

What's Happening in the Library

By Judith Soleil

- Summer at the library means lunches at the picnic table amidst patches of wild thyme; visits from far-flung patrons passing through town; hot, humid days and rainy nights (necessitating the purchase of two additional dehumidifiers); and the occasional day off for your librarians.
- Special this summer was Judith Soleil's attendance at the "Being Awake" conference for members and friends in Ann Arbor in August. It was inspiring to share this experience with hundreds of you (!), and such a joy to meet distant library patrons face-to-face. We have been filling requests for various materials in the conference's aftermath, as we all work to keep alive and make our own the rich and varied content and encounters of the weekend.
- Nancy Dill and Mado Spiegler, two of our essential library "family" (Nancy as a volunteer, and Mado as editor of this newsletter), both underwent surgery this summer, and are recovering.
- Judith Kiely, assistant librarian, will begin graduate studies in library science at Simmons College in September. Her focus will be on preservation, a skill much needed here. Congratulations, Judith!
- Thank you to the Fellowship Community for a large donation of very useful books.
- We have increased dues for non-Society members of the library: these are now \$50 a year, with a \$50 deposit. We will be asking *all* library patrons for a credit card number or cash deposit when they request particularly valuable and/or irreplaceable books, as book loss has been a problem. We ask for your understanding in this regard.
- Overdues are still a galling nuisance! We will start to bill for replacement costs when books are more than six (6) months overdue. We start sending overdue notices when books are one (1) month overdue, to allow for slow delivery. When books are 6 months overdue, patrons will have received a card and several phone calls—and have wasted considerable library staff time. It is easy to renew your books—please don't squander our precious resources by returning books late!
- Patron Margaret Fait asks that readers please use bookmarks rather than folding down the corners of interesting pages. We would add that underlining also detracts from subsequent readers' enjoyment of a book.
- CAN YOU HELP? We are missing several items, and cannot find replacements:
Rudolf Steiner: The Man and His Work by Paul Marshall Allen.
Aus der Sprache der Tierkreises, vol. 2, by Margot Rössler.
Das Goetheanum, no. 17, April 22, 2005.
- Henry Barnes's loving labor of the last several years has produced a most handsome book: *Into the Heart's Land: A Century of Rudolf Steiner's Work in North America*, published by SteinerBooks just in time to celebrate Henry's 93rd (!) birthday. The book and its author were feted at the "Being Awake" conference in Ann Arbor, where Henry signed copies of his grand history of the society and its pioneers. Look for a longer review of this remarkable work in the next issue of the library newsletter.

A Word from the Editor

By Mado Spiegler

There could hardly be two more different bodies of work than those of the two artists and theorists discussed in this issue: artist Joseph Beuys (whose conversations with Volker Harlan are reviewed by David Adams), and architect Christopher Alexander (whose new books David Seamon reviews). Many of those who appreciate the work of one feel an almost visceral distaste for that of the other, and at first glance it is easy to see why this should be so.

On one hand we have Alexander, whose architectural career has been devoted to eliciting a universal “pattern language” for use in the design of buildings and living spaces. His is unashamedly a quest for beauty, clarity, order—what he calls the “luminous ground”—always striving for a simplicity by which things become more coherent and pure. No matter how central “process” and ideas are to his work, ultimately, it must produce practical results, habitable physical structures, and a sense of harmony. On the other hand, we have Beuys the avant-garde artist, equally attentive to all the details of his productions, yet deliberately avoiding an explicit search for beauty in the ordinary sense of the word. His life’s work instead has been to produce elaborate “alchemies,” reasoned assemblages that deliberately disrupt and undermine viewers’ expectations in order to reveal the transcendent quality of substances. For all the complex physicality of his installations, the fundamental quest of his “social sculpture” is for process and concepts.

And yet, seen from a different angle, Beuys and Alexander share common ground—they are unmistakable expressions of the same epoch, and carriers of very similar energies. In their starkly contrasting ways, Alexander’s “generative process” and Beuys’s “social sculpture” each represent a thoroughgoing commitment to improvisation, designed to transcend the limitations of modern individualism while tapping individual imagination. Working out of what is essentially human, they both go after the “forces” in matter. Theirs is a self-conscious work with qualities, generative forces, substances (which may be materials, spaces, or human needs). Their basic vocabularies include warmth, creativity, and openness to change; the fresh, autonomous response to each new moment; “making life”; and sustaining a wholesome, life-supporting world. The success of their enterprise is in both cases gauged by its ability to provoke conversations, cutting through mechanical responses to spaces and situations, and consciously working with polarities. Both work on the assumption that art is the concern of everyone—that ordinary people, given the proper support, can learn to see, to understand, to create in radically new ways.

