

1

Perceiving Materia Medica

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Perception

If the physician clearly perceives what is curative in medicine, that is to say in every individual medicine

Organon §3

In the quest for perception we seek analogy on every level. Unrestricted by method or memory we utilise the sum of our senses, enhanced by logic, warmed by emotion, illuminated by insight. Finally we distil the totality of our understanding into a single meaningful concept.

Thus equipped we explore the wonders of materia medica. No limiting doctrine, or constricting dogma. No recommended technique, or correct mode of inquiry. All that is required is a simple state of being receptive to all potential patterns.

Our search meanders through fields of symptoms, poetic paths, grammatical geometries. Song and symbol, science, riddle, ancient text and modern film weave a web of fact and fancy to mutate musty manuscripts.

And all in the bid for perception.

'The Verb' – Grammar of Pathology

In the *Organon* §9 Hahnemann states that the healthy organism is maintained in dynamic harmony by means of sensation and function. In §10 he explains that aberrations of sensation and function are the primary manifestations of pathology. It therefore makes sense that in investigating the subtle roots of disease we should meditate on these qualities.

What are sensation and function? From their names we can understand that they are closely related to the nervous system. The nervous system is the most dynamic aspect of human physiology, and as such it is the closest physical manifestation of the dynamic vital force.

Sensation and function are attributes of sensory and motor nerves respectively. This is the body's principle means of maintaining constant homeostasis, the harmony of health. Sensations inform us of any change in the internal or external environment, and functions serve to balance that change with an immediate and efficient response.

If we sense cold, our function is to heat ourselves by increasing blood flow or by trembling. If we sense hunger, our function is to balance by eating or by slowing the metabolism. Sensation and function oppose each other, maintaining a dynamic balance. These operations are circular in nature, and are usually controlled by feedback mechanisms.

The first expression of disease is in distortion of 'sensations and functions'. A person may feel cold in warm weather, or tremble when they do not feel cold. They may feel hungry after eating, or eat when not hungry. Homeostasis is disrupted and ill health ensues.

Sensation and function are a more holistic way of describing pathology than emotions, thoughts or delusions, because they pertain to the whole organism. Pathological sensations are the delusions of the whole person, and functions are the physical, general or emotional response. Experience shows that the same stuck sensation and function run through all levels of the organism. As such we can use them to find correlations between physical, mental and emotional realms.

Pathology manifests as stuck sensations and functions, meaning fixed erroneous perceptions resulting in a repetitive misplaced response; or, vice versa, a fixed erroneous action resulting in a perverted sensation. For example, a person may have a continuous erroneous idea that their left side is longer, causing them to lean to the left. Or they may lean to the left due to a perverted function such as scoliosis. The pathological disruption may occur anywhere in the cycle.

The Dynamics of Materia Medica

To study a remedy in the most dynamic way is to prove a remedy. During a proving subtle changes in simple substance ruffle the currents of creation. Prover and remedy are one. No printed word to distort pure experience, no essence or keynote to veil subtle feelings. No longer the intellectual observer standing outside the experience, we become the experience.

A prover is a true student of materia medica. Taught by the subtlest of teachers, the inner nature of a remedy is embossed on her soul, bestowing an understanding finer than words.

A homoeopath who has not participated in a proving has not completed his education. One who has undertaken this alchemical voyage will often be tempted by the next excursion into nature's treasure chest. The knowledge hidden within cannot be gained from books. The process may involve suffering, but the prize is a rich new experience. Care, caution and thorough preparation facilitate a safe voyage.

Provings are a gateway to knowledge. To experience new inner worlds through one's own medicine is a tradition of all shamanic healers. By changing our point of self-reference we gain insight into nature and people. Beyond this personal insight awaits collective wisdom, which lies in sharing the tale. As provers relate their story, a remedy is born. Anecdote and pain, mind and body, eye and soul dissolve to one, enhancing, contrasting, supporting, opposing, completing. Members of the circle experience a feeling of awe as the first ripples of a new remedy spread through the pool of human experience.

