

Art & homeopathy

- a way of case taking

Hahnemann calls it the medical art. We are certainly not using current scientific theories. Our principles are Hahnemannian, always have been and so perhaps by this definition, we are in the realm of the medical art. Our art is that, through our remedies, we do have the means of creating the potential for change, altering the thinking and perception of reality. If disease is delusion on every level, then we bring about a different reality in the patient and that is healing and cure. In the truly healthy organism without delusion, disease cannot gain a foothold.

Case taking and art

We can see that the science of homeopathy is the foundation of case taking. We use a methodological approach to discover the information needed to make a prescription. But what about the art of case taking? Let's go back to the quote at the start of this paper.

The first sentence does not actually seem to be about art. This is what any physician should be doing. This is the humane doctor. But observing and perceiving what the patient unknowingly tries to conceal, this is more like art. This is about the delusions on every level. The final statement, about altered states of actions, sensations, emotions, not normally found in a healthy state as the true evidence of disease, is where we see homeopathy and art blending.

The most "successful" artists create their works in a partly unconscious act. This is a bold statement but it takes us to Descartes and the idea of dualism. Arthur Koestler² says this:

"The knowledge of unconscious mentation has always been there, as can be shown by quotations from theologians like St Thomas Aquinas, mystics like Jacob Boehme, physicians like Paracelsus, astronomers like Kepler, writers and poets as far apart as Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Montaigne. This in itself is by no means remarkable; what is remarkable is that this knowledge was lost during the scientific revolution, more particularly under the impact of its most influential philosopher, Rene Descartes".

Koestler calls this the Cartesian Catastrophe, the splitting of the world into mind and matter and the location of mind with conscious thinking. *Cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am, has become a mantra of modern life. It is only after Descartes that the notion of the

unconscious could even arise. It was Freud who made the term so resonant in our lives as a way of explaining the origins of mental delusion. Before the dualistic universe explanation, there was no need to consider the unconscious separately, it was but a part of how people functioned.

Prior to Descartes and his sharp definition of the dualism there was no cause to contemplate the possible existence of unconscious mentality as part of a separate realm of mind. Many religious and speculative thinkers had taken for granted factors outside but influencing immediate awareness.³

Koestler's thesis is that the act of creation, art, is partly an unconscious process. Many artists themselves say this. Here is the poet and philosopher (and also a champion of homeopathy) J W Goethe;

"Man cannot persist long in a conscious state, he must throw himself back into the Unconscious, for his root lives there.....Take for example a talented musician, composing an important score; consciousness and unconsciousness will be like warp and weft".⁴

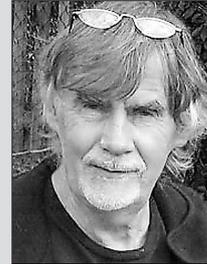
Hahnemann was a contemporary of Goethe. He must have been aware of the arguments which Descartes' revolution had inspired. Perhaps this is why he speaks of the healthy organism as he does in Aphorism 9. The vital force *"governs without restriction and keeps all parts of the organism in admirable, harmonious, vital operation, as regards both feeling and functions".⁵*

This is surely a refutation of dualism. One force acts without distinction in preserving health. It acts as the warp and weft in Goethe's metaphor and is therefore creative in its actions.

No reconciliation

On this reading, there can be no reconciliation between homeopathy and modern, science based medicine; their philosophies are mutually exclusive. There is an acceptance in modern medicine that mind can influence matter in some explanations of how illness can be caused or cured. This is why they are happy to allow the placebo effect as an explanation of homeopathic action. But it is just another dualistic explanation, separating mind and matter.

