



The Nature Institute

Dear Readers,

With this 50th issue of *In Context*, we also celebrate The Nature Institute's 25th anniversary. I recently looked at the first issue of *In Context*, which came out in the spring of 1999. I was interested in how we described the nature of our germinal enterprise and what we hoped to accomplish. I was surprised and also pleased to see how the fundamental intent of the work has remained in focus all these years. We haven't wavered from what we then viewed as essential, and yet we have also done much that we would not have dreamed of at the time.

Over the years we have delved into many different topics, inquiry that has led to a great variety of articles in this publication—information technology, whole organism plant and animal studies, genetic engineering, light and color, Goethean methodology, genetics, and evolution. What has united these manifold explorations is the underlying striving to connect with the world in ways that our modern habits of thought have hindered. This intent is clearly expressed in our founding mission statement, which we still wholeheartedly embrace:

Nature around us is whole and interconnected. Though we are part of nature, we do not yet fathom nature's depths, and our actions do not embody her wisdom. A fundamental shift in our way of viewing the world is necessary if we would contribute to nature's unity rather than dissolution. At The Nature Institute we seek ways of knowing and doing that are fashioned after nature's own wholeness. Science becomes a participatory dialogue with nature, wherein each phenomenon finds its unique, contextual expression.

This striving is part of the stream of scientific inquiry that Goethe so strongly set in motion more than two hundred years ago. We thought that it would make sense in this issue to let Goethe speak for himself (p. 12). He was a master of language, and even in the English translation you can hopefully gain a sense of his flexibility of thought, which doesn't get stuck in coined phrases and always endeavors to find concrete wording for the insights he's trying to express.

One of the key elements of a Goethean approach is the commitment to careful attention to sensory phenomena, and just as careful attention to the way we form our ideas in an ongoing back and forth with the phenomena. A general tendency today is to only see what we already know. We don't perceive what a phenomenon actually reveals in the moment unless we make the effort to attend to its various characteristics and qualities. It is this kind of attentiveness that can open up the living qualities of our world.

In this issue, my feature article brings together many different ways of attending to plants that we have practiced in our courses and that also form the basis of my own plant research efforts. We hope that the description of such practices can stimulate you to embark on your own journey to the open secrets that are waiting to be discovered in the natural world.

Craig Holdrege

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EDITOR: Elaine Khosrova
LAYOUT: Mary Giddens
COVER ART: Kristelle Esterhuizen

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The Nature Institute
20 May Hill Road
Ghent, New York 12075
Tel.: 518-672-0116
Email: info@natureinstitute.org
Web: <http://natureinstitute.org>

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