

## GENIUS AND MADNESS BETWEEN NORMALITY AND PATHOLOGY

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### SUMMARY

*It is reasonable to affirm that madness is inborn with the human spirit and that only in lunacy it is possible to be creative, being the intellect a system of rules that make possible to live with the least conflict possible, as masterfully said by Umberto Galimberti. To understand madness we must glean our lunacy and put aside the reason which relates to the non contradiction principle thus being not capable to comprehend madness that does not respond to the rational principles, whereas as Schopenhauer says, is the essence and the strength of the will to live.*

**Key words:** *genius – madness – transcendence – normality - pathology*

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*Perhaps in any shape, in any state  
Inside one's lair or cradle,  
The day of birth is dreadful to those who were born.  
(from: Night song of a wandering shepherd  
in Asia – Giacomo Leopardi)*

In *As if the world ended* E. Borgna affirms: psychiatry as a frontier science must be denied in its *raison d'être* of natural science, it goes beyond the categories in the context of the human sciences and the sciences released by the reason. Only by denying itself as a (natural) science and by re-emerging radically criticizing any objectification of the other from oneself, it places itself beyond any ideology and re-found itself as a human science. If we intend psychiatry this way and consider the man as a person and not as an individual, as a body-organism, a man as a body and mind, we will be able to see beyond the phenomenon the essence of a person in its transcendence, its creativity and its pain for being in this world. Only in this context we may understand the close proximity between art and madness, art and pain, melancholy and happiness.

A great philosopher of the nineteenth century which name is Arthur Schopenhauer in his main work *The world as will and representation* writes that the originating essence of every phenomenon and every individual is the will. It is nevertheless, an irrational and blind will, a pure and uncontrolled will to live. In fact, for Schopenhauer the irrational or blind will dominates our mind and the world is equally divided between wickedness and madness. The will leads all human beings to fear death or “nothing”, for they transcend every evaluation of life, over the good and the evil that destiny saves us, or over what awaits after our death. It is equally irrational the general behaviour of men induced by will, because man, despite his intellect, is constantly prone to the domain of an irrational and tyrannical will, his rationality is thus not independent nor “free”. These features that the will assumes when it objectifies itself in

the world through what Schopenhauer calls *principium individuationis* are at the origin of all the sufferings, the struggles and the worries that life saves us, as one can well understand.

In art man expresses his true essence with its grave-ness, its creativity and its pain, detaching himself from external reality and from pure phenomena. We can thus understand why in critical-artistic contemporary literature the relationship between art-therapy/ art-pain is one of the most recalled, used and abused, especially since the artistic avant-garde with Dada and Surrealism primarily from the sixties on, the artists sympathized with the Unconscious and then exalted its most morbid features. Certainly, the artist is not a genius as a lunatic, he has already in himself some sort of talent, but it is also surely true that talent, thanks to madness, reaches peaks of brilliant authenticity. As Jasper wrote, “just as the pearl is born from a flaw of the shell, schizophrenia can give birth to incomparable works”.

Tracing a clear line of demarcation between normality and pathology seems therefore impossible. What differentiates the artists and the lunatics from the ordinary mortals is the ability of the first ones to approach “transcendence”, the “demonic” and the impossible that inhabits every human existence. So, as much as contemporary art continues to programmatically sympathize with the Unconscious, sometimes establishing with it in the worst cases an almost scholastic calendar, it is clear that there are wide boundaries of meaning between art and psychological disorders and between art and particular interpretative psychoanalytic theories; despite the fact that psychoanalysis helped us to scrutinize the abysses of the human soul, the same ones that art seems unable to totally and autonomously lead to the climax.

Another contemporary philosopher Umberto Galimberti, writes in *Psychiatry and phenomenology*: in the body-organism classic psychiatry has built itself, so, in front of a man what is discovered is not his way of

being in the world but the damages or the flaws of his organism, the disturbances of his performances and his functions. In this way classic psychiatry does not understand man, but it “explains” him, that is, it reduces him to his own reference system which is the naturalistic one, which in order to guarantee objectivity is forced to resolve all existence into some thing. It is therefore reasonable to assume that madness is inborn with the spirit of the human being and that only in lunacy it is possible to be creative, being the reason a system of rules in order to manage the coexistence with the least possible conflict. To understand madness we must glean our lunacy and put aside the reason, which relates to the non contradiction principle, thus being not capable of comprehend madness that does not respond to the rational principles, whereas as Schopenhauer says, is the essence and the strength of the will to live.

Then art, as a form of free and disinterested knowledge on the part of the genius, who oblivious to his own individuality and a bit crazy himself, addresses to ideas (eternal models of the things) by contemplating or by grasping them while reproducing them as universal aspects of reality, regardless of the practical (instinctual) needs of the will, and thus finding a way to overcome pain. We can think of the boundary between normality and pathology as a subtle thread on which we try to juggle like a tightrope walker.

To conclude, we can state that there is no rigid line of separation between pathological traits and normal

functioning or between genius and madness, because both represent the extremes of a continuum on which multiple elements act, including the psychic resources of the individual, the environmental factors, the genetic substratum and the early relational experiences.

We must favour then, a system based on prevention and dialogue, mitigating the tendency to the exclusion of diversity and acquiring the awareness that the human being is characterized by factors of vulnerability and weakness that could however evolve into elements of resource.

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