears, attends to a group of clients immersed in soil up to their necks as a health treatment. Throwing off his disguise, he launches into a tirade against the modern world, in which the Earth has been "tested by experts", "cleaned up" and "sterilised", and turns one last time to the proletariat for support:

Ihr aber, Brüder, ihr spürt's, wie diese Erde ein Ganzes ist, ein Lebewesen, keine Mineraliensammlung, kein Retortenprodukt, ein Lebewesen, das stirbt, wenn man auch nur einen Teil in ihm zerstört! (p. 156)

Burying himself in a mine shaft, he triumphs in death. For the play ends with his martyred body, displayed, like the *Kassierer* in Kaiser's *Von morgens bis*

mitternachts (written 1912, published 1916), as a Christ-like figure on the cross. This triggers a transformation of public consciousness, and galvanises the people into revolt. Despite the poet's naivety and grotesque excesses, he is thus vindicated.

As the title of *Der Unbedingte* indicates, it is a play consciously taking dissatisfaction with the artificiality of modernity to the extreme, and coupling the longing for return to a simpler, organic way of life with a tragic world view. On a more practical plane, if the rift between mankind and nature is to be healed, "new initiatives are required in the way we plan, design, and manage cities", in the words of David Goode. "We need to consider ways in which people can relate more closely to nature in cities either by protecting the surviving vestiges of the natural world, or by creating completely new opportunities for nature to exist within the urban setting." (Gordon 1990: 3). The first of the two texts looked at in detail in this chapter, Paul Gurk's novel *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee* (1949), corresponds to the first of these options, inasmuch as it depicts the impact on the people living in an allotment colony on the northern edge of Berlin when their homes are demolished to make way for new urban development. The second, Günter Seuren's *Die Krötenküsser* (2000), which describes the conflicts which arise when a group of volunteers create an ecology park on a wasteland site in the north-east of Munich, relates to Goode's second option. First, however, it may be helpful to reflect more generally on the function of green spaces in the city, and on the cultural significance of allotment gardens in particular, and to give a brief indication of their literary representation in the works of Raabe, Fallada and Plenzdorf.

2. Allotments and other green spaces in the city, and their literary representation

Green urban spaces are recognised as fulfilling environmental purposes ranging from providing wildlife habitats to impounding storm water. Vegetation (particularly trees) reduces climatic extremes by moderating wind turbulence and temperatures, countering aridity, filtering and metabolising pollutants, reducing noise and oxygenating the atmosphere. A second category of benefits relates to food production: allotments played an important role in providing fresh vegetables in many European cities during the Second World

War, and they continue to serve this function in some parts of the world today. The first function of green urban spaces in European countries which is likely to come to mind is, however, as places for recreational activities for individuals and the local community. The resurgence of interest which has led to the greening of numerous tracts of urban wasteland since the nineteen-seventies, Goode writes, has been linked with "a very strong need for green" in our lives:

> It may be a very deep emotion: the need for something green and wild or a place to go for sanctuary or solitude – a place to experience wilderness in the city. The need for such places is at the heart of the concept of a green city whether in the form of ecology parks, city farms, allotment gardens, or just neighbourhood wildspace. (Gordon 1990: 7)

Regeneration of social cohesion and the reinstatement of a sense of local pride have been important by-products of the many local initiatives greening European cities since the nineteen-sixties which are described in Gordon's book (see also Nicholson-Lord 1987).

Urban green spaces feature in literature as sites of otherness and wildness, as symbolic configurations of resistance to modernity and alternative cultural values. An early example may be found in Raabe's short novel *Pfisters Mühle*. Written 1883-4, this story is an eloquent expression of the author's discomfort in the face of the wave of industrialisation, urban growth and social change in the first decade after the founding of the Reich. It is typical of its time in its largely negative depiction of the city, and its romantic dream of the rural idyll, but unusual in the sophistication of the framing and self-awareness of the narrative. The text alternates and negotiates between Eberhard Pfister's nostalgic visions of the countryside as a fast-disappearing, harmonious social, cultural and biological sphere associated with the enchanted land of poetry on the one hand, and his consciousness of the inevitable onward march of modernity on the other, symbolised by industrialisation and the seemingly unstoppable expansion of the metropolis of Berlin. Associated with progress and the future, the city exercises a powerful fascination. Eberhard describes its challenging presence in the landscape of his childhood:

> Wiesen und Kornfelder bis in die weiteste Ferne, hier und da zwischen Obstbäumen ein Kirchturm, einzelne Dörfer überall verstreut, eine vielfach

sich windende Landstraße mit Pappelbäumen eingefaßt, Feld- und Fahrwege nach allen Richtungen und dann und wann auch ein qualmender Fabrikschornstein. Aber die Hauptsache in dem Bilde waren doch, und dieses besonders für mich, die Dunstwolke und die Türme im Nordosten von unserm Dörfchen. Mit die Natur steht die Landjugend auf viel zu gutem Fuße, um sich viel aus ihr zu machen und sie als etwas anderes denn als ein Selbstverständliches zu nehmen; aber die Stadt – ja die Stadt, das ist etwas! Das ist ein Entgegenstehendes, welches auf die eine oder andere Weise überwunden werden muß und nie von seiner Geltung für das junge Gemüt etwas aufgibt. (Raabe 1980: 9)

Gone are the days of a happy give-and-take of city and country, when city-dwellers cherished the country not only as a source of food, but also as a place which met its need for conviviality. The mill in the country where Eberhard grew up (now primarily an inn, although flour is still milled there), which has now been sold, and will be demolished to make way for a factory, finds an urban equivalent in a Berlin cemetery. The scene of his courtship with his pretty young fiancée Jenny, this island of green in a former suburb of the great city which is rapidly being developed is described as “a green space, full of bushes and trees, in a rectangle surrounded by new houses built in the most modern style, and criss-crossed by streets as yet imaginary, but in the intentions of the city planners no less real for that” (p. 33). Jenny’s father has purchased a grave plot and is determined to exercise his right to be interred here, alongside his own mother and deceased wife. He takes grim pleasure in the idea of his body preventing the “Fortschrittler”, or agents of progress, from developing the land for thirty years to come.[7]

Raabe’s story ends with a seeming reconciliation of city and country, work and recreation, materialism and things of the spirit. Adam Asche, Eberhard’s friend and adoptive brother, an industrial chemist and enterprising businessman who has already warned us he is “a man […] with the fixed intention of himself polluting some bubbling spring, crystal stream or majestic river, in short: one or other of the many waterways in the idyllic German Empire as soon and as despicably as possible” (p. 69), and who believes “the best man will always be he who manages with the basest of materials to assert himself in the face of the forces transcending time and place” (p. 106), has founded a dry-cleaning factory on the Spree to the West of the city. It is a vast Gothic edifice emitting noise, smoke and the stench of chemicals.

Curiously, he lives next door to it, in a Neo-Renaissance villa called ‘Lippoldesheim’ in honour of his poet father-in-law. The final, emblematic scene in the story is a striking expression of wishful thinking. Asche has described Berlin earlier as a “mangy nest” under a cloud of smoke (p. 136), and Eberhard has noted the maltreated Spree appearing to “drag itself, half fainting with disgust”, out of the city in the direction of Spandau (p. 134). He remarks on the cheek of Asche’s invitation to him and Jenny to sample “the beauties of nature” right next to his factory (p. 173). Yet Raabe leaves us with an idyllic scene, with Asche’s wife and children playing in their garden, overlooking a river which, despite the pollution, is teeming with pleasure craft.

On his deathbed, Eberhard Pfister’s father had indicated people like Asche were the best placed in the modern world to preserve the old traditions of his mill, in the shadow of factory chimneys and polluted rivers (p. 185). The final touch in Raabe’s narrative, where he indicates Asche is learning Greek and reading Homer (p. 188), underlines his symbolic significance as a figure reconciling culture and learning with science, technology and commerce, uniting the beautiful with the useful, and fusing creative imagination with practical common sense. The coexistence of modern industry side by side with the quasi-rural idyll of the factory-owner’s villa must even in its time have been implausible, and is, given its dependence on the ability of the river Spree to dispose of the factory’s chemical effluents at the same time as serving recreational purposes, doubly strange in a story whose central focus is the pollution of that other river on which the Pfister family mill stands.

The threat of development hanging over cemeteries such as that described in *Pfisters Mühle* is ever present in the case of allotment colonies, which have typically existed in a state of merely temporary reprieve. A brief digression into the history and socio-cultural significance of the German allotment is necessary at this point, to contextualise Paul Gurk’s depiction in *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee*.

In Britain, many green urban spaces have come into being accidentally, as the remnants of commons, fragmented marginal areas of wasteland, and temporarily vacant sites awaiting development. As David Crouch and Colin Ward write in *The Allotment. Its Landscape and Culture* (1988), the allotments which have sprung up there over the last two centuries,

often overlooked by factory chimneys and railway embankments, provide models for a reconciliation of nature and culture, the rural and the urban, and for the practice of an alternative way of life uniting individual self-determination with community spirit. Allotments combine in varying degrees functions associated with public health, recreation for the working classes, small-scale food production for the family, education, and the protection of areas of beauty and endangered species. Some allotment colonies have been the products of social policy, and originated in urban planning, housing reform, educational and agricultural schemes. Others, however, have sprung up in a spontaneous counter-movement to urbanisation and industrialisation. In recent years, allotments, traditionally scorned for their petty bourgeois associations and banal aesthetics, have begun to attract interest not only as a sociological, but also as a cultural phenomenon. Crouch and Ward argue they exemplify a 'make do'-philosophy of self-sufficiency. George Orwell, Virginia Woolf and latterly Germaine Greer are among the writers who have celebrated the British allotment.

