

Turning a new leaf

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The phenomenological approach of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe shows the way to re-cognition of a world which has been long divided into a separated knowledge. The idea of 're-cognition' will form a fundamental part of this writing. My definition of the term is one of a relational whole person cognition or perception - a relational way of 'see-ing' that is not only understanding the world in a different, more holistic, way but a way in which what is 'seen' appears familiar; a deep recognition and understanding, as if waking up to something that we, as adults and as a human race, have seemingly long ago forgotten. Re-cognition allows for a 're-membering'^[1] of the wholeness of nature and the nature of wholeness within ourselves, our societies and nature.

Re-cognition allows for authentic, not counterfeit connections to Nature to be made; it dissolves the illusion that we 'know' the world, and allows us to try and dynamically 'understand' it through holistic participation and by see-ing 'relationally'. To develop this re-cognition means employing all of our faculties as human beings, including our intuitive, creative, and emotional ways of 'knowing/understanding', as well as, not instead of, our intellectual, analytical capabilities which have often been overdeveloped in Western civilization and given supremacy, and have led to us see-ing 'separation'.

To explain a little further, here is a summary of the two ways of seeing:

<u>Separation</u>	<u>Relation</u>
Knowledge	Re-cognition
Disconnection	Connection
Separate from nature	Part of nature
Realises partial solutions (e.g. sustainability)	Gives resolution (e.g. whole be-ing)

What emerges from Goethe's scientific works, such as his theory of colour and his work on the metamorphosis of plants, is a way of see-ing which, when practised, helps us to 'see' the world in terms of dynamic, intricate webs of relationships and not just a collection of separate, independent, inanimate objects and externally imposed mechanisms. This dynamic approach focuses on process and relationship which in turn allows for intuitive perception, through observation, of a direct understanding of the world.

'Mephistopheles in....Goethe's epic poem, Faust, scoffs at the scholars who try to understand a living organism by the detailed description of its parts,

*"Dann hat die Theile in seiner Hand
Fehlt, leider! Nur das gestige Band."
(Then he has all the parts within his hand except sadly, the living bond.)"^[2]*

It is this 'living bond', or wholeness, that Goethean methodology allows us to 'see'. By combining in-depth observation and exact sensorial imagination, the idea is to enter into a way of seeing the phenomenon that cannot be reached by using only the intellectual mind. With this way of seeing, relationships between qualities and phenomena can be perceived, rather than being *thought* to be separate instances "This artist's approach to science allows for a more appreciative, qualitative, meaningful and participatory engagement with nature."^[3] The holistic perception that is achieved through following Goethe's methodology enables a more dynamic 'relational' way of seeing.

The phenomenological approach of a Goethean way of seeing is a whole person approach to perceiving; in this case to perceiving nature, to awaken the living qualities of thinking that align with, and are learnt from the

experience and connection to the phenomenon itself. It focuses on developing the capacity of different ways of knowing within the observer through experience, by engaging in an actively receptive relationship with what is being observed. These ways of knowing cannot be learnt through any way other than through the experience itself. The process is phenomenological in nature, in that it allows what is being studied to become its own theory; rather than being subject to external theories or judgment, if the process is correctly followed. Whatever is being observed is allowed to speak for itself and to gradually disclose itself to the observer, within the observer, in terms of itself. When practicing, we must have sensitivity to try and form our concepts in relation to what we are actually seeing, and to the process of see-ing itself, not to what we 'think' or 'know' we see.

Through the practice of a Goethean way of seeing inspiration and intuition are developed to perceive qualities and gestures of the parts and the whole, and possibly even the archetypal whole when the phenomenon itself is brought fully to expression to confront you in your experience. "What is experienced as a way of seeing *is* the unity of the phenomenon."^[4] I personally find these stages quite hard to describe with words, it feels like you have experienced the thoughts between yourself and what you are observing rather than having actively thought them yourself. I experienced this whilst practicing a Goethean way of seeing, studying a Nettle. After having spent time observing various Nettles, going to and from them, eventually I was returning to them and feeling like I was meeting an old friend. One day I sat down with a particular nettle, sat in a patch of many others, and I felt a really strong 'star'-like quality. It is very hard to describe but it felt like this enormous spreading, shining sensation – like an expanding force of intense energy. I intuited it as a gesture of the wholeness of the plant. A wholeness that I could then recognize in parts of the plant such as the force of the 'sting' that you feel when touching the small syringe like 'stinging hairs'; the shape and expression of the thousands of tiny hairs seemingly bursting out of the plant with this immense energy; the pattern of 'spikes' on the leaf edges which feel like they are dynamically spreading outward with purpose. The whole plant felt like a star that was 'shining'. A wonderful experience to participate in. So, as opposed to actively working your way around what you are seeing and describing it, you remain with a still, open mind that is receptive to what the phenomena has to say to you, rather than what you have to say to it. And with enough patience and practice, without you having to say anything, it may well say something back.

