

Thinking and the Sense of Thinking: How We Perceive Thoughts

Dietrich Rapp

Concepts, thoughts can be perceived only where they actually occur, where they are brought forth; otherwise they are not present. And that is through current thinking by a human being.

– Dietrich Rapp¹

How Does Reality Arise?

Reality is supposed to exist somewhere beyond the realm of human cognition. We are said to take cognizance of this reality through sense perception only. Our cognition is said merely to mirror this sense world. In modern times, the tendency has developed to view cognition in this way. How do human cognition and reality relate for Rudolf Steiner? Of what significance is this for us today?

In his foundational works, Rudolf Steiner intensively pursued the question of how *reality arises in the process of cognition*. Rather than devising erudite academic theories, he breached a willed pathway into thinking, from which he sensitively *observed* the activity of cognition, exploring the role of thinking in the process of cognition through introspective (soul) observation. He describes the process of *acquiring concepts through intuitive thinking* in his *Philosophy of Freedom* from increasingly comprehensive vantage points, only to concede one exception on the next to last page of the last chapter in which we “bring concepts over into our own spirit in a pure form,” *unmixed* with conceptual content won through intuition.

Before taking a closer look at this exception, we should turn our attention to the regular process of cognition. How does the human being apprehend the world? What role does perception play therein? What role mental representation and what role conceptual thinking? How does reality arise? Based on introspective (soul) observation, Steiner describes the relationship between cognition and reality in a

remark of 1924 to an early epistemological work from the year 1886 as follows:

Within the inner life of the soul, a content arises which craves external perception as the hungry organism craves food; and in the external world there is a perceptual content which does not bear its essential being in itself but manifests this only when it is united with the soul content through the process of cognition. Thus the process of cognition becomes part of the formation of the reality of the world. The human being participates in the formation of this world-reality through the act of cognition. If a plant-root is unthinkable without the fulfillment of its predisposition in the fruit, so likewise not only the human being but the world itself remains unfinished without the act of cognition. In the act of cognition, the human being does not create something just for himself, but he creatively participates together with the world in making reality manifest. What shows in the human being is ideal appearance; what shows in the perceptible world is sense appearance; only the cognizant inter-working of both brings reality into being.²

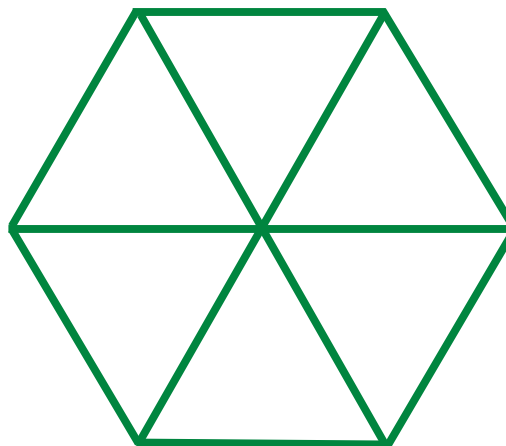
There is no reality to be found through cognition “because it must first be created as reality through cognition.” This realization remained pivotal for Steiner throughout his life.

What Is Sense Perception? What Is Mental Representation?

Now the human being is met by the world of “sense manifestation” fractured into different fields of sense perceptions. The human soul constantly permeates these sense perceptions with concepts, arising from the soul as “manifestation of the idea.” In accord with these concepts, the human being, exercising judgment, brings the different percepts together. Only thus does one-ness come about in our experience of the world. Shortly before the first Waldorf school opened in 1919, Steiner remarked to the future teachers:

And now you can understand exercising judgment as a living process in your own body, which comes about through the fact that the senses confront you with the world analyzed into fragments. The world confronts you with twelve different fragments in what you experience, and through exercising judgment, you bring the elements together, because what is apart does not want to remain apart.³

The human being thus constantly merges sense perceptions into mental representations, which are then experienced as coherent objects in the world. Forming these mental representations requires an activity of the will. This becomes particularly evident when we picture space forms, as the following figure can exemplify:



