Sea Remedies

Evolution of the Senses

Jo Evans

Emryss

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Correspondences

nature, the senses, language and evolution

"Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Correspondances

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme de chairs des enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.
Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Correspondences

At times, the living temple, Nature, allows faint whispers to filter through her sentient pillars.

Meanwhile, we thread our way through forests of symbols, where the untainted mirrors of hidden eyes, observe us, all knowingly, as we pass.

We strain to hear her distant echoes, yielding to the communion of undivided memory, to a source vast as night and as enlightenment: an empire of correspondences where perfume, colour and sound meet in profound harmony. Where pure scents – like that of a baby's skin; mellow as an oboe; or green, as a meadow after rain; and others, darkly compelling, heady and exultant – like ambergris, musk, benzoin and incense – an exalted chorus of infinite substance, they sing of the ascendant soul, in the unity of the senses.

An interpretation, after Charles Baudelaire's 'Correspondances' by Isabelle Waterstone Spinosa and Jo Evans

Evolution and the Unity of the Senses

Sea Remedies: Evolution of the Senses provides a comprehensive guide to the marine invertebrate remedies used in homeopathy. Additional chapters explore the evolution of the senses and the relationship of our human sensory experience to that of this group of early animals: in nature, symbolically and as medicines.

In conventional medicine, marine invertebrates are the focus of research into fundamental biological processes, allowing scientists to observe and test life at work in single cells and cell membranes. Researchers also benefit from the evolutionary adaptations of certain species, such as the squid's giant eyes and super-sized nerves, the immune system of a sponge and the blood of the horseshoe crab. Molluscs are used to learn about human diseases such as diabetes, neurodegenerative disease, cancer and the ageing process. Invertebrate poisons – from cone shells to sea anemone venom – are of special interest in connection with diseases of the nervous system. There are many other examples in the pages of this Materia Medica, accessible in a section towards the end of individual remedy chapters, entitled Other Medical Uses.

Are we ruled by heart, head or senses? The answer to this can never be simple for anyone, but by exploring the evolution of the senses, insights can be gained into the way we perceive, experience and respond to life. Sensory cells began to form before hearts and brains, and we look to the sea – our original home – and to the earliest animals in evolution, to understand how our bodies evolved, how they work and how they may be cured.

Scientific research has shown how, despite their diverse forms and functions, the human instruments of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch evolved from the same genetic code.[1] Our senses have their genetic roots in the very first multi-cellular animals, such as sponges, whose aggregation of single cells specialise and co-operate. Sponges have certain sensory abilities but no actual sensory organs, and have been found to possess, yet leave dormant, the precursory genes that enable the development of sensory organs in animals higher up the evolutionary tree. This has been likened to a black box that has never been unpacked.

Early animals, such as jellyfish, provide clues to the story of the senses, with their combined sensory apparatus located in hubs called rhopalia. The synaesthetic nature

1 E.g. Gehring, W.J. and Ikeo, K. (1999). *'Pax 6: Mastering eye morphogenesis and eye evolution'*. Trends Genet 15: 371-7.'

of perception is clear in the sensory life of marine invertebrates. Smell and taste are chemically infused; movement, balance, sound and touch form a quartet; and touch melts fluidly into taste, sight and sound. The traditional five senses normally applied to human beings appear to know no boundaries in sea life, and indeed more than five senses operate in the oceans, electric and magnetic being just two of them. From sensorially unified beginnings, over 500 million years ago, animals have developed ever more sophisticated, specialised and *separate* means of sensing.

The evolution of the senses begins like an ancient map of the world on which continents now separated by vast oceans were once one land mass. We can trace common origins, despite the great divide and drift of plates, or the pull of tides under countless moon cycles, just as linguists can chart the evolution of language using arrows on an atlas. Language drifts over an infinitely narrower time-scale than tectonic plates, changing within months and years rather than millennia.

