

Jochen Bockemühl: A Remembrance

JOCHEN BOCKEMÜHL (1928–2020) was a pioneering Goethean scientist and an influential teacher for many students who — during the past decades and around the globe — have worked with this holistic approach to science. I had the great fortune to be one of those students and then to collaborate with him on different projects.

Soon after finishing his PhD, Jochen began working at the Research Institute at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. From 1971 to 1996 he was the head of the Institute and of the Goetheanum's natural science section. In addition to research, Jochen traveled to many different countries. He gave courses for lay people and also special trainings for farmers, pharmacists, and doctors. The weeklong seminar he gave at Emerson College (UK) in 1976 made a deep impression on me — especially his love for concrete phenomena and his commitment to explore what the sense world, rightly observed, could reveal about the deeper nature of reality.

Jochen's research up through the 1970s was on metamorphosis in plants. He carried out extensive investigations into the transformation of plants through time and included the study of changing root morphology. His special focus was the transformation of leaves. It would be a mistake to think of Jochen as “only” observing and ordering outer phenomena. It was his special strength to attend in a subtle way to how we participate in what we observe through our thinking and how the way we think affects what the phenomena can reveal. For him the transformations in the plant were not only an object of study, but also a partner in a dialogue that can help the researcher learn to think in more dynamic and transformational ways.

Though a quiet and reserved person, Jochen was at his best in seminars, exploring a particular concrete phenomenon, and observing and commenting on thought processes. I had many “aha” moments in such situations.

In late winter 1979, I was a new student at the natural science study year at the Goetheanum, which Jochen and his colleague Georg Maier led. It was a real immersion in the practice of Goethean science, and each of the 18 students carried out a research project. Jochen was my mentor and he suggested a project connected with the question of heredity, building on extensive work that he had done with the

groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*). I was not particularly interested in heredity, but the prospect of observing how different morphological types of the plant vary under different conditions and over three generations in a year was intriguing. So I took up the project — little knowing that the topic of heredity would become a major focus of my own research over the next 30 years!



In the 1980s, Jochen began to focus more on landscapes. In the desire to meet and then articulate the holistic character of a landscape, Jochen would attend to both the details and the overall impression of a particular place or scene. He began drawing (with pastels), from memory, scenes from his experiences (see pictures on the following page). One time I was with him on a field trip in the Swiss Alps. We were

walking down a forested mountain with many larch trees. We stopped for a few minutes and looked, then continued our way down the mountain. A few days later I entered his office and to my surprise saw a finished drawing of a larch tree within the larger landscape. I realized that Jochen had the ability to really be with the things when observing; they became part of him, and in the process of drawing from memory, qualities became clear to him that he otherwise wouldn't have noticed.

After I returned to the US in 1992, I had little direct contact with Jochen. But my experiences with him and the work of the Research Institute in Dornach were a major source of inspiration for The Nature Institute. Jochen was always pushing boundaries, where something new and fresh can arise; he wanted to go deeper and tap into what is alive in the world. This entails giving careful attention to lived experience and reining in the tendency to form general, abstract conclusions. In this sense, his efforts live on at The Nature Institute. CH

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Books by Bockemühl that have been translated into English are:
In Partnership with Nature (with contributions by students; 1980)
Toward a Phenomenology of the Etheric World (ed. volume; 1985)
Awakening to Landscape (1992)
The Metamorphosis of Plants (with Andreas Suchantke; 1995)
Extraordinary Plant Qualities (with Kari Järvinen; 2006)

Awakening to Landscape

A short excerpt and four drawings from *Awakening to Landscape*

BY JOCHEN BOCKEMÜHL

When we appreciate the beauty of a landscape today and want to protect it, our idea of beauty is usually based on images relating to earlier conditions of life to which we long to return.

However, beauty “preserved” in the old image does not normally fit in with present-day life styles. Something comes into the picture that is not in accord with the times and we realize that it has been artificially imposed.

It would be quite a different thing if we were to see beauty in the landscape where human goals are in harmony with naturally occurring processes. In this sense, awakening to landscape also means awakening to oneself and to personal responsibility. This is the starting point for a completely new way in which human beings relate to their environment: The decaying environment is perceived as our own inadequate human nature. The seeds for a new life, seeds we can help to develop, will then be found in any place where we become aware that something wants to come into existence that has the quality of wholeness.