This can be seen as a three-dimensional cube. Suddenly, however, it can turn into a *different* cube! If we are attentive to the moment when the switch takes place, we notice that it is we who, by the power of our will, engrave the three-dimensionality into the two-dimensional picture. Clearly outlined objects as well as black lines against a white background prompt us to follow the contours with our eyes. Each movement we do, including the movement of our eyes, is perceived through our sense of movement. Due to their spherical shape, the eyes are very special limbs: they move independently of the force of gravity. Now all movements performed by our limbs are acts of will; however, only the movements of the eyes are acts of will performed in a weightless realm. And it is exactly the perception of these acts of will that is most likely to animate us to develop the activity of the will in the weightless realm of *mental representations*. The sense perception of the two-dimensional picture can prompt us to will the three-dimensional representation of the cube. If people’s experiences were restricted to the sense world, a cube drawn on a sheet of paper would never be seen. That we can see it nonetheless is due to the fact that people divide the world into space-filling objects by forming *mental representations* and experiencing these self-formed

mental representations in the world. *These mental representations are mistaken for sense perception only to the extent that our own thinking and representing activities are not sufficiently observed.*

When merging the different elements of sense perception into mental representations, the human being is active beyond this realm of sense perception. And here, in this realm of actively formed mental representations that reach beyond sense perception, concepts can emanate; they are “abstracted” out of the mental representations.⁴ Such concepts may well be tied to the sense world. That does not mean, however, that the concepts themselves are content of a sense perception. They simply are *formed in accord with sense perception.*

Where Do Thoughts Come From?

In 1909, Rudolf Steiner for the first time sketched the foundations of a comprehensive overview of the fields of sense perception to members of what was then the Theosophical Society. The title of the lectures⁵ was simply “Anthroposophy,” that is to say, *anthroposophy* as the link between *anthropology* and *theosophy*, as described at the beginning of the first lecture. Steiner then proceeded to describe the ten basic senses of the human being, the last of which he called the sense of concept or the sense of mental representation (later he also called it the sense of thinking or sense of thought). This sense does not empower us to perceive our own thoughts but *the thoughts expressed by our fellow human beings.*

Could it be possible nonetheless that this sense allows us to perceive other thoughts *beyond the thoughts expressed by other people?* Could it be

that we grasp the concepts of outer world objects through a sense of concept as Steiner understood this sense?

What first weighs against this idea is that then the anthroposophical approach to sense perception would diametrically oppose the epistemological foundations of anthroposophy itself: Concepts arise from within the soul, whereas all sense manifestation streams in from the outside, engaging the soul. In his *Philosophy of Freedom* of 1894, Rudolf Steiner calls

the arising of concepts within the soul “intuition.” There, the sense of concept is not mentioned. Did Steiner discover the sense of concept later on, with the consequence that his earlier, radical epistemological approach grew more moderate by allowing some concepts of outer world objects to be perceived nonetheless by the senses? Under which circumstances is a thought a perception of the concept or thought sense? Under which circumstances does it originate in one’s own thinking or memory? I’d like to focus on the questions I’ve just raised and, in particular, attempt to contribute toward the understanding of concept-, thinking-, and thought-sense.

When Are Concepts not Acquired through Intuition?

In the fourth of the five “Anthroposophy” lectures about the senses, a few days after mentioning the sense of concept or thought for the first time, Rudolf Steiner spoke extensively about the relationship between the outer world and the thoughts by which people grasp the objects of the outer world conceptually. He started as follows:

People would become increasingly isolated from one another in the sense world if the sense of concept or thought wouldn’t make it possible to reconnect thoughts directly, from one person to the other. A person who is not himself in the process of evolving

The human being must indeed think within himself. Objects don't think for us; they don't show us the thoughts from without, but rather we must bring the thoughts toward the objects. That is the great secret, one is inclined to say, of the relation of human thought to the outer world. No thoughts approach the human being through sense organs. If the sense organs themselves have irregularities, sensory illusions can easily occur. Whereas in normal life, the senses do not err, the mind, which cannot put itself in relationship to objects, can err. It is the first member of the human being that can err, because its activity is dammed up within the brain and this activity cannot reach out. What follows from this? It follows that it is quite impossible for people to have thoughts about the outer world that are right if we do not have an inner disposition which allows right thoughts to arise within us. Never—as can be seen from this—could the outer world provide people with right thoughts if the right thoughts would not well up inside us. It can provide them with right sense perception. Yet sense perceptions cannot think. A thought, however, is prone to error, and the human being must have the inner strength for the veracity of the thought.⁶

How far, then, is it justified to speak of a sense of thought or concept at all? Cognition occurs when the right concept arises within us and unites with the percept. There is only one exception to this, when concepts cannot arise within us: that is when we perceive our fellow human being, whose I, in its uniqueness, gives birth to freely begotten thoughts in the sense realm. I cannot grasp, in my own thinking, the germinating moment of these freely begotten thoughts of other people, because I am not you. I must silence my own thinking in order to sufficiently become you.

