Imagination as evolution – an educational and human development perspective

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ABSTRACT. Upon sketching some broad brush strokes pertaining to anthroposophical and theosophical cosmology, this paper argues that the imagination is not just another element within the human whole, but is indeed a crucial part of and plays a significant role to the 'whole'. However, imagination is not necessarily positive per se, but highly dependent on the context and for which purposes a person exercises it. Without context and purpose, images, so closely related to imagination, and so predominant in our visual culture today, may indeed be detrimental for the holistic growth of, especially, children. On the other hand, through context and meaningful purpose, imagination, being a bridge to wholeness, may equally be instrumental in healing fragmentation, not only in the individual but in society at large. Imaginative education, it is suggested, may be a means for 'conscious participation' and thus human evolution.

Keywords: imagination, education, human development, anthroposophy

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Nach einer groben Skizze der anthroposophischen (Steiner 1964) und der theosophischen (z. B. Saraydarian 1999) Kosmologie argumentiert dieser Artikel, dass die Imagination nicht lediglich ein Element des menschlichen Ganzen ist, sondern ein entscheidender Teil dieses Ganzen. Die Imagination ist jedoch nicht unbedingt etwas Positives per se. Vielmehr richtet sich die positive Qualität danach, in welchem Zusammenhang die Imagination steht und welchen Sinn sie hat. Ohne Kontext und Sinn können Bilder, die ja mit der Imagination so eng verwandt sind und in unserer heutigen visuellen Kultur eine so dominante Rolle spielen, insbesondere bei Kindern verheerende Auswirkungen auf deren Entwicklung haben. Hat die Imagination hingegen Zusammenhang und Sinn, so kann sie als Brücke zur Ganzheit (Überwindung der Fragmentierung) eine elementare Rolle spielen, und zwar nicht nur beim Einzelnen, sondern auch in der Gesellschaft. Imaginative Pädagogik, so argumentiert der Artikel, ist potenziell ein Instrument zum Erlangen „bewusster Anteilnahme" , die der menschlichen Entwicklung zugute kommt.

Schlüsselwörter: Imagination, Erziehung, Entwicklung des Menschen, Anthroposophie

> To live – is war with demons in the heart and mind's corner.
> To poetise – is to put yourself before judgment.
>
> Henrik Ibsen

Introduction

Why is the imagination – sometimes defined as the ability to think of what is possible (Egan, 1997) – said by many to be such an important element in teaching and learning and child development? What is the nature of the allegedly mysterious ability of the imagination to connect the various aspects of human experience, such as thought and action, the practical and the theoretical, the material and the spiritual? And why is it that the imagination is said to bring wholeness of experience, yet theorists continue to dissect the imaginative process (e.g. 'cognitive tools', Egan 1997; 'seven methods of imaginative teaching', Nielsen 2004, etc)?

Certainly, reductionism does not exclude synthesis, and in this paper we indeed work under the assumption that a combination of both is most often superior to either approach on its own. As such, the paper will begin by sketching some broad brush strokes of theosophical and anthroposophical cosmology in order to come to an increased understanding of the 'whole', for then to use this understanding to elucidate why the imagination appears to be such a powerful and multi-dimensional link between the infinite parts of our lives and the totality to which they belong.

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Wholeness versus the part

According to a theosophical (e.g. Saraydarian, 1999) and anthroposophical (Steiner, 1969) worldview, the cosmos is an inseparable whole, a *one*. This unity in its highest aspect is *God*, an omnipotent, benevolent and omniscient supreme being, manifesting a divine plan of evolution. As such, this divine aspect of the whole, of cosmos, is undivided, indestructible and permanent. The physical, manifest universe, however, does contain duality and impermanence. This is symbolised in the contrast between opposites: death and life, evil and good, hatred and love, ignorance and knowledge, and so on. Yet this duality, according to a theosophical (Ivanhow, 1986) and anthroposophical (Steiner, 1964) view, is only a 'duality' in so far that its ends contrast with each other. Just as a continuum has a beginning and an end that stand in opposition to each other, but are nonetheless linked by time and space, so too do all 'opposites' belong to the same continuum, the same whole. The dual nature of the whole, the one, is thus really contained within the one, the monoism, only differentiating and shedding contrast on this whole by highlighting its boundaries, its polar ends. Spirit is directly connected to matter, heaven to earth, coldness to heat, by way of degree. It is also in this concept of *degree* that we are able to make further distinctions of the whole, following theosophical-anthroposophical cosmology.

