

# AWAKENING TO THE SOCIAL ORGANISM OF THE FARM & THE DESIGN OF SOCIAL SPACE



~from the notes of Farmer John Peterson (excerpted by ed.)

for a sacred agriculture pre-conference presentation at angelic organics, november 2012

**T**he purpose of this gathering today is to foster an enthusiasm for social life on our farms. A further goal is for this enthusiasm to transform into deeds on your farms back home

Rudolf Steiner said in a lecture series called 'Awakening to Community'; *"Man must become more to his fellow man than he used to be; he must become his awakener. People must become closer to one another than they used to do, each becoming an awakener of everyone he meets. Modern human beings entering life today have stored up far too much karma not to feel a destined connection to every single individual they encounter. ... Now it has become necessary to be awakened not just by nature but by the human beings with whom we are karmically connected and whom we want to seek. ...[this] can be expressed in the words, 'I want to wake up in the encounter with my fellow [humans]'"*

Elsewhere in this same lecture series Steiner said, *"Let us set about kindling this enthusiasm in our souls; then it will become deeds. And deeds are essential."* (pg 85)

What a blessing it will be if this gathering today inspires us in a way that leads to deeds that will enhance the social organism of our farms. Curious, what do you want to get out of today?

**The Central Questions of this Gathering?** To host a day focusing on the social organism of the farm raises the question *"what is the social organism of the farm?"* I am going to proceed with the idea that the social organism of the farm is the social life that occurs on the farm, social life that takes place within the boundaries of the farm. (Note: a drawing from a government extension manual published in 1916 is presented; see drawing to the right: "The Social Organism of the Farm and Neighbouring"). It's a picture of healthy community life. The center. The periphery. The flow of social life through the community. Notice the quote (below the title), also from the extension manual, *"No method or institution will ever take the place of neighborly visiting."* Imagine that government extension was once such an advocate and facilitator of healthy social life.

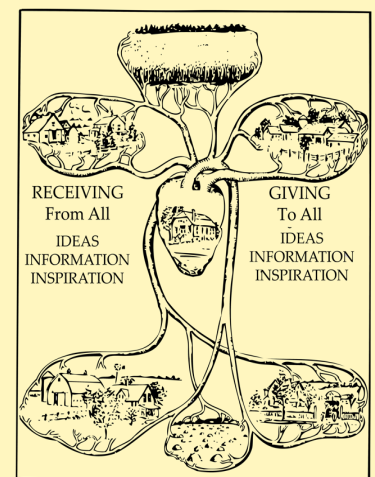
I'll also share the quote (at bottom) by Theodore Roosevelt: *"Our civilization rests at bottom on the wholesomeness, the attractiveness and the completeness, as well as the prosperity of life in the country... The great rural interests are human interests and good crops or livestock are of little value to the farmer unless they open the door to a good kind of life on the farm."*

To offer a picture of farms as self-contained centers or organisms and

also as part of a constellation of the community landscape, here is an excerpt from an essay I wrote years ago, 'The Barn Is There': *"For as long as I remember, I have loved looking at farms: how the fields were laid out; how the buildings were situated, their color, sizes, forms and states of repair; the landscaping of the farmsteads; the livestock and the pens and corrals; the condition of the crops. Each farm*

## The Social Organism of the Farm and Neighboring

No method or institution will ever take the place of neighborly visiting.  
-Extension manual, 1916



"Our civilization rests at the bottom on wholesomeness, the attractiveness, and the completeness, as well as the prosperity of life in the country. The great rural interests are human interests, and good crops or livestock are of little value to the farmer unless they open the door to a good life on the farm."

-Theodore Roosevelt



was a fascinating story - these physical outgrowths were where the farmer interfaced with the land. The barn is that big, I would think. It is not bigger. It could have been bigger. It could have been smaller. It is that big. The farmer made it like that. He put it there, right there. He could have put it a little to the left, or to the right, but he put it there. Then I would see another farm, and I would contemplate that farm. I would notice the relationships of the farms to one another, how they sat separate like islands, like outposts, how they each were surrounded with their own silence and their own robustness, and how this emanation of each farm's individuality somehow made it seem more connected to other farms, not more isolated. I would gaze out over these separated farmsteads, and see their noble separateness and their sublime unity, and notice how these qualities supported one another."

