

THOUGHTS ON A SPIRITUAL HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE

*A Report of Two Lectures Given by
Manfred Klett*

Editor's Note: This essay has been condensed from two lectures given at the Biodynamic Conference, at Emerson College, England, on January 2 and 3, 1986. Manfred Klett tried to show that something good can come from the human presence on the earth, and not only ecological deterioration. Given a deeper spiritual impulse, the beauty and ecology of the landscape can be improved. Klett indicates how the landscape has evolved in Europe, how it tends to disintegrate in the present and how the foundation for its future can be laid from a biodynamic point of view.

Manfred Klett is a co-founder of Dottenfelder Hof, a biodynamic farm community in West Germany. At present Dottenfelder Hof is establishing a biodynamic college at its farm. Klett himself is a widely traveled man, born in Tanzania, raised in Germany and for a year educated in England. His lectures were very deep and vivid. The text which follows has been corrected by Dr. Klett.

Imagine yourself walking on a hill overlooking familiar native countryside. You rest your senses on this landscape. Perhaps you notice your feelings. One impression that is so immediate, especially in Europe, is that all of what you see, the whole structure, the village, the trees, the single trees, the hedges, the islands of fields and forest - all is in a complete harmony. Nothing is separated. That is one fundamental impression, especially in Europe.

A second impression has to be found deeper in yourself. If you travel over many landscapes in Europe, for example in Sweden, you might notice that in Sweden you find what appears to be a moral sensitivity - which you also find in the Swedish people themselves. In Holland also you find this identity between the land and its people.

When Dr. Klett came to England in 1949, he wondered why this land was so distinct, even though the individual landscapes in the country were different. All seemed *typical*. You look at a hedge and you can even imagine that the bush still has the same spirit which inspired Shakespeare. Dr. Klett observed this *typical* quality also as a child in Germany.

A third impression is still more hidden. This might arise in you when you notice that the landscape you live in is self-contained. It lasts throughout the years. It has a biography. The following example was given. If you compare the Black Forest and Vogues Mountains, you find two similar forested landscapes. Both have the same geology, the same trees, the same climate, all the seasons are the same. Yet if you roam about the two woodlands, they are completely different. You can't grasp it. It has grown throughout the centuries.

What composed these landscapes? If you go back to your hilltop, you may get yet another impression. You will notice that everything you see has been influenced by the hands of the people, by people's work. You notice that every tiny detail is related to another. Durer has painted it this way. You might know his watercolor of a piece of turf. It is almost a photograph. It shows how every blade of grass, every herb, is related to each other. A pasture is *human* made. It does not exist the same in the wild.

Every landscape is a creative deed. It is not *our* deed, however, not the deed of farmers in the present. It is largely the effort of centuries of past farmers, especially of the middle ages. It is not *ours*, though. We live as strangers in our own land. We have to gain a new identity.

If we go back to nearly prehistoric times, we find a completely different agriculture. You don't find such a created landscape. You find humanity newly involved in agriculture, who started to domesticate animals, the shepherds. The step to work *into* nature could only be done by those who had a certain spiritual ability for this, a spiritual instinct which was able to transform the bloodline of the animals. At the same time another group began to "kill" the earth, to tear it up, to plough it, only slightly at first—the plant growers. Each had a completely different consciousness. The instinctive early plant breeders had a different inner outlook from the animal breeders. Still a third line were the orchardists who developed the grapevine and fruit trees. A fourth were gardeners. These four lines reach a certain stage of perfection at the time of Christ. Then they tend to vanish as distinct lines.

The germ for their metamorphosis was taken up by the Celtic and Germanic peoples from the 7th to the 9th centuries. The thought they brought was not to accept the landscape as received, but as something shaped, shaped from inner changes in the human being. According to a legend, when Columba traveled from Ireland to the Lake of Constance, his first deed was to rid the area of demons which had possessed the wild swine in the area. That is, of course, a legend, a *picture*. It is a picture of the human being transforming himself, and thereby transforming the world around him. It happened that the four evolutionary lines united. The same person since early medieval times is able *to* breed animals, to till the land and to grow fruit trees. The ego is awakened. You could call it the marriage of the plant growers and the shepherds.

The arts developed in a similar way. For example, the Romanesque churches built in the 9th century still seem more or less hidden in the wild, untransformed landscape. Only a small-cultivated spot appears which seems to hide within the forest. But Gothic architecture two or three centuries later reveals the change. You shouldn't just walk into a gothic church. You should experience it from farther away. Perhaps you will notice that the church is growing out of the whole countryside. It is related to an interweaving of religious feeling and the landscape. The Gothic churches are *an organ of the landscape*. The plant ornaments are perhaps a symbol of the etheric formative forces that are freed by this deed of transforming the wild into a cultivated nature.

Dr. Klett pointed out that our landscapes - which have been created by the human hand - reached the culmination of their development at the end of the medieval times. From then on it was a question of preservation.

It was no longer creative or new. From the 16th and 17th century onward we see that people only think of leaving these small rural villages.