The real fundamental difference is that homeopathic science is not that of the dualistic medical model. It is of itself a fully realised system which is built on a dialectical



by
Ian Hamilton

“A homeopath, to be able to perceive this totality of symptoms, has to be patient, gentle, tolerant and forbearing and this is where art comes in. He must observe and perceive more particularly, the symptoms that the patient unknowingly tries to conceal, because he cannot relate or has no knowledge of how homeopathy works. Altered states like actions, sensations, emotions, behaviors and feelings that the patient would not normally have in healthy state, are the true evidence of disease”.¹

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About the Author: Ian Hamilton RSHom, has been in practice since 1989 and the editor of The Homeopath since 2010. Originally a lithographer and university teacher, he lives and works in Highland Perthshire, with his wife, an artist and gardener, and is the founder of the Art and Homeopathy group.

understanding of interwoven cause and effect, balance and rebalance, logic and counter logic and dare I say it, Art and Science.

The actions of the remedy are much more like the process which happens in the creative act. The appearance of disease is much more a creative process from the imbalance of the vital force, than just the external manifestations which modern medicine seeks to "cure".

I would argue that the homeopath's work is much more like this rather good definition of what an artist does.

"The artist creates an artwork in order to express subjective beliefs: the ideas emanate from him and his creative imagination. His/her mission is to find an efficient and successful way to express them and maybe pass a message, without being restricted by specific necessities and controls. If he/she succeeds, he/she has created a work with the potential to change the viewers' way of thinking and perception of reality".⁶

The viewer in this analogy could be the patient. What we as homeopaths are seeking is the potential to change the viewers' way of thinking and perception of reality, or in my explanation, to remove the delusion which is the source of the disease. In this explanation, the homeopath is the artist.

Case taking as art

The interaction between patient and homeopath, is similar to that between the artist and the viewer. The homeopath is taking the case in a methodological way, following the known and established rules and techniques, as an artist might start a picture on a primed canvas. But as the case taking proceeds it is clear that there is a picture emerging and the patient becomes a many dimensioned character, with layers of images and nuances. As the case taking develops the main image emerges. It may be a clear picture of a remedy or it may be some dominant area to be further cleared. The image may be of a kingdom and a miasm or it may be obvious that the main delusion of the patient's disease picture is coming out.

What has brought this state into being is the case taking. The observations, questions, language, appearance and emotional place of the patient is clarified by the homeopath in much the same way the artist ends up with the finished work. The conscious and unconscious activity of the patient is mirrored by the same process in the homeopath. We don't know at the outset where that case taking will take us, we adjust the warp and weft as the picture begins to emerge. I assume here the analysis process as well, because that is part of case taking. Sometimes we see the picture at once; at other times we need to recollect in tranquility as Wordsworth would have it, until the picture is clear.

Homeopathy as art

So far, so good. But what if homeopathy can

be more than an artistic process? What if art itself is a part of homeopathy? There is some evidence, used in its broadest sense, that art and homeopathy are inextricably linked. Dr. Brian Kaplan, the homeopath and provocative therapist, has written on his blog about Art Therapy, sometimes asking his wife, an art therapist, to do an assessment of a patient to yield more information. He writes in the blog of;

"the difficulties of consulting patients who are familiar with homeopathy, and who may use language in a sophisticated way to hide behind, and not actually disclose much information. (He also includes children in this grouping and those who are less confident in language use).

Art therapy is very useful with these patients as they tend to be less skilled in image-making than they are in language. The art therapy process can help open up the patient and show sides of himself that might not be revealed in words.⁷

Another use of art in homeopathic case taking is with the Periodic Table method of Jan Scholten. The Silver series of the table is about art and creativity. Scholten sees the theme of each series as about the central delusion of those people in the series. In this one he says it's about aesthetics – everything is seen in terms of beautiful or ugly.

In a recent lecture, Scholten talked of sometimes asking about art and how a patient responded. When I asked him about this he said that he would ask this question if he thought this was the series the patient was in. So art plays a big part in differentiating remedies here.

Art as a focus of practice

Useful though the repertory is in giving guidance to remedies, it is limited in focussing on processes at work in case taking. If as I believe, art plays a fundamental role in peoples' lives and disease states, then we won't find out about it only through repertorising. It has to be our own creativity as homeopaths which will reveal, through truly creative case taking, the central delusion which is at work in a person. Here are current examples from my practice.