In the space between contrasts, between polar ends, we may identify a third part, a fusion of dualities, the middle section, so to speak, thus constituting a trinity. The recognition of a divine trinity that is closely associated with the Godhead is not particular to theosophy and anthroposophy but is portrayed in many religious traditions. While there is great divergence in the dogmas associated with leading world religions, there is a remarkable degree of correspondence in the esoteric writings which underpin the main cosmologies, ancient and present, in regard to the representation of three Beings associated with One Godhead. This threefold aspect we see depicted in Hinduism as Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma (Steiner, 2008), in esoteric Judaism as Kether, Chokmah and Binah (Matthews, 1992, pp. 120 -124), in Greek mythology as Zeus, Apollo and Athena (Matthews, 1992, p. 83), and in Egyptian mythology as Osiris, Horus and Isis (Steiner, 1971; 1983; Welburn, 2004; Matthews, 1996, p. 68). Drawing on these esoteric traditions, the theosophical-anthroposophical view presents the holy trinity as a reflection of the three faces of the One, of cosmology. Furthermore, the trinity of the whole is also depicted in the human being in the three aspects, or dimensions, of *body, soul and spirit* (Steiner, 1971). In Theosophy this threefold nature of the human being is represented in the following manner (Saraydarian, 1999):

1. the mental body (representing the divine *Father* aspect or *spirit* in the human being);

2. the feeling body (representing the divine *Son-Daughter* aspect or *soul* in the human being);

3. the physical body (representing the divine *Mother* aspect or physical *dwelling place* of the human soul).

Theosophical literature (Bailey, 1991; Ivanhov, 1986) points out that in the fusion of spirit and matter, the middle ground, arise seven other characteristics of the whole. These divisions are, like the larger trinity, inseparable from the One, but nevertheless embody in the world of form various aspects of the One. The seven 'categories,' or *rays* (Bailey, 1991), can again be dissected into various aspects, creating even more diversity. For example, the *first ray*, that of the *will nature* (Bailey, 1991), is said to be the category embracing all activities of physical action and mental determination, such as conquest, exploration, pursuit for justice, and so on. The *third ray*, that of *active intelligence* (Bailey, 1991), for instance, is said to be the category encompassing all activities pertaining to synthetic thinking, such as philosophy, contemplation, examination based on totality, and so on. While a detailed study of these rays is beyond the scope of this discussion, the important point to make clear at this juncture is simply that multiplicity arises out of the *seven*, which arise out of the *three*, which arise out of the *two*, which arise out of the *one* – all connected to each other by way of degree in time and space. The further divisions of the One may be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Further Divisions of the 'One'

The One as Unity	The One as Three	The One as Seven (Bailey, 1991)
	1. Father – Spirit – Thinking	1. Will 2. Love
1. The Divine Whole	2. Son/Daughter – Soul – Feeling	3. Active Intelligence 4. Beauty and Harmony
	3. Mother – Personality – Willing	5. Concrete Truth 6. Devotion 7. Order

When we relate this understanding of wholeness, we see that distinctions and division do not contradict a holistic philosophy, nor a perception of the whole as unity: distinctions simply portray various aspects, or dimensions, of the whole. It is also in relation to this understanding that we note that the concept of *distinctions* is inherently linked to the concept of *degree*, and thus an idea of *more* and *less, higher* and *lower*, and so on. Not unlike St. Thomas Aquinas' notion of the 'graduation of all things' (Oldmeadow, 1998; Steiner, 1920), which suggests that any genus is a type of original *form*, or *cause*, just as fire is the cause of all that is hot. This view is based on a theory of teleological evolution, where apparent opposites (life-death, good-evil, love-hatred) are, on another level, not really opposites, but rather reflections of potentiality and degeneration, of evolution and involution.