German allotments, according to Hartwig Stein, the author of a recent account of their cultural history up to the Second World War (Stein 2000), have similarly served three principal functions, providing food, facilitating meaningful leisure activity, and affording spiritual regeneration. Though historians have traced their roots back to the early nineteenth-century *Armengärten*, which were placed at the disposal of the 'deserving poor', and beyond, the *Kleingarten* or allotment in the modern sense of the word emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was inspired by the writings of the doctor, educationalist and proponent of physical exercise Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber. Schreber was a key figure in promoting a natural way of life, and probably the most important single link in Germany between Rousseau and the Life Reform Movement at the end of the century. The initial aim of the first *Schreberverein*, which was founded in Leipzig in 1865, was to provide a place for the children of a city school to play, part of which was given over to a small botanical garden. However, adults' recreational needs soon displaced children's as the focus of activities. The so-called *Schrebergarten*, a colony of lovingly tended gardens each with neatly planted vegetable and flower beds, fruit trees and bushes arranged around its

own wooden hut, surrounded by clipped hedges and raked paths, and laid out around a communal building and recreational area, became, as Hermann Rudolph writes in his entry on the subject in François and Schulze's collection of essays on *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* (Rudolph 2005), a common sight on the edge of German cities. It is a quintessentially German institution. The Schreber allotment colonies, which were managed by self-governing associations, complete with statutes and elected committees, who organised local works, duties and events, fostered a strong sense of their members' social and cultural importance. They saw themselves as practising a way of life different from the rest of industrial society, and constituting a model for social development. The *Schrebergarten* is, however, deeply ambivalent as a social phenomenon: on the one hand, as Rudolph writes, it anticipated the *Wandervogelbewegung* and the Life Reform Movement, its intimacy and seclusion providing a crystallisation point for community and familiarity with neighbours in the anonymous city. On the other, it has been associated with inwardness and social apathy, Philistinism and bourgeois self-satisfaction, naïve sentimentality and a taste in kitsch.

The *Schrebergarten* has not, though, been the only kind of allotment in Germany: other 'planned' colonies include the *Arbeitergärten*, plots of land allocated by large firms to their employees, and Red Cross gardens (for instance in Berlin-Charlottenburg), where alcohol and even tobacco were forbidden. On a much larger scale, there have also been the largely unplanned *Laubenkolonien* of Greater Berlin and other cities. It is with one of these that Paul Gurk's novel is concerned. The *Laubenkolonien* emerged from the eighteen-sixties in response to acute housing shortages in the rapidly growing city. The word 'Laube' (originally 'Laubhütte', a simple construction of branches and twigs), acquired a dual meaning as garden bower and as a designation for the makeshift constructions on these allotments, which were commonly built of planks and covered in roofing felt. The usage as a synonym for 'Kleingarten' or 'Schrebergarten' spread from Berlin to the rest of Germany after the First World War.

The bulk of Berlin allotment colonies were effectively shanty towns, largely populated by economic migrants from Silesia, Thuringia, Pomerania and East Prussia. By the 1890s there were some 40,000 *Lauben* in Berlin,

and they had become a permanent part of the urban scene, not only easing the housing conditions of city tenants, but also meeting the desire of commercial developers to derive income from land awaiting commercial development. (Leases were usually annually renewable.) The colonisation of the Third World proceeding apace at the end of the century was reflected in the choice of names for the steadily expanding ring of *Laubenkolonien* around Berlin and other major German cities such as 'Kamerun', 'Transvaal', 'Kapland', 'Grönland' and 'Togoland'. The First and Second World Wars saw a rapid expansion of allotments in Germany, when they not only provided valuable fresh food, but were also a focus of support for the war effort on the home front.

The buildings on the Berlin allotments, which were usually more substantial than the allotment sheds serving to store tools and provide shelter in Britain, acquired a new significance at the end of the First World War, when they were lived in by demobbed soldiers. From 1919 on, the Berlin *Lauben* were legally recognised as habitations in the summer months (from 15 April to 15 October). However, poor insulation and the lack of gas or electricity meant most of them were unsuitable for winter habitation. Cold and damp, many also lacked drains, running water and fire protection, and were regarded by contemporaries as little better than gypsy encampments. The depression at the end of the nineteen-twenties again forced families whose breadwinners became unemployed, and who were evicted from their flats for non-payment of rent, to live in *Wohnlauben*. Until now, there had been few permanent residents in the allotment gardens of most German cities, though Greater Berlin was an exception, some 35,000 *Lauben* having been inhabited all year round there since the early nineteen-twenties (Stein 2000: 586).

During the depression it remained technically illegal to live in *Lauben* all year round, but in practice many people were officially registered there and supported by the social services. The change is reflected in Hans Fallada's bestselling novel *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* (1932), in which the unemployed shop salesman Pinneberg, his wife and child end up in a colony situated some forty kilometres East of the centre of Berlin. On the verge of criminality, Pinneberg starts drinking, but is saved by Lämmchen's love. Fallada depicts the allotment as the last resort of the down-and-outs and a scene of

altercations between political extremists, but also as a home. In a scene at the end of the book, the reddish glow of the petroleum lamp symbolises family warmth and security. Fallada's faith in human goodness and resilience contrasts with the bleakness of Gertrud Kolmar's *Die jüdische Mutter*, a novel written in the same years (1930/31), in which an abandoned *Laube* in Berlin-Charlottenburg is the scene of child rape and murder.

Stein describes the German allotment as a logical response to the threefold social challenge of urbanisation, industrialisation and proletarianisation. In a society increasingly characterised by materialism, mass production, anonymity and the cultivation of appearance rather than reality, allotments have served disadvantaged sectors of the population as recreational spaces offering scope for healthy self-realisation. Fresh air and sunshine, and the opportunity to grow one's own fruit and vegetables and keep small animals were particularly popular in Berlin, where many workers had migrated from the country. The advocates of the allotment claimed moral, educational, social and even political benefits: "Time spent on the allotment fills people with joy in nature. Working with plants, and seeing plants and animals grow ennobles the soul", Heinrich Förster, later president of the Reichsverband der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands, wrote optimistically in 1929. It brings together people from all walks of life, gives them the freedom to shape their own lives, and promotes community spirit:

Der Mensch, heute vielfach zur Maschine geworden, hat im Kleingarten die Möglichkeit, selbst zu gestalten. Dort ist er sein eigener Herr. Von Bedeutung ist auch, daß Menschen verschiedener Berufe, Konfessionen und politischer Parteien hier ein gemeinsames Betätigungsfeld finden. Die Tätigkeit im kleinen Garten regt an zum Austausch der Gedanken und Gesinnung, zur gegenseitigen Hilfeleistung, zur gemeinsamen Arbeit. Die gemeinschaftliche Herstellung und Instandhaltung der Einfriedungen und Wege, die gemeinschaftlichen Feste und Vereinsabende, alles das bringt die Menschen der verschiedenen Berufe und Klassen einander näher. Das Verständnis für andere Lebensanschauungen, anderer Menschen Meinungen wird gepflegt.[8]

In a brochure entitled *Deutsche Schreberjugendpflege* Gerhard Richter wrote of the power of the allotment to 'redeem' the creative powers lost through repetitive work:

In jedem Menschen steckt ja schließlich ein Künstler nach seiner Art, aber er wird gemordet durch das Einerlei des Berufs, durch den vorgeschriebenen Handgriff, durch das tickende und tackende Eisen, durch sein Stampfen und

Rollen in Motor und Maschine. Technik und Mechanisierung sind die Mörder unseres schöpferischen Tuns. Da kommt der Kleingarten wie ein Erlöser, wie ein Erretter aus Alltagsnot. Wir erobern in ihm seelische Provinzen des Friedens und der innerlichen Ruhe, der wahren Herzensfreude zurück.[9]

Allotment holders in the nineteen-twenties and thirties saw themselves as engaging in activities which compensated for the estrangement from nature, the spiritual impoverishment which went with city life, and the culture of immediate gratification in cinema, music-hall and theatre. However, Stein notes the element of self-deception inherent in this response to modern life: "The end product of the critique of industrial society associated with allotments was […] a figure of petty bourgeois helplessness, who affirmed the foundations of modern society while disapproving its political, economic and cultural consequences" (p. 237). Constituting an unpolitical alternative to contemporary Marxist theories of alienation and party-political activity, allotment holding appealed particularly to the lower middle class.

The potential of the *Laubenkolonie* to constitute a community united by radical political ideology was explored by Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht in the film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932). The eponymous colony on the Müggelsee to the East of Berlin, whose cheerful cabins set in allotment gardens contrast with the dark interiors, back yards and busy streets of the city centre in the first section of the film, provides a new home for Anni Böhnike and her family, when they are evicted from their flat after her brother's suicide. The colony is a sphere of leisure and individual freedom, nature and love. But it is a very orderly place, pedantically clean and tidy with its bird baths and hanging flower baskets. Like the *Schrebergarten*, it is an apotheosis of very German qualities, which may be virtues or vices depending on the context: calm, order, diligence, cleanliness and naturalness. As Rudolph notes, the German allotment is "dubious terrain" (p. 202). A product of the best German traditions of idealism and practical social reform, it symbolises at the same time the worst German longings: its trivial romanticism and narrow-mindedness were co-opted by the Nazis into their cult of blood and soil. Kuhle Wampe undergoes a transformation in the third and final part of the film, when a workers' Youth Sports organisation meets there for a weekend camp. The individualistic, petty bourgeois refuge where Anni's non-political boyfriend

Fritz has a second home becomes a symbol of hope for a better future. Cooperative planning, group activities, noncompetitive races and a theatrical sketch about neighbourhood solidarity give a foretaste of communist society (see Silberman 1995).

The Berlin allotments were to provide hiding-places for some Jews during the war, and for members of the resistance such as Erich Honecker and Jan Petersen. In general, however, the *Laubenkolonie* did not become a site of political mobilisation in the economic recession and political troubles of the 1930s, but rather facilitated individual retreat to a life of self-sufficiency. The ethos of the allotment, a blend of practical realism with escapism which Stein sums up as the attempt to realise a utopian vision on a miniature scale, living the good life in one's leisure time without seriously challenging socio-economic structures of exploitation and alienation, is formulated with a certain charm in a booklet published by Ernst Wilhelm Schmidt in 1947 entitled *In Utöpchen*.[10] Schmidt notes in the preface that he had written the story during the Third Reich: "I wrote it for myself, for consolation. It was an escape from suffering and anguish to utopia" (p. 5). It is, then, consciously calculated to help contemporaries in the difficult post-war years put the hardships and indignities in their everyday lives into perspective, and see them with humour and detachment. Making a virtue of necessity, it encourages readers to value the simple life as a better alternative to the vanity and materialism of professional existence in the city, whose disruption through wartime bombing is recognised as probably short-lived.

