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Summary

THE ARTISTIC GENIUS. CASE STUDY – VAN GOGH

Scientific coordinator:
Prof. Univ. Dr. D. N. Zaharia

Author:
Ph.D. Student Mădălina Toma

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It is well known that the artwork, which is a complex intellectual and material creation, may be carried out only by a person who is, by all means, gifted with talent, if not genius. This belief, as well as my long lasting personal preoccupations regarding the visual work of art and its creator, viewed from the perspective of the genius, led to this scientific approach. This paper proposes a research that is based on the concept of genius and the artistic creation of the postimpressionist painter Vincent van Gogh, posthumously regarded as a work of genius.

Vincent van Gogh definitely represents a challenge for anyone with aesthetic preoccupations. In this respect, we aimed to structure the content into two parts, with several chapters and subchapters backed up by carefully selected examples and case studies that are meant to provide a different point of view regarding the work of this great painter. The key concepts underlying the present thesis are: the aptitudes - a primordial concept of the quality of genius, the talent - an intermediary concept of the quality of genius and finally the genius itself - the highest level of the expression of normality. Taking into account the primordial meaning of the three concepts, we can establish the relationship of interdependency. Given the fact that a person gifted with aptitudes (A) may not excel being also talented - even less so a genius, but a man of genius (G) absolutely has aptitudes (A) and obligatorily talent (T), the person gifted with talent (T) is not a genius (G) but certainly has aptitudes (A) in the field. Thus, we come to a set of logical formulas that define the relationship of the three concepts.

A does not include **T**, **T** does not include **G**, therefore **A** does not include **G**. But **G** includes **T** and **T** includes **A**. Hence, **A** and **T** are concepts contained in **G**. Consequently, the relationship between the three concepts is one of interdependency.

It seems impossible to present the complexity of Van Gogh's personality only by analyzing his work and excluding his eccentricity or the influence of the atypical manifestations on his work. The artist,

whose personality was dominated by the *principle of complementary dualism*, developed by Constantin Enăchescu, *Phenomenology of madness - the meaning of alterity of the individual as self-denial*, has shone in his state of *normality*, and what was believed to be an *abnormal* condition took unimagined appearances, unexpectedly beautiful if we look at his creation from the most stirring perspective of the aesthetic ugliness. He made his debut in adulthood, at age 27, and up to the age of 37 years old he made over 2,000 works, thus proving to be a prolific painter. Thirty-seven years, half of which have been a tragic search for his inner self and for the meaning of his existence on earth.

Above all, Van Gogh, the person, was full of contradictions because he fought not only with the society that was refractory to that kind of “different”, also called the “Evil” by Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, but also with art and the concepts that governed it, with God and with his harsh fate; but first with Vincent himself, with a heartbreaking struggle.

I. The first chapter, entitled **Aptitudes** (the primordial concept of the quality of genius), aims, first of all, to define the role of the aptitudes. The merger between the innate element and the acquired one by factors that characterize the individual’s personal experience. Its genetic composition and the influence of the educational environment remain unknown as a quantitative proportion. The blending of the aptitudes in an original form makes possible the creation of new and original values, therefore we are talking about talent in that field.

Thus, the aptitude, from the Latin word *aptitudo*, would mean that individual mental characteristics that conditions the fulfilment in best conditions of a work, of an action, function or predilection. If we talk about aptitudes, we refer to people genetically gifted with a special sensitivity to colour, value, volume, visual memory, power of coordination between eye and hand, respectively an ability to reproduce

images. About these aptitudes without which we cannot speak of *fine art* and *its necessity*, Immanuel Kant said that *it will require (...)* *imagination, intellect, spirit and taste*. All these aptitudes developed in a higher or lower proportion, which varies quantitatively from individual to individual, come in the completion and formation of a complex personality, depending on the stage of their development, as artisans, talents and, why not, masters. These stages and the difference in value are made also depending on the level of intelligence, creativity, spontaneity, thoroughness, the level of culture and innate qualities the individual holds. Kant masterfully wrote in a few words the difference in value between the individuals gifted with aptitudes, talent and genius.