Based on this picture, the farm is at the center. Your farm is at the center. We could say today that Angelic Organics is at the center, and other farms or locations are part of the social circulatory system.

Notice how "this emanation of each farm's individuality somehow makes them seem more connected to other farms, not more isolated?" Picture "their noble separateness and their sublime unity, and notice how these qualities support one another."

What happens on this farm today is part of the social organism of this farm. What the individuals on this farm take to other farms or communities would qualify as *neighboring*. We could develop this example further and say that all of you who are not part of the Angelic Organics farm community are *neighboring* today. You came from the heart of your farm to the periphery, this farm, in a *neighboring* spirit. But today, the center is Angelic Organics, because we are all here today.

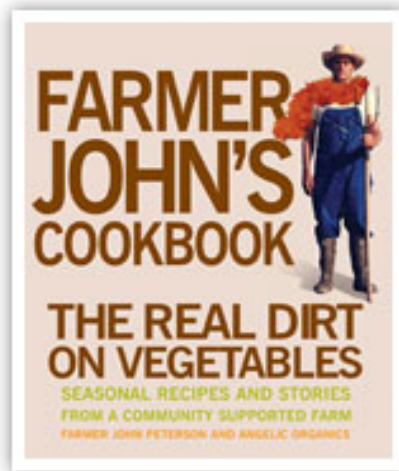
I pondered the definition of the social organism of the farm, especially because I went out into the world from my farm with two ambitious social initiatives, one was touring the Midwest in the 80's with a play 'Resolution' that I wrote about the farm crisis, and the other was touring



John performing in his play, 'Resolution' with the film 'The Real Dirt on Farmer John' (ed. note: available through website [www.angelicorganics.com/film](http://www.angelicorganics.com/film) ; along with 'Farmer John's Cookbook').



These tours were social impulses generated by my relationship to my farm and my feelings for others beyond this farm, but I don't think these initiatives belong exactly to the social organism of the farm, other than from the standpoint of *neighboring*. I consider both of these extensive tours to be in



the realm of *neighboring*.

We could have a long discussion about whether *neighboring* is part of the social organism of the farm. In a way, *neighboring* is of course part of the social organism of the farm, but for the purpose of this day, I propose we hold the picture that social life that takes place within the farm organism is the social organism of the farm, and that social life that takes place off of the farm is in the realm of *neighboring*. Social life off the farm is an extension of farm social life in the form of *neighboring*. This way, we can have something to focus on, or rather two things to focus on: the social life that takes place on our farms is the social organism of the farm and the social life that takes place off of our farms is in the form of *neighboring*. *Neighboring* exists within the constellation of outer community. The community is not necessarily a geographic place. The community is more of a feeling and it takes many different forms. We will not go into a discussion today about what constitutes outer community. It varies with each of us, and you know in your hearts what makes up your outer communities.

(Aside: At hourly intervals John engages the group in playful song & dance, with a likely recognizable but 'biodynamically' altered chorus: "**You put the [yarrow] in, you put the [yarrow] out, you put the [yarrow] in and you shake it all about; you do the hokey pokey & you turn yourself around; that's what it's all about**"; John leads the group, successively singing each of the 'bd preps' into the song: from [yarrow] through chamomile, nettles, oakbark, dandelion, & valerian; a rhythmic social stirring, twirling, singing & silliness ensues, one prep per song session ~ed.)

From 'Garments of the Farm Individuality' by Hartmut von Jeetze (does anyone here know Hartmut? A fabulous soul...): "The land has always been a close friend and ally of humanity. A farm individuality is a being that comes to life, into existence, only through the activity of human beings and their interaction with nature. ... In the past, culture was unthinkable without agriculture.