Toward the end of the last chapter of his *Philosophy of Freedom* of 1894, Rudolf Steiner already described the necessity of the sense of concept for the emergence of freedom within humanity:

Cognition consists in linking a concept with a percept through thinking. For all other objects, the observer must penetrate to the concept by means of his or her own intuition. Understanding a free individuality is exclusively a question of bringing over into our own spirit in a pure form (unmixed with our own conceptual content) those concepts by which the individuality determines itself. People who immediately mix their own concepts into any judgment of others can never attain understanding of an individuality.⁷

In the sense world, it becomes possible to think freely begotten thoughts. This would split humanity; people would become increasingly isolated from one another in the sense world if the sense of concept or thought wouldn't make it possible to reconnect thoughts directly, from one person to the other.

What Is Perceived Via the Sense of Thought?

We can best become aware of the necessity of the sense of thought when perceiving the *freely begotten* thoughts of the other human being, but of course this sense doesn't perceive only *those* thoughts. Through the sense of thought (or sense of concept or mental representation or thinking), I can perceive, while listening without interference of my own concepts and my own judgment, how the other person forms thoughts into personal, individualized mental representations. Everybody's thoughts are initially imbued with his or her own mental representations. Each thought has its own shading, its own nuance of feeling, its own degree of sparkling intensity, according to how its author

mentally represents the thought. Now the more *strength for the accuracy* of thought is brought forth, the deeper thinking breaks through to the *universality* of concept. As we universalize the personal content of our thoughts, the universal strength of thought becomes individualized. The way in which thought content becomes universal increasingly bears the signature of the “I.”

In order to be able to perceive, in its immediacy, *the way in which* a thought is coined by a human being incarnated in the sense world—be it the coining of everyday thoughts or the coining of nascent individualized free thought—his fellow human being needs the sense of thinking, thought, or concept. This sense in fact allows people developing between birth and death to grow into the body of the social organism. It is not the concepts of the objects of the outer world that penetrate the human being through his sense of concept, but the concepts which live in the *inner world* of the other person that manifest themselves through this sense.

Concepts are sense-perceptible only to the extent that other people bring them to manifestation. This is why children put their never-ending questions to everyone around them. The child himself must also meld sense perception with the corresponding concepts out of his own discerning thinking activity. The child doesn’t begin by bringing forth concepts out of his own thinking; he first develops his own thinking through the concepts taken in from the people around him.⁸

It is an innate gift of the child to be able to take in concepts in their immediacy through the sense of concept. The young child cannot but immerse himself in his human surroundings with love and devotion. The stronger the personal discerning power of thinking develops, the more problematic it becomes for the sense of thinking. Personal

Devotion towards the other being is in particular nurtured by deliberately silencing one’s own thinking, no matter how wise it may be.

thinking awakens one’s self to self-awareness; this self-awareness is at first egocentric. The thinking of the egocentric self, however, does not tolerate the selfless devotion that is prerequisite for the sense of thinking. Therefore this sense only functions when the egocentric self falls into deep sleep, thus not impairing perceptual ability. The only reason we don’t take notice of our thinking’s deep sleep is simply that *our* consciousness is completely filled with the *other person’s thoughts*. While listening, my *own* thinking intermittently wakes up slightly

from its immersion in the thoughts of the *other* in order to mentally incorporate the other being’s thoughts into my thought organism. To the extent that the mind awakens, the perception of the sense of thinking recedes. These moments of “blackout” regarding the thinking gestures of the other person, which are due to our *own* thinking activity, are sometimes experienced as gaps in consciousness during a conversation: You just manage to notice that the other has just said something, without, however, perceiving any of his thoughts (because you yourself were engaged in thinking). At best you bridge the gap by trying to bring the last spoken words to consciousness out of the lingering resonance of word-recollection, in order to quickly make sense of them out of your *own* thinking.

What Occurs When Listening?