Certainly, all people are born with a predisposition for the beautiful, but depending on the environment that shapes them, they succeed or not to develop it and thus to excel. And the *fine art* is not only one of the forms of the social conscience meant for an aesthetic experience. In order for an art work to be able to meet one of the aesthetic and artistic qualities required, the creators of the visual message do not need only aptitudes but also talent.

II. Talent is a concept developed in the second chapter, which includes the difference in value between aptitude and talent, which is mentioned by Gheorghe Achiței who states that the artistic talent can *better itself*, it can *strengthen its structures* and it can play a *formative* role in the shaping of the personality of the individual. The continuous desire for self-improvement and perseverance plays a crucial role in the shaping of the creator. A person who holds creative aptitudes in art may not exceed the artisan stage if he has no talent. This is the case of so many craftsmen, who although had this opening towards beautiful and worked, creating icons on glass, beautifully decorated ceramic pots, carved spoons or gates, didn't reach the value of Brâncuși and they remain anonymous.

For if a skilled artisan could reach and could practice the art with amateurism but without having favourable circumstances to form and refine his taste, he would have minimal chances to become a virtuoso in the artistic field. *By excellence a unique handmade product, the artisanal product, is apparently anachronistic and in contradiction with its own tendency of resuming*, states Ion N. Şuşală, *Artizianatul – pledoarie pentru bunul gust (Crafts-A pleading for good taste)*. About painting and how it manages to make its place in the life of society, Cennino Cennini, in his *A treatise on painting*, said that craftsmanship that comes from science, is rooted in it and is learned by working with your hands. In order to succeed in painting one must have fantasy and manual skills, and to those unseen but that are felt, to give them life through your talent to prove their existence. Another view about talent is given by Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Judgement*. He says that talent is a gift of nature, so you're born with talent and you don't acquire it by cultivating the native endowment.

Through the message the artist desires to transmit, through the themes that he hopes to remain immortal, he is his own messenger and also the messenger of the society in which he lives. The majority of the works of art allow for the character of the people that the artist represents to seep through, along with the environment in which the creator lives. For example, the works of Brancuşi, Nicolae Grigorescu's ox cart, the flowers and rural landscapes painted by Ştefan Luchian confirms the Romanian predisposition for beauty and for combining the aesthetics with utility. Hegel confirms that every person can have affinities and inclinations towards certain subjects, some that are more accurate, which emphasize the ability to make precise calculations, other creative, such as the arts, people who usually have a talent that manifests itself early on.

III. The third chapter entitled **Genius** – the highest level of the expression of normality, helps to explain the defining features that are

specific to the personalities that have been the basis of society and helped bring many major changes.

Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Judgment*, states that genius is the predisposition with which a person is born, through which nature dictates rules that must be followed in the creation of art. In his view, the genius' foremost characteristic is originality and it manifests itself through creative abilities, this talent of creating outside the established norms, with the mode of transposition of the artistic act belonging entirely to the artist. The process of cultivating the faculties of the soul in order to engage in social communication dictated by originality, but while still holding moral values, is only possible in the case of the genius. Kant makes a very suggestive contrasting comparison between genius and absurd, highlighting the moral role that the genius has in societal life and mentioning that the absurd, although it is original, is not genius. He mentions that the absurd is steeped in originality but it cannot exhibit the qualities of genius, no matter in what form it manifests itself in.

