

LIFE IN WOODS

As »fields and trees taught him nothing, unlike the people in the city«, Socrates gave nature a wide berth. As to why he nonetheless held an instructive dialogue with Phaidros on the appealing banks of the Illisos, he provided the following curious justification: »I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; [...].«¹ Should it then be possible, in the countryside, to learn something about one's own being in a way one could understand?

Almost two-and-a-half millennia later, in the New World, another philosopher, who had just entered his fourth decade, put it thus: »I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life [...].«² Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) positively fled the city and sought the truth of life in the forest. It was not nature that answered his questions and doubts in a romantically transfigured creation-apotheosis, but he himself. But it was only here that he saw himself in a position to do so, as an individual thrown back on his own resources in confrontation with nature.

Since the turn of the year 2005/2006 the œuvre of Alexander Braun has included the group of works titled *Walden*, which, in the broadest sense, circles around the initial idea of Thoreau's experiment on Walden Lake near Concord, Massachusetts, and his 1854 book of the same name *Walden or Life in the Woods*. Braun's works can be divided into three groups according to the media employed. There are pictures painted in India ink and egg tempera on wood, there are video works, and finally there is a kind of photo-archive, in which »photos trouvés« are assembled and thematically grouped. While in the tree pictures, some of them painted from unusual, often psychogenic-seeming perspectives, the focus remains fixed exclusively on nature, its immanent dynamism of growth and decay, the videos focus quite clearly on the human being, interacting in the conceptual frame of the art-work against the backdrop of a forest. The historical photographs in the archive, finally, lend the theme of »the individual with/against the background of nature« a social and cultural-historical basis by documenting how, since the invention of photography, people have staged themselves in natural settings. In the way in which Braun compiles and presents this material, crosslinking it with other works, they themselves become art-works once more, an autonomous voice in the canon of a total argumentation.

The direct reference to Thoreau in the title of the group of works philosophically puts the whole American Transcendentalist movement around Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) in the spotlight. And as in two of Braun's works there are, additionally, explicit references to Socrates, it can be seen that he is also harking back to the origins of transcendental philosophy. Socrates' thought related primarily to moral action. He saw morality as based not on any objective order (custom, state, religion) but in the self-assurance of the individual. Daimonion, the inner voice perceived by Socrates as divine, was his counsellor, telling him what to do and what to avoid.

Braun's painting *Battle of Athens* (2006) makes reference to the trial of Socrates, who because of his political convictions was accused of impiety (asebeia), which in ancient Greece was punishable by death. Not even his dedicated (and preserved) speech in his own defence in 399 BCE was able to persuade the jury of his commitment to the self-determined individual. As a result he could have saved himself only by abjuring his views or by fleeing Athens, which he however refused to do, as it would have questioned the validity of »justice«: for him, steadfastness for truth was more important than his life. In this unyielding attitude of the individual, contrary to the state order, he finds a distant spiritual kinship with Thoreau, who, during his two-and-a-half year stay (as a non-employed thinker) on Lake Walden, refused to pay tax, which earned him a night in prison and motivated him to write his second influential work, the *Resistance to Civil Government* (1849), which represents the birth of »civil disobedience« as a citizen's legitimate means of asserting himself against the state. In Alexander Braun's *Battle of Athens* various treetops, branches and foliage strive in a circle towards a centre. The individual organic elements seem to dissolve, so that the work is not subject to a particular viewpoint and several perspectives are possible. Quite generally the calligraphic discourse of lines and ramifications in Braun's work is already so far advanced that one can no longer put one's finger on the origin of the expansion. Usually in these pictures Braun begins by establishing the trunk, which supports the composition like a backbone and provides the starting point for the graphic events. But precisely this trunk has here, in the process, been eliminated (by repeated abrasion). If we wanted to refer this back to Socrates, then it may represent a parallel to the circumstance that the Greek philosopher's corpus of ideas has rooted itself deep in the intellectual history of the West without one single written line having been left to us as the origin of his thought.