Survey into Goethean Way of Seeing

After having been so inspired by the experience of this 'new' way of seeing, and feeling how deeply it had changed my be-ing in the world, I felt the desire to explore others' experience of this practice. To investigate the potential that the experience and re-cognition that the practice of this Goethean way of seeing may bring, I decided to gather opinions from other people who had already practised by process of a questionnaire. I felt a questionnaire would be most appropriate. It is a container which allows for qualitative information to come into being through the unique expression of each individual.

The individual questions are each formulated to facilitate process and not to restrict the expression of the individual. All questions are open, mainly beginning with 'how' as a pathway into each part of my investigation. I feel that 'how' is more of a holistic use of language than, for example, 'why'. 'How' is an invitation for all types of description of one's experience and does not restrict the individual to a certain way of seeing or replying. The word 'why' suggests an invitation for a more certain response from the participant, this is not holistic and implies a more a logical way of seeing; if one is to be certain that their response is 'a', there is a logical assumption therefore that 'a' cannot also be 'b'. Therefore the use of 'why' may be restrictive to the individual's freedom of creative self expression, which I wanted to encourage not control.

The first two subsections of the questionnaire were on personal experience and transformation. Not only did the participants convey a thorough sense of enjoyment and fascination in practising this way of seeing but there was an overarching feeling, or emergence, that the relational way of seeing which Goethean methodology requires, leads to the world being 'seen' in a more relational way. Many participants noted throughout responses to various questions that this then enabled them to overcome the notion of separation to nature which occurs within our societies. The majority of participants noted that they had experienced a shift in consciousness during practice, whereas others noted that this shift was in perception or way of seeing. It was also frequently noted by participants that this 'new' way of seeing was reflected in the change in their

relationship with the phenomena; they recounted that 'new' aspects of the phenomenon were seen in relation to the 'new' mode of seeing.

Most participants described that they felt practising this way of seeing was a meaningful process. There was a feeling of the importance of 'participation' with nature and 'meaning' emerging through a hermeneutic process of understanding within this participation – occurring as an emergent property through their relationship with the phenomenon studied. Wholeness was felt or 'seen' by the majority of participants in a number of ways, largely through see-ing and understanding the relation between the whole and the part – the interconnectedness of nature and the nature of interconnectedness. These experiences were described within a personal context but also within the wider context of feeling a part of the 'whole'.

In the "Relation to nature" subsection, the majority of participants expressed a sense of connection to nature through their practice, either in a new, intensified or deeper way "a sensation of being part of nature, of being a whole with the environment around you and not a separate entity". Participants noted that through their practice they could now perceive nature in a dynamic, living way and had an increased sense of ethics and responsibility toward nature. The majority felt that their experience had altered their behavior toward nature in positive ways, including being more careful, responsible, aware, respectful and mindful. I feel that this has great implications for the possible connection between a Goethean way of seeing and current 'sustainability' debates. The largest consensus occurred when all participants described that they feel their Goethean practice offered benefits as a way of seeing nature. These included feeling more a part of nature by seeing in a 'new', or different, relational way and overcoming the idea of separation; "working against the tendency of introducing the illusion of separation with the current mainstream science and society".

A feeling also emerges of a highly relational process developing which is able to re-cognize the relational processes in nature and in oneself. Not only did this seem to be an enjoyable, inspiring experience leading to a whole 'new' way of seeing but as the dynamic relation between the whole and the part, and wholeness, was 'seen', it seems to dissolve the notion of 'separation'; leading to a feeling of being part of nature and developing a natural sense of ethical responsibility and value of nature, thus wanting to treat nature with respect and care. This practice seemed to inspire the discovery of the true nature of nature, not just a partial view of nature as offered by our current mechanistic paradigm. Through the process of practising a Goethean way of seeing, the participants did not learn this relational view, they experienced it for themselves whilst in direct relation with nature. They were able to recognize the wholeness of nature through re-cognition; which they collectively described as an enjoyable, fulfilling, inspiring experience of reconnection with the world.