In Nietzsche's view, the judgment of taste is made by strong individuals, i.e. the genius artist. In his opinion the only one capable of making a judgment of taste is the genius. It has the capacity to come up with arguments for the choices made and has the power to anticipate certain evolutionary leaps that society rejects at the time due to the radical changes they require, but that will eventually happen. A decisive role in finalizing the creation of the artist-genius is the awareness for the need of accumulating qualitative and quantitative information. The genius is only realized through the capacity for self-evaluation of the aesthetic taste, the combination of different techniques, the manner of communication of the artistic message. The creator of a work of art, in order to be a genius, must hold a plethora of characteristics that are essential to making a masterpiece. Among these, we mention not only

the aesthetics, the creative drive, erudition and imagination, but also *sensation, opinion, science, intellect*.¹(Aristotle)

We presented Nietzsche's conclusions concerning the way in which the genius manifests the realization of its own vocation and the different way of reflecting societal culture in a manner which allows society to accept and honour the genius' ideas. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Friedrich Nietzsche expresses his admiration for the way in which the Greeks know how to honour their geniuses. He finds that only a culture such as the Greek one is entitled to talk to us about the *mission of the philosopher*. Of course, in order to accomplish such achievements, aptitudes alone are not enough. What is needed is perseverance, tenacity, a vast culture and talent in order to gather the ingredients necessary to make not only art but also philosophy.

The modern concept of genius is presented to us by Ștefan-Sebastian Maftei in *Artistic Genius: Nietzsche and the issue of artistic creation*. The focus is put on the relation between the artist-genius and his contemporary society and on the genius' failure to blend into the social uniformity in the way he chooses to express and to live in the act of his creation. The different point of view of the artist- genius concerning the society in which he is born and lives, as well as the stubbornness with which he confronts it manifest themselves only through the aesthetic experience, through his artistic convictions which make possible to see the *sublime*, replacing the just plain *beautiful*.

We presented one of the hypothesis proposed by the father of neuro-anatomy, Santiago Ramon y Cajal in 1911, stating that the genius is a characteristic that can be learned. He demonstrated that the genius is not a born trait but one that is learned, discovering that the large number of neuron interconnections (synapses) is a sign of the genius.

¹ Aristotel, *Despre suflet*, Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013,p.159

These connections are much more important in determining the power of the brain rather than the large number of neurons by themselves. Depending on how much and in what way we use our brain, new connections between neurons will be made and the intelligence will rise. We refuted the idea that the genius can be learned by pointing to famous cases such as those of Albert Einstein, Poincaré, Thomas Edison, geniuses that did not know the extent of their talents when they were young. It would be absurd to state that the qualities of a genius can be obtained by a mentally challenged person. Even if the scope of the exercise cannot be disregarded, given that perseverance has its role not only in fixating some notions but also in giving the individual the self-confidence needed, the genius, that *innate* seed, exists as a *gift from nature* and is only possible through the joyful mixing of genetics and hazard and cannot be learned.

We also discussed Dr. Buckminster Fuller's opinion, one that tends to go to the extreme, stating that the genius is a trait just as common as aptitude, and that *each human is born a genius*². In his view the difference of value is made by society and external stimuli that either constrain or enhance the medium needed for the genius to manifest itself. We disagree with the hypothesis stating that the degree to which creativity and genius is developed depends on lifestyle and social factors.

Freud's idea that any work of art is a free-flow of subconscious ideas pertaining to the frame-work of pathological manifestations, naming the actors "psychopaths on stage", is also discussed. A famous case of *artistic madness* was said to be, ever since the day that Van Gogh sliced his ear, an act of self-mutilation unseen by that time, which raised many questions along the way. We exemplified this with short

² Wayne W. Dyer, *Puterea intenției*, Editura Curtea Veche Publishing, Bucharest, 2013, p. 285

case studies such as: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881-1973), Francisco Jose de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828), Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), surrealist Salvador Dali (1904-1989).

We can assert that the geniuses, persons with a degree of intelligence above the average, capable of creating a priceless work of art, have an IQ above 140. It has been established that those who lead the movements that were the basis of new artistic movements have had not only an IQ of over 140 but also a vast artistic culture, creativity and a strong personality with which they asserted themselves in the world of art, along with, of course, a small degree of madness.

IV. In the second part, in the chapter entitled **The stages of the emergence and evolution of the artistic genius at Van Gogh**, we proposed the systematization of Van Gogh's works, from a philosophical standpoint, in four periods. These are determined both by the steps taken by Vincent in this field through the study on drawing and colour, as well as the places through which he passed and the people he met and had influenced him.