A farm develops out of the interaction between what lives in us and in the

*world around us, thereby becoming an expression of human activity joined by the creative beings of the world."*

(The audience is asked this question while it is written on a white board): *What are some types of social life that take place on your farms and what sorts or categories of people make up this social life?* (Include salesmen, delivery people, evangelists, residential; worker; intern; customer; neighbors; relatives; family; students; tour groups etc. ).

Okay, now we've established that when we talk about the social organism of the farm, we are talking about the social life that occurs on our farms. What occurs socially off of our farm qualifies as *neighboring*.

I know this is a little like an academic class, where we have to get our definitions or our terms straight. However, it's important that we have common ground in our discussions today, so we'll spend a little more time on this process of clarifying terms.

We have further consideration of our title for today's conference, *Awakening to the Social Organism of the Farm*, "What is social? What constitutes social life?"

There is a saying which I'm sure everyone here has heard, "Know your farmer. Know your food." What does the USDA mean by "Know your farmer?" What do people know about their farmer when they think they know their farmer? Does it mean how many acres does the farmer own? How many children does the farmer have? How tall is the farmer? How handsome? What does it mean to know someone?

Many people who have watched the film *The Real Dirt on Farmer John* say to me afterwards, "I feel like I know you." I don't feel like people know me from watching that film. The viewers often feel like they know me, but they actually know a small part of me from seeing the film. Over 250 hours of footage were shot to make those 83 minutes of that documentary. I have often thought that in those 250 hours of footage, there could be 3 life stories made about me that would hardly overlap...five life stories, each one dissimilar from the others. My closest friends who saw the film at its premier said, "That's a nice

story about you, John, but it's not how I think about you. The most important things were left out." *What does it mean to know someone?*

This is a good opportunity to tell you something about my wife Haidy, which does not make itself obvious in a first encounter, something that is important to know. Haidy has been very sick the last many months ... one could even say years ... mostly bedridden, with a disease of the immune system, *Hashimoto's*. It is a very big effort for her to be here today, and it is uncertain how much of the conference in Madison she will be able to attend. Your first impression of Haidy might be one of youthful beauty and wellness. But, to know Haidy, you would need to know this sad truth about her health. This would need to be discovered, so you could relate to the real Haidy. How would your listening need to be in an encounter with Haidy in order for this important fact to emerge?

My mother asked me one day to stop at a funeral home so she could go in and pay her last respects to a neighbor who had recently passed away. She came out of the funeral home, got back in the car, and said, "My gosh, she doesn't look sick. Everyone talked about how sick she was these last few months. Who were they kidding? She doesn't look sick at all."

We need to penetrate the veil of outer appearances in our relations with others. Today, there are certainly many people in this room who yearn to be seen in a true way, but this truth will only emerge with the right kind of interest, the right kind of listening.

Rudolf Steiner said, "*Understanding society is primarily a question of understanding individuals and developing individually differentiated interest in them. Wanting to get to know and understand human beings must become our most important task for the future.*"

I'll now put this in a different way, in a sort of paraphrase. Does anyone here know Martin Hahn from *Helchenhof Farm* in Baden-Wurtemberg in southern Germany? (see photo to the right ~ed.)

On my film tour, I had the great fortune of visiting many biodynamic farms. I

will speak more about some of these farms this afternoon, but I want to now share my experience of Martin Hahn of Helchenhof, a biodynamic dairy and vegetable farm situated near Lake Constanz in south Germany.

I loved visiting Martin. I actually visited his farm several times; he is such a charismatic man, a beautiful soul, a lifelong farmer on his family's ancestral land. Martin had no boundaries when speaking to me. Some farmers are like this; it is a strange and magnificent quality. When he spoke to me, Martin usually stood completely in my zone, his head leaning forward maybe three or four inches from my head.

