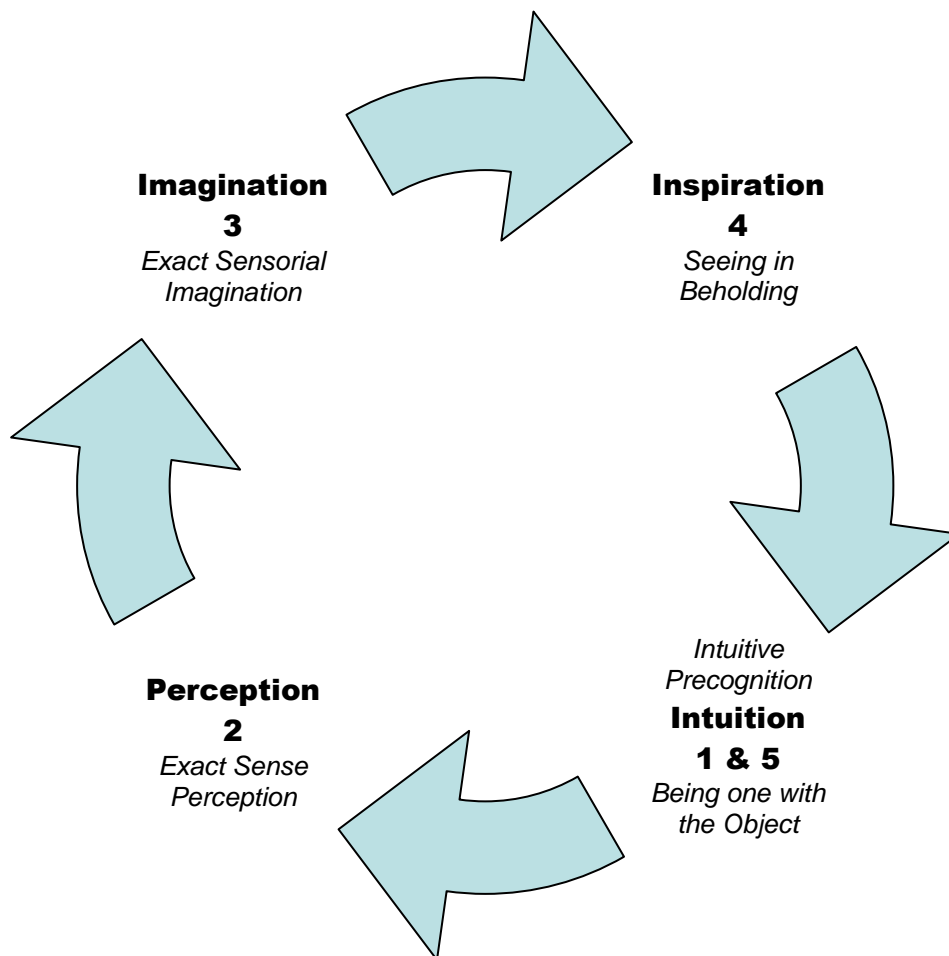




Investigating the Medicinal Actions of Plants II

Goethean Science Plant Study

Goethean Science has been described as a phenomenology of nature (Seamon & Zajonc 1998; Brook 2003) and is said to bear much resemblance to the phenomenology of Husserl (Kazlev 2004). Developed by the polymath J.W. von Goethe (1749 - 1832), and interpreted and developed further by Rudolph Steiner, these techniques represent a method for engaging the scientist in participatory studies of natural phenomena (Brook 2003; Kazlev 2004) or “conscious-process-participation” as Wahl (2005) terms it. For this reason, this method is sometimes referred to as *participatory* or *contemplative* science.



Preparatory Stages / Intuitive Precognition

The preparatory stages of a Goethean plant study involve recording any initial experiences, thoughts or feelings that the investigator gets when ‘meeting’ the plant. These ‘intuitive precognitions’ need to be acknowledged, recorded and then ‘bracketed’ or left alone while the further steps are taken (Brook 2003:12). While this may seem strange to orthodox scientists, it must be remembered that Goethean Science is *participatory* in nature (Kazlev 2004; Wahl 2005).

Stage 1: Exact Sense Perception (Brook 2003; Wahl 2005)

In an analytical quantitative mode, the researcher returns to the plant and makes detailed observations of it using the 5 senses. The plant's physical structure is observed in minute detail and detailed drawings and notes may be made of the leaves, stems, roots and inflorescence, as well as its place in the landscape and what animals, geology and other plants it keeps as company. Other sense data are gathered by systematic organoleptic assessment and making preparations from the plant.

