

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)