Schmidt's narrative of retreat to early retirement on a rented plot of land on the outskirts of a village in the North of Germany is told in the first person. It reads as an authentic autobiographical account, though it includes elements of essay and fictional narrative alongside entries in diary form. Notwithstanding the irony already evident in the title and the tongue-in-cheek idealisation of country life, the narrator is serious in his incitement to the reader to follow him in adopting a life of simple self-sufficiency and modesty. He celebrates the joy of picking one's own strawberries in the morning dew and the pleasures of companionship with a faithful dog, includes recipes for raspberry tea and summer pudding, discusses different ways of cooking potatoes and gives advice on growing vegetables. Life on the allotment is also

a voluntarily adopted position mid-way between the extremes of mastery over nature and subservience to its whims:

> Sie [Utöpchens Lebensform] liegt so glücklich mitten drin zwischen den beiden Polen menschlichen Daseins. In der Mitte zwischen Herrseinwollen und Knechtseinmüssen. Hier ist man Herr und Diener zugleich. Beherrschen will ich nichts anderes als mich selbst. Und meinen Dienst, den setze ich mir aus freien Stücken an Menschen, Tieren, Pflanzen. Just wie es kommt und wer es braucht. (p. 67)

The narrator's service to others can take the form of curing his neighbour's mare of colic, replacing a swallow which had fallen out of its nest, or freeing an old apple tree of moss. Mankind is different from nature, but we have lessons to learn from it: "We could learn much from the grass in the fields! What seems easiest and is yet the most difficult thing: being natural" (p. 68). The allotment-holder respects the dignity of his fellow man and fellow creatures. "Reverence for living things of every kind is our joyful obligation", he remarks, echoing Albert Schweitzer (p. 72).

The problematic aspects of life in the *Wohnlaube*, midway between an alternative way of life freely sought out and involuntary social exclusion, are foregrounded in Ulrich Plenzdorf's teenage novel *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, written in the GDR in the phase of political optimism following Honecker's accession to power in 1971. Edgar Wibeau, who has left his job and family and taken refuge, without registering his change of address, in a *Laube* awaiting demolition (Plenzdorf 1973: 5), dies in what is probably an accident, but might just be suicide, shortly before the buildings are bulldozed. The allotment provides a temporary haven for this nonconformist outsider in GDR society, while the references to Robinson Crusoe and Goethe's Werther link the narrative with a broader tradition of literary envisionings of withdrawal from modern society and return to a simpler, more natural life.

Herr Graumann, Paul Gurk's protagonist in *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee*, is a literary predecessor of Edgar Wibeau's, in withdrawing semi-voluntarily, in a mixture of escapism and protest, to live in a Berlin allotment colony. Like Wibeau, Graumann meets his death in ambivalent circumstances the night before his *Laube* is to be demolished. However, unlike *Die neuen Leiden*, Gurk's novel also anticipates later narratives of environmentalist protest such as Otto F. Walter's *Wie wird Beton zu Gras*

(1979), Peter Härtling's *Das Windrad* (1983), Franz-Josef Degenhardt's *Die Abholzung* (1985) and Gudrun Pausewang's *Die Wolke* (1987). It is no accident that it was reprinted in the decade dominated by the Greens.[11]

3. *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee*: An elegy on a disappearing way of life

Paul Gurk's novel is a passionate plea for retention of islands of green in the "sea of houses" which constitute the modern city: the allotment whose fate it tells of is not merely a last, miserable refuge for social drop-outs, but also a blueprint for a sustainable society. *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee* combines utopian and dystopian elements, reflecting the dual origins of the allotment as *Laubenkolonie* and *Schrebergarten*. Its author was born in 1880, in Frankfurt an der Oder, but spent nearly all his life in Berlin, a city with which he maintained a love-hate relationship. He experienced success as a dramatist and playwright in the early twenties, but died in relative obscurity, impoverished and embittered, in 1953. (I am indebted to Emter 1995 for biographical details in the following.) Gurk was both a social and literary outsider. When his father, a coachman, died of pneumonia, the five-year-old Gurk was sent to live with an uncle in Berlin. He proved a gifted pupil, and, in the absence of funding for further study, completed a two-year training course as a teacher. However, his constitution was not robust enough for the classroom, so he joined the civil service, and worked his way up through the ranks of state employment for the next twenty-four years. Every spare minute was, however, spent writing (poems, novels and plays), painting and composing songs.

Gurk was over forty when his literary breakthrough finally came. In 1921 the theatre critic Julius Bab awarded him the prestigious Kleist Prize for his historical tragedy on the leader of the Peasants' War, *Thomas Münzer* (1922), praising its "ironic melancholy" and "cynical pathos". Other plays were produced in Berlin and elsewhere, and stories and a novel appeared in print. However, this recognition was short-lived. When Gurk resigned from the civil service to devote himself to full-time writing, it was a move from whose financial consequences he was to suffer for the rest of his life. His prolific oeuvre – according to Emter, fifty plays, thirty novels and fifty-three novellas – was influenced by Expressionism, but written when the movement was

already in decline. Gurk's observation of contemporary urban society, and in particular his portrayal of the ordinary man in the street, have been compared with the social realism of Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun?*, Kästner's *Fabian* (1931) or Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). However, he was too conservative in his opposition to contemporary modernity and too traditional in form and language to interest a public accustomed to New Sobriety, the dominant cultural movement in the nineteen-twenties.

His relationship with the Nazis was, like that of many contemporaries, ambivalent: though his novels reveal antipathy towards key aspects of National Socialist ideology, he shared their critique of modern urban civilisation. Gurk was elected a member of the Reichsschrifttumskammer in 1934. However, his novel *Tresoreinbruch* was banned for its realistic depiction of corruption behind the façade of respectability in contemporary Berlin, and its sympathetic portrayal of 'honest' criminals. Gurk's trilogy of Berlin novels (*Berlin*, written 1923-5 but only published 1934; *Tresoreinbruch*, 1935; *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee*, written 1936 but only published 1949) and the science fiction novel *Tuzub 37* (1935) were reprinted in the nineteen-eighties, but he remains largely ignored by literary scholars and historians.[12]

Gurk's writing on Berlin draws on all the negative images used by Naturalists, *Bund Heimatschutz* authors and Expressionists in their portrayal of the city. In the opening lines of *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee* it is personified in a curious conflation of the organic with the inorganic as a monster-machine, crushing or sweeping aside those individuals in whom feeling and idealism persist:

Die große Stadt gleicht einem Fabeltier der Vorzeit.
Sie wächst nicht. Sie schuppt sich an oder schuppt sich ab.
Die große Stadt atmet nicht.
Die große Stadt fühlt nicht.
Das Fabeltier hat einen Motor in sich, der ungleichmäßig stößt. Sein Blut heißt nicht Traum, Hoffnung, Schwermut, Glück, Verdämmern, Tod: sondern Geschehen! (Gurk 1987: 7)

As in Max Kretzer's novel *Meister Timpe* (1888), where the "stone desert" of the city served as a visible sign of an abortive social development (see Freisfeld 1982: 21f.), Gurk presents Berlin as an increasingly uninhabitable environment leading to dehumanisation and de-individualisation. His semi-

autobiographical protagonist, Herr Graumann, has resigned early from a position teaching trainee teachers, despite the financial loss this incurs, out of disillusionment with the arrogance, superficiality and materialism of his pupils and colleagues. He has withdrawn to an allotment colony in the northernmost part of the city, where he lives as a recluse, eking out an existence in loneliness, poverty and ill health.

Passages of indignant protest and satirical criticism are to be found in *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee*, but melancholy resignation dominates in the face of a society which rates journalism, commercial illustration and dance music above the artist's struggle for self-expression and search for the truth. Despite an outpouring of creative activity in plays and stories, paintings and musical compositions while he was a young man, Graumann has been ignored by the critics and the public. Unable to comply with the whims of cultural fashion, he loses confidence in the value of his artistic gifts, and burns his pictures and manuscripts. Disappointed by his experiences with women, disenchanted with modern life, suffering from depression and expecting an early death from a heart condition he is periodically incapacitated by, he adopts a way of life which reduces social contact to an absolute minimum. Gurk takes a quasi-monastic vow of silence. However, his attempt at complete self-effacement is a failure, for he is forced to break his silence periodically, overcome by the urge to speak, just as he was unable to desist from creative activity as a young man, despite the absence of public interest in his work.

The uneasy peace he finds in the *Laubenkolonie* is shattered when the residents are given notice by the authorities to leave, so that a road can be extended through the middle of the colony to relieve traffic congestion.[13] They are made generous offers of compensation and alternative accommodation, either in "permanent allotments" half an hour further from the city centre, where they are assured there are no plans to build for the next five to ten years, or in new flats or housing estates. The allotment holders make their various arrangements. Graumann stays to the very end, and finally determines to blow himself up in his home with an explosive device left behind by a neighbour who was a former miner. At the last minute he changes his

mind, and tries to put out the fuse. But he is prevented from doing so by a heart attack.

Gurk's elegiac account of the fate of a sensitive, creative individual, who combines classical literary education with old-fashioned courtesy, conforms to the traditional Romantic dichotomy of bourgeois and artist. Graumann is, as we are repeatedly reminded (e.g. p. 10), one of the last "individual persons", a man with "soul" (i.e. creativity and integrity), respectful of others and not motivated by material greed. His marginalisation and suffering are presented as inevitable in an indifferent world. Like Prometheus, who was punished for stealing fire from the gods, Graumann, who has "seen through a tiny hole in the curtain and caught a glimpse of the face of the gods and the demons", is "welded to the rocks of loneliness" (p. 120). Creativity is incompatible with success and inevitably brings ridicule (p. 35).

Gurk makes satirical jibes at the educational establishment (in the figure of Professor Brümmer, Graumann's former teaching superior), and the world of contemporary art, music and publishing (in the persons of a young musician, an artist and a journalist). Though there is little that is particularly insightful or innovative in the characterisation of these figures, or in the reflections on the position of the artist in modern society in Graumann's conversations with them, their visits to the *Laubenkolonie* provide a provocatively critical external perspective on his life, and introduce elements of satire and humour which enliven a narrative otherwise bordering on self-indulgent pathos. The realism present in Gurk's description of individual inhabitants of the allotment colony, their everyday lives and how they respond when they are forced to leave it, and the ironic detachment in some of the passages on Graumann's habits are among the qualities which make it worth reading today.

Berlin, a city unceasingly in motion, but where people lead lives of mechanical repetition, has a secret heart and soul in the allotment colony: "In the *Laube* the heart of the big city is revealed" (p. 7). In a world of constant change, the *Laubenkolonie* where Graumann and others have made their home has remained the same for as long as people can remember: here they have found a 'Heimat' (e.g. pp. 112 and 124f.). "The *Laube* was our one and all! We didn't have electric light, not even gas. But when the paraffin lamp was

lit, Lothar sat doing his school homework, my husband read things out from the newspaper, and the wind was blowing outside, it was cosy in our living room", one of Graumann's neighbours laments (p. 155). The colony is situated in a no-man's-land on the dividing line between city and country: "The city has a strange green border, which is foolish and faintly ridiculous, yet moving and beautiful, like everything which lacks a practical purpose and can't be immediately turned to profit: *the Laube*!" (p. 7). A remnant of nature in the sense of not yet being subjected to rationalism, instrumental ordering and commodification, it is to be found at the end of the tram line, where dreary streets lined by uniform facades fronting rented flats give way to a disorderly landscape of factories and highrise buildings, single-storey warehouses and petrol stations, timber yards, breakers' yards and empty lots.