Access to Goethe's methodology, an open mind, discipline and natural phenomenon to observe is all that is needed to develop this new way of seeing. Within this way of seeing there is potential to dissolve the perceived separation between humans and nature, as when the observer is deep in process with the Goethean way of seeing, boundaries between observer and observed become blurred until, at an intuitive level of consciousness, they become one. This research demonstrates the principles understood from the relation between the whole and the part. It could also have strong potential implications for individuals and societies in every aspect of their life due to the further levels of consciousness, or ways of understanding, that are developed through this hermeneutic process of observation and participation.

A phenomenological way of see-ing such as Goethe's is neither form nor content, it is dynamic organic process; seeing dynamically, seeing like and aligning with the organic realm, re-cognizing dynamic organic nature which is also the nature of the see-ing itself. When a person re-cognizes life, sees life dynamically in a 'new' way, they become a physical expression of this way of seeing, this wholeness, just like a leaf on a plant; its form is an expression of its process, wholeness and its relation of part to whole. It is a physical expression of its way of 'see-ing' the world that the way of see-ing itself has created. Each new expression of this way of see-ing offers a new possibility for interpretation, a new form of language to be interpreted by the world. It may be a different language that is perhaps understood by a person, or people, who could not understand the variations of this language that were available to them before. And it is through the interpretation of this particular language that they then become able to gradually re-cognize the world around them, thus planting the seed of this new relational, organic, holistic way of seeing. Each person who has started developing (I am not sure it will ever be fully developed) the capacity to see in such a phenomenological way can only express it in *their*

own unique way, the same but differently, just as leaves emerging uniquely from a plant; by living and participating in the world that *their* seeing has created.

The individual lyrics they recite may be different, but if lived through this way of see-ing, of *re-cognising*, the resonance of wholeness will remain the same – like a moral within a story and the hermeneutic understanding of a text, the whole or meaning, is never fully present in the text yet it can be understood by reading the parts of the text which are expressions of the whole. By living the way of seeing we bring it into physical expressions of wholeness, whole be-ings, be-ing whole, seeing the dynamic potential of metamorphosis in all. Being ourselves the same but differently like every other organism on earth. We must be ourselves, live our wholeness and whole way of seeing in our own unique way, with confidence, believing in what and how we see, concerning ourselves only with our own path of change in our ‘new’ way of seeing. Trusting in the universal ‘dynamic metamorphosis of the possible’, that all others may also find their own path of growth .

Opening windows to ‘new’ worlds, a Goethean way of seeing enables you to turn a new leaf, and to ‘see’ things that you have never dreamed of. When see-ing wholeness and the relation between the part and the whole, it puts one’s life in a whole new perspective created by one’s see-ing. Where before there may have only been separation, re-cognition enables connections to be ‘seen’, understood and felt, everywhere. Through re-cognition we are no longer a lonely human race separate from the rest of existence, but actually a part of the animate earth which sustains us, the rest of life and even the universe beyond – we are part of nature, nature is part of us. In re-cognizing the wholeness of nature, we are re-cognizing the nature of wholeness and what it truly means to be a part of whole on this earth.

References

1. Re-membering – when one is able to understand the relations between parts they can imaginatively be ‘put back together’ in ones mind to perceive process & wholeness
2. Mae-Wan Ho (2008) In Search of the Sublime, Science in Society Issue 39, Autumn 2008, pg 6
3. Daniel C. Wahl (2005) “Zarte Empirie”: Goethean Science as a Way of Knowing”, Janus Head,8(1),pg 60
4. Henri Bortoft (1996) “The Wholeness of Nature” Henri Bortoft, pg 34

 This paper summarises the dissertation submitted for the degree of Masters in Holistic Science at Schumacher College in August 2009 entitled: **Re-Cognition – The re-cognition of our connection to Nature through Goethe’s way of Seeing**. Now, Emma is exploring practical ways to combine skills in design and embodied principles arising from a holistic way of seeing and out of this has emerged *Emiliana Underwear*– handmade by Emma - unwanted clothing and fabrics are upcycled into beautiful new underwear.

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