

RAGGED UNIVERSITY

The Origin of Hippie in Europe 1880 to 1940 by Anne Hill Fernie

This talk was given at 'Gullivers' on Oldham Street in Manchester 20th April 2015 by Anne Hill Fernie, an event planned and brought together by Anne with [Joseph Darlington](#), and assisted by Susan Brown and Alex Dunedin.

Slide 54 to 60: Gusto Gräser (the Nature Apostle)



Gusto Gräser

Gusto Gräser is one of the most important figures in this story as he forms a direct link from Diefenbach to the influential émigrés who took Lebensreform ideas to the States. He was born in 1879 in a German area of what is now Transylvania. He had a promising career as an artist & was acclaimed at the 1896 World Fair in Budapest. Then he burned all his work and dedicated himself to inner explorations and nature studies; poetry and dance. He gave away all his inherited money to live out what nature gave him.

When he was 18 (1897) Gräser joined the 'Himmelhof' commune of Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach & later wandered through Europe with his family in a caravan painted with philosophical slogans, spreading his gospel and giving away poems or blades of grass as gifts. Wandervogel magazines featured his poetry & many writers & intellectuals of the time including Hermann Hesse who featured the personality and teachings of Gräser in several of his books & Gerhart Hauptmann who regarded Gräser as the personification of the 'New Man' as extolled by Nietzsche and Walt Whitman. Others however mocked him as a 'holy fool' due to his eccentric appearance which the writer Johannes Schlaf described in 1909:

The upper body of this form is wrapped in a kind of chiton made of yellowy-brown coarse sacking fabric with the bare, lean, strong arms and slim veiny hands exposed. His legs are clad in tight trousers from the same material and his feet wrapped in sandals fastened up the shins with straps. A meshed wanderer's sack hangs over his shoulders.

The media mocked him & authorities often banned him from their towns & countries & his pacifism saw him interred in an asylum during WW1. He was equally unpopular when he preached non-violence to the revolutionaries who briefly turned Bavaria into a Communist republic.

In the 1920s, Gräser worked at an anti-war museum in Berlin (which, by a grotesque irony, was later used as a torture chamber by the Nazis). He lived in Munich during WW11 in extreme poverty writing poetry until his death in 1958 & burial in a pauper's grave.

Thanks to Herman Hesse however, Gräser's teachings lived on in the 1960s & 70s counter-culture generation for whom Hesse's writings were required reading. Hesse first encountered Gräser & 3 other long haired men in 1907 near his home in Ascona, Switzerland. He followed them, stayed at the Ascona commune & took a nature cure for his alcoholism. Gräser became his close friend and teacher. Hesse's report *Among the Rocks: Notes of a Nature Man* (1908) described how he & Gräser lived the lives of natural men and hermits, sleeping in caves in the Swiss Alps and fasting. The guru-disciple relationship within Hesse's novel *Siddhartha* (1922) was a mirror of his own association with Gräser his teacher.

In 1963 Timothy Leary and his colleague German born colleague Dr. Metzner pioneers of LSD use for consciousness expansion, published an article in their quarterly magazine *The Psychedelic Review* entitled: 'Hermann Hesse: Poet of the Interior Journey', acknowledging Hesse's contribution in defining the mind-set of the Aquarian age.

Slide 61: Gusto Gräser & the founding of Monte Verita/Ascona Commune.



Ascona Commune

In 1900, Gräser, his brother Karl, Henri Oedenkoven, Ida und Jenny Hofmann and Lotte Hattemer founded Monte Verità, a reform-community on a mountain above the lakeside town of Ascona in Switzerland. It was a loose collection of anarchists, dancers, artists, wanderers, healers & writers who saluted the sun at dawn naked, refused eggs, milk, meat, salt and alcohol, fasted, attended lectures on Theosophy & lived in simple huts in the forest. It was the first of several utopian colonies on the spot which would have a huge influence on the development of the later countercultural trajectory.