In a recent article on the southern suburbs of Vienna, which formed part of a research project 'Kulturlandschaftsforschung' led by Helmut Haberl and Gerhard Strohmeier, Christine Gamper has described the urban periphery as a transitional zone challenging modernity, and a site of possible alternatives. An indefinable non-place characterised by contradictions, a formless, incoherent, random area in which residential, industrial, retail, leisure and transport needs are met cheek by jowl, it is nevertheless a "reserve space". As a "sphere of hope", harbouring the possibility of a symbiosis of the urban and the rural, it holds the promise of providing a home for those whose aspirations have not been fulfilled elsewhere (Haberl and Strohmeier 1999: 79-84). These are precisely the qualities described by Gurk: "Neither city nor country, neither fish nor flesh", "an eighth Ruhr industrial area, an eighth Lüneburg Heath, an eighth San Francisco, an eighth colony, an eighth poor man's paradise – and so on" (p. 122). The periphery of Berlin is "where the last bits of city clash with the first bits of nature, so abruptly and suddenly that it makes strangers stop and look all around them in confusion" (p. 7). The skyline is punctuated by factory chimneys, but there are still open fields, and woods on the horizon. Here, in an area which includes streets which have been laid out but are as yet only provisionally paved and have yet to be built on, as if challenging the hegemony of calculating reason, live Gypsies and other social outsiders.

Gurk presents the colony quite realistically as a refuge for the destitute and dreamers, the poor and elderly, the victims of inflation and bankruptcy, work-related accidents, physical and mental illness, alcoholism and marital breakdown. The land on which the allotments stand is municipally owned, and the most of the buildings on the rented plots, more or less ramshackle constructions, are only inhabited in the summer. They have no electricity, gas, running water or sewers. Daily life in Schwanensee consists of growing vegetables, keeping hens and geese, and tending fruit bushes and trees, in a community depending as much on barter and the services of itinerant tradesmen as on shops and the normal economy for the satisfaction of their other needs. Whatever freedom, dignity and tranquility it affords, these are precariously gained at the expense of comfort, security and social inclusion. Living here is tantamount to a dangerous departure from social norms and normality: visitors are warned symbolically of the danger in approaching through a sign saying: “Private way! Owners accept no liability for use!” (p. 14). The names of the allotment colonies reflect hopes for a better existence: “All the allotment colonies have ringing, flattering names, redolent of sunshine, peace and happy dreams” (p. 9). We are, however, constantly reminded of the ironic contrast between the aspirations of the inhabitants and the reality of their lives. There is no lake or even pond in the Schwanensee colony: at one point the name is attributed to an artificial lake in a nearby park.

Nor is there any sense of the primary ecological benefits of allotment gardens in Gurk’s novel, unless one is to take the references to the appearance of a rare butterfly, the *Ordensband* (probably the *catocala nupta*, or Red Underwing), which is mentioned pp. 28, 117, 147, as evidence of their providing a habitat for such species. Yet the colony constitutes an alternative sphere associated with the dream of a simple life: “Here longing for simplicity is fulfilled, and – at times – the last aspirations of the lonely, the exceptional and the impoverished” (p. 7). The inhabitants have the freedom to build and shape their houses according to their needs and interests, to keep pets, grow flowers, sunbathe and relax outdoors. Whether it is financial loss, illness or a work-related accident which has jolted the colonist out of bourgeois existence, he has been freed from the necessity to conform to normal expectations and the dictates of reason. The otherness of the allotment dwellers is perceived as

a potential threat: their disorderly homes are described as an eyesore, and constantly threatened by intervention from the authorities. The *Lauben* are popularly regarded as a hide-out for "criminals and uncontrollable riff-raff", and Graumann learns from one of his visitors of articles in the newspaper demanding "that the current primitive constructions be demolished and replaced by a proper layout of allotments in orderly rows, with communal play areas, washrooms, clothes lines and so on, so that the unsightly products of an earlier age are no longer a blot on the city's skyline" (p. 125).

The allotment holders' resistance to the regimentation of the individual in modern society is linked with a particular attachment to nature, for life in the colony fosters an awareness of the changing seasons, and reminds the inhabitants of the natural boundaries of human life. The allotment, described by Graumann as "a room furnished by the Earth" (p. 33), "my green citadel" and "the last green habitation of the soul" (p. 77), is associated with an attitude of reverent wonder towards nature (p. 49), "cosmic fear" (p. 55), and an awareness that humankind may not be the be-all and end-all of creation (p. 118). "All this is a mere breath, a momentary glance of eternity", Graumann muses, "it will cease to exist when the Earth is flung into the corner or trampled on, like a toy in the hands of an angry child, by some incomprehensible event!" (p. 50). Graumann's resolutely nonconformist, hermit-like way of life disconcerts and challenges visitors, reminding them of the petty pretence of their own lives:

> Wer ihn gesprochen hatte, fühlte sich von Fremdheit angeweht oder vergiftet oder in seiner tiefsten Eitelkeit und Streberei entlarvt. Hatte er etwas Verwandtes uneingestanden in seinem tiefsten Wesen, so erschrak er, als habe die Gorgo ihr Gesicht im Spiegel gesehen. Er schauderte dann vor der Sprache der Laube zurück, und suchte so schnell wie möglich, diesen sonderbaren Einsiedler, seine Sätze und seine Bewegungen zu vergessen. (p. 117)

The phrase "Sprache der Laube" links the allotment holder's way of life with that of the writer or artist. They are both social outsiders and opponents of the dominant values of society. Ironic passing references to Graumann's 'simple life' as a "Rousseauvian return to nature" (p. 88), and to his hospitality as a reenactment of Uhland's poem 'Einkehr' ("Bei einem Wirte wundermild […]", p. 129) and to the scene after the expulsion of the colonists, with old beds,

mattresses and blankets lying around, as the last resting place of a tired and starved Pan, abdicated, bankrupt and homeless in this technological world (p. 191), take a darker turn when Graumann is presented with a gramophone and a record of Carl Loewe's 'Herr Oluf' by his parting neighbour. Herder's doom-laden ballad (the inspiration for Goethe's 'Erlkönig') recounts the fate of those who once enter "the realm of poetry, art, the irrational, the intuitions, things that cannot be quantified or purchased" (p. 181).

The clash between progress, mobility, utilitarianism and self-interest on the one hand and a gentler way of life based on tradition, rootedness, appreciation of natural beauty and respect for one's neighbours on the other comes to a head half way through the book when Graumann learns that they will have to give up their *Lauben*. He immediately interprets this as an attack on the last manifestation of *Heimat* in an alien world, and the end of a process whereby the soul is driven out of modern society: "Is there then no feeling, no soul left in the world, only utility, traffic, technology?", he bursts out:

> Hat denn der einzelne Mensch gar nichts mehr zu bedeuten? Ist er nur dazu da, ausgeschlachtet zu werden und dann in die Müllkute mit ihm, ins Massengrab! Muß denn dies verfluchte Geschlecht ewig herumrasen, fortwährend Handel treiben und immer mehr, immer dichter zusammenlaufen, bloß weil sie alle für sich leer sind und sich zu Tode langweilen, wenn sie sich nicht selbst in Haufen bewundern und immer mit dem Ellenbogen zusammenstoßen, ganz gleich, ob sie sich zanken oder nach der Molle in die Arme fallen? Nur Krach muß sein, Betrieb! Je mehr Verkehrsunfälle, desto lebendiger ist das Leben! Das sind doch keine Straßen mehr, unsere Straßen! Sie verbinden doch nichts! Sie überrennen nur alles! […]
> Wer kann mir meine Laube zurückgeben, den Blick in den Himmel, den einzigen Horizont, diesen Horizont mit diesen Schornsteinen, fernen Masten, Park- und Waldgrenzen und dem ungeheuren Kampfplatz der Wolken darüber, an dem ich mein Verborgenstes seit Jahren genährt habe? […]
> Verzeihen Sie meine Erregung! Aber es muß doch etwas geschehen! Wir haben uns doch alle an diese Erde, an diese Gärten, an diese Lauben gewöhnt! Sie sind wir selber geworden! Man kann sich doch nicht ausreißen, sich vernichten – und doch weiterleben! (pp. 156f.)

This *cri de coeur* over the loss of sense of place, time and identity, the massification of society, the pace of modern life and the commercialisation of relations reflects Gurk's roots in the conservative critique of urban modernity of the turn of the century, and does not differ greatly from Georg Simmel's diagnosis of the impact of city life on the individual a generation earlier (see Midgley 2000: 276f.). His tirade culminates in the words: "I must do something

now! For the first time I must do something! I will go and speak to everyone. We must act together. We must stay here! *We must put up resistance!*" (p. 157. Emphasis in original). Gurk's allotment holder is a last heroic individual with soul, holding out against the pressures of modern society. "You are a bad case. You have actually got a soul! What does somebody like you expect of the world?", he is asked by an unexpectedly understanding official in the City Planning Department, who concludes the whole colony is "contaminated with soul" (pp. 172, 174). Graumann bows to the inevitable, recognising that other men too live lives of "quiet desperation", and that, as he had been told before, he and his neighbours have no legal grounds not to comply: "Everything was settled, signed and sealed, perfectly legal and in line with the intentions of the authorities and the wishes of the public" (p. 158). Gurk's melancholy conclusion is that it is the end of an era, individual integrity can no longer survive: "The time for individuals was over" (p. 211).