Accordingly, the degrees of importance that may be assigned to various elements of a holistic philosophy, or indeed imaginative teaching, should not necessarily be seen as an attempt to create fixed, hierarchical and value-based fragmentation, but rather as a way to intelligently deal with the nuances and gradual unfoldment of aspects within the whole – thereby providing contextual elucidation for the sake of *conscious participation*. In other words, the creation of imaginative modes, methods and tools, as developed by some theorists (e.g. Nielsen, 2004; Egan 1997), does not, in themselves, contradict an aim to be holistic if we consider that in any holistic world there is a need to move intelligently towards potentiality by discerning appropriate interconnections and relationships within, and of, the whole.

The bridge of and to wholeness

Arising out of the above insights, additional support emerges for the argument that imagination is not just another element within the whole, but is a crucial part *of* and plays a significant role in contributing *to* the whole. Imagination can be understood to be a metamorphosis of the *feeling* nature, the *soul-aesthetic* part of the human being (see also Nielsen 2004, chapter 2), thus constituting a link between the *ends* of human existence, one that brings together thought and action, theory and practice. The pedagogical transaction of imagination facilitates in students the growth of a capacity which enables them to rise above any limitations of context and enter into a type of trance, or imaginative mode, that seemingly connects them with inner, spiritual-aesthetic dimensions or significances (Nielsen, 2004, chapter 4). The above discussed theosophical view of wholeness provides additional support for these findings by accenting that the second ray aspect of the trinity (Son-Daughter, Soul-feeling) constitutes the crucial middle-ground, or *pathway*, between the spiritual-aesthetic realm and the physical realm, between the Spirit-Father aspect and the Body-Mother aspect. Furthermore, the anthroposophical view casts light on the significance of the relationship between Love (the second ray in the sevenfold model) and Imagination which become, when working together, a 'cognitive force' (Steiner, 1923b):

> When the power of thought and the power of will are developed further than in ordinary life, then the power of feeling, which is the deepest, most essential part of the human soul, will also be transformed. (Steiner, cited by Nesfield-Cookson, 1983, p. 139)

> A power of soul, which many are unwilling to accept as a means of knowledge is raised to a higher level. This is the power of love. (Steiner, cited by Nesfield- Cookson, 1983, p. 139)

Notably, this view of imagination as a bridge to wholeness, and a process of synthesis, is not particular to Steiner or theosophical theory in general: it is echoed in a number of independent studies on the imagination (Dirkx, 2001; Johnson, 1990; Neville, 1989; Giambattista Vico, in Burke, 1985; Sloan, 1983; Bohm, 1980; Warnock, 1979; Rugg, 1963; Langer, 1953; Dewey, 1916). For example, the late Harold Rugg conducted a life-long study into the concept of imagination and its function as a mediator between the conscious and unconscious mind. In his book, *Imagination* (1963), Rugg makes an important elaboration on how we think, and thus come to know something. The most known and accepted type of thought, Rugg argues, is the verbal-analytic thought of scientific thinking. This mode of thinking, he claims, consists primarily of mental substance, having very little feeling, if any, in it. While mainly beneficial for verification, the verbal-analytic mode of thinking on its own does not promote discovery. To discover something, one engages in what Rugg calls *felt-thought*, a type of thinking which involves the feelings and intuitive realms. Rugg points towards Einstein as a scientist and philosopher in whom the rational, scientific way of thinking was epitomised, but who nevertheless often explained that none of his ideas emerged out of analytic thinking. Rather, they came as intuitive 'flashes', feeling-thoughts, which then he might try to express logically in words afterwards.

What is important in this realisation, Rugg felt, is what he termed the 'theorem of the transliminal mind'. In this concept, the illuminating flash of insight occurs at a threshold of the conscious-non-conscious-continuum on which all of life is lived (Rugg, 1963, pp. 292–293). Rugg, in other words, identified not only the two ends of the continuum, the conscious and the non-conscious state, but a third state that also exists. This third state constitutes a transliminal antechamber in which the creative flash occurs. As Rugg (1963) notes, people like Galton, James, Schelling, Freud, and others, were aware that a fertile border state exists between the alert, conscious problem-solving mind and the depths of the unconscious, but they did little more than name it. Rugg's study suggests that the phenomenon of imagination is similar to the Taoist's state of *no-mind*, the state of *letting go*, so we reach the place *where we know before we know it* (Rugg, 1963, p. 293).