But this pure experience must be sifted, printed, sorted and stored. A chronicle is created. As subtle sensations curdle into typeface, materia medica spirals down the potencies towards a state of stasis. MM hardens to CM, CM calcifies to 10M. Recorded statements and simple language leave footprints of pure experience, a trail for future generations to study. It is this trail that we must follow while retracing the prover's journey. Pure provings are the foundation upon which the homoeopath constructs his knowledge.

At times it is difficult to tell if the pathology lies in disrupted sensation or disrupted function, as the result (e.g., leaning to the left) is the same. But as a circular mechanism it does not really matter. Sensation leads to function leads to sensation, a snake biting its own tail. We cannot say that one is compensation for the other, because that would suggest that one is the primary cause. It is a 'chicken and egg' situation.

Dynamis means motion, the basis of life. In a state of health we are free to perform any motion at any time, and will choose the appropriate actions in response to accurately sensed situations. Thus we adapt perfectly to change. In pathology we become confined to a fixed sensation or function, true in one particular circumstance, but misplaced in every other situation. Pathological functions repeat the same actions and are therefore easy to perceive.

Grammatically, these symptoms are expressed as verbs. For example, in the symptom, 'My green nasal discharge alternated sides', 'alternate' is the verb, 'discharge' is the noun and 'green' is the adjective. The verb 'alternate' is the most dynamic expression of the case, and these dynamic symptoms are often the most characteristic. Most strange, rare and peculiar symptoms are verbs rather than nouns, due to their dynamic nature (e.g., Feels hot so he must cover – Camph).

I have therefore called this system of synthesis 'the verb'. It is a description of the constant stuck action in which a person is imprisoned. In health people are free to respond with any possible verb. In pathology they are confined to a single function that indicates loss of freedom. This restricted verb pervades the whole organism. As a stuck repetitive action, people often express this verb as 'must', 'have to', 'should', 'need to', etc. For example, a Silica patient may feel that they 'must push through', both mentally and physically. This is a constant and misplaced function, resulting from a sensation of being blocked, i.e., constipation, suppressed perspiration, delusion he will fail. Every action will express difficulty pushing through against this block (bashful stool, difficult dentition, abscess, splinters, obstinacy, etc.). In order to fulfil the constant need to push through, Silica will be compelled to begin the process, retreat and start pushing through again (bashful stool, yielding and obstinate, inserting and expelling splinters, undertaking nothing lest they fail). Thus the function (verb) becomes an ongoing repetitive cycle. This cycle may be perceived in the following symptoms of Silica:

- "Sensation as if a bubble of air were pushed through eustachian tube and burst in middle of ear."
- "Nosebleed after inserting the finger."
- "Obstruction of the nose in the morning, followed by coryza during the after part of the day."
- "Difficulty of swallowing; she imagines that she has swallowed pins."

As materia medica evolve further from their source, original tales stagnate into remedy pictures, poetic symptoms condense to keynotes, verbs harden to nouns. Fantasy lends wings to the armchair voyager. The prover's dynamic expression has been crystallised, calcified and varnished. Clinical cases create new landscapes. Truth and fiction blur as convenience extracts its price.

Yet we would not be without all these. We cannot spend all of our time trekking the proving jungles. Clinical experience, creative thinking, simplification and signatures are all aspects of materia medica. Abbreviation and essences are important aids. Keynotes can point the searcher on his way. All are useful tools of the healing art, but none can approach the precision of a proving. Our healing tools must be accurate, unfolding from proving to case to image, in that order.

In our study of old remedies, we undertake the quest of recreating this dynamic experience, potentising processed material back to original whispers. Retracing the steps of our predecessors, pure proving narrative is our guide. We follow a long gone feeling, seek a line of logic, potentise a pattern. Yet we now possess new tools. Two hundred years of homoeopathic evolution have enriched our perception and enhanced our understanding. Philosophy, analysis, art, science, computer and method have lent power to our inquiry. We may be at the same point in the circle, but we have surely ascended the spiral.