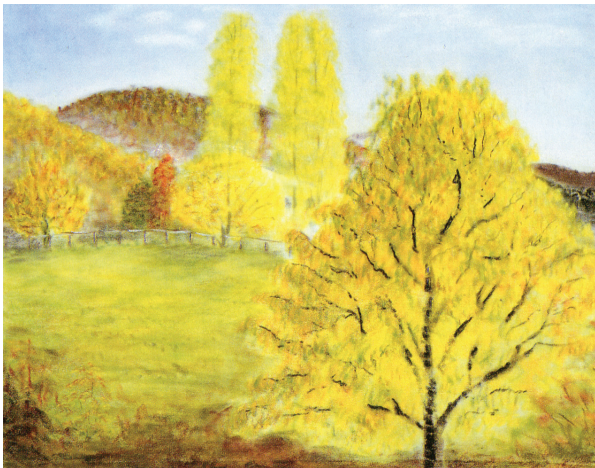
How can we relate to the living environment of the landscape in such a way that new beauty may arise?



Spring



Summer



Autumn



Winter

The countenance of a Jura mountain landscape in Switzerland through the four seasons, drawn from memory.

A Commitment to the Phenomena of Color

“Michael Wilson felt that the major theme in his life had been the understanding of light and colour.” These words were written by Wilson’s colleague Ralph Brocklebank soon after Wilson’s death in 1985 (he was born in 1901). Brocklebank continues:

He had developed a remarkably keen eye for observing and recording the ever-changing patterns and effects of sky and cloud, sunbeam and shadow, dawn and dusk, and all the phenomena of the atmosphere.

Wilson was not only a close observer of color phenomena in nature. Over decades, building on Goethe’s work on color, he created and carried out numerous experiments that show the myriad lawful relations of color phenomena and the conditions under which they appear. I had the opportunity to hear him give a talk at the University of Sussex in the UK in the mid-1970s and recall his energetic and lively presentation — with the use of many slides — on color. The lecture was in the physics department and I remember him stating at one point late in the talk: “You see, color is more than wavelength!”

Over the course of more than 30 years Wilson wrote articles on color. Many of these articles were hard to come by, and we can be grateful that in 2018 a volume of 26 articles was published: *What is Colour? The Collected Works*, Michael Wilson (edited by Laura Liska and Troy Vine, Logos Verlag, Berlin, 2018). Anyone interested in a disciplined, phenomenological approach to color will gain much from the study of these essays. Here I present one short excerpt from the prelude to the main essay in the book. It gives an impression of the nuanced attention he gave to the appearances of the visual world:

The mountains have emerged from the night fresh and clean in their mantle of deep violet blue, and a liquid light pours across the land calling forth colour as it goes. As the sun climbs and warms the earth, the mountain slopes disclose their form in a play of pink light and purple shadow, while beyond them the distant ranges lie serene and still, cool blue beneath the pale transparent turquoise of the rain-washed sky — a colour changing with infinite smoothness to deep cobalt overhead. In front of us the wind-swept autumn grass and the dying bracken glow gold and orange-brown in the morning light and even the outcrops of cold grey rock have joined in the scheme of things and show their sunlit faces warm against

shadows of soft violet grey. Beyond this the blue of the lake lies back in vivid contrast—a blue embracing all the subtle transitions from clear emerald to deep violet.

We lose ourselves in wonder at the majesty of the perfectly ordered colours and must feel that beauty is not by chance in the world. And yet, we reflect, only yesterday the same landscape was grey—the sky, the mountains, the rocks, the water — all grey with but a hint of dull colour in the grass and bracken. The solid features of the landscape have not changed and the sun gives no more light than yesterday. Where then has the wealth of colour sprung from, whither will it vanish? What is the miracle of air and cloud? (p. 4) CH

New Editions of Noteworthy Books

- This year the second edition of *The Heart and Circulation: An Integrative Model* by Branko Furst, M.D. was published by Springer Nature. We reviewed the first edition in *In Context* #31 (2014). The new edition has a whole new section encompassing 100 pages that focuses specifically on the heart and circulation in the human being. As Furst writes,

It is my hope that this expanded version of the text will inspire new avenues of thought and stimulate further exploration of ideas that will deepen our understanding of the heart and circulation and thus bring us a step closer to “what makes a human being human.”

Cardiac surgeon Roland Hetzer writes in a forward to the book: “the hallmark of his thesis is the renunciation of the cardio-centric view of the circulatory system, which regards the heart as the motor of blood flow, while providing a view of the importance of the peripheral circulatory system ... This book brings a significant gain of knowledge.”

- This fall the authorized edition of *Threefoldness in Humans and Mammals* by Wolfgang Schad will be published (available through steinerbooks.org). We printed an excerpt of the previous edition in *In Context* #41 (2019). This in-depth (1300 pages in two volumes with color photos) treatment of dynamic morphology is a one-of-a-kind study. It shows the truly integrated nature of animal forms, and is a treasure trove of insight into the biology of animals.