

INNER AND OUTER SEEDS: A GOETHEAN STUDY OF SEEDS & SELF**KELSEY AGNEW****SEED TO SEED**

One of my favourite aspects of Canadian aboriginal storytelling is the non-chronological order in which they emerge. These narratives evade my spatial and temporal understandings of stories, creating the sense that all myths have their own identity and purpose swirling around, suspended in a liminal reality, freely flowing into and out of one another. My own life is a fluid dance of different stories creating or leading me to particular moments, new beginnings. Yet these new beginning are at the same time the middle or end or any part of another story – a pattern of influential stories that co-evolve

together in the micro- and macro-cosmos of life. This has been my journey of the outer and inner seed.

One influential story unfolded several years ago during a summertime in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I was walking out to my garden to pick some beautiful golden peas. The Russian Giant sunflower looked me in the eyes as I approached the back of my garden. I came out to find a handful of pea pods that had been wrinkled, dried out in the sun, no longer fresh enough to eat. One pod was so dry that it crumbled in my hands, leaving me with four peas that looked exactly like the pea seeds my neighbour had given me to plant this pea patch. Then I realized that if I left some of my peas to dry out in the sun, I would have seeds for next year's patch!

It was beautiful to so clearly see and physically experience the flow of nature's rhythm, yet at the same time astonishing to realize that the seed-to-seed cycle was not an integral part of my gardening practice. I realized that I had no understanding of where the seeds of a broccoli or garlic or a radish plant, for example, would be or what they looked like. Curious, I also left some of these plants to complete their own intrinsic rhythms, allowing me to learn from their wisdom and became a more engaged and receptive participant within the garden. The pea seeds shifted how I interacted with and saw the garden, and I find myself continuing a seed journey, both outward (planting, gardening, and eating seeds) and inward (self-reflecting, abnegating control, and being more in tune with myself). I cannot express enough gratitude for the lessons I received in Goethean science at Schumacher College; they have formed my main support system and pathway of understanding on this journey of coming to know the inner and outer seed.

GOETHEAN SCIENCE

The key text for this essay has been Nigel Hoffmann's "Goethe's Science of Living Form: The Artistic Stages" in which he describes four main stages of Goethean science: earth cognition; water cognition; air cognition; and fire cognition.

Briefly, Goethean science has become for me a way of creating understanding and meaning in experiences - an ability not readily nurtured in the Western world where our focus on analytical thinking is valued over all other valuable ways of knowing, including sensing, feeling and intuition. Embarking on a Goethean study of seeds led me first into that analytical way of thinking (earth cognition) also referred to as *physical thinking* or *mechanical thinking*, which is concerned with collecting outward, objective facts. This is what Goethe referred to as 'exact sensing fact finding'. Hoffmann associates the next phase of water cognition with Goethe's 'exact sensorial imagination', in which we use our imagination to tell a fluid story with the facts of which we are a part. The next stage, air cognition, involves 'seeing in beholding', and represents the inspiration stage. Fire cognition finds us becoming one with the being, and forms the intuitive stage from which an action emerges. (Hoffman, 2007; M. Colquhoun, personal communication, September, 2011).

The scientific method developed by Goethe was formed in response to the mechanistic methods of science he recognized in his life time, and used in a conscious effort to remarry the arts with the sciences. I see this process as not just a methodology, but as a lifestyle - a lifestyle that, like a pea seed left to move with its own rhythm, enables flow in my life. This way of being prevents me from becoming stagnant in an 'earth' mode of thinking based purely in the intellect, concerned with what is happening in the head rather than the whole self. It is a response to the way in which western science, which has fundamentally shaped the western world, 'cuts people off at the head' (M. Colquhoun, personal communication, September, 2011). In Hoffmann's words, Goethe's work of cycling through all modes of cognition could be regarded as "the movement from the

determined to the determining, the constituted to the constituting, from the objectively structured to the creatively free" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 11).

It was only upon writing this essay that I realized how organically I moved through these four stages. Ironically, I felt as though I was constantly getting distracted, but in fact the distractions were my natural rhythm and are, in hind sight, what Ruldolf Steiner has referred to as the "cultivation of an authentic living thinking" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 8). This authentic living, however, is often devalued by western science, based as it is on the belief that:

"We see objects outside ourselves, and do not notice that in order for them to appear as such, we must picture them to ourselves in a particular way. We mostly overlook the fact that the reality of these objects derives from the joining of two experiences which are gained in quite different ways: the percept coming from without, and the concept brought forth from within" (Bockemühl, 1985, p. 1).

I have begun a journey that is attentive not only to the prudence of planting seeds, gardening and food security – 'the percept coming from without' – but also that which is 'brought forth within' myself from seeds.