Graumann's mistake is, it would seem to today's readers, that rather than seeking sanctuary in the allotment colony in order to devote himself to a life of creative fulfilment, he has retreated into silence, renouncing his gifts. "I have deliberately killed off that nonsense in me", he he says to a young musician and composer: "I have become dumb, close to nature, I can't go on, don't wish to go on, won't go on!" (pp. 36 and 38). He describes the *Katzenvater*, an old man who lives in an empty allotment, surrounded by his cats, and had completely stopped communicating with the outside world, as an almost perfect role model (p. 106). Such extreme self-discipline and modesty, however preferable to his contemporaries' affectations and vices, do not, however, provide a viable model for society. Though Graumann rises to the challenge of social responsibility, and shows kindness and generosity towards strangers as well as his fellow colonists, his masochistic asceticism is deeply ambivalent. The view of life expounded by Graumann's former colleague, Professor Brümmer (pp. 93-101) suggests that Gurk subscribed to a Nietzschean conception of nature as governed by the principles of interdependence and balance, determining human history in ways cruelly indifferent to the suffering of individuals. Like Schopenhauer (and Loerke), though, he holds that out of suffering can come comfort, for those who yield to nature's laws. In fleeting moments, we are witnesses to the sublime natural

beauty that accompanies unadorned truth. The final chapter of the book is reminiscent of Stifter in associating the beauty and tranquility of nature with renunciation of human happiness. Gurk describes the onset of winter in a scene whose intoxicating clarity and vivid colours transcend earthly existence:

> Die Straßenbahnen klangen klarer und näher herüber, und doch fühlte Herr Graumann, als er durch den Laubenweg bis zur Straße ohne Häuser ging, die unerklärliche, wie Wein schmeckende Wintereinsamkeit.
>
> Noch einmal betrachtete er die Hügellinie des großen Parks. Die entlaubten Bäume standen in der schönen Klarheit ihres kostbaren Baues bläulich lila, weit entfernt und doch zauberhaft gegenwärtig. Der lilagoldene Rauch eines Fabrikschornsteins zog sich endlos weit geradeaus wie eine hauchdünne Wolke durch die feurige Morgenlohe über dem verdämmernden Wald… Über dem Ocker, dem Gelb der Horizontalstreifen wölbte sich das durchsichtige, blasse Grün des Himmels auf, wurde blasser und schwamm endlich in das milchige Blau der Höhe hinüber. In unauslöschlicher ewiger Schönheit schwang sich die Halbkugel des Äthers über der schlafenden Scheibe Erde... (pp. 197f.)

The beauty of nature is here inseparable from a coldness reflecting its indifference to the individual's struggle for self-realisation, to human suffering and death. Graumann recognises and accepts this, seeking to become one with nature, in a process which involves renunciation of all human striving: "The individual must learn to do nothing and want nothing" (p. 38). His Schopenhauerian goal is "to be dumb, nothing but *Laube*, so as to have in the end at least the pleasure of the earth, sky, sun, clouds, winds, trees, flowers and butterflies, of the cold, storms and freedom from traffic" (p. 36).

He spends much of his time watching the clouds come and go. They demand to be appreciated as more than mere meteorological phenomena: mysterious and beautiful correlatives of creative inspiration and non-material values, they are also images of the transience of human life. It is Graumann's wish to die in the allotment, which he describes as "my last refuge, the possibility of ending and overcoming all illusion and pretence" (p. 113), evaporating like a cloud: "In this sky, in this landscape I will pass away, like a small cloud which has neither rained nor thundered" (p. 114).[14] The crushing inhumanity of such a philosophy of submission to nature's laws as a greater order and harmony, in which the trials and tribulations of ordinary mortals lose their significance (p. 116), when taken to its logical conclusion, is provocatively formulated in Professor Brümmer's Darwinist lecture. The

history of mankind is, Brümmer insists, “a kind of gymnastic exercise of nature”. Individual genius is of no significance: “We can never outwit nature! Nature determines everything” (pp. 98f.). For Graumann himself, nature, however preferable it may be to the “scented hypocrisy” of city life, is a combination of “unfeigned, genuine cruelty and beauty” (pp. 33f.). The limits of Gurk’s social realism and his anticipation of environmental activism are set by this Nietzschean conception of nature, which we have seen above in the plays of Georg Kaiser.

Though allotment-holders also feature in Günter Seuren’s recent novel *Die Krötenküsser*, they are no longer Gurk’s tragic, creative outsiders. My attention in the following shifts to the ecology park, a manifestation of the urban utopian experiment more characteristic of the late twentieth century, in which communal repossession of lost common land came to accompany the individual cultivation of enclosed private gardens. Gurk wrote in a period of rapid urban growth, which continued into the post-World War Two period. However, population growth slowed and stopped in many of the old European industrial centres in the nineteen-sixties, and a phase of counter-urbanisation began. The longstanding flight to the suburbs, the modern quest for Arcadia, accelerated, and greater mobility permitted both businesses and individuals to move to the countryside beyond, leaving behind considerable areas of dereliction in our larger cities. In the subsequent efforts to make cities more livable in, the renaturalising of wasteland and secondary wilderness has played a significant role. Gurk was unable to imagine the utopian way of life he associates with allotment gardens other than as a phenomenon barely tolerated by mainstream society, and threatened with extinction. In Seuren’s novel, this lament at failure to preserve nature in the city is replaced by a satirical commentary on the consequences of misguided attempts to do so. If Gurk is a pre-environmental novelist, Seuren can thus be described as a post-environmental writer, who critically observes the confused thinking behind well-intentioned efforts to green the city.

4. *Die Krötenküsser*: A satire on the environmental movement

In many of the novels which addressed environmental issues most overtly in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, such as Carl Amery’s *Der Untergang der*

Stadt Passau (1975), Silvio Blatter's 'Freiamt'-trilogy (1976-88), Hanns Cibulka's *Swantow* (1980), Monika Maron's *Flugasche* (1981), Jurij Koch's *Der Kirschbaum* (1984) and Günter Grass's *Die Rättin* (1986), the city retained its negative image from the earlier part of the century. Works such as Max Frisch's *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän* (1979), Gudrun Pausewang's three autobiographical *Rosinkawiese* books (1980-90), Uwe Wolff's *Papa Faust* (1982) and Klaus Modick's *Moos* (1984), as well as Günter Grass's *Die Rättin* and Christa Wolf's *Sommerstück* (1989), contained passages which constituted ecologically-oriented variants of traditional narratives in which the protagonist withdraws from the city to live in harmony with nature. They revisit themes and perspectives from Hermann Hesse's *Peter Camenzind* (1904), Ernst Wiechert's *Das einfache Leben* (1939), Max Frisch's *Homo faber* (1957) and Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* (1963). A smaller number of environmentally committed writers in the seventies and eighties also explored the ecology of urban communities, including Peter Härtling (*Das Windrad*, 1983) and Christine Brückner (*Die letzte Strophe*, 1989). Günter Seuren's *Die Krötenküsser* has, however, been chosen for closer analysis here because it reflects critically on tensions and contradictions within the environmental and alternative movements, from a vantage point at the end of the century.

Like Gurk, Seuren was at the time of writing all but forgotten in the literary world. Born in 1932 in the Rhineland, he had started professional life as a journalist in Düsseldorf, writing stories, comic strips and film reviews. These were followed by screenplays for film and television. Seuren established a literary reputation in the 1960s as a member of Günter Wellershoff's 'Cologne School of New Realism', alongside Nicolas Born, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and Günter Herburger. His novel *Das Gatter* (1964) was filmed by Peter Schamoni under the title *Schonzeit für Füchse*, and became one of the early successes of the New German Cinema. However, the novels that followed found ever less favour with the critics, and Seuren ceased writing altogether after the harsh reviews of *Die Asche der Davidoff* (1985), turning to film documentaries. However, *Die Krötenküsser* was an exception. It broke a fifteen-year literary silence when it was published by Franz Greno's Eichborn Verlag. It was well received, and has since appeared in paperback.

The action takes place in the North-Eastern suburbs of Munich, between Bogenhausen, Englschalking and Denning. The area, in which the author has lived since the early nineteen-eighties (see Müller 2002), has seen considerable change since the Second World War. With the expansion of the city and the increase of traffic, recognition has come of the need to preserve and develop the remaining areas not built on. The skyline towards the city centre is now dominated by the high-rise buildings of the Hypobank and Allianzversicherung, but the Arabellapark, an allotment colony and even fields of maize, on land now owned by the city, which are invaded in summer by tramps, young couples and playing children, remain as open spaces:

Früher, vor einem halben Jahrhundert, sagen die Einheimischen, die hier als Kinder gespielt haben, brauchten wir keine Schutzzonen. Das war alles eine einzige Wildnis, keine steilaufragende Hypobank, kein zubetonierter Horizont. Wer heute sechzig ist, schwamm damals in den klaren Baggerseen der Kieswerke. Die alten Witwen, deren Männer an Magenkrebs oder Herzversagen starben, erzählen, daß sie als kleine Mädchen nicht einschlafen konnten, weil die Tiere nachts lauter waren als die wenigen Autos. Man hatte Strohhalme und blies Frösche auf, man fummelte im Gras an Bluse oder Hosenschlitz, heiratete, erbte das kleine Elternhaus mit Vorgarten und lebt noch immer auf der Schotterebene aus der letzten Eiszeit. (pp. 236f.)

Traces of the glacial moraine which once gave the landscape its character are evident in disused gravel pits now surrounded by the ever-expanding housing estates. These vestigial “steppes” are still populated by wildlife:

Die Steppe ist ein Versammlungsplatz für aussterbende Arten, die auf einen Noah mit der Arche warten. Ein verstörter Hase hoppelt herum, ein Fasan fliegt über Autodächer, ein Fuchs hat sich im Unterholz gehalten, sagen Frühaufsteher, die ihn gesehen haben. (p. 22)

Seuren’s story is concerned with an area of waste land some 10 000 square metres in size which has been “adopted” by a local biology student.[15] Staudinger, aged twenty-five, is assisted in his efforts to reclaim and renaturalise the area by the narrator and a handful of other volunteers. Their efforts reflect the experiences of the initiators of the many ‘pocket parks’, ‘urban nature parks’, ‘community gardens’ and ‘neighbourhood gardens’ which have sprung up in European and North American cities since the nineteen-seventies. With the support of the City Planning and Environment Department, they first clear the ground of cans, bottles and condoms, and set

about trimming and clearing the existing vegetation and sowing native wild flowers. Staudinger is particularly interested in saving the population of *Wechselkröte* or European Green Toad (*bufo viridis*). He goes to great lengths to return parts of the area to the original sparse vegetation which constitutes the natural habitat of the insects and butterflies on which the toads feed, and lays out ponds for them to spawn in.