Stage 2: Exact Sensorial Imagination (Bortoft 1996) / **Exact Sensorial Fantasy** (Brook 2003)

After analytically investigating the plant in the present, how it *IS*, Stage 2 is commenced. The researcher attempts to perceive how the plant has *become* what it is.

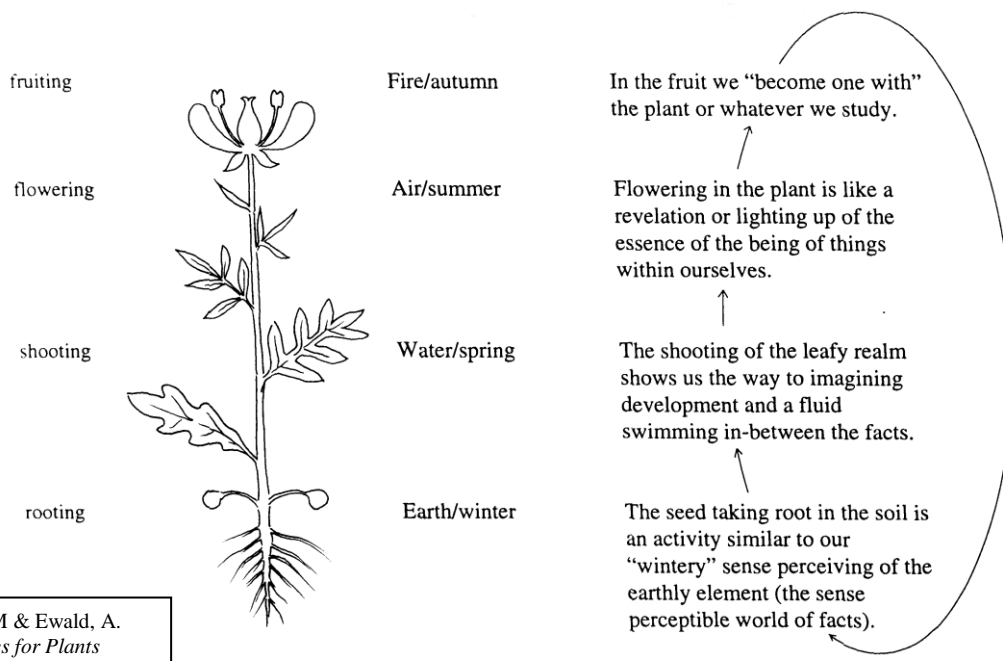
This involves looking at different stages of growth of the plant, how it grew, rooted, shooted and flowered and being able to **-imaginatively** - 'live into' or 'swim with' this growth process (Colquhoun & Ewald 1996:169). In the mind's eye, it should be possible at this stage to 'see' the growth process of the plant, morphing from seed to flower to seed - backwards and forwards in time.

Stage 3: Seeing in Beholding (Wahl 2005)

In this receptive stage, active observation is suspended and the phenomenon is allowed to express itself through the tool of our conscious awareness. When this occurs, the researcher experiences flashes of insight or 'Ah-ha!' moments (Wahl 2005).

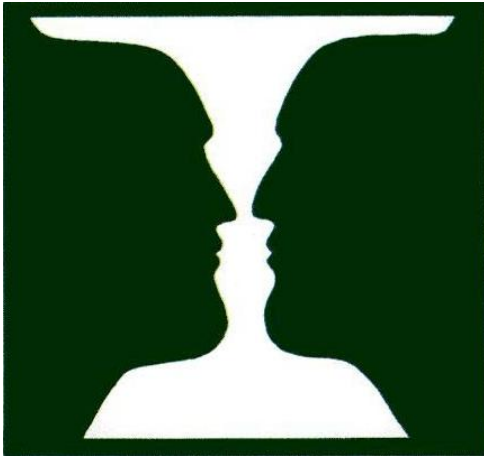
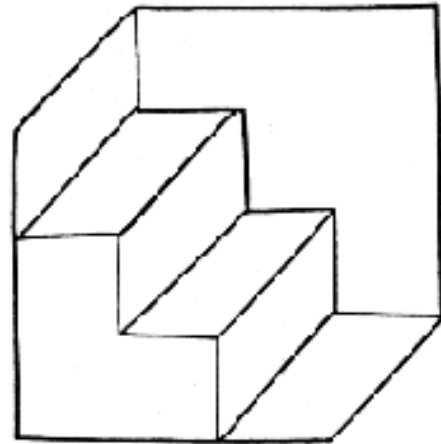
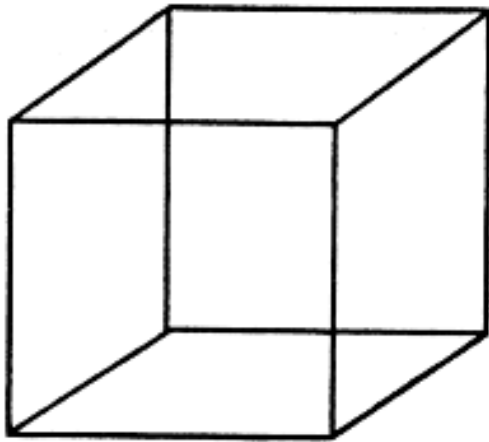
Stage 4: Being One with the Object / Being the Being (Brook 2003; Wahl 2005)