OUTER SEED

Earth Cognition – Physical Thinking

Goethe's first step concerns scientific intelligence, cause and effect, and the laws of nature - in other words, conventional science. It is a very mechanical, externally-based process of writing down only that which you observe on the surface of a phenomenon. I worked with broad beans to begin forming a deeper relationship to all seeds, and used the act of drawing them at various stages of their sprouting process as an entry point into this relationship. Some observations from my journal are as follows: "varying shades of light brown/beige to soft pinks; dark brown 'mouth' at one end with a distinct line; kidney shaped; between 1-2 cm long and 1-1.5cm wide; smooth and uneven surface." Then I sprouted them: "all sprouts growing from one side - I expected them to come from the brown line at the one end; peeled off the skin of the previous sprout, leathery texture quite easy to do. The seed was splitting into the cotyledons under the skin. The sprout was growing from [in]side, and I broke it apart. The sprout was growing from both ends, the one end emerging out of the seed already, the other growing through the centre of the seed. Not sure which part is root or leaf" (personal journal, October 30, 2011).

An infinite amount of detail could be collected, forming a rather exhausting process that can easily leave us lost in our heads. If I imagine myself writing down every fact about the seed that I could see, smell, touch, taste or hear, I would lose all interest in the process of forming a relationship with the seed, distracted and consumed by the objectifying stage. As Hoffmann (2007) states:

"In terms of practical science, the inside of things – rocks, plants, animals – must be broken open...in order to be observed and measured; thus what is inside must be penetrated and established as the external. The method of quantitative science is to break things open – but when we do so we do not see inside at all, but only more surface..." (p. 30).

Here we see the limitations of perpetually maintaining an earth mode of thinking, a stage that exists only on the surface. Yet no meaningful relationship in my life has stayed at a surface level. Creating a deeper exploration requires a move into 'water' cognition which "represents a mediating, softening influence; by imaginatively flowing into things, we are, in a way, giving ourselves over to them for the sake of letting them appear just as they themselves are, not according to a wilful desire to conquer through our knowing" (Hoffman, 2007, p.44). Without this deepening, the cyclical rhythms of life are blocked, confined by a "scientific thinking that is mechanical and logical [and thus] perceives only that dimension of nature that is mechanical and logical" (Hoffman, 2007, p 7-8). A seed is not a machine, and a deeper relationship is possible. I facilitated my data collection of the seeds by drawing what I observed. This can also be a mechanical process, but with awareness, by not imposing any expectations and allowing myself to be receptive, I see how I flowed beyond earth thinking into water cognition. Let me share with you what the seeds shared with me.

Water Thinking – Imagination

As I spent time drawing I became fascinated by the shadows that were cast by the seeds. It was only when I included the shadows in my drawings that the drawings came alive on the page. Below is an excerpt from my journal:

I'm noticing as I draw a bean seed how many different shadows it casts, and it's almost as if the shadows have shadows. When drawing the bean, you really have to draw the shadows in order to bring the seed to life on paper. Without them it's very one dimensional. The shadows bring the drawing to life (personal journal October 30 & November 8, 2011).

What I've come to realize about shadow is that it is everywhere all the time, we're just not able to see it because the light blocks it out or covers it up. I realized this because I was playing with the shadow of my seeds and noticed that it could be cast anywhere if I just manipulated where the light fell. So then in some aspects that must mean we are always in a state of shadow – of creativity and potential.

I have the sense that my broad beans sprouting in my room grew noticeably in the night, so that I often awake to recognizable growth. But this state of eternal shadow is stunted by the light to some extent, and only when pure shadow is present is the creative side, the side of potential, most pure and abundant (personal journal, November 16, 2011).

These journal entries are some examples of how I was using my imagination, the key element of water cognition, to see the shadows as something deeper and more significant than they appear with earth cognition. Seeing the shadow from a different mode of cognition resonated with Hoffman's observation that "that which began as a clearly recognizable scientific process of observation and measurement has begun to turn into something more like art... Science becomes artistic out of its own requirement to realize itself as a true science of living form" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 43).

My interest in the shadows cast by the light (external) drew me into the seed itself (internal). When I used my rational mind to imagine the inside of the seed I assumed that it was very dark inside. Then, flowing into my imagination, I saw the inside of the seed as an internal shadow. Reflecting on the MSc classes in which we explored the qualities of light and dark, I started seeing the inside of the seed, its internal shadow, as a space of unlimited potential. From the inner shadow a *whole* plant will grow. The essence of life is contained within the small dried seed - within every seed. The secret of all life is contained in these inner shadows. From within the seed comes the root, stem, leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds. This is beautifully expressed by Hoffman's statement that "freedom and creativity in organic existence means that an organism comes forth 'out of itself' and is not merely the products of something else" (2007, p.13).

When I think back to the size of my pea patch growing up the chicken wire fence in Thunder Bay, and all the space they eventually took contained in the tiny seed, the generosity and abundance of nature - of us - overwhelms me. All this from a place of internal darkness. "For Goethe, darkness is not the completely powerless absence of light, it is something active" (Steiner, 1897). This I found clearly evidenced within the seed itself.

As I began seeing the inside of the seed as a place of unlimited potential, I related other active qualities of darkness, such as creativity, uncertainty, holding back, withdrawnness, freedom that at any time can find expression into the light, to the seed qualities. These are all crucial to how a seed gives voice to itself (P. Franses, personal communication, October, 2011), but I knew that something else was involved in the seed finding its voice: what ignited this active darkness into an expression of itself?

