

## Talks, Workshops, Courses

### Events at the Institute

*Goethean Explorations of Light and Color*, with Henrike Holdrege. Over four Saturdays we explored the visual world through various observations and experiments. We worked with human vision, atmospheric and prismatic colors, afterimages, colored shadows, and the mixing of colors through darkening and lightening. The workshop, which aimed to demonstrate the practice of Goethean phenomenology, was designed for artists and others interested in the subject. It was offered in The Nature Institute's spring program and was part of the Free Columbia Art Course.

Nine teachers and two parents came to the Institute for a weekend in March on *Mathematics Alive—Geometry for Middle School Teachers and Parents*. The workshop was led by Henrike Holdrege and Rebecca Soloway, a teacher from the Garden City, New York Waldorf School. The participants engaged in a variety of activities. As one teacher commented, *"the feeling of being challenged, and yet having the tools to find my way was a good experience. I put my students in that position every day! I look forward to bringing these subjects in the coming years."* The two evenings of the course we spent mainly outside observing the clear night sky, which included the experience of observing the largest full moon in years as it rose over the eastern horizon.

*Farmers Course*: see separate article.



Participants in the farmers course.

### Other Events

- ♦ Monday Nights with the Stars, with Henrike Holdrege — Spring 2011
- ♦ Winter Wildlife Tracking, with Michael Pewtherer and Jonathan Talbott

## Out and About

*In March*, Craig gave a talk at Allegheny College entitled "Tending the Roots of Sustainability: Education and Our Responsibility to Children and the Earth." In a follow-up workshop, Craig guided participants through plant observation exercises as a model for nature-based exploratory learning that can be adapted to other areas of science teaching.

*Also in March*, Craig taught a half-day workshop at the Pfeiffer Center on how to understand plants and animals in a holistic way. The workshop was for participants in a year-long Saturday course on Biodynamic Gardening and Farming.

*In April*, Craig traveled to Kassel, Germany, to the Institute for Waldorf Education, where he taught a course on Evolution for high school teachers.

*In early May*, Craig traveled to Nova Scotia to give a talk sponsored by the Anthroposophical Group of Nova Scotia entitled "Truth, Beauty and Goodness: Pathways to a Living Understanding of Nature." He also delivered the keynote address at a conference on "Waldorf Education as Environmental Education." He spoke about "Reconnecting with Nature."

*In August*, Craig and Henrike will travel to South Africa to collaborate with the Proteus Initiative ([www.proteusinitiative.org](http://www.proteusinitiative.org)), which employs "an understanding and practices first developed for seeing into living processes within the world of nature" and seeks to "enable a new way of engaging with social and developmental phenomena: a way which may work effectively with social complexity." The Nature Institute's relationship with the Initiative's founders, Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff, dates back to the winter of 2001-2002, when they came to The Nature Institute in order to work for three months with Craig and Henrike.

Widely experienced as international consultants to social organizations and communities, Allan and Sue wanted to bring the qualitative and phenomenological methods associated with Goethean science to bear upon their own work. Inspired by their time here, they returned to South Africa and worked toward the fulfillment of a double hope: to create the

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Proteus Initiative as a vehicle for applying Goethean methods to social contexts where they are almost unknown; and to establish a wilderness retreat that would not only preserve a valuable and breathtakingly beautiful landscape for posterity, but also provide a site for some of their conferences and workshops. Craig and Henrike will teach part of the Initiative's series of workshops entitled "Towards a Thinking Which Is as Alive as Its Subject Matter." The aim of the series is to bring an ecological awareness to social process, and a social sensibility to environmental concerns. While each workshop is different, all will attempt to bring our social and ecological strivings together within the broad framing of a Goethean phenomenology, deepening our practice and our thinking towards a genuinely holistic and living response to our world.

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## A Place-based Environmental Science Curriculum

This past fall and winter Craig participated in the development of an environmental science curriculum for grades 6 – 8 at the Detroit Waldorf School. The school's question was: Could a curriculum be developed that weaves together a phenomenological approach to science, environmental and social justice awareness, and service learning opportunities? The school felt that such a curriculum—which could be modified for other learning settings, such as urban summer camps—would be "an essential contribution that we could make to our community, especially to demonstrate to our young people how they can be instrumental in understanding and acting upon locally significant environmental issues. The central approach is to study topics around which the students can become passionate and can also fit into their understanding of the world at their age."

Candyce Sweda, who has been involved in the school and other Detroit community activities for many years, approached Craig, Michael D'Aleo, and Gary Banks (both Waldorf teachers and scientists with a passion for environmental topics) to develop this curriculum. This was an intensive and rewarding collaboration. Each of us developed one area for all three grades and then the group worked together to create coherent courses: Michael focused on energy and transportation, Gary on substances and cycles (e.g. water, air, carbon), while Craig developed ideas for teaching about and experiencing plants, food, and agriculture. The challenge was to craft a curriculum that would involve firsthand student experiences and not just transferral of information. Moreover, it was important that this curriculum be place-based so that the students could learn about the environment in and

around Detroit and also be involved in community activities such as river monitoring and urban gardening. Detroit is a city that faces special challenges, having lost over one million residents since 1950 (when its population was nearly two million; now it has about 790,000 residents). It is a vast urban landscape marked by many signs of decay, and yet many grassroots and innovative initiatives are taking hold to change this landscape. The school, with this curriculum and the hope that it can bear fruits within the broader community, wants to contribute to the current of change. Craig felt it an honor to be part of this effort.