One of Thoreau's descriptions of nature could equally have provided the inspiration here: »Standing on the north side of a bush or tree, looking against the sky, you see only the white ghost of a tree, without a mote of earthiness; but as you go round it, the dark core comes into view. It makes all the odds imaginable whether you are traveling N. or S.«³ Emerson's thoughts can also be symbolically transferred: »Such [is] the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight in and for themselves; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists.«⁴ It is clear that Braun in his pictures avoids the illusionistic, the volume, and any coloured details in favour of a view of nature as an abstract model consisting of linear script and rhythm. It is a contre-jour look into the sky, which turns trees into dark skeletons (»dark core«) and restricts itself to »outline, motion, and grouping«.

In the two sculptural works *Maieutic Tree* (2006) and *Maieutic Branch* (2007) Braun refers to the procedure developed by Socrates and known as maieutics, in other words the »art of midwifery«. At core, maieutics asserts that the truth is concealed in the innate reason of every human being, and needs only the right questions in order to be brought to light (= »delivered«).

An appropriate rhetorical means is the »Socratic question«, which, posed in the style of purported ignorance and irony, leads the person thus questioned to the correct opinion. From this the idea is revealed that eventually leads to knowledge. The path to knowledge thus passes via self-reflexion and questioning. Nothing other is suggested here by the *Maieutic Tree* and *Maieutic Branch*, both of which rise out of a reflecting surface and are thus forced to reassure themselves constantly in the process of growth. The irony which Braun explicitly acknowledges as a compositional technique in various places in his work⁵ is based, if nowhere else, in the mere fact that the built-up character of this tree and this branch contradict any illusion of »growth«. As already in the landscape model of the installation *Silling* (2002) – which may be seen as the origin of all the subsequent nature models – the dominant factor is the »building block« character. What is represented here is not growth itself, but rather the product of growth is modelled, specifically with materials which only carry an inkling of nature within them: ersatz wood! (= coreboard remnants, veneered plywood, turned decorative elements etc., held together and stood upright with the help of glue, screws and cable-ties). And when the sculpture does then leave the realm of the »knocked together« and natural forms are imagined by hand (like the black foliage of a tree, directly borrowed from an India-ink shape in a painting, its shaft or the shrouding of a branch), then it is formally transformed rather than imagined. This aspect becomes particularly clear in the case of the branch wrapped in thick white felt, which negates its details and its surface texture and instead places the accent on its form, its convolutions and bifurcations.

The answers to the questions of knowledge in Braun's work seem crumbly and inadequate. The Tree of Knowledge, which we know from the Bible's account of the Fall, evinces blemishes. The idea of the transcendental is an arc stretching from Socrates via Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling to Thoreau. What is examined is the relationship of the subject to his/her outside world, and in this context to nature in particular. According to Schelling, any form of organization in nature symbolizes spirit: »Thus there is something symbolic in every organization, and every plant is so to speak, the convoluted drawstring of the soul. [...] As there is in our spirit an endless striving to organize itself, so also in the external world there must reveal itself a general tendency towards organization.«⁶ The organization of nature and the organization of the spirit are, however, not two elements that proceed separately and independently of one another, but rather the organization of nature is merely the image of the soul coming to itself. Schelling expresses it thus: »What the soul looks at is always its own evolving nature (...) Thus it is through its own products, unnoticed by the common eye but clearly and definitely for the philosopher, that it marks out the path on which it gradually achieves self-awareness. The external world lies opened up before us, and in it we rediscover the story of our spirit.«⁷ Schelling's philosophy of nature can be seen as a form of Transcendentalism. His last sentence could be seen as the theme of the American transcendentalists: »I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, to discover that I had not lived.«⁸ This sentence of Thoreau's comes from the notes he summarized in the aforementioned book *Walden or Life in the Woods* (1854). From 4 July 1845 to 6 September 1847 he lived far from all forms of civilization on a lonely forest lake in a log cabin he had built himself near his native town of Concord, Massachusetts. Thrown back on his own resources, and reflecting on the status quo of civilization, he describes the simple life and describes the relationship of his own subject to nature. »But I retained the landscape, and I have since annually carried off what it yielded without a wheelbarrow. With respect to landscapes: »I am monarch of all I survey / My right there is none to dispute.«⁹ Thoreau thus became the godfather of all the subsequent generations of »drop-outs«, who, however, easily overlooked the fact that he did not undertake his excursion into the wilderness in any sense in a spirit of dogmatism, but, on the contrary, for a limited period and within a defined conceptual framework. In persisting with his faith in the strength of the individual he shows himself to be a true heir of Socrates and does not fall to his knees in romantic excess before the miracle of creation, but says, with self-confidence, but also with a nudge and a wink: »It is true, I never assisted the sun materially in his rising, but, doubt not, it was of the last importance only to be present at it.«¹⁰