(I need someone to come up here to play me, so I can play Martin ie. Skit of Martin Hahn):

Martin says, "*The most important biodynamic thing I do is not the preps; it is my interest in the other on my farm. What does the other want and how can I help? I have many Polish workers here; I have interns. I have managers. Always, the most important question is who are you and how can I help you to get the life you want?*"

Helchenhof Farm and Martin Hahn assuredly reside today in the hearts and the biographies of many.



Home of Martin Hahn, Helchenhof Farm.



Steiner said, *“Human beings wake up in the mutual encounter with each other. As each one has new experiences between these encounters with these others, and has grown a little, these awakenings take place in an ever new way as people go on meeting. The awakenings undergo a burgeoning development.”* (Awakening to Community, pg 99)

**Who Are We?** You are here today, most likely because you consider this an important endeavor, to Awaken to the Social Organism of the Farm.

Here’s a heads-up from Rudolf Steiner, *“Today human beings know little about human beings. Spiritual science is only at the beginning of its cosmic assessment of human dignity and human nature. In real life, people today know little about human beings. As a rule, we do not penetrate deeply into the soul-essence of our fellows. A more profound social system, however, will require a new understanding of the human being, and this new understanding will have to become a factor in human evolution.”* (from Peter Selg’s *‘The Fundamental Social Law’*, pg 81)

Is this what the USDA is advocating, when they advise consumers to know their farmer? Is our government suggesting ...to penetrate into the soul essence of our fellows? Perhaps our farms as social organisms can help us to achieve this social intimacy.

(time for discussion)

The farm, as we all know, is not just an economic model; it is also a social domain or social organism. We can elaborate more on this picture of the farm as a social and cultural organism. How we integrate the social realm into our farms has potentially great consequences in the lives of those who experience our farms, and also for the spiritual beings that help to tend our farms.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6oNnp7Ohpw>

How would a healthy social organism on a farm function? This is an essential question, which we will investigate and discuss throughout the day.

I will now, however, present an obstacle to healthy social functioning, because I would also like our attention to be on this obstacle throughout the day, as we interact with one another.

Steiner said in ‘Awakening to Community’, *“But where the ordinary, everyday state of mind prevails, it often happens that people talking together are not even concerned to hear what the other is saying. We all know this from our personal experience. It has become a habit nowadays to give scant attention to somebody else’s words. When a person is part way through a sentence, someone else starts talking, because he is not the least bit interested in what is being said. He is interested only in his own opinion.”* (pg 110)

When I was little, I was horrified by how little listening there was at the kitchen table. I’d be asked how my day was and no one would wait for an answer. This concern has stayed with me for my whole life. In the 80’s, I designed a 12 hour course *‘The Art of Neighboring’* and it was taught in many rural communities in Illinois. Primarily, it taught the art of listening. To contextualize this just a bit, according to Steiner (as I understand it), this is the age of the development of the consciousness soul. We have processes at work within us - and this will be humanity’s condition for the next 500 years or so - processes that, while they are helping to build our consciousness soul, make us self-centered, make us inward, make us not listen to others, make us say things like, *“I’m glad that’s his problem and not my problem”* or *“He had it coming.”* To counter this upbuilding of our consciousness soul, which makes us pre-occupied and self-centered, we need social life - healthy social life - to take us out of ourselves in the direction of compassion and consideration for our fellow humans. Let us *“strive to wake up in the encounter with [our] fellow [humans]”*.

(Note: an example of people not listening so well to each other is shared in a music video of Lesley Littlefield’s *‘The Farmer John song’*, performed by her & John; for a laugh, visit the link below the photo to the left ~ed.)

Today, pay attention to how you are paying attention to others; pay attention to if you are paying attention to others.(Note: an old photo of a picnic happening on the farm is shown ~ed.):

I was brought up with a community spirit. We often had large community picnics on Sunday afternoons here on the farm, in that yard (gestures toward it) surrounding the farmhouse. Social life, community life, were a part of this farm from my very first memories.