Case one

A mother of a one year old child, very protective of the child but also desires to run away. She longs to go back to an earlier life when she felt free and not tied down. She loves the idea of travelling and an uncomplicated life. She has a fluttering sensation all the time in her chest, region of the heart. She was very sensitive to any noise in the early days with the baby, thinking always that she would wake up and need feeding. All the mum wants is to sleep. She is a very yielding sort of person, with a man who is caring but cannot give her the support with the child she craves. She resents this now. But she says she could not leave him.

She is very *Pulsatilla* in her presentation. She is an artist, a painter. She has had a few remedies, responding to *Pulsatilla*, *Ignatia* and *Staphysagria*. She breast feeds on demand, at any time of day or night.

I visit at her home as the baby does not sleep well and it's easier to see them both. On the wall is a picture, painted by the patient, of a brooding mountain in the Cuillin in Skye, where she lived. It is a very dark mountain with a hint of light behind it. I ask her what this means to her. She says it's freedom, where she wants to go back to. To me this is a very stark image and unappealing. To her it's paradise, it's her old life.

I puzzle about this. It seems she has a desire to escape, to travel but she is also very loyal and determined to do all she can for her child. She would never abandon the child but would love to be free of breast feeding and leave the child with her mother overnight.

I find it difficult to fit the painting into the case. The only way I can do it is by seeing it as the desire to escape to an earlier life, no matter how dark it is. But then I see that perhaps the dark brooding mountain may also be her present life, which is weighing down on her. There is a dichotomy. It is freedom but it's also what is holding her back. This is much easier to accept now as an image, it makes more sense in the case – it can be both things.

We have to be willing and able to interpret art in this way. It's the conscious and the unconscious at work in the same image. It is the creative force.

I end up giving her *Cimicifuga racemosa* 200c, on the basis of the desire to escape and travel, the sensitivity to noise during and after pregnancy, the fluttering sensation in the heart region and also as it's in the same family, *Ranunculaceae*, as *Pulsatilla* and *Staphysagria*. Here is what Jan Scholten has to say about it:

"They fear that when they make a choice for their own good, they will be left alone, so they are in conflict with themselves, not knowing what to choose. The situation they are in is unpleasant, like in a marriage where there is no love anymore. But the idea of leaving the husband produces all kinds of anxieties about how to survive alone in the threatening world, so they often stay in a situation that they do not like at all. There they feel caught, as if bound by wires. Their mood becomes depressed and dark, with the well-known symptom as if a dark cloud surrounds them. This situation can also occur during pregnancy. They feel imprisoned by their child, they cannot divorce".⁸

Frans Vermeulen quotes, *"I have seen (in Cimicifuga cases) the feeling of being strongly tied to people, (usually the family, the children or the partner) or the need for close relationships or the desire to free oneself from them.....the ties feel too tight, it is choking them. So we can perceive a conflict between wanting to be free and needing to be*

connected".⁹

With my patient, I also feel that this explains the dichotomy of the painting. A dark cloud surrounds her yet she wants to escape to this dark mountain as well. It seems like a confirmation that the image she painted does represent the conscious and unconscious aspects of her predicament. Her creative, vital force created this image.

The equivalent place in the periodic table of this remedy is in Stage 13 – Withdrawal. *There is a feeling of nostalgia for the good old days, when everything was still going well, when they still had talent and they could manage everything.*

The patient responded to the remedy with more of a relaxed feeling. It lasted until the child was once again not sleeping so she became overtired with feeding the child.

Gave *Cimicifuga* 1M. Aggravation lasted 2 weeks, including fluttering. This now a lot better but still gets it. She did not even notice her last period after bad PMS in past.

Partner making more effort. Child seems a bit afraid of father coming in from work but says his name all the time. He plays with her more. Patient is painting again, taking commissions. Anger and temper still there but not throwing things. But feeling anger about breast feeding as it stops her sleeping.

Reports that she has developed a craving for salami and salty things.

Rx *Tuberculinum* 1M.