It was the step into the growing cities that led to the new faculty of self-consciousness. The original units of which the countryside of middle Europe are composed is the village. In the middle stands the church. Around are the farmhouses and the animals, often in the same building. Around the houses were the peasant gardens. The next layer was the ring of fruit trees. Then the view opens into the fields and meadows. The whole is then surrounded by forest, but after a short distance through the forest the view is caught by the church tower of the next village. The whole of Europe is more or less composed of such rural cells. These cells or special organs showed a harmony of the four streams of agriculture. The social structure of such villages showed a special signature which was still apparent in Europe until the middle of this century.

In our present time these special organs disintegrate. Far from any spiritual background, the four evolutionary lines of agriculture reappear as a mere matter of specialized production. This indicates the evil that something that was true in its time now reappears untransformed. We will not find our way into the future, if we do not realize the motif of the spiritual development since early medieval times as a Christian one. Steiner took up this motif in his lectures on agriculture, when he described the self-contained organism. This organism depends upon finding a relationship between your own awakened ego and the natural surroundings.

The Present Day Situation

If we wish to create harmony with our natural surrounding, we need to know the individual being of the farm where we are working. It has its biography. In the last four centuries people have abandoned the old agriculture in order to find their own self-consciousness. Natural science was needed to achieve self-consciousness, which, in a way was a product of the cities. The move from nature into the cities created the modern situation for agriculture. Natural science produced dead thought and thereby modern technique. However, this also made daily work easier.

The untruth of our time is that we are falling backwards. It is an objective evil. The four streams of agriculture become separated again, as distinct specializations, each of which tends to disintegrate the whole. If we attempt to run the farm biodynamically, we find just a skeleton of the older whole organism just skin and bones, so to speak. It has to be re-enlivened. It is necessary to establish the self-contained farm as a Christian motive. We try to find the right measure, the right economy of crops and animals, and how the organs within the farm are related to each other. It is a challenge to rediscover unconsciously the wisdom which earlier people seemed to possess instinctively. Though you might call it organic farming, it isn't just that. It involves the development not only of a biological organism, but one which works into the future.

There are three main challenges. Suppose we have created a farm organism. We may have the feeling that this is not enough. It is not enough for us to do just as nature does. Nature forms organisms all the time. You have to step forward. The actual nucleus of biodynamic farming means the responsibility to take nature with us. Being conscious of ourselves we are aware that we can transform ourselves into something better, into a higher being. We live in the confidence that we can become a different person tomorrow than we were today. Does nature share this feeling? Yet, this is an essential responsibility for biodynamic farming, the task to take nature along with us. The task can be grasped if we regard the functions of the biodynamic preparations. Working with the preparations and applying them we step beyond a threshold. Here Dr. Klett gave an example. I will describe how we make the dandelion preparation. Dandelion is a wonderful plant. It grows somewhat inconspicuously throughout the seasons, but at the beginning of May it blossoms. Before that the leaves form a flat rosette close to the earth, gathering strength, in order that in a very short time the head of the dandelion pushes out, resulting in a white ball of seeds. It is a singular plant.

You gather these blossoms and for the biodynamic preparations, you take the mesentery of the cow. You make a ball by wrapping the mesentery around the dandelion blossoms. You sew it up and bury it in the earth in the autumn, thus exposing it to the earth during the winter. In spring you dig it up. You find it has become a tiny bit of humus. You add it to the compost or manure and it starts to radiate. Through such a manure the plants become more sensitive to the surrounding soil.

What actually happens when you carry out such a practice? Have you even reflected on this? Let us follow the practice once again. You gather the blossoms. They represent a high or even a final evolutionary stage of the plant. The same is true for all plants. All the herbs and trees as it would reveal the highest perfection of their physical evolution. The same is true of the cow or any animal. So too are the forms of the crystals the highest perfection in the physical world. But the idea to combine the dandelion blossom and the cow mesentery is not found in the physical world. They are ideas of the origin of natural creativity which stand behind nature, given us to use as a new impulse to develop into the future.

This may not at first appear to be an enormous work, but it is. When one builds an atomic bomb it is clearly an enormous work, because by the thought of man all of a sudden tremendous destructive forces are released. This is exactly the contrary to our work with the biodynamic preparations. Out of human thought they represent a technique in the living sphere, which consciously releases evolutionary forces. Because of this work more and more can be done out of the realm of freedom. This is different from the daily work, which you must do as a farmer.

This work is bound to nature. You have to do it. The cow tells you what to do. If you fail to do it, fail to milk or to feed properly, the cow gets ill. The season tells you when to sow. You are a servant of nature. You are completely unfree. It is different with the preparation work. It doesn't come from the external world. The insight has to come from yourself. You will notice this especially when you stir the preparation. During that time you have to observe yourself. There is nothing in the world that tells you what to do.

