



The Nature Institute

Dear Friends,

Rather like an autumn cornucopia, this issue of *In Context* contains a rich and diverse yield, with something for everyone. You will no doubt be struck in particular by one element: with this issue we begin what we expect will be a continuing practice of printing the newsletter with full-color photos.

If you want color—in insects, birds, flowers—you can hardly do better than go to the Amazon basin. And, as it happens, Henrike opens the newsletter by taking you there. She offers her own retrospective on the summer's watery adventure upon the Rio Negro and Amazon rivers. The debut of our full-color format is the perfect occasion for presenting some of the snapshots from that excursion. For those of us living in northern climes, the Brazilian rainforest offers many revelations of an entirely different world. Henrike shares some of those revelations in her thoughtful reflections.

Bruno Follador, the newest addition to the Institute's staff, is a student of soil, agriculture, and landscape. He takes an active interest in the *culture* of the land, in all the meanings of that term. Here, he describes his work with chromatography as a tool for assessing qualitatively the condition of soil and compost. This work raises interesting questions about the relation between qualitative and aesthetic considerations, on one hand, and the more conventional, quantitative methods for judging soil health and fertility, on the other.

In his feature article, Craig tackles profound questions about the nature of organisms as *living beings* whose essential character lies first of all in their activity rather than their physical constitution. "When we say in biology something 'stays the same,'" he remarks, "we actually mean it continually *becomes* the same out of activity." Things don't explain doings; rather, the doings explain the things. In pursuing his question whether a genuine science of beings is possible, Craig continues his portrayal of the frog, begun in our last issue. It all leads in the end to a characterization of portrayal—a "portrayal of portrayal," you might say—whereby this descriptive activity can be distinguished, as a goal of biological science, from the more usual efforts at causal explanation.

On his part, Steve has also been attempting to track the organism as activity. But whereas Craig has focused primarily on the phenomenological study of organisms at a level where we have something meaningful to observe, Steve's effort has been to hear what contemporary researches in molecular biology might be telling us. Due to length considerations, we cannot present his most recent article here, but only some rather brief excerpts from a very much longer piece, together with a link to the full text.

Craig and Steve have both found valuable stimulus in the unexpected convergence of their paths. And they both find themselves drawn—from opposite sides, as it were—toward the fundamental challenge of understanding the evolutionary pathways of life on earth.

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In Context

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Copies of *In Context* are free while the supply lasts. All issues are posted on the Institute website. Our *NetFuture* newsletter is available at: <http://netfuture.org>.

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