The crux of Rugg's thesis is that this reservoir for acquiring knowledge and new insight is not necessarily reached by way of the rational mind, which we allegedly aim to develop first and foremost in modern schooling (Glazer, 1999; Gatto, 1997). The illumination of mind, Rugg argues, is primarily nourished through a stimulation of the child's imaginative powers. Through the alchemy of thought-feeling, concentration-relaxation, the antechambers of consciousness are fused with something of a higher nature than thought or knowledge itself. In artistic life, the process of the higher self merging with the lower self is typified. For that reason, Rugg believed, as Steiner did, that education is a question of making teaching artistic and imaginative.

Bernie Neville in his book, *Educating Psyche* (1989), comes to similar conclusions. Drawing upon psychology, philosophy and Greek mythology, Neville sheds light on the important role that imagination plays and the subconscious side of our being has in our lives, and how a greater acceptance of and knowledge about this side can aid educational theory and practice. Like Rugg, Neville does not downplay the importance of intellectual and physical experience in education, but simply argues that our imagination, or *psyche*, is the shadowy, soul-like 'ground' where these can meet and be truly enlightened. In fact, without tapping into our subconscious via imagination, fantasy and play, Neville argues, nothing we do is truly creative, and thus, in many ways, truly educational. The Greek myth of Psyche's experiences and consequent metamorphosis is to Neville a pictorial analogy of the creative and transformational power of the soul-aesthetic part within us, the transliminal 'ante-chamber' of which Rugg spoke, initiating our consciousness into new and deeper states of being and knowing.

Inspired by Steiner's pedagogical approach, Douglas Sloan's comprehensive study *Insight-Imagination* (1983) adds further support to the view that the imaginative realm is the inner place where our different soul capacities are joined and find their unity. While Rugg focuses on the interaction of thinking-and-feeling, and Neville highlights the interplay between the conscious-rational aspect of thinking and Psyche as the shadowy subconscious, Sloan shines light in particular on the interrelationship between thinking-feeling and *willing*. We experience a distancing from the world, Sloan explains, as we tend to *break down, separate*, and view *the abstract*. Through the active experience of willing, by contrast, we enter into immediate participation with the world of concretes, often remaining unaware or having little thought while in motor activity (Steiner, 1996). What makes these two polar ends of experience possible to meet, Sloan argues, is the intermediate realm of feeling and imagination. Feeling-imagination constitutes 'the rhythmic connection between participation in the world in volitional activity and detachment from the world made possible in thinking' (Sloan, 1983, p. 205). Without the intervening realm of knowing in feeling through images, Sloan argues, we are doomed to oscillate between immediate immersion in activity on the one hand and thinking without life and depth on the other. Feeling and imagination, Sloan implies, are in many ways the ground of *conscious participation,* as suggested earlier.

John Dewey, the renowned American philosopher, also identified imagination as the encompassing, qualitative bond between thought and action:

> Only a personal response involving imagination can possibly procure realisation even of pure 'facts.' The imagination is the medium of appreciation in every field. Were it not for the accompanying play of imagination, there would be no road from a direct activity to representative knowledge; for it is by imagination that symbols are translated over into a direct meaning and integrated with a narrower activity so as to expand and enrich it (Dewey, 1916, pp. 236–237).

The importance of imagination in all true learning, Dewey argued further, does not devalue the aspects of thinking and activity. Thinking is, he said, the equivalent to an explicit rendering of the intelligent element in our experience, which in turn makes it possible to act with an 'end in view'. Through thinking and reflection upon experience, we become co-creators with the 'sea of imagination' (Dewey, 1916, p. 146).

