



The Nature Institute

Dear Friends,

Twenty years ago, in 1998, The Nature Institute was founded here in Ghent, New York, and a founding ceremony was held at the local school where both Craig and Henrike were teaching at the time. On that occasion Henrike spoke briefly, offering what you can find in the very first issue of *In Context* as “Words of Dedication at the Founding Celebration.” She concluded those remarks by relating the plea of a German colleague from the days when Craig taught in Germany. The woman advised Craig, “Do not go back to America, since your work there would be like a drop on a hot stone.” Henrike and Craig, of course, did come to America, and Henrike concluded her dedicatory words with a heart-felt wish: “May The Nature Institute’s work become a steady drop on the hot stone.”

Looking back over these twenty years, we would like to think that our work *has* become a steady drop. Certainly all of us feel that a great part of our lives has been invested in the Institute, and the task of responding to what seems like need and opportunity has been never-ending. Our educational programs, as you will see in the *News* section of this issue, are continuing to expand. And each of us feels that our personal research and outreach has been richly rewarding.

A steady drip-drip-drip, to be sure, can have monotonous and even torturous connotations. This is why we have always attempted to feature a variety of different kinds of articles in *In Context*. Some explicitly tackle major problems in our scientific culture, some lead through the consideration of natural phenomena to a deeper sense of the wisdom of nature, and others challenge us to become more awake to our own inner processes of thinking. And you will find such different perspectives addressed in this issue.

In her remarks Henrike also related a story that can remind us of the distorted understandings children can so easily pick up from our scientific culture. The story concerns a first grader who, as Henrike recalled, “came home from a play date one day with shocking news: the earth, the whole earth, was only as big as a marble. What can one say to that? Fortunately there was a four-year-old who laughed at these words and said, ‘That’s funny. How could our house fit on a marble?’”

You may be reminded of this story when you read the feature article by Steve in this issue, whose subtitle is “Do We Have a Home in the Vast Cosmos?” We often hear about the insignificance of our earth, our meanings and values, and ourselves, given the epic scale and massive “indifference” of the larger universe. But, as Steve tries to show in his article, this line of thought reflects a number of misunderstandings that have become associated with “hard-headed” science, but that find no justification at all in the world we actually live in.

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In Context

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