There are four social initiatives that stand out for me when I review my biography with this farm, but I will not have time to go into each in detail. Two are within the farm organism: the flourishing of the Midwest Coast here in the late 70’s and early 80’s and the design of social spaces here; two would qualify, by the definition we have assigned today, as neighboring: touring in the 80’s with my play *Resolution* and touring with the film *‘The Real Dirt on Farmer John’*. (Note: for the purposes of this publication we will focus mostly on the theme of the design of social spaces, as fascinatingly interesting & inter-related as the other aspects are to the biography of this farm ~ed)

Before we break, let me share another insight by Steiner. He spoke of [the importance of] a fundamental interest in other people, in the concrete circumstances of their lives and in their accomplishments on behalf of the community: He said, *“Interest in the other person is what is needed. Formerly instinctive, it must now be acquired very consciously. The main nerve in society is each person’s interest in the other.”*



Social space key design features: milk/coffee & cookies?



**A Transformed Social Impulse: Design of Social Spaces:** Towards the end of the film tour, I found myself hiking the Italian Alps for several days. During these hikes, I was visited by imaginations of what to do with the farm when I returned home. These were surprising imaginations; they were not about production methods, equipment purchases, or economic expansion. They were design imaginations. I sensed them as social imaginations, though they were not about social life directly. They were about completing or creating spaces on the farm that would be amenable to social life here. These imaginations came to me, one wave after another. Detailed imaginations. Windows: where, the shape. Walls: the texture. Doorways. Planters. Balconies. Walkways. I experienced these visions or imaginations as a spiritual mandate, or at least a spiritual directive. They inundated me, day after day, as I hiked those splendid Alps.

For my whole adult life, I had been working with the buildings here to embrace and uplift social life. In spite of the many other engaging aspects of farm activity, such as the growing, the equipment, the soil, the weather, I will say that **my relationship to the built forms here is amongst the most compelling.**

So, in a way, this inundation of pictures in the Alps was welcome to me, even exciting. But it was a rather hefty spiritual mandate. I did feel a bit perplexed that I was not given direction for any of the activities that were to take place inside of these social spaces. My job was to create the spaces.

In late summer of 2009, I returned from the five year long film tour, and set to work creating or completing the spaces according to what had been inspired in the Italian Alps. It is only because of the deeds that were generated out of this inspiration in those mountains that the farm is able to gather so many people here today, in 3 separate weatherproof locations, hosting and feeding all 130 of us. What happened in the Alps lead to the realization of this day (and numerous other events that have already occurred in these spaces, but none so extensive as today.)

(More notes are shared 'About the farmstead', from 'The Garments of the Farm Individuality' by Hartmut von Jettez):

*"The first thing we usually do when we meet another human being is to look into his face, because we want to know whom we meet! The same holds true for a farm. You may have looked at all the*

*fields that belong to the farm. But we all know, even if instinctively, that until we have seen the barn area, the stables, cow barn, and mill room, and more importantly, have visited the farmhouse and met those who live there, perhaps shared a cup of coffee, we have not met the farm. Until we have seen the area at the center of the farm we have not seen the face of this particular farm individuality."*

...Barns, sheds, machine shops, gardens, a small meadow by the orchards, flower borders, the paint on the buildings, all speak their own language. They are the face. All express "who lives here."

...If you plan to enliven the practice of agriculture on your farm, it may not be a bad idea for you to consider having a room or even a building where people

can meet, where conferences can be held and festivals and arts can be celebrated. Also a library would make sense, where textbooks on





agriculture and other books of learned people could be found, including the suggestions which Rudolf Steiner gave in support of our work. A farm also needs a place where guests can come to stay and teach and learn, for we must again attract human beings to the land. Then the Agricultural Individuality will have a home. It will be happy.”(time for discussion)



The first Goetheanum, Switzerland (R Steiner)

### Spiritualizing Space Through Architecture:

I want to give you some sense of what is possible through forming our social spaces properly, the physical spaces which contain the social life. I want to share these ideas before we have our tour of the social spaces later this morning.

