

# News from the Institute

## Plants and the Living Earth Holistic Science in Service of Agriculture

From February 7 to 12, twenty farmers and apprentices came to the Nature Institute from local farms, northeastern states, and also from Minnesota, Wisconsin, California, and Canada. With Craig, Henrike, and Bruno they explored:

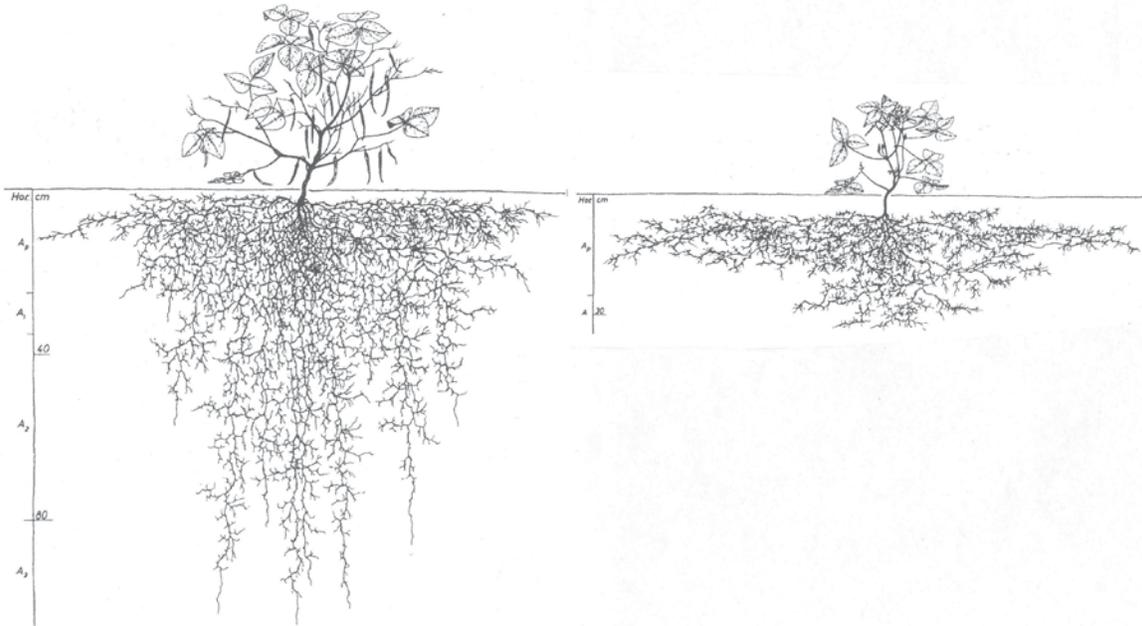
*Plants:* Metamorphosis; plant growth and development in relation to the environment with a focus on soil; domestication characteristics of food plants; assessing quality through our senses.

*Earth, water, air and warmth:* Practical exercises and observations to understand these essential qualities that inform all life on earth.

*Soil, compost, and phenomenological chemistry:* The dynamic process of compost formation; qualitative assessment; the qualities of the chemical elements carbon and nitrogen.

### *Some Comments from Course Participants*

“It was wonderful. I’m certainly overwhelmed by all that we covered, but not in a bad way (for once). In other words, the flow of the days worked really well for me – from the variety of topics and the way many were revisited, to the frequency of breaks and the different leaders and presentation styles. For an experiential learner, the demonstrations, pictures, stories, and activities were invaluable. It’s been awesome also to spend a whole week with this group and this content, giving time for individual processing and for synthesizing with others. I feel I’ve made many small and several great steps in my education.” (Apprentice)



Bush bean plants growing in different soil conditions. In both cases humus-rich loam in the upper thirty centimeters; on the left, loam continues, but less humus-rich; on the right, the soil becomes sandy and gravelly where no more roots are growing. (After Kutschera)



Flower morphology



A steaming pile of manure at Hawthorne Valley Farm



Experiencing the quality of warmth in different objects

“This past week has been incredibly stimulating and inspiring. The combination of the different areas and themes, moving through the different life processes – and they within me – have given me a new perspective and appreciation. I enjoyed the variety of activities and relationship between theoretical, philosophical, spiritual, scientific, and real-life connections. I feel like the week was broken up well, with enough time dedicated to fully explore each element we were learning with. Having the day broken up in different blocks also helped give me a holistic understanding ... of what we were observing.” (Farmer)

“I thought the course was thought-provoking, engaging, intimate, and fun. I thought that it was structured brilliantly. An overarching theme of plants and the soil and weaving in the [chemical] elements and this aspect of quality allowed for new insights, perspectives, and questions to bubble up. There was plenty of room for discussion and engagement with the students. The weaving of the science experiments, chalkboard lessons, and outdoor activities, and well-timed snack breaks kept me engaged and interested. This was quite a unique educational experience and I would love to come back for more.” (Farmer and Social Therapist)



Fluidity, laminar flow, and turbulence: creating a vortex



The characteristics of different vegetables

# Eighteen Monday Mornings of Goethean Science

As part of Free Columbia's six-month course in painting, nature study, and social change, we offered eighteen Monday mornings (9 am to 12:30 pm) at The Nature Institute. Five full-time Free Columbia students participated, and as many as fifteen other individuals took part in the various modules. Craig taught five sessions on plants and animals, Henrike eight sessions on the visual world, optics, and color, and Bruno four sessions on landscape and agriculture. In the concluding review session, the students commented on how, as a result of the course work, they had become much more attentive to their perceptions and also to the contextual nature of all phenomena. We were gratified to hear how strongly the course had affected the students. It reconfirmed our commitment to the experience-based and reflective kind of learning process we strive to offer in our education programs.

