

Just before I began work on my book *Harmony and Dissent: Film and Avant-Garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century*, I discovered a trove of photographs depicting participants in a radical German movement, *Freikörperkultur* (free body culture), the early years of which constituted something of a prototype for the hippie movement that would emerge in California in the 1960s. Many of the photographs were strikingly well composed, unlike more recent images of practitioners of social nudity. But these formal rigours were responsible for only a small part of their charm. More important was this: there was something unbearably sweet about these images of groups of people who were convinced that they might alleviate modernity's depredation of charity through exposing, completely and frankly, their vulnerable naked selves to one another. Though these social activities too soon ramified into more pernicious forms (including the body amplification taught by Hans Surén, who was admired by Adolf Hitler), *Freikörperkultur* did experience one brief, innocent, paradisiacal moment that reverberated through subsequent decades as an ideal. This moment was captured in these photographs. Reading texts produced by the advocates of social nudity, and especially *Kehrt zur Natur zurück! Die wahre naturgemäße Heil- und Lebensweise. Wasser, Licht, Luft, Erde, Früchte und wirkliches Christentum* had made me aware that early forms of *Freikörperkultur* were associated with a distinctive aesthetic, one that was reflected in their use of an exercise regimen the purpose of which was develop participant's awareness of the deeply rhythmic character of fundamental coporeal energies. Similar aesthetic theories, I knew, had cosmological underpinnings, and the pagan character of the more important strains of *Freikörperkultur* connected these practices to such lofty metaphysical speculations. I decided to make a film that, I hoped, would reconnect these photographs to the cosmological yearnings I felt they harboured by creating a thoroughly Pythagorean work. Like my previous film, whose title I borrowed from the extraordinary book I mentioned, this work is dedicated to Adolf Just.