Language is fossil poetry. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Materia medica is fossil provings. J. Sherr



- “Silicea taken during the menses seems to suppress them for four days; afterwards they flow for four or five days and then remain away for six weeks.”
- “He woke with great anxiety about midnight, could not move in spite of every effort, and imagined that thieves were breaking in; on rising he became quiet; after lying down the anxiety returned.”

The fixed verb is a constant factor in any proving or case, repeating on every level.

I remember a Silica child who had a repeated pattern of peeking slowly through the door and then hastily retreating. In pathology, a person will tend to excel at performing their main verb, while failing at everything else. Silicas are world champions at the initial stages of pushing through and immediately retreating, but will falter when it comes to going all the way.

Sensations are generally more difficult to perceive than functions, as they demand accurate describing and perceptive listening. They may often be understood from the spontaneous expressions and idioms used in the case, or from dreams. Poor provings and poorly taken cases will not reveal well-defined sensations.

The ‘verb’ of a case or remedy is its most dynamic expression, equalled only by its invisible counterpart, the sensation. It is interesting to note that certain aboriginal societies have no nouns, only verbs (river being expressed as ‘rivering’). As pathology advances it becomes progressively more static, just as all verbs flow into nouns. Nouns (arthritis, tumour, neurosis) are the end result of a pathological process that began dynamically and ended as a fixed entity.

As homoeopaths dealing with dynamic forces we should pay much more attention to verbs than to nouns. But we often focus on the more attractive nouns and their adjectives (green discharge, blue monster, hot anger). This is particularly true in dreams. In a dream of a huge black and white dog with purple eyes and yellow teeth jumping over a fence, the jumping is primary, yet many analysts focus primarily on the multicoloured dog.

For example, in the symptom, ‘My red eruption wanders rapidly’, ‘eruption’ is the noun, the most static and least useful part of the description. ‘Red’ is its adjective, slightly more dynamic and descriptive. But the most interesting and indicative parts of the symptom are ‘wandering’ (the verb) and ‘rapid’ (the adverb), which echo the stuck vital force.

Western physiology and pathology focus on nouns. In homoeopathy, these nouns are termed affinities. Systems of analysis, such as the four elements (or Chinese five elements), focus on adjectives – colour, taste, temperature, etc. Verbs run silently behind these components, lending them motion and life. From verb to noun is the true progression of hierarchy.

Organon §16

Our vital force, as a spirit-like dynamis, cannot be attacked and affected by injurious influences on the healthy organism caused by the external inimical forces that disturb the harmonious play of life, otherwise than in a spirit-like (dynamic) way, and in like manner, all such morbid derangements (diseases) cannot be removed from it by the physician in any other way than by the spirit-like (dynamic, virtual) alterative powers of the serviceable medicines acting upon our spirit-like vital force, which perceives them through the medium of the sentient faculty of the nerves everywhere present in the organism, so that it is only by their dynamic action on the vital force that remedies are able to re-establish and do actually re-establish health and vital harmony, after the changes in the health of the patient cognizable by our senses (the totality of the symptoms) have revealed the disease to the carefully observing and investigating physician as fully as was requisite in order to enable him to cure it.

§16 Synthesis and Conclusions

Dynamis means 'force in motion'.

The life force is dynamic, i.e., in continuous motion.

The dynamic vital force can only be made sick by dynamic inimical forces, which impede its motion.

Dynamic aspects of diseases can only be influenced by dynamic potencies.

Dynamic symptoms and potencies are sensed and expressed via the nervous system.

The origins of disease are dynamic, while the end results of disease are static. This is homoeopathic hierarchy.

Therefore the most dynamic aspects of diseases and remedies are best understood from their most dynamic symptoms.

The most dynamic symptoms are expressed as verbs.

The most static symptoms are expressed as nouns.

Dynamic symptoms tend to be more characteristic.

The more dynamic the symptoms used to match remedy to disease, the more profound the similarity.

The dynamisation of the remedy (choice of potency) should match the dynamic level of the disease. A dynamic homoeopath utilises a wide range of potencies.

The homoeopath should be in a dynamic state to perceive the most dynamic aspects of the case. Static attitudes perceive only static aspects of cases.

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