## Out and About

As part of our Living Soils initiative, **Bruno Follador** gave a variety of talks, workshops, and on-farm consultations around the country and abroad during this past winter and spring. Here is a glimpse of his activities:

- In early February Bruno gave two workshops at the "**Farming for the Future**" **Agricultural Conference** organized by the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA). He spoke on "Biodynamic Agriculture: A Qualitative Approach to Farming" and on "The Art and Science of Composting: A Biodynamic Approach." The conference took place in The Penn Stater Conference Center, State College, Pennsylvania.
- In mid-February Bruno gave two talks at the annual conference of **The Fellowship of Preparations Makers**, a group within the Biodynamic Association interested in deepening their understanding of the biodynamic soil and compost preparations. His first talk was on "What are Qualities?" and the second one was on "Portraying Soils and Compost: Color, Form and Pattern." This year's conference was at Yokayo Roots Ranch, Ukiah, California.
- Bruno was invited to give an early-March series of talks and workshops in the United Kingdom. His first workshop took place at **Emerson College**, where he spoke on "The Art and Science of Biodynamic Composting: Practices and Insights." After this workshop one of the participants asked Bruno to consult at his biodynamic farm—**Albury Vineyard**—located in the Surrey Hills in Albury. The second workshop was held at **Ruskin Mill** on the theme, "Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's Chromatography: Portraying Soils

and Compost through Color, Form and Pattern." At Coventry University's **Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience**, he gave a talk on "Practices and Insights of Biodynamic Agriculture: Developing Dynamic Ways of Seeing and Working with Compost and Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's Chromatography." Finally, at **The Field Center** (Ruskin Mill), Bruno gave an evening talk on "Encountering the Amazon: There is More to Seeing than Meets the Eye."

- In early April Bruno consulted at the **Fellowship Community** in Spring Valley, New York, regarding their composting practices. He also delivered a public talk in the evening on "Soil, Compost and Community."
- Finally, at the end of April Bruno gave a presentation at the **Farm School in Massachusetts** on "Developing dynamic ways of seeing and working with Compost."
- **Henrike** was invited to spend a week in April at the **Eugene, Oregon, Waldorf School** to work with its faculty and students in an education program on teaching mathematics. In addition to a Saturday workshop, she had four sessions each during the week with lower school and middle school teachers. She also gave a public talk on "Math and Science in the Middle School: Opening or Closing Doors?"

## Still Ahead

- In mid-May Bruno will be consulting for **Biodynamic Services** in Chateau, France. He will also be offering a public workshop on Biodynamic Composting Practices.
- At the end of May Bruno will give a weekend workshop at **Avena Botanicals** in Maine on "Practice and Insights of Biodynamic Composting: Developing Dynamic Ways of Seeing and Working with Compost."
- Craig is one of a dozen educators and scientists invited by Wes Jackson of **The Land Institute** (Salina, Kansas) to serve as the inaugural core faculty for a major new initiative to develop Ecospheric Studies. The first meeting will be in June.
- **New Two-Year Program in Brazil: "Seeing Nature Whole."** Henrike and Craig will be teaching a two-week course in Brazil on the Goethean approach to science. With twenty-five participants already committed as of last March, the course is full and has a waiting list. This is the first two weeks of a four-week program during July 2016 and 2017 at the Associação Sagres, a center for adult education in Florianópolis in southern Brazil (<http://www.asssagres.org.br/>). Henrike and Craig will teach in English, and all classes will be translated into Portuguese. The course is for people who seriously wish to apply the Goethean scientific methodology in their own work and carry it further.

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# Spring and Summer Events at the Institute

## **Benefit Screening: “Even Though the Whole World Is Burning” (March 15)**

About 60 people viewed this screening of a beautiful and insightful documentary about the Poet Laureate W.S. Merwin, directed by Stefan Schaefer. The son of Nature Institute board member Signe Schaefer, Stefan graciously allowed us to show the film as a benefit for the Institute.

## **Mathematics Alive! Supporting Students at the Threshold of Adolescence (March 18 – 20)**

*A geometry workshop for middle school teachers with Henrike Holdrege and Marisha Plotnik*

## **Phenomenological Research within the Human Encounter (April 1, 8, and 15)**

*Three talks by John Cunningham, Waldorf educator and trainer in nonviolent communication*

- “Introspective Observations on the Inner Dialogue: Practical Illuminations of Marshall Rosenberg’s *Nonviolent Communication*”
- “Becoming Through the Other: Social Inquiry through Goethe’s *Way of Seeing*”
- “Conflict, Community, and Slow Dialogue: Shared Care through Dominic Barter’s *Restorative Circles*”

## **Working with the Principle of Polarity in Projective Geometry (April and May)**

*A course in eight sessions with Henrike Holdrege*

## **Soil, Culture, and Human Responsibility (April 22)**

*A talk by Bruno Follador in celebration of Earth Day*

## **Doing Phenomenology in Teaching Science: Performance Art that Evokes Insight (May 23)**

*A talk by physicist Wilfried Sommer*

Wilfried teaches physics in Waldorf schools, and is Assistant Professor at the School of Education at Alanus University in Germany.

**SUMMER COURSE 2016** — *See announcement on back cover*