Dirkx (2001), Johnson (1990), Giambattista Vico (in Burke 1985), Bohm (1980), Warnock (1979), and Langer (1953) make conclusions in their respective studies that support the concept of imagination above. Suffice it to note that the previously discussed theosophical-anthroposophical view of wholeness, in essence, resonates with a number of significant, and more importantly, non-anthroposophical studies. Students of imagination in general seem to agree that one of the main characteristics of imagination is its ability to connect the various dimensions of human existence, as it is both a *process* and the *continuum* on which the process takes place. Imagination is not merely a downward movement from the Oneness of the spiritual-aesthetic realms, nor an upwards one from the manifold divisions of the physical, or tangible, realm. The upwards and downwards motions merely exemplify the ends of the continuum, the wholeness, the *One*. Imagination, in this line of thinking, thus takes on an identity which to some extent is non-identical, a 'definition' in consistent movement, which constantly embraces the ends. Oneness descends from the spiritual-aesthetic realms, whereas division ascends from matter; imagination, being the bridge and medium of both, is, in other words, of both spirit and matter.

The paradoxical tension implicit in the *descending-ascending* process whereby the 'Oneness-to-the-Manifold' is made manifest to us in the world, is also experienced by us in the contrast between our inner and outer ways of knowing. While the pathway of the mystic strives inwards towards an underlying sense of unity beyond the manifoldness of outer worldly experiences and perceptions, the exploration of the scientist leads outwards towards a sense that the nature of the reality of the world is characterised by multiplicity. Steiner (1964; 2006) draws attention to the philosophical problems that arise from the tension between the

mystical experience of unity which leads to monism and the scientist's explorations of the manifold world which lead to pluralism. He observes that deeper research 'leads to a realisation that unity and multiplicity are concepts inapplicable to the divine-spiritual ground of the world' (Steiner, 2006). Neither a unity nor a multiplicity can be fully characterised which means that we need to conclude that 'the divine-spiritual transcends these concepts and cannot be fathomed by them' (Steiner, 2006). However, Steiner does not let the matter rest there; he goes on to explain that if the mystic pathway is followed in tandem with that of the scientist then new faculties of thinking can be developed which do enable us to understand the divine-spiritual ground of the world. Thus, in relation to the *inward-outward* continuum of our experience (mystical-experiential knowing versus scientific-thinking), it is also possible to conceive of imagination as the connecting link between spirit and matter.

Imagination as evolution

Seeing imagination as the *middle ground*, as the meeting place for both spirit and matter, it stands to reason that the quality of imagination may reflect the vast myriad of *degrees*, positive and negative, found within the whole, within life. Steiner's main conception of imagination was mostly linked to notions of soul and the higher, positive aspects of the human being. Yet, Steiner argued that imagination is also an inherent faculty of perceiving, which is not educational in itself.[1] In a case study (Nielsen 2004), a Steiner teacher argued that imagination is not always positive, but depended on the person doing the imagining. If the impulse to imagine is bound in reality, he argued, then the effects will be positive in the child. But if it is bound in the unreal, the *untruths* of life, or a type of *awfulising*, then the effects could be harmful. Moreover, considering the first proposition of this paper – that all things can be said to reflect either degeneration or potentiality, involution or evolution – it may be useful to reconsider what it is exactly that makes imagination educational, as opposed to non-educational or perhaps even mis-educational.

Steiner sometimes talked about imagination in relation to imagery, or images, mostly in order to explain the physiological mechanics of the human eye, and how, in order to understand the world around us, a type of imagining is going on all the time through our vision.[2] Through sight, Steiner argued, the human eye constantly perceives single images, which the brain then reconstructs into an identical reflection, or counterpart, of what is seen (Steiner, 1964). What is interesting to highlight in this connection is that a reflection, or counterpart, is not the original, but a double, a representation of the original. One meaning of imagination, in other words, is that which tries to catch a reflection of the original, whether this is good or bad. This conception may be poetically illustrated by a passage from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act V, scene 1:

> The lunatic, the lover, and the poet are of imagination all compact: one sees more devils than vast hell can hold, that is the mad man: the lover, all as frantic, sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt: the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and as imagination bodies forth, the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. Such tricks hath strong imagination, that if it would but apprehend some joy, it comprehends some bringer of that joy; or in the night, imagining some fear, how easy is a bush supposed a bear!