Die Krötenküsser deconstructs central myths of the environmental movement, showing how visitors to the nature reserve project their own dissatisfaction with modern life and their longing for a "return to nature" (Seuren 2000: 219) onto the project. They assume the volunteers are "good people", living healthily and working for a better world (p. 121). One of the many people attracted by the site is the former owner of a city-centre shop for leather and hunting wear. After a serious injury in a car accident, he has begun a new life, sleeping rough and avoiding contact with the authorities by living "invisibly" (p. 171). "I've stopped taking part in the madness of normal life", he observes (p. 167). However, tramps are not welcome in Staudinger's conservation area. Indeed, he initially tries to discourage the public in general from entering it by putting up notices asking them not to disturb the wildlife, and creating a natural barrier of thorn and bramble around it. This is naturally unpopular with the local dog owners, and with the children who were used to riding their mountain bikes here and skating on the ponds in winter. The opposition of many of the locals is reflected in the title of the novel: "Toad-kissers" ("Krötenküsser") is one of several openly abusive names shouted by children and unsympathetic passers-by – others are "green weirdos", "eco-shits" and "eco-arseholes". Toad-kissing is clearly a metaphor for the exaggerated, sycophantic adulation of nature of certain members of environmental groups. However, Seuren also hints at a literal meaning behind the term 'Krötenküsser'. The narrator describes kissing a toad in his childhood in the hope it would fulfil his wishes (p. 33), and later seeing Staudinger as a young boy appearing to kiss a toad, in a gesture which suggests the closeness of children with animals (p. 34).[16]

The different terms used for the nature reserve reflect diverging conceptions of its function: Staudinger's "Reservat" and "Biotop" put the emphasis on the preservation of indigenous plants, birds, butterflies and

amphibians. His obsession with raking away the footprints left in the sand by trespassers where he has sown wild flower seeds (pp. 89f.) indicates his desire to recreate a pristine nature unsullied by human hand. The city authorities, on the other hand, whose priorities lie with the educational and leisure needs of the city's inhabitants, plan a "demonstration park", or "adventure area" (pp. 79, 113), with paths for wheel chair access and an observation platform. The narrator, who becomes increasingly disillusioned with the shape the project is taking, repeatedly uses the words "Gehege" (which has associations of restricting enclosure and precious artificiality), and "Filz" (alluding to the tangled motivation of the activists as much as the tangle of vegetation on the site).

These differences of opinion over the use of the area reflect the tensions between anthropocentrism and biocentrism inherent in many environmental enterprises. Seuren's book charts the problematic consequences of Staudinger's biocentric approach, and implies the necessity of balancing environmental against social needs. But the extent to which humans should shape and control nature in general is also queried. Staudinger's ultimate aim is a kind of botanic garden, in which it is forbidden to tread on or pick the plants, while the narrator would prefer the place to look "natural" and remain a wildernis. Seuren probes the motivation for the volunteers' 'Nature Activity' (the presumptious logo on a baseball cap given to the narrator). The project is introduced as an initiative to preserve endangered species (p. 5), and as a Noah's Ark (p. 22). However, Staudinger and the narrator see themselves from the start as "reviving" the area (p. 8) in a more interventionist sense, by sanitising it.[17] Staudinger, who uses the phrase "doing our duty for creation" ("Dienst an der Schöpfung"), albeit half jokingly, regards himself as "godfather" of the endangered species (p. 33). The narrator becomes increasingly conscious of Staudinger's preoccupation with power and control: "He wants to understand everything and have it under control" (p. 32). His aim is even described at one point as "reconquering" the area (p. 33). Impatient to speed up the metamorphosis of the tadpoles in the Spring, he brings in an excavator to dig a series of shallow basins in which the sun can warm the water quickly. When the water seeps away through the clay, he proceeds to line the basins with plastic sheeting. To prevent the

expensive wildflower seeds he has bought being smothered by indigenous weeds, he similarly resorts to sterilising the soil with a gas burner, and in the end he is reduced to concreting over areas of ground, leaving small holes for his plants. The gas burner becomes a symbol of his heavy-handed technological approach to managing the environment. (Its sinister appearance comes into its own when a stranger steals it and uses it to rob a bank, striking terror into the bank staff by passing it off as a biological weapon.) Excavating a new basin for the toads to breed in, because Staudinger needs to collect experimental data for a university project, the narrator finds himself slicing the limbs off hibernating toads. "We are really killers, though people think we are doing good", he notes with distaste (p. 298).

Staudinger also treats the site as his private property: "He took liberties himself which broke all the rules. But when children came round with jam jars [to fetch tadpoles], he threw them out of his enclosure" (p. 54). A habit of Staudinger's which particularly annoys the narrator is letting his fingers play on the surface of the water, in a gesture implying ownership and mastery:

> Ich wunderte mich, warum mich diese Handbewegung anwiderte. Er tauchte seine Hand ein, ließ das Wasser durch die Finger gleiten, und dann begannen sie, auf dem Wasserspiegel zu "klimpern". Je länger ich hinsah, um so mehr wurde mir klar, daß Staudinger sich für den Besitzer eines großen, unsichtbaren Klaviers hielt, auf dem nur er zu spielen verstand. (p. 54)

The narrator accuses Staudinger of being a control freak (p. 66), of taking over the whole area on an ego trip (p. 91) and even practising "ecological masturbation" (p. 82). He compares Staudinger's obsessive toad-breeding project with the Nazis' *Lebensborn*, the brothels reserved for SS officers:

> Sein unerschütterliches Selbstvertrauen steht ihm gut, blond, raumergreifend, er geht nicht, er marschiert. Damals hätten sie ihn gebrauchen können, er hätte perfekt organisierte Gehege ausgedacht, Lebensborn, Zuchtstationen, immer nur das Beste. Damals hätte er Karriere machen können mit seiner deutschen Gründlichkeit. (p. 84)[18]

What started out as an initiative to preserve an endangered species has become a concentration camp for animals, from which the genetically selected toads must not be allowed to escape:

> Wenn er durch sein Gehege geht, denkt er sich wieder Verbesserungen aus, um das Ganze genauer kontrollieren zu können. Er kommt zu mir und erklärt, daß unser System Lücken hat. In den umliegenden Gärten werden ab und zu Wechselkröten gesehen. Wenn sie das Gehege verlassen, sind das Verluste

für die Population. Man muß ihren Wandertrieb stoppen. Man könnte ein Gehege im Gehege bauen. Staudinger wollte einen ausbruchsicheren Plastikzaun um dreißig Quadratmeter errichten, eine größere Anzahl Kröten selektieren und dort isolieren. (p. 85)

Half way through the book, the narrator rows with Staudinger and drops out of the project for a time. At several points (pp. 44, 90f.), he fantasises about sabotaging it. However, his own aims are no less confused than Staudinger's. His initial self-understanding as "a kind of nature guard" is gradually modified. He acknowledges his own participation in the project is less an act of idealism, or even motivated by the simple desire for physical exercise, than a way of working through the depression he suffers from, his writer's block and his difficult on-and-off relationship with his partner. He recognises physical labour on the project site is a therapy necessary to get over what he calls his "Oedipus affair", i.e. the tensions in the relationship with his partner over her eight-year-old son's behaviour (p. 44).

Furthermore, both the narrator and Staudinger are engaged in a protracted struggle against potentially terminal illness. Staudinger is undergoing treatment for Hodgkin's Disease, while the narrator fears a recurrence of an auto-immune disease contracted on a trip to Turkey some years earlier. Work which is allegedly "in the service of creation" is thus revealed as motivated by fear for their own survival (p. 136). "The people don't know why we are working so hard, they aren't aware we are working off our fear. They think we are just trying to improve the environment", the narrator comments (p. 57).[19] He shares many of Staudinger's feelings, but retains an ironic self-awareness lacking in his younger companion: "I try to laugh at myself and at this attempt to heal myself with an impossible therapy" (p. 84). As the novel progresses, the difference in standpoint between the two men, the technologically-oriented environmentalist and romantic ecologist, is blurred. A division of labour eases the tension between them. Staudinger, we learn, "was perhaps no longer quite so sure he was entitled to a green vision in which others had so little space" (p. 209), while the narrator has long since observed himself becoming a petty-minded guard of the site (p. 116).

The story ends with a paradox: Staudinger receives glowing press coverage, official support and significant private donations at the very point in

time when the tadpoles in the reserve are dying in their thousands for the third summer running. No one seems to notice or care that the “success” of the project is a lie. The precise reason for this disaster is never established, but it appears to be due to damage to the amphibians’ liver cells caused by a toxic concentration of iron and calcium in the clay, possibly deriving from subsoil dumped there during excavation work for the Munich underground. *Die Krötenküsser* thus suggests symbolically that attempts such as Staudinger’s and the narrator’s to recreate nature and restore meaning to their lives in a world of empty affluence are blighted by the “Altlasten”, or legacy of contamination left behind by the affluent society. Seuren’s critique of the pampered prosperity of his contemporaries verges on the cynical: “People have it too good”, says a friend of the narrator’s. “They eat and drink, are spoiled and fat. And if there is a puddle they have to walk round, they look for someone to put the blame on” (p. 278).

In the narrator’s dreams, Hitler’s ghost returns in his open Mercedes on the old road to Riem airport, whose asphalt is only concealed by a thin layer of soil under the nearby trees. A mindset of “cosy fascism” lives on among the local people (p. 105). Ultimately, however, the environmental project suffers from being tainted by the wish of its originator to “play God” (p. 130), and by the unrealistic expectations of contemporary society, in which people’s imagination is dominated by TV advertising and popular film (p. 239), and their wishes are determined by the hedonistic “pleasure industry” (p. 271). The public themselves seem to the narrator threatened with extinction, having lost faith in their ability to shape their own future. They regard Staudinger’s environmental project as a waste of time, but support it out of a sense of guilt and anxiety regarding the future: “Somehow everyone feels affected by it and doesn’t want to die out” (p. 106).

Die Krötenküsser is then highly critical of the muddled thinking of the environmental movement and its projection of emotions onto nature. Staudinger’s behaviour shows the obsession with environmental management inherent in ecological fundamentalism as leading to totalitarian control of hapless animals and antisocial exclusion of the people who had previously enjoyed use of the site. Seuren’s critique extends, however, beyond such obsessive activists to the general public. The ecology park acts as a focal

point for the false consciousness of the local people. An overworked nurse who comes there to get away from her cancer patients for a moment ("She had seen too much sick flesh and longed for some animal peace" p. 120), muses that we are relying more and more on instruments to postpone the degeneration of our bodies. Many of the visitors border on the ridiculous in their longing for "Do-gooders […] who one could entrust oneself to" (p. 122), and the narrator becomes increasingly irritated by their naivety. "We must bring animals, plants and humans closer together, they enthused. […] A tape was playing in my head, answering their questionsabout the reunification of humans with animals and plants" (pp. 213f.). He feels he has lost control over himself: "I had somehow become the lackey of a system which longed for more life" (p. 216). Yet Seuren holds out the possibility of a better life and calls for change. "More and more people visited the site in whose imagination my digging the soil seemed to stand for a revolution in human relations", the narrator comments:

> Irgendwie waren sie verschüttet, und die Leute sahen mir angespannt beim Ausgraben zu, in der Hoffnung, es würde im Lehm plötzlich eine Hand, ein Fuß, ein Körper oder wenigstens ein Gesicht erscheinen, in dem sie sich wiedererkannten. Sie taten so, als interessierten sie sich für aussterbende Arten, aber ihnen lag viel mehr daran, etwas auszusprechen, was sie woanders nicht entsorgen konnten. (p. 122)

Yet for all his critical detachment, Seuren does not deny the legitimacy of their dissatisfaction with society. Behind his satire there lies sympathy with the deep-seated longing for a more natural way of life which finds expression in their support for the ecology park as a utopian project.