In the centre of the whole group are the two video works to have been produced to date, *Walden* (2006, 1 DVD as projection, 1 DVD on monitor, each 11:07 min., with sound) and *Marlin, Leonardo: Samaritain* (2006, double DVD projection, 2 min., with sound). The protagonists in the two works are children, a boy and a girl, each equipped with a fixture from the artist's total oeuvre: a hand-sewn skeleton figure made of felt. These works have their origin in the 2002 installation *Silling* and in the video *Felicitas* produced in connexion with it, and a series of subsequent portrait photographs of children with a skeleton figure. In *Felicitas* the eponymous 6-year-old is playing in her nursery in the landscape model of the installation, which bears the place-name Silling. Braun refers with his model (1. forest, 2. two high mountain peaks, 3. a place on the plain hidden behind mountains) both to a travel-description in Adalbert Stifter's 1841 novella *Der Hochwald* (»The Mountain Forest«, but no published English translation) and to an almost identical description at the start of the Marquis de Sade's scandalous fragmentary novel *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785). Both authors, Stifter and de Sade, seek a sheltered refuge for their protagonists both IN the world and FROM the world. Stifter leaves the location open, de Sade by contrast names his refuge »Silling« and places it in the deepest recesses of Germany's Black Forest. Through the building-block character of the landscape and the simultaneous presence in at least two places (in *Felicitas*' nursery in the video and in the respective real exhibition situation), the artist enhances the tension between the secret and the idealized essence of the place and simultaneous maximum portability and availability. The child's play with the skeleton in the video for its part increases the ambivalence of the work between yearning and reality, innocence and virulent violence. The characterized idyll alternates between dream and illusion.¹¹

The motif of Death and the Maiden, familiar from the European danse macabre occurs, only here evidently with roles reversed. To the extent that *Felicitas* performs as a self-confident mother of her doll and unambiguously determines the course of the game, Death is demoted to the status of »Deathikins« with no choice but to follow – an interpretation that stands the traditional motif on its head and underscores the aspect of the free self-assertion on the part of the child.

After the video was made, Felicitas said she wanted to take a photo. The choice of location and the colour of the bows with which the skeletons are decorated was left to the girl. This was also the principle according to which all the other photographs in the series with other children and the artist's book *Pioniere!*¹² were taken. Felicitas chose a spot between her parents' house and a railway embankment, a kind of secret »hide-out« for the local children, which, with its minimalistically dishevelled conifer-look in the middle of the industrial Ruhr landscape, cleverly supplements the Silling idea of a refuge concealed in the midst of nature.