Rudolf Steiner’s most precise description of how it is possible to “bring over” concepts (unmixed with our own conceptual content) via the sense of concept is found in the first appendix to the second edition (1918) of his *Philosophy of Freedom*. During the act of perception through the sense of thinking, the other person’s thinking is momentarily taken over into my spirit as if it were my own. While perceiving another personality, I am compelled, as a thinking being, “to

extinguish my own thinking as long as I am under its influence, and to put its thinking in the place of mine. I then grasp its thinking in my thinking as an experience like my own. I have really perceived another person's thinking."⁹

It is then primarily the *individualized* way of coining or forming of concepts by the other person that I experience.¹⁰ Steiner continues:

...It is a process lying wholly within my consciousness and consisting in this, that the other person's thinking takes the place of mine. Through the self-extinction of the [outer, bodily] sense appearance [of the other person], the separation between the two spheres of consciousness is actually eliminated.^{11,12} This expresses itself in my consciousness through the fact that while experiencing the content of another person's consciousness I experience my own consciousness as little as I experience it in dreamless sleep. Just as in dreamless sleep my waking consciousness is eliminated, so in my perceiving of the content of another person's consciousness the content of my own is eliminated. The illusion that it is not so comes about only because in perceiving the other person, firstly, the extinction of the content of one's own consciousness gives place not to unconsciousness, as it does in sleep, but to the content of the other person's consciousness, and secondly, the alternations between extinguishing and lighting up again of my own self-consciousness follow too rapidly to be generally noticed.¹³

Eight years earlier, Steiner had phrased it as follows in the fragment of his book *Anthroposophy*: "What we can experience within our own soul as a concept, we can also receive as revealed from an external being. ... With the concept that lives within another human being, we perceive what lives, soul-like, within ourselves."¹⁴ It lives soul-like within

ourselves because the thinking of the other is of the same nature as our own thinking and because it is "brought over into our own spirit in a pure form" in the moment of thought perception, "unmixed with our own conceptual content."¹⁵

The quality of social discourse now depends decisively on how a person "awakens" from this "bringing over," this "deep-sleep" listening activity.¹⁶ Because the child acquires his self-consciousness through the development of his self-centered personality, the waking-up moment is connected with an aggressive self-assertion. When he slackens, the child again "falls asleep," as it were, into the thoughts of the other being. Insofar as a person does not take his social development consciously in hand, this will remain so into adulthood.

Through self-observation in adulthood, however, we can become conscious of the inherent anti-social nature of this waking-up of our personality to its own thinking. If, out of this awareness, you dampen your own personality, a foggy state of mind ensues, excluding yourself from playing an active role in any social setting. At the threshold of awakening, one stands *unavoidably* between a deep sleep of devoted listening and the anti-social nature of thinking.

How Does Listening Interact with Thinking?

It can happen that when listening intently to another person, one *experiences* and fully understands the lively depiction of this other person's thoughts in all their richness and depth. However, shortly thereafter one may remember the richness, the depth, the vitality of the lively depiction of the thoughts, but may find oneself hard put to reproduce their content. An autonomous understanding is something quite different from the immediacy of understanding while perceiving with the sense of thinking. During the latter, thoughts blossom between speaker and listener, momentarily living into the listener's organism of concept,¹⁷ still carried by the speaker's power of thought: The other's thinking is active instead of one's own. Whether or not we are then able to reproduce the

other's thoughts out of our own power of thinking depends on our ability to think the thoughts independently.

After abandoning oneself to the other person's thinking for a while, the effect of the thought perception on your own life organism, this rooting of foreign thoughts in your organism of concept, can be felt increasingly as an intrusion, arousing one's own thinking in defense. When consequently one expresses one's own thinking activity through words or gestures, the whole process begins anew, now with reversed roles. This is how a rapid alternation between extinguishing and relighting of your own self-consciousness comes about.

This alternation can come to life in a variety of ways, in particular by training my thinking, while awakening, to be less influenced by my personality. The more universal my thinking, the longer it can remain devoted to the foreign thought, out of which it then unfolds its own strength while awakening. Immediately, though, we are liable to revel in the strength of our own thinking, therefore unable to properly "fall asleep" into the other thinking again. A proper rhythm must develop between one's own thinking activity and devout, dedicated listening. When that happens, the conversation can rise into a shared realm of spiritual and soul intimacy. This kind of conversation nourishes souls. It constitutes the building material out of which social art arises.