In order to facilitate the expression of the phenomenon, the researcher places him or herself in a calm, relaxed state and mentally 'grows' the plant in all its observed detail, 'feeling in' to the root, rhizome, flower and shoots as it grows. That is, in the mind's eye, recreating the plant from all the data collected in Stages 1, 2 & 3. This is repeated and intensified and then let go. In the gap / stillness following 'letting go', a number of thoughts and feelings, impressions, flashes of insight and the experience of a number of symptoms may occur in the investigator's body. The researcher is allowing the phenomenon to dynamically occupy or inhabit their being. This is similar to a homeopathic proving, but the phenomenon is taken into the consciousness, not in physical form. The researcher and plant come together and the researcher can begin to experience that phenomenon's state and interpret it through their mind and body.



from Colquhoun, M & Ewald, A. (1996). *New Eyes for Plants*

Feeling hungry → smelling, tasting, chewing → digestion → assimilation → anabolic creation of new substance



The Doctrines of Signatures & Correspondences

The Doctrine of Signatures is the persistent and widespread idea in many systems of medicine that there is a sign or 'signature' in a substance that is a clue to how it may be used medicinally. When there is a signature, then that thing (e.g. fruit, root) is said to be *in correspondence with* the organ or process that it resembles in the human body. Signatures are about simile and metaphor. There is argument as to whether signatures are merely a useful mnemonic device to assist in recalling the medicinal uses of a plant, or relate directly to the plant's dynamic or physical properties which in turn give it its medicinal action. In prehistory, did the recognition and use of signatures pre- or post- date the discovery of a particular plant's medicine?

Working with signatures needs practice. The more you do it, the more you see. It is a process of observation and contemplation. Your tools are *keen observation, imagination, intuition, sympathy* and *analogy*. A good knowledge of human physiology, anatomy and pathology is important in order to make links. It can be used as a stand-alone method to enrich your knowledge of plant medicines, or can be incorporated into the Goethean approach.

It is like ...

It is similar to ...

It reminds me of ...

It is as if ...

Signatures usually relate to one or other of a plant's physical characteristics such as:

- **Habitat** (dry, gravelly, boggy, chalky, altitude, fire, wind etc)
- **Colour** (red, purple, yellow etc. – especially if not in the 'usual' place)
- **Form** (morphology of plant is frequent key – cf. 'gesture')
- **Texture** (rough, slimy, soapy, hairy, prickly etc.)
- **Taste**
- **Aroma / scent**
- **Sound**
- **Times** (e.g. of most prominence – flowering, fruiting etc.)

Temporal · Morphological · Organoleptic · Environmental

Another way of classifying signatures is differentiating between **static** and **dynamic** signatures.

The most reliable signatures appear to be those that relate to *plant growth processes*, i.e. dynamic signatures. In this type of signature, the way that a plant develops (how and when), grows, unfurls, ripens, flowers or does any other process of development or death, may give a clue to how it may be used as a medicine. *Function is related to function*. For example, the way that *Capsicum* fruit ripens from the apex to the attachment at the base, turning red in the process, is analogous to the way the heart contracts and blood is expelled from the ventricles. There is a link here between one *process* and another – this is more dynamic, individualised and representative of that plant's unique medicine.

On the other hand, *static* signatures relate less to function, are less dynamic and are usually not unique to a specific plant. These are broad or generic signatures and they are therefore more likely to mislead the investigator. An example would be the colour red. This is said to indicate an affinity to the blood. However, this is not detailed enough to be very helpful in prescribing and there are many plants that have red in them that are not known to affect the blood.

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