This work was supported by a grant from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to the Detroit Waldorf School. The curriculum was presented at a meeting on January 22, 2011. The complete curriculum and a CD of the public presentations can be purchased by contacting: Candyce Sweda, Detroit Waldorf School, 2555 Burns, Detroit, MI 48214; or email [csweda@ibl.org](mailto:csweda@ibl.org). Craig's curricular outline for the topic of "Plant and Human Interactions" can be found at: [http://natureinstitute.org/txt/ch/envir\\_cur2011.htm](http://natureinstitute.org/txt/ch/envir_cur2011.htm).

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## Credere Grant in Goethean Phenomenology

This year The Nature Institute sponsored a \$1,000 grant in Goethean Phenomenology. The funds were donated to the Credere Fund of the organization, Think OutWord, which has a number of grant programs. The Goethean Phenomenology grant program was newly instituted this year.

The grant committee awarded the 2011 grant to Joao Felipe Toni for his project "Goethean Phenomenology as Environmental Education in the Brazilian 'Restinga' Biome." This study will investigate and elaborate activities for students utilizing the Goethean phenomenological method in botanical research of the native species and the landscape of a biome of Brazil called Restinga. The Flora of Restinga has about 142 families and over 1500 species. During his month-long fieldwork, Joao Felipe will engage in rigorous observation, data collection, artistic exercises and contemplative reflection upon the plant life along the Morro das Almas's Trail in Cardoso Island State Park in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. This project is a case study to demonstrate the relevance of the history and the philosophy of biology and the Goethean phenomenological method for high school science teaching, and for elucidating the nature of science.

For more information about the Credere Fund or to donate to support next year's grants, visit <http://thinkoutword.org/grants.html>.

# Understanding Qualities in Nature

## *A Basis for the Agriculture of the Future*

Twenty-one farmers, gardeners, apprentices, and individuals interested in food and agricultural issues participated in The Nature Institute's weeklong intensive. Most of the participants spent the following week at Hawthorne Valley Farm learning more specifically about the view of agriculture and life that informs biodynamic agriculture, with an emphasis this year on animal husbandry.

On the first evening each person introduced him or herself, and through the brief presentations both the diversity of the group and the intensity of each person's search were evident. Many of the participants were in transition, some about to begin their life as farmers or apprentices, others looking to find a new farming or gardening situation that would allow their ideals to be more fully realized. Their search for a deeper understanding of nature and a way of farming that integrates human activity into the larger web of life imbued the course with a quality of openness, connectedness, and wakefulness that was remarkable.

The course at the Institute included many practical activities: each morning began with explorations and experiences that let us form qualitative concepts of earth (solids), water (fluids), air (gases), and warmth. We then worked to understand the way-of-being of animals and how we can learn to "read" form and function through observing and comparing bones. These sessions culminated in a consideration of the interconnected and yet distinct nature of plants, animals, and human beings within the context of agriculture. The evenings were dedicated to astronomy—working to understand the movements of stars and planets in the course of a day and year. Here are some comments from participants:

*After working at a fast pace on farms for several years, [I found] the course to be a blessing and introduction to a whole new way of interaction with the natural world. I'll take the skills I've learned into my daily work, and I'm sure it will enhance that work.*

*Each [course activity] informed the others, bringing thought to practical application and into different contexts. There was also a gradual development that almost snuck up to culminate in such a way that was difficult to predict. Brought me to a new vision of realizing our freedoms and responsibilities as human beings and inspired me to explore and develop my own capacities.*

*I will see the world I am so closely working with, with brand new eyes. Eyes more like a child seeing things for what they really are before me, and not for what I have been told they are. I feel small in this large world, which is a good feeling. I am in awe of the power and enormity of nature.*

*This week will serve me to better educate apprentices on our farm, using real-life phenomena to convey and speak directly to them during their time learning.*

*I really enjoyed the hands-on activities as you allowed the four elements to show us how they worked rather than just explaining or portraying them.*

*I have taken comparative vertebrate anatomy courses in the past – but never like this! A whole different experience! I really enjoyed the stimulating discussions facilitated by Craig as well as the students in the course. The Socratic approach to learning enriched us all!*



## A New Brochure

We have recently completed a new brochure that provides an overview of The Nature Institute, including our mission, programs, and research activities. If you would like a brochure or have ideas for placing additional brochures where they might find interested readers, please contact us!



## Building Expansion Update

As you know, we started our building expansion capital campaign in the fall. We began with the \$150,000 leadership gift from the Seyhan Ege Trust and our goal was to raise an additional \$225,000. Our request for support met a generous response from individual donors and foundations—not at all something we take for granted in times where finances are tight. We have received gifts and pledges totaling \$200,000 so far, and we are currently working to raise the final \$25,000. 115 individuals have given explicitly to the building project while another 150 people have given unspecified gifts or gifts to support the work that will go on in our facilities—our core research and education work. *Thank you for this generosity of spirit and the monetary gifts that flow from it!* Now this money can flow, directly and indirectly, to the many hundreds of people who will contribute to the project through their work and their building products.

We would like to express our warmest thanks to Heide Zajonc, who helped us plan and carry out the capital campaign; we can hardly imagine what we would have done without her able advice and active commitment to make the project happen.

During the fall and winter a building committee met regularly to finalize the design. We would like to thank Jon McAlice (design), Chris Hoppe (engineering and plans) and David Gardiner (a local builder who will be the general contractor) for working together in such a collegial and fruitful way with Henrike and Craig to move the project ahead.

We'll keep you informed. You can expect to hear more in the fall.



Elevation Sketch — View from the southwest