It seems obvious that by putting the seed in soil or sprouting it in water, the seed starts to grow. This is very logical, rational, earth thinking. However, if I move beyond this earth thinking I come to the realization that the inner shadow is activated when the whole bean becomes engulfed in shadow, i.e. soil. In a sense the seed surrenders to the darkness. The seed and soil become unified in the darkness. The seed roots itself in darkness and in doing so is able to grow up towards the light. Plants display a balance that embraces the dark and the light, not because they cannot have one without the other, but because the seed goes beyond these descriptions and embraces life in its entirety. There is a striking difference, however, between a seed growing in water. Being engulfed by water, the seed can still grow and exist, but this is what I would call an inauthentic shadow. The seed has surrendered to a quality that will never let it reach its full potential.

INNER SEED**Air Cognition – Inspiration**

In a move away from the seed as physical matter to the philosophical realm of understanding what the seed represents, I moved into air cognition, inspiration. The insights brought forth through the seed were very inspirational when I applied them to myself and how my life is stimulated. I recognized the different layers of darkness that are intricately connected: in the seed, the soil, myself, the world. These layers create a fractal structure of darkness, highlighting how the pattern of the whole is mirrored in the parts. On another level I was very inspired when I came across the book “Secrets of the Soil” by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird (1989) and read the section labelled in the Index as ‘Seed-formation, spiritual science,’ which is shockingly similar to what I had discovered:

“Carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen, which occur in leaf and flower, calyx and root, are everywhere bound to other substances in one form or another, and can become independent again, says Steiner, only when hydrogen carries them outward into the far spaces of the universe, separates them all, and merges them into a universal chaos. Alternatively, it drives these fundamental substances of protein into the tiny seed formation and there makes them independent, so they become receptive to the in-pouring forces of the cosmos. In the tiny seed-formation there is chaos, and away in the far circumference there is once more chaos. *Chaos in the seed must interact with chaos in the farthest circles of the Universe. Then the new being arises.* (p. 375, emphasis added).”

I could also use chaos as a synonym for ‘shadow’ or ‘darkness.’

Like the seed, I too must surrender to the chaos in the farthest circles of the Universe so that I can rise to my full potential - a metaphor for my life brought forth by the seed. Air cognition “is experienced as the void, the spaciousness or nothingness which...is not merely an absence of matter but an *overcoming of matter*” (Hoffmann, 2007, p. 44). By entering into air cognition, albeit unknowingly, I came to many other realizations about what certain manifestations mean beyond their physical form.

I’m a jumper. I physically or outwardly love to cliff jump, bungee jump, rappel; I ‘jump’ into situations and allow the learning or process to come forth from situations, from replacing the plumbing in my upstairs shower and tiling my bathroom without previous plumbing experience to applying to the Holistic Science program without ever having visited England let alone the College. Looking back on these examples, they all share a surrendering into the unknown, allowing myself to become completely engulfed by darkness, where authentic and more meaningful learning or living emerges. Here I have lived with trust, interacting “*with chaos in the farthest circles of the Universe. Then the new being arises*” (Tompkins & Bird, 1989, p. 375). Metaphors of the dark and how I live my life extend into interesting symbols, including those of my astrological chart which are all contained in the bottom half of the sphere – the underworld, the dark. My identification with the seed is also interesting to mention in light of the Homeric Hymns of Demeter’s daughter, Persephone, who is represented as the seed and queen of the underworld.

All of this relates back to Hoffman’s description of the inspiration stage as inner readiness, a receptive space – a place of feeling. For as much as I am a jumper, it has mainly been a physical experience rooted in my external world (i.e. jumping into new situations, or literally cliff jumping). Being at Schumacher College, I have been making the steps towards jumping into the chaos within myself, in other words deepening my connection to my inner seed – discovering my own potential and creativity.

Fire Cognition – Intuition

During my Goethean study of seeds I decided that I was going to undertake a meditation for my project instead of doing an essay. I felt that it was a much more accessible way to share what I was learning from the seed, and yet in the end I also wrote the essay. By reflecting back on my study with seeds I have come to see how I progressed smoothly through the stages of earth, water, air and fire, although at the time I thought I was digressing from my study. It is only in looking back that I can align my experience with these titles. The meditation that I created could be described in Hoffman’s words as a gesture, symbolic of the fire cognition: “Gesture is a manifestation of being; it is still apprehended from without, albeit through inner participation. The creative idea, the being itself, can only be grasped from the inside out” (Hoffmann, p. 58). Out of the seed has arisen a meditation that I plan on sharing as an invitation for people to connect with their own inner seed, and as a contribution of my stories to the stories of others.

And so like the tales of the Canadian aboriginals there is no ending to this story. It will flow freely into the lives of others, influencing their stories in turn. From the bean seed this story has come full circle, into my inner seed. May the cycles always continue, from seed to seed.

References

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