Homeopaths work with the tension between language and sensation. We work with the script of the case, the exact words of the patient describing how they *feel*, in relation to the words that originally stem from homeopathic provings.[2] Proving experiments represent the language of nature expressing its healing capacity through individual forms: animal, mineral and vegetable. Each remedy 'speaks' in emotional and physical symptoms, through the participants of a proving, as if they were one voice. In case-taking, after studying the manner in which the patient's subjective sensations and symptoms are expressed, verbally and physically, an appropriate homeopathic medicine will be prescribed. This decision is made according to the degree of correspondence between the 'voice' of the medicine and that of the patient.

The prose interpretation of Baudelaire's *Correspondences*, at the opening of this chapter, suggests that without fully exploring sensory experience, we are simply navigating a path through self-seeded, solipsistic forests of symbols, attempting to grasp the true and essential messages that occasionally slip through the pillars guarding the entrance to nature's temple. Baudelaire expresses a longing to perceive nature's true voice: the authentic language of the senses. Accessing the realm of the senses reunites us with this well of wordless, sensory *correspondences*, however lost we are in life, in the depths of the forest of symbols.

Are we moving senselessly through a denatured landscape, amongst abstractions of our own creation, or, as the French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) has suggested, has verbal and written language evolved out of *the language of nature* and indeed that of the senses? Merleau-Ponty understood the act of perception to be a reciprocal *exchange* between the body and the animate landscape, of which we are an inseparable part. In his thesis, beginning with preverbal expressions such as gestures and cries, language was first conceived and

2 For non-homeopaths reading this: A proving is the procedure for ascertaining the effects of substances by administering them to healthy human subjects in order to observe and record symptoms (Jay Yasgur, *A Dictionary of Homeopathic Medical Terminology).*

developed as a preconscious sensory response to the living environment. Automatic or instinctive sensory responses are the antecedent forces sculpting the symbols we know as words. If Merleau-Ponty is correct – as I believe he is – one can understand why following the language of the patient closely, as Hahnemann originally advised, leads to a closer understanding of the essence of a case, reuniting psyche, symbol and substance.[3]

The idea of language as an outcome of sensory evolution has been richly explored by David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous, Perception and Language in a More than Human World*.[4] Abram points out that Plato, the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) had also argued that language has its roots in our instinctive sensory response to the natural world's shapes, colours, sounds, smells, textures, tastes and shadows.

The relatively recent discovery of mirror neurons, found in humans, primates and some birds, lends a physiological basis to this view. Eminent neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran has suggested that mirror neurons are likely to be fundamental to the process of language acquisition. First discovered in the early 1990s, these are the neurons of recognition, mimicry and sympathy: a type of brain cell that fires equally when we perform an action and when we witness someone else perform the same action, mirroring the movement. On the cellular level, it as if the observer is acting out the actions of the observed. An example might be when we witness someone having an accident, and we flinch or flail as they do. Mirror neurons allow us to put ourselves in the position of the other and to feel or act as they feel or act, empathising and learning how to respond.

In the sea, invertebrates such as the octopus and cuttlefish mirror their immediate environment by means of a language of the skin, merging seamlessly into the seascape of shadow, reef and sand; they also converse using body patterns and gestures. This mirroring and patterning is said to be an automatic reaction of the nervous system, relating to moments when visual silence is required, and also when it becomes necessary to communicate.

The mirroring process in cephalopods (such as cuttlefish, squid and octopus) takes place by means of reflector cells in their skin; these sense the wavelengths of ambient light and instantly replicate the brightness and tone of the environment. Is there an evolutionary link between the mirror neurons in our brains and the reflector cells in a cephalopod's skin? I cannot provide the answer to that question, but do explore crypsis and communication amongst cephalopods in The Sense of Touch, under the sub-heading The Language of the Skin.

3 Hahnemann, S, 1842, *Organon of the Medical Art,* paragraph 84. All references to the *Organon* in this book, relate to the edition: ed. Wenda Brewster O'Reilly, 1996, Birdcage Books, USA.

4 Abram, David, 1996, *The Spell of the Sensuous, Perception and Language in a More than Human World,* Vintage Books, Random House, USA. See the section The Flesh of Language in particular.