It is, however, possible that the development of our self-centered thinking (our intellectuality) weans us so radically from the surrounding world that we are no longer able to assimilate foreign thoughts through the sense of thought. It is not surprising that, in an age of "cool" self-centeredness, the willingness to "fall asleep" into the thoughts of another person, to think them as if they were our own, declines considerably. Here a certain unity with the surroundings still protects the child, as it can't do otherwise than experience the thoughts around it most intently, long before it is able to think them independently. The adult, in particular after having undergone an intellectual training (and who has not in this day and age?), is in danger

of shutting himself up in his own thoughts to the degree that his disposition as a truly social being wanes. He then constantly expresses his own thoughts; when he doesn't express them, he thinks them. He is no longer capable of truly listening.

When strengthening your own thinking, it is likewise necessary to strengthen the other pole: devotion toward what is not "I." Only then can the anti-social nature of exercising judgment be integrated into the social organism. Devotion towards the other being is in particular nurtured by deliberately silencing one's own thinking, no matter how wise it may be; otherwise it is like light reflecting on the surface of water, impeding sight from penetrating into the water's depths.

We develop full individuality by lucidly and willfully strengthening our thinking. Consciously caring for developing devotion towards other people builds community. These two poles are interdependent: the deeper we penetrate one, the deeper we can enter into the other. Neglecting one weakens both: If we spin ourselves into the cocoon of self-referential thinking, the sense of thought becomes obscured and can no longer take in foreign thoughts.

How Do We Perceive Concepts While Reading?

Under which circumstances is a thought a perception of the concept (or thought) sense; under which circumstances does it originate in one's own thinking or memory? This question was asked and dealt with in the first part of this essay regarding the nature of *listening*. Is *reading* different from listening in this regard? How do we perceive concepts while reading?

We can speak of sense perception "whenever cognition comes about without involvement of reason, memory, and so forth."¹⁸ Rudolf Steiner proposes precisely this necessary condition to delineate sense perception when introducing the sense realm beyond the sense of hearing in the fragment of his book *Anthroposophy*.

Now while reading, I am constantly dependent on my reasoning mind; without it, I would experience mere words and not understand the weaving of thoughts behind them. It is only through the power of my own thinking and mental representations that I can perceive thoughts when reading. To be sure, I form these thoughts based on the sense perception of what is written; however this does not mean that the thoughts are contained, sense perceptibly, in what is written. When reading a book, I can work myself through to thoughts only by means of a lucid mind that is capable of thinking. Here the perception of thoughts is *supersensible*.

Exactly the opposite is the case when perceiving via the sense of concept (or sense of thought or thinking): I can perceive nothing through this sense while my reasoning mind stays awake. In order to perceive the thoughts of my fellow human beings in their immediacy, my own reasoning mind must be willing to fall asleep, so that during the act of perception via this sense I can live devotedly within the thinking power of the *other*. Rudolf Steiner once characterized the field of perception of the sense of thinking as follows:

...When I perceive a word, I do not as intimately connect with the object or with the external being as when I perceive the thought through the word. At this stage, most people cease to make any distinctions. But there is a distinction between perceiving the word, the meaningful sound, and the veritable perception of the thought behind the word. You can also perceive a word, after all, when it has been separated from the thinker through a phonograph or even through writing. However, while in a living connection with the being who is forming the word, to transpose myself directly through the word into the thinking and

Reading thus becomes the starting point of a conscious advance into the supersensible worlds

mentally representing being, this requires a sense that goes deeper than the usual word sense, this requires the sense of thinking, as I would like to call it. And an even more intimate relation to the outer world than through the sense of thinking is given to us through that sense which enables us to feel with another being in such a way as to feel at one with this being, to sense it as one senses oneself. That is the sense of I: *through the thinking, the living thinking which the other being turns towards me*, I perceive the “I” of this other being.¹⁹

“Word” and “thought” should not be taken too literally. In the sense of Steiner, the realm of perception of the sense of tone²⁰ or word encompasses all of human body language, including all expressed gestures of the soul insofar as they are perceived in their immediacy.²¹ Facial expressions of a human being also show the stirrings of the soul, including the person’s thinking, which can be perceived by the sense of thought accordingly; insofar as the “I” comes to expression in the soul, it can be perceived by the sense of “I.” Being together in silence with another human being can thus also provide a field of perception for these three upper senses.²²

The sense of concept enables one to “delve into another being ... through sensing what lives in that being as concept.”²³ When (sensorially) delving into another “I,” first its stirrings of thoughts are perceived (as sense perception), before awakening, enriched, to one’s own thinking. While *reading*, the order is reversed: We must first awaken to our autonomous thinking before the thoughts of the other can be perceived (now super-sensibly!).