In the video work *Walden*, finally, the aspect of self-determination is emphasized even more strongly in that here the children perform both as actors and directors, completely following their »inner voice«. Braun doesn't even hold the camera, but contents himself with the installation of the settings in an area of woodland characterized not by commercial forestry aspects, but by the natural cycles of the decay and rebirth of nature. In the middle of this woodland setting a mirror is set up, with microphones beside it. The optics of the camera are in a blank area of the mirror, so that the image that the camera records is identical to the reflection of him/herself that the child sees. The child in other words is performing more for him/herself than for the camera – while at the same time there is total control of what the camera records. The only directive on the part of the artist was to tell the two children Marlin and Leonardo to sit down with the skeleton doll in front of the mirror, to stay there as long as they like and then to leave the area in front of the mirror. Whether they made faces or sat still, looked at their reflections or turned away from the mirror to explore the surroundings with their eyes, was left to them. The finished work in each case used the first (and only) take, with no edits. In actual fact, the pair stayed sitting very still, staring at themselves: the girl for about six minutes, the boy for about five. In the meantime, a second camera behind the children's backs filmed the scenario from a greater distance. The artificial element of the experiment is emphasized more strongly as a result. The illusionism of the perspective of the camera in the mirror is relativized by the non-illusionism of the second camera; it is the latter that defines the video as a spatial installation and stage. While the video projection is accompanied only by forest sounds, we hear on the monitor before the children appear, before we can follow their path to the mirror for a short distance, a fast instrumental version of the Temptations' hit *My Girl*, which in its brevity functions as a flourish accompanying the entry of the protagonists into the arena. The children as a symbol of innocence in the face of an untamed natural setting are an image of pristinity, their untrammelled, self-determined performance, in the presence of Death, is a symbol of time and finiteness, while Death's appearance in the guise of a toy puts his authority in question: it is the strong point of Braun's works that he gives these existential questions a form without formulating them in too explicit metaphors.

The second video work, *Marlin, Leonardo: Samaritain* aims in the same direction. Two video projections, each a mirror-image of the other, show the natural setting familiar from *Walden*. In the grass lies a skeleton felt doll with open ribbons. Accompanied by the soundtrack of a devotional piano piece, the two children appear at the same time, Marlin from the left, Leonardo from the right, reassure themselves of the presence of the camera by grinning broadly straight into it, before bending down to tie the skeleton's three ribbons into bows with deliberate movements. No sooner has this task been performed than they grin once more into the camera and leave the picture in the direction from which they came. As the work's title suggests, the children appear here as Good Samaritans, who help the skeleton to tie its ribbons. In another context Braun has said: »The symbol of the bow, as I use it, works in two directions. For the skeleton it has the meaning of domestication – it is the expression of adoption. For the children, it is a milestone on their path of development. The ability to tie a bow is an important step towards adulthood.«¹³

By the repeated deployment of the mirror Braun directs our attention to the transcendental theme of reflection. In the environment of the forest the children have the possibility, without direct influences from outside, e.g. parents or friends, to reflect on their own actions and thus to create a certain idealized image of their own personality, which distractions maybe prevent them from realizing in everyday life. The theme of mirroring (and thus reflection) is also present in many forms in Braun's paintings, as for example in *When Stance Becomes Form (Unfinished)*, dating from 2006. Individual areas of the picture, such as elements of the foliage of a tree or the centrally placed conglomerate of branches, are variously repeated, rotated or reflected, like a thought being subjected to examination. As in all the other paintings in this series, the manner of India-ink depiction and the suggestion of calligraphy convey something non-illusionistic. There are no clear colour gradations, the composition is all on the surface without any effect of depth worth mentioning. The beholder can in principle reconstruct every individual compositional step. From the meandering combination of the branches to the elastic-looking lineation of the total structure of the trees, no illusion is generated by technical sophistication. The partial integration of the surface of the picture support, the grain of the wood, as in the paintings *Hold fast, three-eyed pioneer!* or *Great Whistling* (both 2007), make this aspect clear.