At first it was like an outpost of the artistic neighbourhood of Schwabing in Munich with Schwabing residents including writers Stefan George, Erich Mühsam, Gerhart Hauptmann, Hermann Hesse, Else Lasker-Schüler and artists such as Hans Arp, experimental dancers

Mary Wigman, Rudolf von Laban & Isadora Duncan, all spending time there. The so-called 'myth of Monte Verità' grew around the figure of Gräser, with stories, novels and poems being inspired by him and the commune's life philosophy.

Fidus, whose art we have seen designed a 'Temple of the Earth' specifically for Monte Verità which was never built.

Slide 62-66. Monte Verità, Ascona

Monte Verità was run on a co-operative system, aiming to promote the emancipation of women, new ways of cultivating a unity of mind, body and spirit. It has been described as a Christian-communist community. What is exceptional about it is the concentration of key creatives who stayed there sharing their ideas. This ensured that the common ideals could later be disseminated across Europe and later to America.



Monte Verità

To counter a rather revisionist perspective of Ascona that is portraying it as nest of tree hugging proto-hippies, one resident was Otto Gross, a follower of Sigmund Freud. His views were too radical for Freud and he was rejected from the Vienna circle and travelled to Ascona in 1906 & planned a 'school for the liberation of humanity' there. He was an anarchist, believing that the new insights of psychoanalysis should be used to change society.

He was also a champion of women's rights, free love and believed that marriage was slavery. Otto's father Hans invented the discipline of criminology and believed that his son had gone insane. In a huge scandal at the time, he had him arrested in Berlin and taken to court in Vienna, claiming that Otto was unfit to be a father. The court case was closely followed by the European media and artists like Otto's friend Franz Kafka who, it is rumoured, was inspired to write his novel 'The Trial' with Josef K based on Otto.

Over the years the community became a sanatorium frequented by theosophists, reformers, anarchists, communists, social democrats, psycho-analysts, followed by literary personalities, writers, poets, artists and finally emigrants of both world wars. The writer [Erich Mühsam](#) called Ascona 'the Republic of the Homeless'. D H Lawrence, the Dadaist Hugo Ball, El Lissitzky and many others visited and stayed there.

In 1964, Harvard psychedelic researchers Professors Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner published their landmark book "The Psychedelic Experience" which was quickly labelled the "bible" of the hippie movement. In the introduction they included a

tribute to Swiss psychologist Dr. Carl Jung who wrote extensively about universal consciousness & archetypes; significance of dreams & internal perception. Jung, once a resident @ Monte Verita (Ascona) had witnessed first-hand many spiritual purifying rituals involving fasting, diet and excessive hiking, that could sometimes induce a psychedelic-type high.

In 1903, an anarchist newspaper in San Francisco published an article about Ascona, describing the people and their philosophies. This was certainly one of the earliest instances of detailed news of European counter-culture reaching California.



Mary Wigman

Slide 67 to 72: Ascona & modern dance

The 1920s brought new forms of Ausdruckstanz (expressionistic dance) which were a bodily equivalent to expressionism in the art of painting and literature & was regarded as a 'revolution' in dance. The new style was represented by Isadora Duncan, Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman & developed into what later became known as Modern Dance. The existential trajectory of Muck-Lamberty's Neue Schar spontaneous folk dancing movement with its consciously radical stance was part of this tendency.

The free dancing was a revolt against classical and romantic ballet and worshipped rage and ecstasy, bare feet, and the idea of dance as a means to assert identity rather than enacting established moves. Gusto Gräser's ecstatic 'Expressionist Dance' was interpreted into a more professional, structured form by Laban who later performed it publically as the 'German Dance' or 'Expression Dance'.

Mary Wigman came to Ascona in 1913, invited by Rudolf Laban and stayed throughout World War 1. She and Laban worked intensely together and out of it she developed her revolutionary dance. In 1918 she left Ascona and changed the world of dance.