In **The period of genius denial** (1862-1882) we quoted Constantin Enăchescu in trying to explain the mechanisms of denial. *The denial changes the order of normality that is considered to be natural*³. The denial, in Vincent's case, was a mechanism of protection against suffering. The young man most likely had developed an inferiority complex caused by the learning of the fact that he was named after an older brother that had died. Although he used to draw in private, Vincent couldn't desire to become an artist. He had to know and accept himself as he was built, and in order to do that he needed time. The denial was brought on by the lack of self-confidence. This is

³ Constantin Enăchescu, *Fenomenologia nebuniei*, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 49

the period, in which Vincent tried hard to create this somewhat comfortable environment for his inner self, by trying to follow on the footsteps of his father. But his will, rationality and feelings embraced different things.

Therefore, the period of negating the genius is comprised of the works he made between 1862 and 1880, between the ages of 9 and 27. The first studies date back to 1862, when Vincent was only 9 years old (*The Bridge* and *Milk Jug* – both at the Kröhler-Müller museum in Otterlo). Starting with 1873, when Vincent was 20, he started drawing in pencil, charcoal or chalk the landscapes of the places he visited: Hague, Helvoirt, London, Etten, Isleworth Dordrecht, Laeken, Cuesmes or Antwerp. The joy in his nature drawing is self-evident, but soon he would admit to himself that he would dedicate the rest of his life to art.

In **The period of genius acceptance** (1881-1885), Van Gogh, became a mature individual recognizing that no matter how hard he tried he couldn't walk the path laid out by his father and he stopped trying to stifle his artistic drive. Therefore, he declared that he must follow his passion. The period of accepting the genius strictly refers to the acceptance of his own Self and it comprised the works he made between 1881 and 1885. Given that each period corresponds to a certain stage of development and even a different style, in this period, of accepting the genius, when young Vincent was 28-30 years old, not only the way in which he approached subjects but also the themes reflected the lack of experience. He had small inaccuracies in his drawings and a lack of courage in choosing colour, also he was aware of the fact that he had to recover the time "lost" in the previous period of denial. We quoted from Ion Stendl's *Desenul, Estetica. Suporturi. Materiale (The aesthetics, techniques and materials of drawing)* in order support the assertion regarding the preoccupations of the artist in this period. Therefore, Vincent was working intensely studying many techniques, materials, styles and themes, discovering the great masters

and important art movements, he was interested in the study of perspective, light and shadow, anatomy. He was permanently trying to perfect his drawing, convinced that a true painter must know, before anything else, to draw. Slowly but surely, Vincent's whole being, both spiritual and physical began a sped up process of self-acknowledgement as if he was trying to recover the lost years. The notion of value for Van Gogh represents the road to knowing Good and Evil, Truth and Error, Beauty and Ugliness, journey which the artist set on with confidence and a thirst for knowledge. These first tries of the period, recognized and assumed as being part of him, already denotes a talent that was original, strong and not fully developed. His relation with the prostitute Sien Hoomit was unwelcomed by his family and therefore short-lived, but gave him a model and an inspiration. We know that Vincent came from a family of ministers which thought that *lechery tears down the moral walls of a healthy community* quote from Nicu Gravriliuță's *Mama proștilor este mereu gravidă (The Fools' Mother is Always Pregnant)*. What is striking is the frequency of imperative sentences. He always repeats the word "must" which dominates his existence. Thus, after ten years, the apprentice reached the level of the old masters which he always admired.

In a philosophical way, he was accommodating to the status of an artist, acknowledged by himself first and then by the ones around him. He wanted to quickly go through the steps that he skipped, without which he could not shape his personality as a visual artist or finish his works of art. Some of the most frequent themes in the works he did in this period are: still natures, sea landscapes, fishermen, landscapes with dunes, peasants working the land, picking potatoes and people shovelling. The first studies in colour, two still natures, were made in the workshop of painter Anton Mauve, in 1881. We quoted from letters showing this aspect.