When I read what has been written in a book, I face someone else’s thoughts in a similar way to the manner with which I face nature. I realize:

Here beings acted creatively, but I myself face only the accomplished work. These condensed gestures allow me to surmise that this work arose out of life-imbued creativity. However, within the realm of sense perception, I can never reach the creative beings because they themselves are no longer present in the condensed gestures of the accomplished work that I behold.

In the written text, the complete content is there; I must simply learn to read it. I can learn to read it only by exercising my thinking activity, so that it itself forms the language. While reading, I retrace the gestures inwardly and experience their movement. The willing activity of my thinking must make them flow so that my thinking can grasp the *unifying impulse* of the movement—the un-manifest thought. While reading, I am not on a par with a thinker. I am confronted with mere letters—dead, petrified signs of former thinking activity; I break through to the thinking activity, which condensed itself into these letters and words, only when, out of my own willful thinking, I cause the words to flow again and thereby the thoughts to resound. “The reader comprehends because he himself fills the given text with meaning. ...And not only does thinking make connections, but a power which arguably gives thinking its impulse to do so: the imagination,” writes Michael Bockemühl in his excellent essay “Reading and Comprehension.”²⁴ I understand what I read only to the extent of what I am able to grasp through my *autonomous thinking*. Apart from that, I can merely parrot words.

Do I Read When Listening?

Now I can also listen to someone present in an uncommitted fashion by “reading” the words he utters as if they were written in a book, instead of paying attention to his thinking. Persons with a dysfunctional sense of thinking in fact cannot listen in any other way. They hear sequences of

words that they then try to connect and to enliven into thoughts out of their *own* thinking activity. If I listen in this way while the other speaks, I will be able to understand him in a way, although he will never feel understood. The unifying meeting of beings (through the sense for the “I” of the other), for which the percept of the sense of thinking becomes permeable and which resonates with each perception of the sense of thinking, is circumvented when “reading” the words of a speaker, because the sense of thinking is bypassed altogether (which also disables the sense for the “I” of the other). When listening in this way, people do not *truly* meet. A conversation of this sort is not “more invigorating than light.”²⁵

When listening to audio recorded or radio broadcast language, much more content of perception is given sensorially than while reading: The remote speaker who is transmitted via a loudspeaker conveys his intonation, his cadence of speech, etc., as carrier of a whole world of soul.²⁶ Through accentuation in the flow of speech, a particular understanding can be induced in the listener. A content so communicated is thus sensorially richer and easier to understand than when read. Precise soul observation will not, however, fail to notice that when listening to someone on the phone or to canned speech, the thoughts of the speaker are not perceived with the same immediacy as when people meet face to face, in spite of an empathy for the other “I” that can still be conveyed purely on the level of phonetic tone. In fact you need to continuously follow the thoughts

of the other inwardly in *full waking consciousness*. It is hardly possible to sensorially “fall asleep” into the thoughts of the other while being spoken to on the phone or when listening to canned speech.

A certain relationship of beings can nonetheless occur while telephoning. Sensorially, insofar as the

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“I” of the listener perceives “a tone coming from the other I” and empathetically “lives in that tone, and therefore in the other I” (cf. the quote at the end of the last endnote). Furthermore, a relationship can also connect to an inner image if one carries an inner image of the other human being with whom the indirect communication is taking place. This relationship of beings is not sensorial, however. It arises by turning our attention inward. In case of sense perception through the sense of thinking and the sense of “I,” our attention is outward bound. It is even easier to realize that, within the process of reading, an encounter of beings is not mediated by the human sensory organism, but by our own supersensible thinking and feeling. When reading, I can notice how the thought, which is petrified in the written text, quivers slightly when touched by the will-power of my thinking and so begins to delicately resound within my own thinking. It resounds to the degree that I form the thought anew.

The wider my comprehension of the interconnections of inner threads that manifest through the text, the more my own thinking—in the will-quality of the “I”—becomes the bearer of the being who created the written work I behold. Reading thus becomes the starting point of a conscious advance into the supersensible worlds of the spirit.

Thoughts in a book can, however, be set into such solid clusters of mental representations that they are no longer able to resound. The petrified thoughts have passed under the threshold of possible reanimation. They may never have been alive in the writer himself. In that case only dead mental representations, schematically combined, are rigidly strung together through associations of words. In both cases, my thinking cannot perceive any thoughts.