Last but not least, it can be said that their project is a redemption of matter, achieved by taking it seriously, not just exploiting it in what has become the accepted fashion of modernity. They want to release the formative energies in the physical world, and to create “productive substance” (what Beuys calls “capital”) *within* us. Indeed, Beuys called himself “a true materialist seeking to penetrate the threshold where matter is recognizable as spirit,” a statement that could apply equally to Alexander. Whether they have succeeded in their self-assigned tasks remains for the reader to decide; certainly, those tasks represent demands facing all of us.

For those who would like to further explore Beuys’s concept of “capital,” there is a helpful chapter in Johannes Stüttgen’s book on Beuys (in German); a slightly abridged translation by Mado Spiegler is available on request.

As well as Christopher Alexander's new books, the library also has his classics: *A Pattern Language*, and *A Timeless Way of Building*.

While preparing this issue, we found an essay by Matthew Barton on a German website devoted to Joseph Beuys. Referring to Beuys's work with bees and the qualities of warmth, he describes Beuys's appeal for the younger generation in his freshness of spirit. While Barton's essay—at once poetic and political—constitutes an important marker, it is more indicative of Beuys's renewed importance than descriptive of the work itself. Readers can, however, delve into the question further by reading David Adams's essay: "From Queen Bee to Social Sculpture: The Artistic Alchemy of Joseph Beuys," which appears as an afterword in the 1998 edition of Steiner's lectures on bees.

From a different direction, the library recently acquired the "Bolk Companions," phenomenological approaches to medicine, reviewed here by physician Cathy Sims-O'Neil. Readers may recall our review of Jos Verhulst's *Developmental Dynamics*, based in large part on the work of Steiner's contemporary, the Dutch morphologist Louis Bolk. For the past 30 years, an institute bearing Bolk's name has been pursuing research in agriculture, ecology, and healthcare, with a focus on the conditions of overall systems—their vitality, capacity for self-regulation and self-healing, and the extent to which they express the intrinsic nature of plants, animals, and human beings. All phenomena are linked within a complex relationship; in the final analysis, they are all part of the same whole, which includes people, and thus the researcher. Research is approached from each disciplinary level as well as the interdisciplinary, and focuses on developing and maintaining awareness of the links between direct perceptions and systemic understandings. The four booklets in the series are available from the Bolk Instituut (website: www.louisbolk.nl at a reduced price).

As always, our shorter annotations include many books worthy of fuller attention—so many books, so little space!

Making Better Worlds: Christopher Alexander's *The Nature of Order*

The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe.

Vol. 1: *The Phenomenon of Life* (476 pgs.); vol. 2: *The Process of Creating Life* (635 pgs.); vol. 3: *A Vision of a Living World* (697 pgs.); vol. 4: *The Luminous Ground* (355 pgs.).

By Christopher Alexander

Berkeley, CA: Center for Environmental Structure, 2002–2005

Review by David Seamon

"We have a vision of buildings taking their form continuously through a smooth step-by-step process in which each step preserves the structure of what was there before."

—Christopher Alexander, *The Nature of Order*, vol. 3, p. 678

The Nature of Order is architect Christopher Alexander's four-volume masterwork. His aim is to lay out the conceptual and applied foundation for an entirely new way of doing ar-

The Rudolf Steiner Library

RUDOLF STEINER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2005

Volume #37

Editor: Mado Spiegler
Contributing editor:
Fred Paddock
Copyeditor: Judith Soleil
Production: Judith Kiely

The library newsletter is a publication of the Rudolf Steiner Library, the national library of the Anthroposophical Society in America. It is designed to keep library users informed of the contents of the library, as well as protocols for using it. It also features translations of articles from European anthroposophical journals that explore anthropology's relationship to the world, thus encouraging dialogue and the mutual exchange of ideas. Subscriptions are \$16 for three issues.

Subscribe through:
Anthroposophical Society in America
1923 Geddes Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1797

Letters to the editor are welcome.

Contents

- 2 What's Happening in the Library
By Judith Soleil
- 3 A Word from the Editor
By Mado Spiegler

Reviews

- 4 Making Better Worlds: Christopher Alexander's
The Nature of Order
Review by David Seamon
- 10 *What Is Art? Conversation with Joseph Beuys*
By Volker Harlan, ed.
Review by David Adams

Essay

- 13 Bees and Beuys
By Matthew Barton

Review

- 16 *Bolk's Companions for the Study of Medicine*
Review by Cathy Sims-O'Neil
- 18 Annotations