ABSTRACT

Under the title "Art(ificial) Illnesses and Healing Arts: Cathartic Dynamics Through Samuel Hahnemann's Homeopathy and Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theater," I establish an interdisciplinary dialogue between Hahnemann's (1755-1843) homeopathy and Brecht's (1898-1956) epic theater. In light of Aristotle's definition of tragedy as cathartic (Poetics), I argue that both initiate homeopathic-cathartic impulses: the physician within the individual biological organism, the theater theoretician and practitioner within the "patient" society. While both expressly deny cathartic effects of their work, I illuminate connections and tensions between their theories and practices, focusing on a specific concept of catharsis through which I link their respective visions of holistic healing (Hahnemann) and social transformation (Brecht).

Through a mutually-informing collage of texts (philosophical, medical-historical, sociological), I first delineate today's dominant rationale of pharmacological treatment, i.e. allopathic treatment, which directly fights symptoms or (perceived) illness causes through chemical intervention. I then present Hahnemann's alternative therapeutic rationale of homeopathy (Organon of Healing Art). Homeopathy is based on mimetic qualities of substanceless medicinal forces, thus enabling the organism to respond with self-healing action. An analysis of tensions between allopathy and homeopathy within the medical discourse provides the framework for my investigation of the dramatic discourse.

After outlining the literary history of catharsis, I show that analogies between Hahnemann's homeopathy and psychological interpretations of catharsis confirm homeopathy as cathartic and tragic catharsis as homeopathic. Yet, in light of modern society's "illness" of alienation, tragic catharsis reveals allopathic traits: Emotional over-distancing (alienation) in life is countered with its opposite, with emotional under-distancing (identification) in the theater. I trace the allopathic move in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's and Friedrich Schiller's theater.

Finally, I interpret Brecht's epic theater (Rise and Fall of the City Mahagonny and theoretical texts) as setting impulses toward homeopathic catharsis on the societal level: Brecht mimics the "chronic illness" of alienation though distancing alienation-techniques, aiming for what I call "socio-catharsis," i.e. transformation or "self-healing" of the societal "organism" through revolution.

Taking an alternative medical healing-method (homeopathy) as my point of departure, I establish connections between Brecht's theater and the medical discourse, thus furthering discussions of Aristotle's catharsis and Brecht's allegedly anti-cathartic theater.