

The Far Side

Urgent need for a different view. From France: what's at stake

This is an edited version of the article by Nicolas Joly 'Urgent Need for Biodynamics – What's at Stake', which first appeared on the website www.coulee-de-serrant.com.

In French, the system of Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) is used to guarantee the quality and the geographic origin of wine. When we speak of appellation contrôlée we must remember that the soil itself is only the last link in a chain, a kind of relay for the much more subtle, less tangible world that exists above the soil.

What is this subtle world?

It is made up of everything around us, our atmosphere, which is composed of air, light, and heat.

The earth is not merely what is under our feet! It extends hundreds of miles above our heads, to a belt of hydrogen-rich heat known as the heliosphere. And this world above the earth is itself a link in an even more complex, noble system dominated by the sun.

Farmers have venerated the sun for thousands of years, sensing the impact of its power on the soil. In our time, scientific studies (by C. Bourguignon, in France, among others) have revealed that soil contains an extraordinary system of living organisms (up to a billion different ones per gram of soil) that are magnificently combined not only in relation to the geological composition of the soil but to the whole microclimate that surrounds the soil and makes it what it is.

To understand this is to rediscover what appellation contrôlée truly means. In other words, appellation contrôlée applies not only to a plot of land but to an entire system that comprises temperature variations, prevailing winds, slope of the land, length of seasons, surrounding vegetation and the kinds of organisms living in the soil itself.

When we realise that the roots of a vine cannot be linked to the soil except through microorganisms, we understand how AOC functions.

Our so-called progressive agriculture has destroyed organisms in the soil through the use of chemical herbicides, so that the soil is almost incapable of supporting plant growth. Thus it must be treated with chemical fertilisers that the vine must absorb as it takes in nourishment. But this source of growth is totally foreign to the concept of AOC, whether we are referring to France or any other wine-producing country in the world. In the past, we nourished the soil. Today, we nourish the vine!

This explains why wines available to the public today are

beginning to taste more and more alike. The grape harvest, marked more by grape variety than by soil and microclimate, has to be 'personalised' in the cellar. This practice – involving increasing use of technology and artificial yeasts with dominant flavours – is destroying everything that the AOC system was designed to protect.

The originality of the biodynamic approach to grape-growing (a complex subject that cannot be summed up in a few words) lies not only in its strengthening of the soil's authentic character through applying animal and vegetal matter (compost) but also in its application of preparations that will help the vine nourish itself on light and heat. In short, to improve its photosynthesis.

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When we look at a flower, we understand that its nobility (colour, odour, aroma, form) come from the world of the sun. It's this same force, which manifest itself in myriad ways, that we must intensify in wine or in any other comestible.

When the earth is too closed in on itself, when it is cut off from its vital solar source, a plant's sap goes down and gravity dominates over the ability to rise.

This is what happens in winter. But so-called progressive agriculture has created a permanent winter.

We must move in the opposite direction! Stop throwing the vine into isolation by destroying the soil (Mother Earth, as the ancients rightly called it), which is no longer able to unite with the solar world to perform its regenerative function. Stop isolating the vine through cloning or genetic manipulation, which destroys its capacity to link itself to a subtle, invisible world that it distils in unique ways in the flavour of its fruit.

Be aware of widespread hertzian wave pollution, invisible yet profound disturbances in the atmosphere that create barriers between the solar world and the earth, between light and the vine. In this very disorderly world, we must help the vine link itself to its surroundings, the terrestrial world (through bringing new life to the soil) and the solar world (through assisting the process of photosynthesis).

Treatments using powdered quartz crystals, for example, can reinforce deficient or altered sources of light. A treatment

AT A GLANCE

- It is time to rediscover the subtle world of vital interconnections
- Conventional viticulture feeds the soil, not the vine
- Wine have a sameness – lack the personality of microclimate
- Terrain is everything
- Time for unity to halt destruction



using valerian (which has a high concentration of phosphorus) can intensify heat that may be lacking. A nettle infusion can stimulate the flow of sap inhibited by drought. All these complex preparations (which are difficult to sum up in a few lines) are usually mixed with compost. Each wine-grower applies these treatments differently, depending on the geographic situation of a vineyard or the special characteristics of a particular year, to intensify the lower forces affecting the vine (the life of the soil) or the upper ones (light and heat). A wine-grower in Champagne must act differently from one in the Midi. It is through this difference that agriculture can again assume the role it should have always played.

We can also see the impact on the vine of plants growing nearby (which was the subject of a recent study by the French scientific research organisation INRA, entitled *Vigne et Terroir*). Neighbouring plant life can serve as an antidote to the destructiveness of single-crop agriculture.

The atmosphere of the vineyard is influenced by the trees growing near it, for example, since certain trees have special affinities (the maple has an affinity for light, the cypress for heat, the willow for water and so forth). Vines will be nourished by this atmosphere through their roots (via different microorganisms) and especially through their leaves. Thus, the wine made from grapes on these vines will have even more of an individual personality.

We will soon have in our vineyards new genetically engineered vines that will not succumb to disease; even this natural indicator of problems will have been bred out of them.

We must understand the capacity of each plant, each flower, to diffuse subtle substances into the atmosphere in spring time, innumerable, ever-different aromas and flavours. Can we call ourselves true tasters without taking these mysterious qualities into account?

Why not try to understand this complexity, to be guided by it rather than trying to destroy it? Why not use nature to benefit nature?

As Claude Bernard has said, "The plant virus means nothing; terrain is everything." This key concept should help us understand the cause of virulent new plant diseases that we have generated unwittingly and for which no cures have been found even after years of research. We must understand these new diseases, against which plants are now being 'protected' in such ill conceived, dangerous ways. We must bring new life to the soil, and recreate vines (and seeds) that are exempt from genetic and clonal manipulation and are instead filled with new strength. We must use landscapes, diversity, and the extraordinary power that biodynamics represents to nourish places that support life. We must halt destructive, so-called progressive practices like the forced spraying of vineyards with chemical insecticides (by helicopter) that was imposed by the French government in April 1994; a practice harmful not only to vines but to people as well.

We are systematically destroying alternative, organic agri-



About the author

Nicolas Joly was the international keynote presenter at the First International Biodynamic Wine Forum at Beechworth, Victoria.

culture to the detriment of the farmer and wine-grower in order to benefit the agrochemical industry. We have never been so close to experiencing vine diseases as destructive as phylloxera as we are today. Never has the treatment of vineyards in France proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture been so misguided. The 'new' vine diseases we are seeing have in fact existed for thousands of years but never have they been so harmful to vineyards as now, when vines have become moribund and weak, deprived of their natural, sun-based defences.

Instead of caring for our vines and curing their diseases, we destroy their natural life through the use of insecticides – and for no purpose, since these insecticides have even been proved

totally ineffective against disease. We will soon have in our vineyards new genetically engineered vines (they have already been produced) that will not succumb to disease; even this natural indicator of problems will have been bred out of them. And this is considered progress. The solar world will be inaccessible to these new vines. Technology and artificiality will be the sole sources of the tastes of their grapes. The factory will replace life.

Isn't it time for all of us — grape-growers, farmers, restaurant owners, sommeliers, consumers — to unite and act together to halt this daily destruction of life inspired solely by economic considerations? ■

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CEO Biological Farmers of Australia
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