But when was the turning-point in landscape aesthetics that re-defined the relationship between subject and nature? More than two thousand years after Socrates, on his journey from Velletri to Naples, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was concerned with a similar question to the one posed at the outset, namely relating to the achievement of knowledge of the self through the experience of landscape. Longingly he hurried towards the city and in the process experienced the journey as a sequence of potential landscape pictures. Now the purpose of Goethe's Grand Tour was not least to visit Jakob Philipp Hackert, the best-known vedutista in Italy at the time, who was to introduce the poet and amateur painter into the art of the landscape. In any case Goethe proved his worth as a pupil even before he got to Naples. His depiction of the area around the Palazzo Chigi betrays a view of nature that points ahead to Hackert's thoroughly composed ideal landscapes: »Here a true wilderness spreads out: trees and shrubs, herbs and creepers grow as they will, dry out, fall and decay. That is all as it should be and all the better so. The area in front of the entrance is unspeakably beautiful. A high wall closes off the valley, a barred gate allows

a view inside, then the slope rises to the hilltop where the castle stands. It would be the most magnificent picture, if a proper artist were to attempt it.«¹⁴

Idyllically tree-framed natural scenes opening out on a view of transfigured architecture formed the foundation of Hackert's international reputation. Paintings like these, staging the relationship between man and nature with a degree of pathos, went down well with the tourists who came from all over Europe, and shaped the image which several generations had of Italy. Goethe's Italian Journey however was written decades later. He had long since corrected the contradictory dream of that country in which a serene nature either preserved or destroyed the fragmentary heritage of Antiquity. He therefore described his journey to Naples at first in the manner of a compendium of Hackertesque pictures and finally compared the city itself – not nature! – to the Garden of Eden. Thus this narrative artifice prepared the way for an abrupt experience which had far-reaching consequences for the aging Goethe's understanding of nature. After all, for the minister at the court of Weimar, the alleged blessings of Naples turned out with hindsight to be somewhat precarious: »Naples is a paradise, everyone lives in a kind of intoxicated self-oblivion. I feel the same, I hardly recognize myself, I have the impression of being a quite different person.«¹⁵

But who would want to live permanently in surroundings where one's own ego was subsumed in nebulous bliss? It is equally questionable in Goethe whether the possibility and limits of being oneself can be explored in a nature suspected of harmony. And thus he admonished himself right after his description of the Palazzo Chigi: the picture he had just sketched, which dulled any mistrust in the face of luxuriant nature, came across as excessive: »I mustn't go on with this description, I will only say that when from the hilltop we looked out over the mountains of Sezze, the Pontine Marshes, the sea and the islands, in that moment a heavy shower passed across the marshes to the sea, light and shadow, alternating and turbulent, which indeed gave multifarious life to the desolate region. A number of columns of smoke illuminated by the sun produced a very beautiful effect as they rose from the scattered, barely visible huts.«¹⁶ In order to reproduce such a movement of light and air, Goethe the artist dispensed with clear echelons and strict lineation. In addition, blurred colours and an arrangement of objects in parallel planes capture the dynamic of the scene and lend the watercolour an impressionistic density. By the standards of such works, which capture the fleeting moment, Hackert's landscapes come across as the »result of a projection of the [...] topos Italy on to the object of the depiction«.¹⁷ Instead of capturing the events of the moment, Hackert only saw that sunspoil and culture-drenched Italy of which his clients wished to preserve pleasant memories. By contrast, Goethe's alternative image unsettled traditional associations and wishful thinking. Evidently overwhelmed by the sight of the elements, he sketched a nature that tolerates no allegorical baggage and seems to push humanity into the background. In this not exactly idyllic landscape, there is no room for Arcadian shepherds to enliven the scenery with their herds, nor for elegant strolls the sight of which was intended by ancient tradition to ennoble the landscape. The Pontine Marshes, rather, prove their own pictureworthiness. A process of maturity like this is pursued once the artist portrays a landscape which encourages beholders to take rational flight from the dangerous illusion of paradise.