5. Heterotopian dimensions of allotment and ecology park

Laubenkolonie Schwanensee and *Die Krötenküsser* both possess an obvious autobiographical dimension, but their authors also both combine self-analysis with reflection on the redemptive social potential of green spaces in the city. For all their scepticism about the possibility of reconciling country with city, nature with civilisation, humans with plants and animals, Gurk and Seuren inscribe into the allotment and recuperated wasteland traces of a utopian alternative to mainstream society.

Unmistakable parallels between details in the authors' lives and those of their fictional protagonists (figures coming to terms with their failure to achieve public acclaim with their writing, confronting illness and depression) reveal the latter as self-portraits. However, they are equally figures diagnosing the weaknesses of their originators, and critically exploring the consequences of these weaknesses. Graumann is a fifty-eight-year-old teacher who has taken early retirement, forfeiting his pension rights: Gurk, who published for a time under the pseudonym Franz Grau, had retired from the civil service after only twenty-four years of service, and was 56 at the time of writing. Passages in the book undoubtedly reflect the author's three-fold talent in writing, art and music, and his feelings about his lack of public recognition. Graumann's way of life is, however, described (admittedly from the perspective of an insensitive young visitor) in terms accentuating Gurk's own situation, as "the total foundering of an old man" (p. 19). Alone and unheeded on his birthday, he refers to himself as "dead and buried in the *Laube*" (p. 46). His presentation as a man stranded on the edge of society (p. 126), a belated Romantic, old-fashioned enough to persist in projecting his own sentimentality into nature (p. 136), is of course provocative, and does not indicate the values he stands for are entirely unfounded. On the contrary, Gurk demands our sympathy for this victim of modern life and our respect for his protest. Seuren's narrator, a middle-aged has-been writer who drinks more than is good for him, a drifter whose attitude towards life is frequently one of apathy and cynicism, and who is ineffectual and disingenuous in his "romantic" attachment to nature, is a similarly unflattering self-portrait of the author.

The process whereby nature becomes a repository for the city-dweller's longings for a better life endows allotment and ecology park with the functions of the 'heterotopia'. In his essay 'Of Other Spaces' (1986), Michel Foucault defines the heterotopia as a real place which has acquired special symbolic significance in a particular culture, through association with values which negate those of mainstream society. The heterotopia, in which traces of ancient traditions of privileged, sacred or forbidden places survive, exemplifies Otherness, in that it is outside normal society, and behaviour there inverts and contests the human relations designated, mirrored and reflected elsewhere. Allotment and ecology park differ from the first set of examples Foucault

gives, in that the people who live or go there do so more or less voluntarily. They may be acting under pressures from society, but are not forcibly placed or incarcerated there, as in the case with Foucault's boarding schools, military barracks, psychiatric hospitals and prisons. However, the green urban spaces in Gurk's and Seuren's novels are places embodying a psychological need, where the perceptual and the actual merge. They act, like the gardens, fairgrounds and holiday villages which Foucault goes on to discuss, as heterotopias, in the sense of "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia" (p. 24).

Foucault introduces the cemetery as one of his examples, discussing its shifting significance over the centuries as a place of the dead, though he does not mention the function it possesses in Raabe's *Pfisters Mühle* as a retreat from and resistance to the instrumental rationalism of modernity. Gurk's allotment and Seuren's ecology park combine elements of each of the two categories of heterotopia outlined by Foucault, "crisis heterotopias" and "heterotopias of deviation". Inasmuch as they are places reserved for individuals in a state of crisis, they correspond to the former, and inasmuch as persons whose behaviour is deviant in relation to required norms are placed there or gravitate there, they belong to the latter.

The heterotopian dimension of the novels discussed here is present in the alternative social order and alternative cultural values associated with the 'simple life' in *Laubenkolonie* and *Biotop*. These are idealised through fleeting visions of beauty and harmony, and allusions to them as "paradise". The garden or paradise, traditional site of a state of innocence and harmony with self, others and environment, is one of the principal tropes in which the redemptive project of a reconciliation of nature and culture has found expression. Just as the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament is the scene of human life before sin and the fall from grace, its New Testament equivalent, the Garden of Gethsemane, is the site of redemption through Christ's sacrifice. The story of expulsion from Eden encapsulates the severing of the union with Mother Earth which, according to Freud, lies behind all erotic longing, and loss of the animal-like state of preconsciousness before individuation. As Hartwig Stein has shown, there is a long history of allotment

holders seeing their activities as devoted to regaining paradise. He cites Max Demuth's vernacular poem 'Vom Garten Eden zum Dauergarten':

> Wohlbekannt ist einem jeden,
> daß dereinst im Garten Eden
> Adam lebte; erst allein,
> doch weil's besser ist zu zwei'n
> hat ihm Gott für's spät're Leben
> Eva noch dazu gegeben.
> Aus der Rippe ihm entnommen,
> ist sie auf die Welt gekommen,
> und so war denn, dies ist klar,
> hier das erste Schreberpaar. (Stein 2000: 23)

More sophisticated allusions to paradise are to be found in the writings of the proponents of the Garden City idea and the colonies founded at the turn of the twentieth century. Bruno Wilhelmy for instance, originator of the vegetarian Obstbaumkolonie Eden in 1893, explained its biblical name as follows:

> "Eden" ist der verheißungsvolle Name unseres Unternehmens, also ein Eden, ein Paradies wollen wir uns schaffen? Allerdings, nur nicht von heut auf morgen. Auch müssen alle, welche noch an die Möglichkeit eines Paradieses auf dieser Erde glauben, tatkräftig mithelfen. Entwickeln wir unser Programm, um Mitarbeiter zu werben. *Im Paradies herrscht Friede*: lassen wir zunächst den Tiermord. *Das Paradies ist ein Garten*: In einen Garten wollen wir unseren Acker verwandeln, in einen Garten, der alle Sinne entzückt. (quoted from Linse 1983: 41. Emphasis in original)

Eberhard Pfister's family mill is described as a "foundering paradise" (Raabe 1980: 123), surrounded by "forfeited trees of paradise" (p. 75, in reality chestnut trees, which are felled to make way for the new factory), and its new owners joke that they are driving out Eberhard and Jenny with fiery swords like the guardian angels in the Book of Genesis (p. 143). Ulrich Plenzdorf has his Edgar Wibeau die (on Christmas Eve!), "in a *Laube* in the Colony *Paradise II* in the District of Lichtenberg" (1973: 5).

Gurk and Seuren engage with this trope in different ways. In *Laubenkolonie Schwanensee*, the allotment is for instance described as the site of a way of life which gives the individual "immortality, providing both leisure and an Earthly garden" (p. 121). Graumann is referred to, albeit ironically, as a "hermit" and an "allotment saint" (pp. 129, 133). Accepted by the dumb animals, he finds serenity in union with nature: "Only in the *Laube* do I have the seclusion and security to be in clouds, winds, flowers and the

sun" (p. 75). References to paradise form a leitmotif throughout *Die Krötenküsser*, though in many instances they are mere clichés. Visitors to the ecology park exclaim: "A paradise! Right in the middle of the city!"; "It's quite a little paradise out here" (pp. 120, 187f.). Seuren gives a twist to the term when Staudinger transforms the area into a private enclosure by planting a hedge of thorns around it. The exclusion of the public is likened to expulsion from the garden of Eden: "It's to go back to how it was, said Staudinger, a paradise. And then, the people asked, will we be allowed to go back into this paradise again?" (p. 42). Later, we are reminded of the artificiality of the so-called paradise, created by digging out ponds with bulldozers, building toad habitats out of limestone boulders, spreading lorryloads of chippings to prevent grass from smothering the wild flowers, and wholesale removal of unwanted vegetation:

Die Kolonne arbeitete eine Woche lang, dann stand ich mit den beiden verdreckten Mädchen auf einem Hügel, und wir sahen uns die Erschaffung der Welt an – wüst und leer lag vor uns das geschotterte Paradies. (p. 63)

The narrator's dream of an "asphalt savannah" which recurs throughout the novel parallels the 'paradise' topos. The motif first appears when we are told of the "longing for a savannah" (p. 7) aroused by the tales of foreign travel told by a wildlife photographer who lives in the area. It reappears when the "strange, wild scent" of a tree transports the narrator on an imaginary safari:

Ab und zu, wenn ich alles um mich herum vergessen will, schnüffele ich an diesem Baum, schließe die Augen und bin dann weit weg, als sei ich gestorben und in der Savanne ein Baum geworden, an dem Tiere ihre Haut reiben. Ein Leopard hängt eine Gazelle in den Ästen, ich kann die Fliegen hören, die über dem Kadaver summen, wenn die Katze satt im Schatten des Baumes liegt. (p. 66)

A spectacular sunset and several bottles of beer trigger another vision: "The large pond resembles a waterhole in the savannah, its clay banks trampled by thirsty herds, and at any moment a lion could sink its claws into a straying zebra" (p. 240). "It was like a dream, herds of animals gathered cautiously around rthe waterhole, fearful of carnivores in the long gras. I was surrounded by a smell of blood and dung" (p. 243).