Within two days patient says she is feeling much better. No cravings for salami. Child ran in and jumped into bed with dad and played for an hour, while mum got up.

My case taking and analysis were very ordinary but it was the added dimension of the painting which led me to *Cimicifuga*, which in turn I think opened up the *Tuberculinum*, which I always suspected was there.

Case two

A woman of 26 with history of kidney infection and very bad blind spots or cysts on her chin. The kidney problem started with a urine infection. She was very anxious. She had a very bad reaction to a BCG injection. She was off school for a long time. Says she developed a stomach ulcer.

She is very busy. Holds down 3 jobs which she took to be able to buy a house. She is a very anxious person. She is recently hot, restless and fidgety, but also likes a hot water bottle for the pain. Lacking confidence in her work.

She worries about being not good enough, of being sick. She has OCD tendencies. Does ritual things, scared of losing control. Generally she is cold but hot with infection. Her hair is different, more greasy and lank. She craves cheese, sweets, averse salt and hates greasy food.

During the case taking she reveals that she trained in fine art. Her passion is stone carving. In particular she loves to do very precise

lettering, measured in millimeters. She says she is a perfectionist in this – not perfect, not good enough.

I gave her *Arsenicum* 200c. it was only when she told me about her art that I saw her perfectionism. I also considered *Syphilinum* and the BCG tautode.

Follow up-1 month

After the remedy she felt better for a short while but then had a two week aggravation, mostly on mental, emotional and general levels. Very anxious. Then she gradually became better. Her skin almost cleared up and was discharging yellow pus from the blind cysts. But now it is beginning to return. Not as painful, but still not as good as it got.

Her hair has become more shiny and thick. Appetite improved and she is more confident. Kidneys have been fine but this was not a problem when we first met. She is less fidgety and restless OCD is a little better. Not obsessing as much. She has been to a stone cutting course and did very well. Working with top people, very hard work. I repeated *Arsenicum* 200.

A week later, she phoned to say she had a urine infection but had been to the doctor and is taking anti-biotics! She did not think to call me before this. This is clearly her anxiety about health and my view is that the infection was a physical aggravation to the remedy or return of old symptoms.

The case for Arsenicum to me was made stronger by the revelation of her artwork. It helped guide me because her perfectionism came out so strongly in the thing she called her passion.

The artist's studio

The next stage for me is working with a group of like minded homeopaths, who may collaborate in a joint practice, possibly in an artist's studio, which has art works around the walls and other space. Here, clients are exposed to these works and are asked to respond to them as part of the case taking. They will also be encouraged to express how they are in words, poetry or images, as a normal part of case taking. We have already met once in London and are a group of 6. Our next meeting is in September and we are inviting others to come. We have devised a way of recording the part which art plays in the case taking.

The group of homeopaths in their own practices, will be continuing this as a matter of course in every case. The aim is to gather as much information as possible about how art affects the case taking, the patient, the homeopath and ultimately our understanding of homeopathy, using it improve our art and science. It is not another new way of doing homeopathy. It is most guided by *The Organon*, §98

It is certain that, on hearing about a patient's



Piet Mondrian's studio reproduced at the Tate Liverpool Exhibition – June 2014

ailments and sensibilities, one has to ascribe belief principally to the patient himself, especially to his own expressions with which he can render an account of his sufferings. (these are wont to be altered and falsified in the mouths of relations and attendants). However it is just as certain that the investigation of the true and complete image of the disease (my emphases) and its details requires . . . special circumspection, scrupulousness, knowledge of human nature, cautious enquiry and patience – all to a high degree".

What is new or re-emphasised, is the notion that the art of homeopathy lies in working at both conscious and unconscious levels. We should be aware that we are part of the creative process of the patient in arriving at a prescription which begins to clarify that central delusion behind their illness. We are helping them to see that. The correct remedy helps them to restore the image of true health. It dispels the old deluded image of themselves. How often do we hear a patient say, "I may not be physically better but something has changed, I feel different". Something has changed at some level which is not apparent or even fully conscious, but the change is the beginning of health.

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