Now I will quote from Steiner in his lectures appearing in *‘Architecture as Synthesis of the Arts ... (I must point out the whole title of this book ...): An Art and Architecture that Reveal the Underlying Wholeness of Creation’*, complementing the modern tendency to analyze and dissect .

*“If the idea underlying such works of architecture [as the First Goetheanum], find followers in human culture, then people who enter such buildings and allow themselves to take in what speaks through artistic expression, and who learn to understand its language with their heart, and not only with their intellect, will never wrong their fellow human beings. The artistic forms will teach them how to love. They will learn to live with their fellows in peace and harmony. Peace and harmony will pour into hearts through these forms. Such buildings will be ‘law-givers.’ And their forms will achieve what external measures [such as laws and decrees] will never achieve.”*

In 2009, I studied the First Goetheanum in a 3 day workshop at the 2nd Goetheanum. The principles Steiner



Milkhouse bedroom.

speaks of above were incorporated into the First Goetheanum, which he said gave a voice to the gods. (Steiner said the First Goetheanum gave this voice to the gods in a rudimentary way; he said this was just a beginning for what was possible to be achieved through design by humans.) If you are interested in approaching design from an Anthroposophical standpoint, design that will elevate social life and invite the gods into the social sphere, I highly recommend *Architecture as Synthesis of the Arts*; lectures on architectural design by Steiner. I know most of you are busy running farms, but please spare some time to consider how your farm designs and implementation can enhance the social and spiritual life of your farm.

I’m not equipped to create architecture like Steiner describes here, but with a certain openness, willingness and patience, I can sometimes achieve something in the direction of which he speaks, where the social spaces I create can assist in upbuilding the social life here. I am more confident in the outcome when I rely on traditional forms for the basis of the design, such as this barn and the corn crib over there, or the 170 yr old limestone schoolhouse across the road where I live with my wife, Haidy. It seems that these forms came about at a time when there was a more instinctive or innate feel for architectural form and proportion. So, now on the farm, we have numerous spaces that allow us to bring people together, and even to accommodate large gatherings such as today. These spaces are created, of course, with function in mind, but another primary goal is also to create them in a way that might spark the human spirit, that might enhance the sociability within the room. This is a most important consideration, to create spaces which, through their design, will embrace and lift up the social experience.

**Gothic Spaces on the Farm:** This barn and the corn crib over there are called

gothic in style. When I was maybe 8 or 9 years old, my mother explained to me that we needed to do some construction on the farm, and she drew a curved roof and a triangular roof and asked me which shape I preferred. I pointed to the gothic form. This room is that gothic form.



Curved plexi-glass window in milkhouse.

From Steiner again in *Architecture as Synthesis of the Arts* , Chapter 1:

*“In each and every form, gothic architecture seems to reach out beyond its own boundaries, to express the aspirations and searchings of those within its walls; everywhere there is a kind of urge to break through the enclosing walls and mingle with the universe. The Gothic arch arose, of course, for a feeling of dynamic proportion, but apart from this there is something in all Gothic forms that seems to lead out and beyond; they strive to make themselves permeable.”*

When I was 20, I cut through that gothic ceiling above the milkhouse and installed a curved plexiglas window.

You can see the window through that little door over there (the whole room is needing repair now). I remember the exhilarating feeling of opening up the wall to the outside, allowing me to see the night sky and the daytime frolicking of the pigs in the barnyard. Last year, we put those west windows into the gothic curve (indicate the windows), and that doorway, which will eventually lead out onto a deck. And we lined the form with fabric, softening it with insulation,



conveying a feeling of permeability.

You will also notice when we are on the tour how we installed windows and a doorway into the gothic curve of the corn crib.



greenhouse gothic



gothic bug garage

Steiner said that the Greek temple was a picture of the intellectual or the mind soul that prevailed in that epoch; the individual sensed god within him. The Greek temple was self-contained, a whole within itself. The gothic form is a picture of the consciousness soul.



