

Creativity in Art, Playing and Madness *

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Abstract

We experience the world from the solid stand point of logical thinking. However playing is entering the world of magical thinking and gathering the pure look of the child's eye. Plays let us go into a more unbounded layer where we can experience the 'reality' differently. In this altered state of consciousness, s/he can experience derealization and depersonalization. This dissociation can be regarded both as the symptom of a mental illness and the experience of the artist who loses himself in the process of creating. When one flows in playful trance, some mental images can come into being. Bipolar disorder is a type of mental illness where this kind of mental images, creativity and madness come close to each other. Although traditional approach can relate those images to delusions, this image-producing process is the main necessity of creating and standing against that one-dimensional perception of psychiatry may be liberating.

Keywords: Madness, Images, Art, Magical Thinking, Creativity.

SANATTA YARATICILIK, OYUN VE DELİLİK

Özet

Dünyayı mantıksal düşünmenin katı bir bakış açısından algılarız. Ancak oyun büyüsel düşüncenin dünyasına girmek ve çocuğun saf bakışını edinmektir. Oyunlar "gerçekliği" farklı bir şekilde deneyimleyeceğimiz sınırsız bir katmana girmemize yardımcı olur. Bu farklı zihin halinde, kişi derealizasyon ve depersonalization durumlarını deneyimleyebilir. Bu çözümler hem bir akıl hastalığının belirtisi, hem de üretim sürecinde kendini kaybeden sanatçının deneyimi olarak görülebilir. Kişi oyuncu transa girdiği zaman bazı zihinsel imgeler oluşabilir. Bipolar bozukluk bu tür zihinsel imgelerin, yaratıcılığın ve deliliğin birbirine yaklaştığı bir zihinsel hastalıktır. Geleneksel yaklaşım bu imgeleri sanrılarla ilişkilendirirse de, bu zihinsel imge üretim süreci yaratıcılığın temel gerekliliklerinden biridir ve psikiyatrinin bu tek boyutlu algısına karşı çıkmak özgürleştirici olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Delilik, İmgeler, Sanat, Büyüsel Düşünce, Yaratıcılık.

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The Definition of Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mental disease according to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). To be precise, it is a mood disorder which is claimed to be genetically caused. It is cured with lithium treatment. Some anti-psychotics can be used in psychotic episode for a short period. Anti-depressants are regarded as dangerous for people with bipolar disorder because they may trigger the manic episode. Food and beverages containing caffeine such as coffee, green tea, chocolate may also cause a manic mood (İzmir, 2013: 43).

As it can be understood from the prefix 'bi', bipolar disorder consists of two different phases: mania and depression. For this reason, this illness is also known as manic depressive disorder. In the first phase, namely mania, the so-called 'patient' gets so energetic that he speaks, thinks and moves fast; spends a lot of money; works for long hours; perceives the world at a very different pace and barely sleeps. He can be extremely joyous or angry. In addition, he can make very quick associations between things. Feelings of enthusiasm, excitement, superiority, jealousy, anger, fear and a childish happiness are witnessed. Thoughts and feelings are fast and intense (Jamison, 2011: 79). It is very common for people with bipolar disorder to be arrogant about their abilities and skills. They also get brave, ready for danger and impatient to *statu quo* in their manic episodes (Jamison, 2011: 135-136). In the second phase, namely depression; boredom, indifference, tiredness, sadness, ideas of death and suicide occur. Psyche gets in a state of slowdown (Foucault, 2013: 11). There is also a less severe version of bipolar disorder, hypomania. A hypomanic person never has real manic attacks. He is joyful and has a lot of *joie de vivre*.

At some point the manic person gets incapable of distinguishing the mental images from the visuals of the concrete outer world. Psychiatry defines that delusional state as psychosis. In psychosis, the person with bipolar disorder can be in a paranoid and suspicious mode. He may have doubts and suspects about the safety of himself and the close ones. He may sense some non-existent dangers and threats from some unknown enemies. He can name some irrelevant people as opponents making some oblique plans against him. He misinterprets the concrete reality, considers every little and irrelevant detail as personal and relates everything with himself. Existence of hallucinations is possible.

In opposition to schizophrenia; manic episode and psychosis are temporary and acute. After the psychotic stage has ended, the manic person turns back to reality. Even in the psychotic phase, he can realize the outer world's reality.

So he thinks both magically and logically at the same time. As Aldous Huxley states, one can live in two separate worlds at the same time (2010: 21) and a person with bipolar disorder is a certain example for that situation.