When you grasp such a point of view, I am sure you are able to grasp the daily work in a different fashion. It is no longer such a burden on your shoulders. The older farmer could stand the weight of it. But just to be able to endure it today, you must have ideas that draw you into the future. You must know that you possess something which will also blossom in a thousand years.

Every person can join in this work as common cultural challenge. The point of view that is induced by this work produces a new identification with nature. Do you really think that such a work can be done by a single farmer? Only 3% of the working population of Britain engages in agriculture, about 6 to 7% in Germany. Are there enough people to meet this challenge? No. Since the sixties things have changed. Prior to that, the still existing social body of the farms made it easier to farm biodynamically. Now you not only find a skeleton of a farm, you also find the skeleton of the social structure. Twenty years ago it was socially easier to found a farm. From now on we have to establish a social body for each farm organism.

Several aspects of the farm at Dottenfelder Hof relate to this. The farm community there decided to organize the farm so that they could have enough time to stir the biodynamic preparations by hand. Four hundred and fifty acres means a lot of stirring, so they asked themselves, how many farmers would be needed to organize this task? They felt that at least three people should stir together at one time. They regarded the stirring of the preparations as a common social task. They used this as one point of view in establishing the social structure.

Specialization was another aspect which they regarded as important for a new social structure, since modern people tend to specialize in their abilities. At Dottenfelder Hof they organized their labor by dividing the farm into several sections of responsibility. As a result the farm became very diversified. There is now almost nothing that the farm doesn't produce. Each of the five farmers identifies with a different part of production. The women on the farm also have areas of responsibility, especially in processing. Of course, there is great danger in splitting off in this way and the community tried to avoid this through weekly meetings. They study anthroposophy and gather together everybody's experiences in order to maintain the wholeness of the farm within the consciousness of the individual. Within such a structure one is able to develop as a modern person.

Each farm has to develop its own suitable social structure. It will be different in England than in Germany. A biodynamic farm induces a social structure not only within itself, but also radiating out into a social environment. This is also a challenge to the farms themselves. For example, who should be the owner of the land, the livestock, the fruit trees, the machinery and the floating capital, when this new social structure of the farm is established? Land should no longer be a matter of commerce. Slaves were once a matter of commerce, but in our present time we are certain this would be an evil act. Now the question arises whether a piece of earth can be bought and sold? Steiner once said that to do so is a social lie. At Dottenfelder Hof they have taken steps in this direction. They extended the farm community into the social environment and established a kind of common stewardship, which takes the place of inheritance and carries the responsibility for the farm into the future.

This includes everything that supports the fertility of the farm operation, including livestock, trees and other plants. We have to meet this problem of how to handle the legal sphere in agriculture. Biodynamic farm can become crystallization points in this sense. Through common ownership, people can take hold of their responsibility for each square meter of the earth, even though they are occupied in other professions.

Dr. Klett concluded by pointing to still another challenge in the social life, which we meet on biodynamic farms. Everybody must have the chance to educate themselves throughout their life, not only in practical but also in a spiritual sense. As you dive into the practical work, being on your own, you have no mirth and no energy to study. You need to cooperate with people who have the same spiritual aim. This creates a social life that is the foundation of any self-education.

Further Comments by Manfred Klett During Discussions

The farm will be more economical the more it becomes a self-contained organism. This is the biodynamic economic measure which is a prerequisite to any measure of economic viability. It is the individuality of the farm, the local natural conditions, that are the origins of the social structure. That means having more people on the farm. By having processing on the farm, it gives the necessary financial support. The customers themselves will be the more supportive the more they realize that the people on the farm cooperate for the sake of a common cultural task. Having more people on the farm also tends to make living costs cheaper. Capital products, such as cars can be shared by the group of farmers.

The way we tackle capital is that the farmers themselves don't own the capital. Initially we had to take out a loan. We also pooled our resources without interest. We were in a bad economic situation for many years.

Also, we rented the land at a high cost. Each year we divided our farm profits into five parts for the five families, booked, but not necessarily claimed. The families only took the minimum of what they needed. The unclaimed profit assured the liquidity of the farm, and treated this as a non-interest loan by each family to the capital of the farm. After twelve years this capital fund accumulated to 1.5 million marks (\$700,000). Needless to say, the farmers lived at a low standard of living during that time, but they paid off their debts!

After twelve years (in 1980) the local government of Hessen agreed to our proposal to purchase the land, which until then we were renting. Part of the deal was that the farm buildings and 44 acres were to be purchased by a trust that we formed. This was made possible by a non-interest loan from the Bochum Bank. (This bank specializes in loans to alternative activities, ed.) The farmers told the bank that they could not repay the loan soon. Then the farmers founded a wider community group which shares responsibility for the farm. Many friends came forward to help. Doctors, lawyers and others with special skills offered their services. At present the community has 150 members. The profit is divided amongst them, but not claimed by them. All members are, as it were, "part farmer." This expanding community eventually creates the social foundation on which the consciousness grown that biodynamics is a common cultural task. Capital is raised out of this wider community. At present the Dottenfelderhof community has repaid one-quarter of its loans.