

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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About Madness
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About Madness

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This text has been written years ago following a lived experience in an inner circle. It's not the purpose here to retell it, but to reflect on different mechanisms that far too often are put in place when faced with abnormality and to develop reflections following from it. I don't use "we" because of a feeling of belonging but to point out the mechanisms that touch us all sometimes a bit, others more. Finally, I'll talk mainly about "abnormality" and not about severe crises which entail a serious situation and that need at times a specific involvement.

In the current system the violence of social relations is often disguised. However it's difficult to put a mask on madness because it allows to disclose the vulnerability of a shattered society. Someone who disintegrates faced with a "valid" world which is imposed on us, necessarily disturbs - an uncontrollable spirit, an "unhealthy" phenomenon. Those who can no longer stand this society where your individuality is denied and where you are only a cog in the machine, are quickly quarantined. The "illness" or psychological suffering is treated or punished, never accepted. It is even often denounced as perverse, shameful or the result of failure. "The Greek word *norma* refers to the ruler that one follows to draw a line, and which

permits to walk straight: those who walk in an organised herd are said to be *normal*.” Today, everything is “clean”, we are clean on ourselves, we make clean wars, right down to our relationships: we speak correctly, no rudeness, nor any deviation is possible, we all walk very very straight... And finally, as time goes by, the forms of exclusion change (from banishment to confinement, from asylum to chemical straitjacket) but its process remains.

Our timidity in the face of what disturbs makes us sometimes silent or complacent in the face of a “problem” which we will then individualise and personalise. This frees us from responsibility and avoids us having to go through a certain number of reflections and to take some delicate stances. And which will have as a consequence to participate in making a given situation invisible and taboo. And finally, not reacting is also taking a stance with obvious consequences. So what do we do? We “reach out” as in good Judeo-Christian fashion that knows how to do the good, we close our eyes, we condemn what disturbs, or we question the mechanisms that accompany this situation and that touch us even in our own spaces where relationships of power and domination are never completely absent. Of course, we are not always ready to be open to suffering. Still one must say it. Because silence is more violent. There is noisy violence and discrete violence. That of silence, of cowardice and of disregard is among the hardest because it is underhanded. Without having a position of angelism, you can’t hold everyone in your arms. We can, however, approach it the most vigilant as possible in the face of a situation that is sometimes difficult to discern and to try to create spaces where people can feel confident and supported.

”People must be left to their own, let them find and practice their own choice of life, their own project. And this freedom must not be subject to conditions, agreements, compromises imposed by our limits, our fears, our paternalism. We cannot transform ourselves into those to whom they have to be accountable, respon-

sible tutors, good “therapists”. We cannot again link the existence of persons to a judgement (ours) that can only be arbitrary and violent.” - Giuseppe Bucalo, Derrière chaque idiot il y a un village. Itinéraire pour se passer de la psychiatrie.

Fear of the other, of contagion, of what it breaks us down to, generates different systems of defence and mechanisms of protection. It is not always a simple “fear of the difference”, but very often a recognition that leads us to avoidance, indifference or false awareness and hypocrisy. The fact of seeing in the mirror sensations in the other that are not foreign to us, to discover ourselves similar to those marked by otherness sometimes leads us towards the extrapolation of unspeakable fears. Which relates us with a part of ourselves that disgusts us. The other then becomes a thing, a deviant identification, and this is what this mechanism of projection reveals, which generates the phenomenon of exclusion. In this context, the relationship to the other can be experienced as a destabilizing experience. We can then see that rejection constitutes, in a way, a refusal to look at ourselves, to see ourselves defenceless and to live our own madness. A way of excluding the other in order to free ourselves from its haunting.

It is our tolerance of eccentricity or difference that is diminished when our disposition to the normalisation of behaviour is becoming more pronounced in a “society” that is devoted to a real cult of performance. The dominant culture seeks to conform, lynch or bury alive all subjects that defy the social norm. One adapts or disappears. The norm erases intensity, multiplicity. The system abhors what does not work, so it tends to neutralise the best it can anything outside of the frame. Domestication is a tool that is excessively well developed through so-called universal laws and codes (you have to work, to fit in, to go to school, to smile and to produce).

To be normal is to be socially useful. It means being able to adapt to the group and to be able to comply with the norms in

place, and it is sometimes also a question of survival because the social environment is a determining factor in the construction of the self. The rules of the game are legitimized by the silent acceptance of the majority, by the integration of the relations of domination. And that is why it is necessary to restore the social and political dimension of this issue to give it a global dimension. The dominant model is not sustainable without social reproduction. And while the institutions of assistance and control organise the dispossession of bodies and knowledge, we build our own devices of power and alienation.

Normality has become a means of social control. It is essential to know in which box to put the individual in order to know where it stands in the system. If you step out of line, you're documented, categorised, diagnosed, put in a box by the psychiatric or social police for a better management of flows. In short, one is alienated by illness. Diagnosis is also based on subjective interpretations and depends on the vision of what is socially compliant, conventional and correct. However, the boundaries between the normal and the pathological remain fuzzy. Social alienation and mental alienation are two sides of the same coin for who has not found their own place or a specific "social utility" for this system.

Conversely, what is considered madness is sometimes fetishized, idealized or even considered subversive "by nature", or an example to follow. This rather naïve tendency permits to passively accept the definitions of deviance provided by the dominant ideology (Giovanni Jervis, "Le mythe de l'Antipsychiatrie", Ed. Solin). It also allows us to not have to take responsibility for ourselves by identifying madness as an imminent liberation, which is tantamount to denying certain realities. Madness is not an alternative to life as it is presented but an expression of social violence, it cannot be defined with certainty as a homogeneous reality, much less romanticized. Any ideology that seeks to define categories and to clumsily interpret the troubles of the mind fails faced

with the complexity of human relationships and emotions. It is impossible to make all the reactions of the human body and mind predictable. Its elusive and spontaneous character plunges us towards the unexpected...

"Basically, every domination is based on the hypothesis of being able to regulate the unpredictable future. Every domination has managed to exorcise fear and uncertainty of the future. The refusal of domination therefore also passes through the conscious and courageous restoration of instability, the unknown that awaits us around the corner of the street." - La nostalgia di Dio, in Canenero, Issue 17, 3rd of March 1995