The gothic form pulls us outward into external reality. In this epoch, we tend to seek god outside of ourselves. I have noticed through my whole adult life the impulse to install dormer windows and doors into the gothic curves of our buildings. Can you feel this outward pull in this gothic space? Do you want to see more windows and doors in these arched walls?

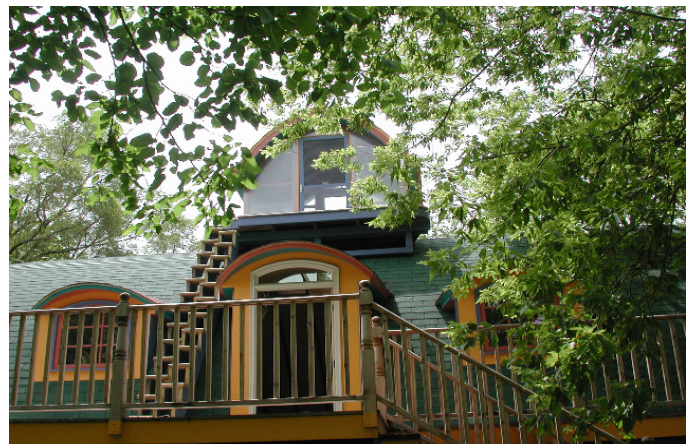
Elsewhere in his lectures on architecture, Steiner says that the



corn crib undergoing transformation, 2003



cupola of granary, thru which the Peterson's ran grain until the 1960's



transformed corn crib





2 views of lazured granary interior (upstairs of corn crib); once used by the Petersons to store oats, wheat & corn.

gothic form (to clarify, he is referring to the gothic church, but if you will grant me the liberty, I'll generalize here to the gothic form) is really not complete without people in it. Notice this space with people in it today, and later you might have a chance to observe it without people or without many people in it. Although the space might seem suitable or even lovely when people are absent, you will probably observe that human beings help to complete this space.

So, we are very fortunate to have some gothic forms on our farm, which hopefully embrace people in our social gatherings in a somewhat spiritualizing way.

**Martin Hahn's Break Room:** So as not to get too lofty about the design of spaces for the social good, I'll go back to Martin Hahn and his farm in Southern Germany.

Martin has a room in a shed where the crew takes their morning and afternoon coffee breaks. It is a modest room. He said, "The room has to be the right size. If it is too small, all the people won't fit. If it is too big, people will gather in cliques and not interact with the others. This size makes everyone come together."



a break room at Angelic Organics

To give another example of the influence that design has in our social interactions, the living room in Haidy's and my home at the end of the driveway often has a special affect on people: it makes them reveal things to one another. It serves as a sort of confessional room where long hidden, long buried things somehow make their way to the surface and emerge into the redemptive light of the spoken word. This effect is created by the constellation of proportion, color, light, and materials, a mystery, really, as I never intended the room to become a confessional. I only gave the room what it wanted. (time for discussion)

**In conclusion,** this presentation has been just a smattering of design considerations for the creation of social spaces in order to get us thinking about

our built surroundings, developing a feeling for the rooms we are in. The design of rooms in which people gather can have a powerful affect on the social organism of the farm. I personally live into the design of these spaces on the farm. I ache into them. I dream into them. Ultimately, the answer comes from listening to the space, to what the space is calling for, and then through deeds honoring what the space needs. Listening is not just what we need to cultivate in our relationship to other humans or to our fields and crops. We need to listen to what the social organism of our farms is calling for.

**Now there will be tours.** The group will divide into two. Chris will take one group and point out our production highlights. I will take the other group and show our social spaces. At 11:30, Chris and I will switch groups, so each group will experience both our production side and our social spaces. As part of the tour of social spaces, we will visit the corn crib where Nancy Melvin will spend ten minutes introducing you to the art of lazure painting, a method devised by Rudolf Steiner for enhancing our spaces with color.

Til we meet again, Farmer John Peterson