Conclusion

The only source bringing forth thoughts that is also able to manifest its essence in the world of wrought work²⁷ is the human being. Without human thinking

as “the translator that interprets the gestures of experience,”²⁸ inorganic nature manifests none of the concepts by which it can be grasped; these concepts—along with all meaning—must arise from within the human being. Organic nature manifests its concepts to the degree that the human being ascends to supersensible perception of these concepts in an act of cognition wherein thinking not only acts as “translator [of] the gestures of experience” but itself becomes experience.²⁹ The germinating moments of thinking experienced in this way are to be found only in the world of becoming, not in the world of finished form, towards which the human sense organization is directed.

The source of perception from which our own thinking wells is intuition. This source is of a supersensible nature. The source of perception for the one and only life of concepts which can express its being in the world of otherwise finished form is the sense organ of the sense of concept or thinking which, directed towards the wrought world, is the source of perception for the germinating moments of thinking of another human being.

Resources

1. Rapp, Dietrich. Sense of Concept – Sense of Mental Representation – Sense of Thinking. Concerning the sheaths of its uncovering. In *Die Drei* 11/1986.
2. Steiner, Rudolf. *A Theory of Knowledge Based on Goethe's World Conception*. (From the first note to the new edition of 1924. Retranslated by the author, with some segments taken from the translation of Olin D. Wannamaker.) Anthroposophic Press, 1968.
3. Steiner, Rudolf. *Allgemeine Menschenkunde*. August 29, 1919. Passage translated by the author.
4. Scientific concepts are generally formed in this way. Concepts can also be “condensed” or “individualized” to mental representations through sense perception. In particular, ethical and moral representations are formed in this way. Cf. Steiner, Rudolf. *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press 1995.

5. The first four were published in *Anthroposophie, Psychosophie, Pneumatosophie* (translated as *Wisdom of Man, of the Soul, and of the Spirit*), the fifth lecture in *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis* (translated as *The Nature and Origin of the Arts*). The content of these lectures was meant to appear as a written book; Steiner managed to write only a fragment (which was first published in 1951 under the title *Anthroposophie. Ein Fragment aus dem Jahre 1910*, published in English in 1996).
6. Translated by the author. A translation of *Anthroposophie, Psychosophie, Pneumatosophie* (Vol. 115 in the Bibliographic Survey, 1961) was made by Samuel and Loni Lockwood from the original German edition published in 1931, which was later drastically revised when better stenographs of the first set of lectures turned up. The translation was supposedly “carefully checked against the later edition of 1965, published by the Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, in which complementary material derived from additional transcripts located since 1931 was incorporated,” and “minor alterations in keeping with the new material” were made to the Lockwood translation “where necessary,” as noted in the 1971 Anthroposophic Press edition of this translation. The passage cited in this essay was, however, not an accurate translation of the text in the later edition.
7. Steiner, Rudolf. *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1995, p. 229, translation by Michael Lipson.
8. More precisely: Thinking develops in conjunction with progress in the development of kinesthesia (self-movement). Kinesthetic ability gets “nourishment that pours forth from within” through the sense of concept (cf. the lecture by Rudolf Steiner “Human Spirit and Animal Spirit” of Nov. 17, 1910).
9. Translation of this and the following quote by Michael Wilson.
10. A concept is individualized by the way it gets mentally represented. As already mentioned, when Rudolf Steiner spoke about the sense of thinking or concept the first time, he also called it sense of mental representation (*Vorstellungssinn*). Cf. lecture of October 26, 1909 in the “Anthroposophy” lectures.
11. Michael Wilson here uses the word “overcome” (Michael Lipson the word “suspend” in his translation). We have translated the German *aufgehoben* as “eliminated.”
12. In the eighth lecture of *The Study of Man* on August 29, 1919, Rudolf Steiner describes the “vibration of the soul” between “abandon to the other” and “inner defense” as basic gestures of the sense of “I” and refers to his characterization of this sense in the new edition of his *Philosophy of Freedom*. In fact, there he mainly describes the “vibration of the soul” as basic gesture of the sense of thinking. The sense of thinking and the sense of “I” are obviously different aspects of one sense continuum with the same alternating basic gesture. It can be viewed as one sense realm, but also as two. The statement that “the separation between the two spheres of consciousness is actually eliminated” clearly refers to the sense of “I,” which borders on the sense of thinking and resonates within it. Insofar as thoughts are presently being begotten by a thinker, it is always possible to direct the attention more toward the begotten thoughts or toward the begetting thinker. There is thus a gradual transition from the sense of thinking to the sense of “I.” The basic gesture of oscillation between sympathy and antipathy can have very different qualities, even up to the point that the realm of “I” and the realm of the other amalgamate into a common realm, reaching beyond sympathy and antipathy.
13. Steiner, Rudolf. *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1995, first appendix to the 1918 edition.
14. Steiner, Rudolf. *Anthroposophy (A Fragment)*, 1996, p. 94ff.
15. From the previously cited last chapter of Steiner’s *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*, written 24 years before the just cited in-depth remarks from the first appendix to the new edition of 1918. Steiner’s discovery of the sense of concept became a life-long theme of research.
16. Regarding social discourse, compare Steiner’s lectures of December 6 and 12, 1918, in *Social and Anti-Social Forces in the Human Being* and the first lecture to the delegates conference on February 27, 1923 in *Awakening to Community*.
17. Cf. chapter 7 of the book in endnote 14.
18. *Ibid*, p. 92.
19. Cited from the lecture of August 12, 1916, contained in *The Riddle of Humanity*, translated by John F. Logan. London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1990. Logan has a mistake at the end of his translation of this paragraph, where he incorrectly attributes the