Here we see a poetic representation of the concept of imagination as a neutral *vehicle*. The lunatic, lover and poet are all capable of imagining, but the nature of the imagined is in each case particular to the mood of the one imagining. This observation implies that the quality, or value, of any image is dependent on the intentions, feelings and purpose of the person imagining. If the impulse to imagine originates from the, in anthroposophical terms, 'less evolved forms' of human experience – the degenerate manifestations of their spiritual-aesthetic counterpart, or genus – such as fear, illusion, and ignorance, then a bush is easily supposed as a bear. If, on the other hand, the impulse originates in the higher levels of potentiality – the undiluted *essences* of the spiritual-aesthetic, the whole – then our imagining may glance from 'heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,' apprehending 'some bringer of joy.'

Imagination, that of creating, or indeed *receiving*, an image from somewhere else, is, in this line of thinking, thus only important insofar as it connects us with the important. Where educative imagination can be said to be the reflection of something important, thinking can be said to be a reflection upon the reflection. Imagination and thinking are necessary and indeed both invaluable for intelligent living, yet neither must become pretenders of originality. When imagination is elevated as the originator of the image itself, as exemplified by some artists in the Romantic Period, we see a tendency to unreasoned fear, or an over-emphasis on so-called artful living, in which the spontaneous and impulsive tendency dominates to the extent of impracticality; when thinking is elevated above that which is reflected upon, as exemplified by some theorists in the Enlightenment Period, we see that the mind becomes, as Oldmeadow (1998) puts it, 'a tyrannical master, rather than a humble slave.' In either case, the tool takes precedence over its task.

Viewing imagination in this light, as the bringer of both 'joy' and 'illusion,' rather than the origin of either, we also come to realise that what distinguishes useful, or educative, imagination from futile, or non-educative and mis-educative imagination, is

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1. Conversations with Marcus Cox on Rudolf Steiner's concept of Imagination, 2000, Daylesford.
2. As above.

its *connection* to higher dimensions or inner understandings, whether these dimensions are spiritual or aesthetic. Interestingly, this concept is also reflected in the development of a philosophy of imagination by people such as Harold Rugg, Bernie Neville, Douglas Sloan, Mary Warnock, John Dewey, Giambattista Vico, Mark Johnson, Suzzane Langer, David Bohm and John Dirkx. Here, imagination has consistently been linked to inner, spiritual-aesthetic realities, challenging exclusive reliance on rational and conceptual modes of knowing and learning. As Dirkx (2001, p. 3) notes, when speaking of imagination, image, the imaginal and fantasy, we use these terms not in the sense of imaginary, fictive, or otherwise unreal, but as something *mytho-poetic*, central for holistic understanding, self-development and transformational perception.

The quotation from Henrik Ibsen, the great Norwegian poet and play writer, which introduces this paper, cites his words as follows: 'to live – is war with demons in the heart and mind's corner; to poetise – is to put yourself before judgment.' While the translation 'to poetise' in this quotation is really a poor substitute for the original Norwegian word, 'digte,' used by Ibsen, it is probably the closest a translation can come to the meaning of this word in the English language. In reality the word used in the original text is a concept, meaning to *imagine, create* and *make poetry* at the same time. Ibsen, like Steiner and the aforementioned students of imagination understand the process of imagination to be synonymous with the unravelling of the mysteries of the human psyche, bringing us to a sense of wholeness and self-understanding. Imagination, as we have noted, can also be used as a way of describing the activity of awfulising, making oneself sick with worry, and so on. This meaning of the word imagination, however useful it may be in other contexts, does nevertheless not portray its educative properties, and is certainly not the sense in which Steiner mostly used the word. Such a type of imagination does not include the characteristics of what we may for a moment call fruitful imagination, imagination that brings us closer to the spiritual-aesthetic part of ourselves, to wholeness, to transformation. Awfulising and imagining too much – whether out of fear, ignorance, or an antipathy towards the over-emphasis on rationality and reasoning produced by the Enlightenment – may connect us with the tangible world of *possible realities*, but automatically closes off to the spiritual-aesthetic dimensions, the faculties by which the physical world must be interpreted – if not 'a bush is easily supposed a bear.' One type of imagining brings us closer to the *original*, the *real*, and thus *evolution*; the other takes us closer to the *unoriginal*, the *unreal*, and thus *involution*.