Bipolar Disorder, Magical Thinking, Images and Creativity

There is a connection between bipolar disorder and images that are the specific forms of energy in the psyche (Jolande, 2002: 85). Because of the activation in the prefrontal cortex, the outer world -as well as the inner one- seems so vivid and bright to the person with bipolar disorder. A lot of images automatically emerge and conjure up. Mania provides a visual richness to the person with bipolar disorder and some bright, colourful and vivid images are formed in the mind automatically.

Although it is an important field of study, the relationship between creativity and bipolar disorder is underestimated (Jamison, 2011: 177). Bipolar disorder's creative potential derives from the magical thinking process in manic episode and acute psychosis. Magical thinking can be summarized as going beyond logical perception. If someone has a high score from magical thinking test of psychiatry, he is considered as mad. However, magical thinking is also a sign for creativity. In magical thinking, one seizes deriving meanings by the means of observations or reasons. He utilizes magical elements for meaning-making process. Although psychiatrists deny that fact, magical thinking can make someone entirely poetic (Bachelard, 2012: 18). Aldous Huxley summarizes the importance of magical thinking as follows (2010: 66):

Systematical and logical thinking is something we cannot live without as an individual and as a species. However, if we want to stay mentally healthy, we have to perceive both our inner and outer world. This reality is a kind of eternity that logic misses out. It is something that does not belong to human order and it is transcendental.

In psychotic and manic episodes, a mental image generating system functions in the mind. This image generating system of the mind is very similar to the process of the artistic creativity. It is quite common for a person with bipolar disorder to see many images even if his eyes are closed. Those mental images can be as impressive as the visuals in some art pieces. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between psychosis and creativity: When the associations in the brain reorganize themselves to form a new idea, it is called creativity. However, if those associations cannot organize themselves and form an invalid idea, it is called psychosis (Andreasen, 2011: 129).

People with bipolar disorder sense an intense happiness, joy, enthusiasm, ex-

citement and euphoria. They think magically. Magical thinking is one of the major determinants of apophenia. Apophenia can be described as discovering meaningful paths between random datas. Everything has an apophenic meaning beyond itself for the manic people. They connect two unrelated incidents in a very short time which can be regarded as a proper definition of creative thinking. The tendency of the divergent thinking increases in people with bipolar disorder. It is known that people with bipolar disorder get higher scores in remote association test when they are in manic episode. The ideas that are emerged in manic states can be reevaluated as art pieces when the consciousness is back to normal (Andreasen, 2011: 132).

As Carl Gustav Jung foresees there is a connection between images and psychosis (2009: 113). If the images of psychosis are translated into a solid form such as a word in poem or a brush stroke in a painting, then we can talk about artistic creation. According to Gaston Bachelard when doing this, one enters a transcendental area (2012: 9).

Maçkali, Gülöksüz and Oral made a literature review on the correlation between bipolar disorder and creativity. According to that review, psychosis is related to creativity. The common thing between creativity and psychosis is the ability to link cognitive elements in a useful way. The manic people have more tendency to combinatory thinking than schizophrenics. Combinatory thinking involves the ability to link the thoughts and images in an eccentric, abnormal and detailed way. The combinatory thinking process of the manics can be both humorous and presumptuous (2014: 52).

Psychotic situation, mental activation and apophenic thinking lead us directly to imagination. All kinds of arts owe a lot to those excessively activated minds; however this relationship is especially obvious in visual arts, mainly painting and cinema. The images in those visual experiences have supernatural lights, colours and meaningfulness. The perception gains strength exceptionally and extrasensory perceptions can occur. Some can discover a world of visual beauty (Huxley, 2010: 21-22). The mind of a person with bipolar disorder is full of magical thinking; odd, uncanny, animistic, peculiar and primitive images. This new way of thinking involves a deeper truth and reality.

The Creative Experiences of Some People with Bipolar Disorder

The people with bipolar disorder have the chance to create dreamy images. They can use those rich visions in their unstable periods as a fountain for their creative Works (Andreasen, 2011: 131). The image creating process of the a person with bipolar disorder, the child who is playing and the artist are very much close to each other. For this reason, it is no surprise that many artists

are claimed to have bipolar disorder and many of the significant art pieces are the productions of these bipolar artists. As Erasmus states the monks, philosophers, kings, priests, scientists, artists and poets are all mad people and it is the madness that created the most bright monuments (2000: 60).

The creative process requires evoking the symbols that are asleep in the subconsciousness and organising them in order to form an artistic work. The activated mind provokes the visuals of collective subconsciousness (Jolande, 2002: 41-42). In manic episode, the a person with bipolar disorder can reach his subconsciousness much easier. He can break free from the language and the conceptual thinking system. His perception of visual objects has a naked intensity free from dull abstractions and words. The brightness of this experience leaks into the daily vision (Huxley, 2010: 76-77).