The writings of the young Schelling had an influence on this landscape aesthetic that should not be underestimated. After all he showed that the sensory perception of nature is always subjective. If this subjective appearance should awaken the impression in the artwork that the painter had confronted nature with self-assurance, the depicted motifs must stake a claim to objectivity. If the artist by contrast is not prepared to admit a particular intention when it comes to nature, then according to Schelling he is either in danger of capitulating in the face of a supposedly threatening outside world, or else he underestimates the interplay between his freedom and a well-organized nature. In the assumption that human reason relates in principle to a noetically perceptible world soul, Schelling opposed Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who had answered the cardinal question in German Idealism of the role of the subject in the process of knowing by asserting that only the self-related view of things constituted nature, step-by-step, as a conglomerate of phenomena requiring explanation. Their anthropocentric epistemology did not however explain why nature functions according to laws independent of any human intellectual perception. Schelling solved this aporia by assigning to nature both mind and the capacity for organization.¹⁸

This idea was taken up by the Transcendentalist around Emerson and Thoreau. »I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both,« wrote Thoreau.¹⁹ And Emerson asserts: »Whether nature enjoy a substantial existence without, or is only in the apocalypse of the mind, it is alike useful and alike venerable to me. Be it what it may, it is ideal to me, so long as I cannot try the accuracy of my senses.«²⁰ Both Thoreau and Emerson, in numerous statements concerning nature and subject took the following dialectic consideration by Schelling as their foundation: Nature represents the coming-to-itself of the mind. This means however that nature is, if one looks at it as such, unconscious mind. Schelling argument proceeds: the development of the mind shows that it works itself forward from an uncomprehended condition to self-awareness, and precisely this uncomprehended condition is nothing other than »nature«. Consequently the development of nature must precede the mind. Self-awareness is according to Schelling a late product that follows the development of nature.

By this criterion the autonomy and self-awareness with which Alexander Braun has his child-figures evolve take on even greater importance. With death under their arms, so to speak, they do not have to assert themselves against nature, but triumph in the face of it as a kind of metamorphosis displayed in parallel. Here it seems absolutely essential for Braun to work with children and not with adults, let alone with himself as a person. The self-awareness and inwardness of children represent unconscious animal essence (i.e. nature) and not (yet) a product of education and socialization.

Within his group of works, Braun has made repeated ironic commentaries on this assignment of the transcendental to the beholding of nature by integrating textual matter into the growth of the lines which mostly says something different from

what the respective picture says. So we can read, for example, along the thick trunks: »delicate stalk«. On one of the smaller variants, which depicts completely defoliated trunks and branches, we read: »tall calm blossoms«. By engineering an encounter of two different semiotic systems – the calligraphic system of the branches and the text readable as such – Braun calls into question any kind of idealization, which in his opinion is fundamentally ambivalent. This Heraklitian dichotomy, in which any idyllic composition always has its opposite projected into it, logically appears, in the formal sense, as an inseparable unity: the letters imitate when necessary both the two-dimensionally solid silhouette-like character of tree-trunks and the permeability of the outline character of the weave of branches. The script thus comes across as the causative component of growth.

In a current group of four pictures there emerge from an atmospherically heavily charged red-orange leaf-chaos background the terms *Deserta* (dereliction), *Solitudines* (uninhabited), *Arena sterilis* (place of infertility) and *Vastitas* (immeasurable wisdom). While the first three concepts evoke associations with deserts rather than with the luxuriant vegetal growth actually depicted, the culmination, by invoking »immeasurable wisdom« harks back to the long tradition of (literary) places in which emptiness, the presence of death and temptation ultimately lead to purging, purity and revelation. What one extreme (desert) offers in the way of open space and denies in the way of vegetation, the other extreme (uninhibited growth) leads to its opposite: a glut of green with a simultaneous maximum crowding out of space. In both cases, human beings are called upon to assert their justification for existence.