Returning again to Einstein's claim that none of his ideas came from analytic thinking, but from 'flashes' of which he had no further explanation, we get a vague sense of the meaning of originality: the source of insightful knowing is not only thinking, nor even imagination. Connection to the original, or the real, can be instigated through imagination, and reflected upon by the faculty of thought, but is nevertheless not the manifestation of either. It occurs as an essence which we may only term the *mytho-poetic* aspect of ourselves (Leonard and Willis, 2008), the spiritual-aesthetic part of our being (Steiner, 1923a), the same essence Rugg (1963) identified as the imponderable place we reach when 'letting go'. Resonating with the claim that the potency of the imaginative transaction enables students to connect with transpersonal dimensions, Ibsen's words highlight that imagination, as it comes from the mytho-poetic part of ourselves, our *soul* and *heart*, may further spiritual-aesthetic development in us. There *is* a battle to be won between light and darkness, Ibsen seems to say, but the battleground is not to be found between a Devil and a non-omnipotent Deity, between *a fragmented whole*, but in the human heart, endowed by the freedom of choice, as Dostoevsky put it – the freedom to follow an evolutionary or involutionary pathway. To imagine and create poetry, or to 'digte,' is to reveal the shadows and unrefined sides of one's personality to oneself – to choose to put oneself before judgment. But more importantly, according to both Steiner and Ibsen, to imagine is at the same time to invoke, whether consciously or unconsciously, the antithesis for each dark aspect found – which is really spiritual-aesthetic evolution, according to a theosophical-anthroposophical line of thinking, the process of transcending and transforming low into high, degeneration into potentiality, darkness into light (Steiner, 1923b).

Contemporary concerns

The above philosophical concept of imagination, it should be noted, does not mean that the faculty of imagination only has to procure beautiful and feel-good images, in order to be fruitful, or educational. Again, it is the image's connection to its source, its *originating* principle, that is important, rather than any particular set of images as such. An image may indeed be ugly and somewhat unpleasant, as Ibsen suggests, and still by virtue of its originating impulse to 'put it before judgment' lead us to its antithesis, to something beautiful and pleasant. Grimm's fairytales, it may be recalled, which are part of the Steiner curriculum from early childhood, are filled with gruesome images and events; it is the nature of the context of these images and events, the *good story* of which Steiner spoke, told by the imaginative teacher, that makes the images *educational*.

> We can take to heart, without dispelling the fragrance of such a tale, the Grimm's story of the child and the paddock (a small frog). A little girl lets the paddock eat with her out of her bowl of bread and milk; the paddock only drinks the milk. The child talks to the little creature as to another human being, saying one day, "Eat the bread crumbs as well, little thing." The mother hears this, comes out to the yard, and kills the paddock. And now the child loses her rosy cheeks, wastes away and dies. In this tale we can feel an echo of certain moods that really and truly are present in the depths of our soul. They are there not only at certain periods of our life, but whether we are children or adults, we recognize such moods because we are human beings.

Every one of us can feel reverberating in us how this something we experience but don't understand, something we don't even bring to consciousness, is connected with the effect of the fairy tale on our soul like the taste of food on our tongue. And then the fairy tale becomes for the soul very much like nutritious food when it is put to use by the whole organism. (Steiner, 1913)

The young child cannot make rational deductions about whether a concept is true or false, ugly or beautiful, right or wrong, but he or she can feel antipathy or sympathy for such concepts when presented in an artistic form and expression. In other words, it is the sympathy and antipathy, the *feeling for* an image, produced by the image's placement within a particular context, that connects the child to inner and deeper significance, not the single image in itself.