“living thinking,” through which the “I” of the other is perceived, to the perceiver, whereas Steiner is speaking of the living thinking of the perceived. The paragraph has been largely retranslated by the author.

20. The German *Laut* is here translated by “tone” (which should always be thought of as ensouled), and the German *Ton* by “sound,” consistent with the English translation of *Anthroposophy (A Fragment)*.
21. For this distinct sense realm, see in particular the well-documented work of Peter Lutzker, *Der Sprachsin. Sprachwahrnehmungen als Sinnesvorgang*. The book was translated into English, but the English manuscript was never published.
22. Together with the sense of hearing, the senses of phonetic tone or word, concept, and “I” are often called “upper senses.”
23. Cf. endnote 14, p. 95.
24. “Lesen und Verstehen,” published in *Lesen im anthroposophischen Buch. Ein Almanach*, Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1987.
25. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*, a fairy tale.
26. A listener reacts to the articulated structure of words with precisely synchronized movements that correspond to those of the speaker (this is called “entrainment”). This was studied by William S. Condon. “One of the most significant and unexpected results [for Condon as well] of this unique study of the relation between speech and movement was the realization that not only is there a continual and exact coordination of a speaker’s movements with his or her own speech, but that the listener moves in precise synchrony to the articulatory structure of the speaker’s speech almost as well as the speaker does.” Furthermore, “no synchronization was found with non-speech sounds. It has also been shown that a two-day-old American infant was capable of entraining to Chinese speech while at the same time not showing a synchrony of movement with tapping sounds and disconnected vowel sounds. These results were also duplicated when tape recordings were used.” This is how Peter Lutzker summarizes the experiments of William S. Condon and L.W. Sander, which were published in the magazine *Science* in 1974. Cf. Peter Lutzker: *Der Sprachsin. Sprachwahrnehmungen als Sinnesvorgang*, 1996, S. 44. (Lutzker’s book was originally written in English, but only published in a translated German version.

The quotation above is taken from the author’s unpublished English manuscript.) In a hand-written fragment of a text that was printed under the heading “Regarding Listening and Speaking” by the publisher as an appendix to the book *Anthroposophy. A Fragment* (p. 205 of the 1996 edition), Steiner delineates the perception of a sound of a lifeless object from an empathetic listening to a phonetic tone from a human being. After a longer exposition, he concludes “that in the case of human tone, the listener imparts his or her ‘I’ to the ‘I’ of another, while in the case of a sound of a lifeless object, the ‘I’ is imparted only to the sound itself.” Prior to this passage, he had written about the mystery of empathy with the “I” of another and described it as follows: “We sense our own ‘I’ in the ‘I’ of the other. If we then perceive a tone coming from the other ‘I,’ our own ‘I’ lives in that tone, and therefore in the other ‘I.’ ”

27. Steiner, Rudolf. *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, leading thought no. 112. The German *Werkwelt* is there translated as “accomplished Work” instead of “world of wrought work.”
28. Steiner, Rudolf. *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe’s World Conception*, also translated as *The Science of Knowing*. Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1988. Chapter II: Thinking and Perception.
29. Steiner, Rudolf. *Goethean Science*. Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1988.

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