In a picture dating from 2007 it says in white ink on the tree-trunk »Now Triumph!«. This is a quote from the magnum opus *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman (1819–1892). The line here comes from the special printing *Good-bye my Fancy*, published in the winter of 1891 three months before his death and included as the second appendix to the ninth edition of *Leaves of Grass* that same year.²¹ Here Whitman celebrates his own departure from life in words that increase in emotion with which he prepares himself for the transition. In the artist's book *Life in the Woods*²² Braun had already arranged an encounter between the contemporaries Thoreau and Whitman, and used precisely this exclamation in an extended way. There it says on a woven embroidered tape: »Now Triumph! transformation!« In the complete original line, we are even called upon to rejoice: »Now Triumph! transformation! jubilate!«²³ Whitman – as a New Yorker he enjoyed a lifelong bond to ordinary people, and in his robust language represented a kind of counterpoint to the New England intellectualism of Thoreau – provides precisely this line in his manuscript with a rare footnote²⁴, in which he describes how he had found a place where a particularly large number of birds gathered and how he visited this place before sunrise and at sunset in order to find out whether the song of the birds was more splendid at the start of the day or at its close, as nightfall threatened. The morning song came across to Whitman as particularly »joyous« and »stronger«, the evening song by contrast as »penetrating« and »sweeter«. Finally he found that he was increasingly neglecting his morning excursions in order to listen regularly instead to the evening song, which alone could deeply touch his soul. Ultimately it was not the fear of darkness that conquered, but enthusiasm for the transformation it brought with it.

¹ Cf. Plato, Phaedrus, see: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/texts/phaedrus.html>

² Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods*, ch. 2: *Where I Lived and What I Lived For*, see: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden02.html>

³ Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, 1 January 1853. See: <http://walden.org/institute/thoreau/writings/journal/Winter%20days.pdf>

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, ch. 3., see: http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/e/emerson/ralph_waldo/e53na/chapter3.html

⁵ »Irony is also a >serious< rhetorical figure. Vilém Flusser says of irony that it's the only position from which a person has an overview of >his conditions.<« Cf. »The Retablo-Projekt and other Works – A Conversation between Alexander Braun and Christoph Kohl«, *Das Retablo-Projekt and other works*, exhib. cat., Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Cologne 2007, p. 25.

⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, ed. Horst D. Brandt/Peter Müller, Hamburg 2000, p. 241, translated by the present translator.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 239.

⁸ Thoreau, *Walden*, ch. 2: *Where I Lived and What I Lived For*, see: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden02.html>

⁹ Thoreau, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Thoreau, *Walden*, ch. 1: *Economy*, see: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden1a.html>

¹¹ Cf. Oliver Zybok (ed.), *Idyll. Illusion and Delusion*, exhib. cat. Phoenix Kulturstiftung – Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg/DA2. Domus Artium 2002, Salamanca/Galerie der Stadt Remscheid, Ostfildern 2007, p. 64 ff.

¹² Alexander Braun, *Pioniere!*, édition séparée, ed. Reiner Speck and Gerhard Theewen, Cologne 2004.

¹³ Braun/Kohl, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, here quoted from the Berliner Ausgabe, Vol. 14, Berlin/Weimar 1978, p. 345 and translated by the present translator.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 377.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 345.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Krönig/Reinhard Wegner, Jakob Philipp Hackert, *Der Landschaftsmaler der Goethezeit*, Cologne 1994, p. 167.

¹⁸ On this, cf. Schelling, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

¹⁹ Thoreau, *Walden*, ch. 11: *Higher Laws*, see: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden11.html>

²⁰ Emerson, *Nature*, ch. 6, see: http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/e/emerson/ralph_waldo/e53na/chapter6.html

²¹ Instead of composing new volumes of poetry, Walt Whitman spent his life writing one poem. In other words, every new edition meant a change in the length and order of the poems. The tenth edition, published posthumously in 1897, contains a few extra lines. The ninth edition of 1891 may thus be regarded as the definitively final authorized edition.

²² Alexander Braun, *Life In the Woods*, artist's book with a series of prints and two embroidered tapes, Cologne 2006.

²³ Walt Whitman, »An Ended Day«, *Leaves of Grass – The 1892 Edition*, New York/Toronto/London/Sydney/Auckland 1983, p. 429.

²⁴ *loc. cit.*