But what about today's globalised, visual and popular culture, we may then ask, where we are bombarded daily with images, many of which are embedded in the dubious side of human nature, media and consumerism. John Allison, an experienced Waldorf teacher and author on Steiner education, points out something of interest in this context. According to Steiner's anthroposophical theory, Allison (2002) argues, a child cannot produce an image that is harmful to him or herself, simply because he or she is the constructor of that image. While Grimm's fairy tales may produce images of absolute horror to the adult, the images that will occur before the child's inner eye will be of a nature appropriate and useful to the child's own development. Grimm's fairy tales are, as are classic fairy tales in general, symbolic stories, representing individual transformation; the 'prince,' the 'dragon,' the 'princess,' are all archaic attributes, found within the child. The level and nature of 'war,' 'conflict' and 'transformation' occurring between these 'participants' in the child's mind, therefore, are individually determined and appropriated, and can, in principle, not disturb the child's natural development (Allison, 2002).

The only problem, as Allison goes on to point out, is that this principle is based on the premise that the child is and has not already been exposed to directly negative or to the young child possibly inappropriate images, reminding us that Steiner's philosophy was written almost a century ago, and that we today live in a readily assessable culture of images, many of which leave children with rather undesirable and disturbing impressions. The upsurge in violent behaviour and premature sexuality we see in schools today, Allison (2002) argues, is linked to the fact that the young generation is exposed to a flood of negative and possibly inappropriate images through TV, film, computers and the internet, forcing premature socio-emotional growth, and thus a general disturbance in the natural unfolding of their physical, emotional, cognitive and moral development. Already in the 1920s, Allison notes, Steiner pointed out that, since young children are, literally, so impressionable, teachers and parents need to protect especially the young against explicit images that may rob them of their natural innocence and thus disturb their innate development. Surely, the possible implications of this statement can only be more worrying in today's society. Could it be that children are being filled with images from TV, film and computer games, leaving them less receptive to the power of creating their own imagery?

The point is not whether young children should watch TV and films at all, as many Waldorf educators in fact agree they should not (Allison, 2002). The point is this: if images are indeed fertile ground for evolution or involution, all depending on their level of connection to context and purpose, we should indeed be worried about the indiscriminatory exposure of children to the experience of images in today's Western society. Or, put another way, if images connected to a spiritual-aesthetic context and purpose is a powerful ground for metamorphosis for the sake of evolution, there is reason to suspect that images *not* connected to such contexts or purposes may be equally as powerful, *but in an undesirable sense*. The alleged lack of understanding child development, imagination and its relation to 'wholeness' in mainstream educational theory and practice (Glazer, 1999; Palmer, 1999; Gatto, 1997), combined with a culture at large, perhaps equally unaware about what is wholesome for children and what is not (Gatto, 1997; Govinda, 1997; Jung, 1953–91; Palmer, 1990; Peck, 1983), may be a dangerous cocktail. While much educational research tends to focus on elucidating the benefits and positive nature of imagination and imaginative teaching, the possible effects of directly negative and possibly inappropriate images and pictures cannot, and should not, be ignored, as they point towards the need for further research into the possible repercussions of Western society's rather nonchalant attitude towards its freely accessible and at all levels pervading 'visual' culture.

Conclusion

To sum up, it should be recognised that Western culture and living not only are at odds with fundamental aspects of theosophical and anthroposophical theory, but that the latter certainly is at odds with fundamental aspects of the former! We cannot hear Steiner's thoughts on what long-term effects the many dubious and uncontextualised impressions the images of today's visual, technological society may have on children, but more research into the concept of the augmenting of effects of imagination seems urgent. Not only does imagination appear to be a principle of learning and a favourable activity to increase and maintain interest in that which is studied: it appears to be a link between the dualities found in the human being and in the world. Imagination may be a process of self-purification, healing and transformation, an engagement in metamorphosis for the sake of evolution. Or, it might 'see more devils than vast hell can hold.' At any rate, imaginative teaching, in many ways constituting an educational

representative for parents and society at large, emerges as a crucial variable in education, especially since imagination, in itself, is free of religious and political dogma. As such, imaginative education has the possibility of being not only a means for learning and motivation, but also a catalyst for positive societal change – for conscious participation and thus human evolution.

Notes

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