Does Seuren intend the reader to take this "bit of savannah in the middle of the asphalt" for more than "a fleeting and ridiculous dream of a

completely different life" (p. 243)? The images are clichés derived from TV nature programmes, and betray a dubious fascination with predatory violence. The author's distaste is unmistakable in certain passages, for instance where he describes men who play at regressing to an animal-like state preceding human consciousness of self:

> [Sie] spielen noch einmal das Vordringen in die Natur nach, Überlebenstraining, essen Würmer, schlafen in Betten aus Laub und waschen sich frühmorgens am Fluß, erschauern wehmütig, wenn sie spüren, was Dr. Benn feststellte: "Das Ich ist eine späte Stimmung der Natur." (p. 279)

Seuren does not, however, seem quite to close the door on the vision of a simple life in urban surroundings. The narrator's activities are not invalidated by either the complexity of his own motivation or the naïve expectations of others. The dream of an authentic experience of nature, at least one passage suggests, can still enrich our (sub)urban lives, so long as we remain aware of the artificiality of our surroundings:

> Stadteinwärts ragen die Steilwände der Hypobank in den Himmel, daneben das Arabella Hotel, auf beiden Gipfeln hinterläßt die untergehende Sonne gelegentlich eine Art Alpenglühen. Ab und zu holt sich der Sperber eine der verwilderten Tauben, die unter dem durchlöcherten Dach des Holzschuppens nisten. Dann ist Strategie in der Luft: Er greift im Tiefflug an, treibt den Schwarm vom abgemähten Kornfeld, fliegt unten durch, zieht eine Schleife über dem verwirrten Schwarm und stößt mit verdoppeltem Angriffstempo zu. Die Beute scheint zu explodieren, Federn wirbeln, der Sperber landet gut abgefedert auf der Taube. Ich bin jedesmal hingerissen, wenn ich sehe, daß sich die alten Jadgregeln nicht weit vom Portal der Hypobank gehalten haben, als gäbe es das Stahlgebirge des Kapitals überhaupt nicht. (p. 22)

Katrin Hillgruber interprets this passage as an example of the narrator's self-deception: "A country boy is retaining his sense of the original in the big city. He is constructing an anachronistic reserve, a preservation zone for utopians." He has extricated himself from the miasma of the affluent society, she argues, only to acquiesce in the limitation of his freedom within an idyllic enclosure (Hillgruber 2000). This understanding of the book and the passage ignores the tension between human ideals (including the longing for nature) and their corruption in social practice which lies at the heart of Seuren's writing. His narrator's pleasure at nature returning to the city may be dubiously motivated by lust for the kill. But is it too far-fetched to interpret the "alpenglow" behind Munich's highrise buildings as exemplifying the symbiosis of natural beauty

with constructed environment which we need to cultivate today? The author's approval rings through his narrator's captivation at the sight of the age-old ritual he describes with such eloquence.

Admittedly, Seuren does not make it easy for us to accept this interpretation. His book ends with the narrator's longing to regress to animality and divest himself of the "smiling endurance" of civilised society – aspirations cynically reduced to sex with Lena, returning the narrator to a problematic relationship (p. 311). And *Die Krötenküsser* is certainly a scathing commentary on our sentimental relationship with the natural environment. The narrator sneers at the pathetically generous donations of rich survivors of heart attacks, and ridicules as "eco-kitsch" the importation of a lorryload of Alpine quarzite by the Secretary General of the Bund Naturschutz to construct a "fairy mound" (p. 298). Yet for all the inauthenticity of their articulation, the narrator's and the public's dreams possess a utopian dimension. Seuren's standpoint is less one of cynicism than of profound scepticism and regret at the seemingly inescapable corruption of such feelings in our media-saturated society.

Gurk's and Seuren's books are fictional scenarios testing the viability of forms of protest against the society of their time rooted in the dream of return to a more natural way of life. These involve appreciation of natural beauty, a sparing use of natural resources, and solidarity with one's fellow men and women. Gurk's protagonist's inwardness and ascetic qualities are at odds with the emancipatory self-realisation and grass-roots participation which was to prove essential to the success of green politics in nineteen-seventies Germany, and he concludes pessimistically that the simple life is not merely likely to be painful, but also doomed to failure. Seuren is no less sceptical about the possibility of regaining nature and living a 'natural' life today. His narrative reveals the project to save endangered species and conserve a pocket of nature in the suburbs of Munich as a deeply problematic undertaking. Undermined by the consumerism and egoism of our age, good intentions become empty, symbolic and merely compensatory acts.

Nevertheless Graumann's way of life challenges his visitors, and the book's readers, to rethink comfortable assumptions. Also discernible in *Die Krötenküsser* is a determination to prevent us from being completely cut off

from a nature in which the meaning of our lives seems to continue to reside. The heterotopian green urban spaces in Gurk's and Seuren's books are responses to a longstanding and deep-rooted nature quest for a zone of purity and sanctity, offering psychic regeneration to the individual. This remains as powerful as ever today. Gurk and Seuren acknowledge our thwarted quest for wilderness, and the need for nature as numinous other of which David Nicholson-Lord has written in *The Greening of the Cities* (1987). Nature, as 'reality', truth, value and sacred space for an animate universe incorporating myth, marvel and mystery, is essential to our psychological health. But it can no longer be located in distant countries: we need to reintegrate the wild in our own cities. Previous attempts to implant elements of wildness in cities, such as Victorian and early twentieth-century parks, failed in Nicholson-Lord's eyes, because, under the physical and cultural pressures, they became bureaucratised, regulated and standardised. Ornamental, tamed and tidied, they ended up only fit for passive spectatorship and not for active use. They lost their integrity as importations of the country into the city and became adjuncts of the planned and constructed environment, no longer facilitating wonder, veneration or a sense of kinship with plants and animals. The inexorable growth of cities in the twentieth century has intensified the old distortions whereby city and countryside became respective emblems of the man-made and the natural, by destroying wilderness: it is up to human skills in the working of land to recreate it (pp. 54f.).

By greening our cities, according to Nicholson-Lord, we can not only begin to regain a lost relationship of interdependency, partnership and companionship with animals and plants, but also to reintegrate in our lives two increasingly divergent traditions: one the one hand, the rationalist and technological, and on the other, the imaginative and the primitive – the source of creativity and psychic energy. "It is of immense significance", Nicholson-Lord writes,

> that in the greening of the cities people have been able to rediscover the miraculous and marvellous among the common, the ordinary and the near-at-hand. If a garden is a game reserve and a city park a forest, distant latitudes lose their allure. […] The urge to escape remains. But in showing that we can reconcile and transcend it, that we can "escape inwards", bring wilderness back into our homes and our minds and our settlements and thus make it

something more than wilderness, we have planted a small seed of hope for the future. (p. 230)

The conception of nature as a *cultural product* hinted at here is central to the final chapter of this book.

[1] See also 'The Social Claim on Urban Ecology. Interview with Andrew Ross' – Bennett and Teague 1999: 15f.

[2] The form of urban writing so far seized on most often by ecocritics is, according to Lawrence Buell, "the narrative, essay or poem of rediscovery of unexpected signs of nature in the city". These are, however, relatively modest in ambition, constituting "epiphanies […] against the background of enclosure" rather than engaging in a reimagining of the urban bioregion (Buell 2005: 86f.).

[3] Hermand 1991a: 152f. It is an indication of the broken tradition of green thinking in Germany that the mix of the utopian and the practical in the latter idea, which emerged from a seminar of Robert Jungk's (see Jungk 1976), was derived from the writings of the American and British environmentalists Murray Bookchin and E.F. Schumacher rather than earlier German theorists such as Landauer and Hart.

[4] Heinrich Hart, 'Gartenstädte' (first leaflet of the Deutsche Gartenstadtgesellschaft), quoted from Bergmann 1970: 151.

[5] See Ulrich Linse, 'Einführung. Landkommunen 1890-1933', in Linse 1983: 7-23, here p.7.

[6] David Midgley has already argued along these lines in his study of the literature of the Weimar Republic, noting in the chapter on 'The City and the Country' that it is too simplistic to assume a categoric association of the city with the forces of modernisation and the provinces with those of reaction in the wider culture of the time (Midgley 2000: 262f.).

[7] As in the case of Eberhard's father's inn, 'mother' nature serves as a substitute for a deceased mother, providing a womb-like security and warmth. Raabe is not the only writer for whom nature plays a central role in a masculine, tendentially regressive and patriarchal discourse, in which women are often absent as equal partners (see Boa and Palfreyman 2000: 26f.).

[8] Heinrich Förster, 'Wesen und Bedeutung der Kleingartenbewegung', *Zeitschrift für Kommunalwirtschaft* (1929), no. 17, column 1238. Quoted from Stein 2000: 160.

[9] Gerhard Richter, *Deutsche Schreberjugendpflege* (Schriften des RVKD 19), Frankfurt am Main 1930, p. 16. Quoted from Stein 2000: 236.

[10] *In Utöpchen. Geschichte einer Sehnsucht* is another of the forgotten minor works discovered by Jost Hermand (1991a: 124).

[11] First published in 1949, it was reprinted by the Verlag Peter Selinka (Ravensburg) in 1987.

[12] Apart from Irmgard Elsner Hunt's article on Gurk's 'Berlin' trilogy (Hunt 1991), Kähler (1986: 205-9) and Midgley (2000: 282-4) briefly discuss Gurk's best-known novel, *Berlin*. Gurk is not, however, mentioned in Andreas Freisfeld's study of some hundred twentieth-century city novels (Freisfeld 1982), Klaus Scherpe's *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte* (1988 – a collection of essays on literary representations of the city between Modernism and Postmodernism), or the essays on literature about Berlin between the *Gründerzeit* and National Socialism edited by Klaus Siebenhaar (1992).

[13] There is an oblique reflection here of Gurk's own experiences. He moved, for financial reasons, from the city centre to a flat in Berlin-Wedding, situated on a 'Privatweg' close to the Laubenkolonie Togo, between the Afrikanische Straße and the Müllerstraße (see Emter 1995:12).

[14] In the ideal of becoming "naturnahe" (p. 38), and merging painlessly into nature in death (p. 114), which has been noted above in Klaus Modick's novella *Moos* and in Wilhelm Lehmann's poetry, there is an echo of the metamorphosis of Greek myth.

[15] "The text is tantamount to an invitation to visit the place, and parts of the nature reserve are still there", writes Katrin Hillgruber (Hillgruber 2000).

[16] Seuren further alludes to the special biological properties of toads' skin, referring to a newspaper article telling us licking toads has become a new fashion in America replacing the use of cocaine and designer drugs, since their glands possess a stimulant (p. 94). References to the term by the narrator's partner Lena (e.g. p. 269) suggest a parallel between self-renewal through sex and the attempt to regain the immediate relationship with nature experienced in childhood. Finally, Seuren also plays on the figurative meaning of 'Kröten' ('money') with respect to Staudinger's preoccupation with obtaining municipal funding and private donations. And Katrin Hillgruber has suggested that Seuren may be echoing the title of Arthur Koestler's novel *The Case of the Midwife Toad* (German title *Der Krötenküsser*, 1971).

[17] "Wir wollten 10.000 Quadratmeter sanieren, eine verwahrloste Landschaft" (pp. 8f.). See also: "Er […] wollte mir den Paß zeigen, den er sich bei der Stadt verschafft hatte, um seine alte, kaputte Wildnis aus Kindertagen zu sanieren." (p. 41)

[18] Seuren was to return to the theme of the Nazis' relationship with nature in the historical novel *Die Galapagos-Affäre* (Munich: Ullstein 2001).

[19] Staudinger in particular resembles Max Frisch's Walter Faber (in the novel *Homo faber*) in being driven to impose order on nature with the help of technology, by fear of what is beyond his control. His own ageing and illness, incontrovertible proof he is himself a part of nature and subject to its laws, are the real source of his anxieties.