There are many examples of creative productions of manic people. For example Vincent Van Gogh completed 37 paintings in his manic episode. The doors of mystical rhythm of nature were open to him. He was so creative that he had those times that he escalated to the state of both madness and prophecy (Venzmer, 2010: 42).

The imagery experience of Carl Gustav Jung, a psychiatrist who is claimed to have a mental illness, was very close to image-creation in psychosis. He tried to translate his feelings into hidden images. He saw beautiful and intense symbolic images of subconsciousness in his pre-death experience. During that time, everything was released from its spatial boundaries and turned into bright images (Jung, 2009: 236).

The experience of Kay Jamison, who is a a person with bipolar disorder and also the head of a medical service for mood disorders is interesting. In her book, *The Unquiet Mind*, she gives examples to the relationship between bipolar disorder and creativity. In her manic state, she gets sensitive to arts and she writes lots of poems. Besides, manic episodes cause her ideas to get extremely fluent. She feels that she can put everything in harmony of cosmic relationships. Images of changing lights, striking colours, visions of a delusory flight on the stars come up. There is a carnival in her mind full of lights, sounds, laughs and possibilities. All those images have a poetic beauty. In depression, the exciting cosmic ideas are replaced with scary sounds and images of death. Even in her psychotic and delusional times she can discover new places in her soul full of incredibly beautiful images (2011: 226).

Madness as an Altered State of Consciousness: Trance and Play

Altered state of consciousness is the condition of the mind when it is in the

opposite phase of beta-wave state. Some of the altered states of consciousness can be listed as hallucination, dream, sleep, insomnia, hypnosis, trance, ecstasy, mystical experience, psychedelic experience, depersonalization, de-realization, meditation and psychosis.

Madness is also a type of altered state of consciousness. In madness the altered states of consciousness -such as dissociative ecstasy, over-functioning association, the feeling of eureka and symbolic thinking- reveal. Extrapersonal issues about distances and time gain importance. Ego boundaries disappear and awareness increases (Eşel, 2009: 198). The individual feels that he unites with the universe and loses the perception of self. This state is very close to the peak experience of Abraham Maslow (Campbell, 2010: 276) or the oceanic feeling that Sigmund Freud explained in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2001). This state is called dissociation in psychiatry.

What psychiatry calls dissociation is very close to the flow in play and trance in artistic creation. In other words this state is related to inspiration, flow in play and creative dissociation. The child playing games, the artist writing poems and the a person with bipolar disorder in manic state all forget about the time and experience a deep trance. Dissociation in madness is linked to the perception of a child who's playing and an artist who is creating. In trance one experiences ecstasy, euphoria, flow and higher consciousness. He passes out himself with the pleasure of ecstasy in music, art or poetry. He discovers a world of visual beauty. External richness of naked existence comes into being (Huxley, 2010: 21).

It is very common for an artist to experience dissociation. For instance the writer Neil Simon explains that state of mind in those words: 'I enter a different dimension. I don't write consciously. I feel as if there is a muse with me' (Andreasen, 2012: 46-47). Like a child late for home because of the joy of the play, the artist loses the sense of concrete reality and self.

In trance, the person discovers a link between himself and the cosmic system. He senses the existence of the whole universe and feels that he belongs to something alive under the sky at night, in an immense place (Campbell, 2010: 126). Contrary to daily life, in the moments trance and ecstasy, he leaves his fears behind. He becomes aware of a divine, indivisible One where opposite polars unite (Huxley, 2010: 123). As a result, the dissociation of the person with bipolar disorder is related to the trance experience of the artists and children playing games.

Conclusion

Madness is an altered state of mind where the logical ways of thinking are replaced with magical ones. Bipolar disorder that is a type of mental disorder is related to artistic creativity. In the manic and the psychotic episodes, the mind's image producing capacity expands. The a person with bipolar disorder experiences dissociation which is very close to flow in plays and trance in artistic creativity.

In dissociation, just like the creative artist and playful child, the a person with bipolar disorder may lose the sense of past and future and surrender to the instant. He dives into the bright images created by his excessively functioning mind and recognises that the world is a magical place. He may transfer those precious images into art pieces after the manic state is over.

Altered state of mind helps entering a world that is purified from daily worries and restricting ideas just like the artist and the child. In this world, wild and other, magical and visionary, imagery and abnormal are altogether. In this surreal world everything is fluid. The mind that experiences the acute madness forces the doors of time and space; and starts producing images.

The eyes of the a person with bipolar disorder see beyond the two dimentional perception of the normal. He discovers both the underground and upper sky and he produces new images. He explores a garden like magical world of childhood where the flowers and fruits are magical, animals can talk, sky is pink and clouds are suitable to be walked on. The image creation process in madness is also against the established power relationships in solid reality. It is very important to perceive the world in terms of images. It is a revolution.

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