In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, in a chapter titled 'The Body as Expression and Speech' Merleau-Ponty emphasised the emotional resonance of words, the reciprocity and poetry involved in the transfer of meaning:
"If we consider only the conceptual and delimiting meanings of words, it is true that the verbal form – with the exception of endings – appears arbitrary. But it would no longer appear so if we took into account the emotional content of the word, which we have called above its 'gestural' sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example. It would then be found that words, vowels, phonemes are so many ways of 'singing' the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as in the naive onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, the emotional essence."[5]

In a similar vein to Baudelaire's forest of symbols, Ralph Waldo Emerson defined the human predicament in terms of nested abstractions, describing us as symbols inhabiting symbols. It is a potentially alienating vision of humanity. If we do not pay attention to language, we often lose our sense of the connections between word, symbol and energy. Emerson wrote: "Language is fossil poetry. As the lime stone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin." [6] The poet is a conduit. He or she, Emerson observes, comes closer than any other mortal to seeing the true essence of a thing and naming it. But this is not a result of the poet's art; it is a consequence of the true forces of nature working through the poet:

"This expression or naming is not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree. What we call nature, is a certain self-regulated motion, or change; and nature does all things by her own hands, and does not leave another to baptize her, but baptizes herself; and this through the metamorphosis again."[7]

Like the poet, the homeopath is a conduit for the voices of nature. Poetic insight is required in order to tentatively and delicately break open the fossil specimens provided by patients – the script of their lives, both verbal and physical – to see the evolutionary roots of their true essence, to unify past and present and to facilitate healing on an immediate energetic level. Rather than seeing and hearing life-histories of dates, conditions and events transferred onto a page, homeopaths listen to their patients, as Merleau-Ponty put it, "singing the world".

The mission of the palaeontologist is to devote his or her life to walking the length and breadth of a beach on which there is an infinite number of grey pebbles. Here, he or she hopes to tap the right pebble with a hammer, carefully break it open and find a prized specimen; the prize will contain precious signs, meanings and messages

5 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 1945/2005, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge Classics, Page 217
6 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 1844, *Essays: The Poet*
7 Ibid.

dating back to early evolution. So it is with the homeopath in case-taking and analysis; one hopes to understand the essential nature of the patient and the roots of their illness: the essence beyond the symbol.

This is the homeopath's great prize: to recognise the correspondence of energetic expression – of patient and medicine – and by means of *similia similibus currentur* (like curing like), to liberate our patients from limiting physical and emotional symptoms.

These thoughts led me to feel that there was much to be gained from a study of early life in the sea and the evolution of the senses; hence the creation of this book. Language, symptoms, sensations, patient and remedy: all are energy, and all are in the process of evolution; each individual life is evolving, and is part of the evolution of life on earth as a whole. The sea sponge, jellyfish and squid are our sensory antecedents. For all the reasons explained in this opening chapter, this Materia Medica has been organised around the senses, allowing sensations to be accessed more readily in the text, distinct from functions. The word *sensation* is used throughout this book in the sense that the homeopath Dr Constantine Hering (1800-1880) intended in his *Guiding Symptoms*, taking the sensation from provers' language and from rubrics.[8]

Hering wrote: "Things in nature are words in colour and form; a language which expresses itself to those who can read". I would add to Hering's colour and form: the perceptions of all the senses combined. It is vital for homeopaths to know how to read the homeopathic materia medica and their patients' expressions as *the language of nature*. In nature lies the analogous cure: the reflection of the patient's inner disturbance. And to find the simillimum[9] requires observance of all the senses and a synaesthetic approach.

David Abram's *Spell of the Sensuous* is partly responsible for the inspiration to write this book and to find a new way of presenting homeopathic Materia Medica. I develop these ideas further throughout the book, particularly in the sensory chapter on hearing, under the subtitle, 'Singing the World: Homeopathic Poetry'.

As much as it aspires to inspire healing connections and enjoyment of nature's correspondences, this book is intended to delight the senses and inspire the imagination, connecting you to the wonder of sea life visually as well as through the written word.

8 Distinct from the definition of the current Bombay School, who use a capitalised 'Sensation', which loads the word with specific connotations. See the works of Rajan Sankaran.

9 The remedy with a symptom complex as similar as possible to that of the patient's.