Starting with 1884 he switched focus to anatomical studies as he was fascinated by hands and faces. The women painted by Vincent had piercing eyes, were preoccupied and overwhelmed by worry. Van Gogh never tried to soften their features or to cover their worries and never tried to paint them as pretty representations but rather all his works were emotionally charged, because that's how he understood art, an essence of pain and hardship of the simple folks.

The period of genius confirmation (1885-1888) was to bring important changes in his life. He was 32 years old when he did his first composition, later thought to be his first masterpiece. *The potato eaters* is the work which confirms the shift to another stage of the evolution of his genius. He chose to paint something that was close to his heart, as he loved the simple people and appreciated art as a philosophy of life. Van Gogh painted the soul of people, not just their faces, gestures or hands. And if a work of his in which he paints the working people or a stable does not smell of perfume, it is because he considered that painting should not be embellished or sanitized. *It is the natural order of things that a stable should smell of manure and not of perfume* – that's what Vincent wrote to Theo trying to explain his choices.

But the passion that consumed him did not care for the financial shortcomings, many times he would forgo eating in order to afford a model. (...) *you should know that I'm hungry, and that is in the true sense of the word*⁴. The work never tired him. He was always willing to paint. After he quit the constraints of the Academy of Fine Arts where he enrolled in November 1885, he left for Paris. The two years spent by Van Gogh in Paris (1886-1888) were, without a doubt, a crucial moment for him as an artist. Here, Vincent met many of the giants of impressionism: Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Emile Bernard, Camille

⁴ Vincent van Gogh, *Scrisori*, vol II, Meridiane Publishing House, București, 1981, p. 94

Pissarro, Georges Seurat and, of course, Paul Gauguin. This is the period in which Van Gogh's paintings were inspired by impressionists and their luminous chromatics. Although his behaviour and moods were hard to tolerate, even by his brother Theo, the painter continued to create paintings in bright colours that even expressed tranquillity. Also in this period of confirmation of his artistic value, Van Gogh started to paint self-portraits, moving away from the darker tones and the realism of the first attempts with a clearer chromatic palette and impressionist technique. As for the nature that Van Gogh painted, he loved it enormously and it continued to inspire him. He knew how to see and illustrate as nobody else the cypresses.

In **the period of genius acknowledgment** (1888-1890) we analyzed the last two years of his life spent in Arles, Saint Remy and Auvers sur Oise, years which were the apogee of Van Gogh's creations. The dramatic events that took place in the last period of his life, the slicing of the ear, the episodes of mental disorder that happened more and more often, his prolonged stay in a psychiatric hospital, the breaking away from all those with whom he was close, the lack of money, all made him change his style of painting and the brightness of the colour was slowly replaced by the vigour of the line. In this period, Van Gogh developed another side to his visual and emotive truth, therefore the rhythm in his paintings started to increase, the forms became forcefully drawn, everything was in motion which represents so clearly what was happening in his troubled mind. In the last year of his life, Vincent van Gogh, through the efforts of his brother, was received at the Artists' Salon in March 1890. Aware of the fact that his time was running out and that his genius will only remain in what he created, the artist wrote to his brother: (...) *life goes by (..) But I go deeper into my works*⁵. The meaning of these words was that he was becoming one

⁵ Enrica Crispino, *The life and works of Van Gogh*, Adevărul Holding Publishing House, București, 2009, p. 144

with his works, a merging of the spiritual with the proof of his existence that was materialized in his canvases. He was aware of the value of his works, of the value of his genius. He knew that he will live on through the originality of the works he left behind, and through them he himself will live on.

Chapter V is named **The hermeneutics of the plastic signs in his first and last works of Vincent van Gogh**. The first drawing, which today is kept at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Holand, is *The Bridge*, made on 11th of January 1862. A bridge, accurately designed, not too small, well centred, solidly built, all sings that this 9 year old boy was conscious of the importance of the bridge as a continuation of the road traversed by water. At the end of the bridge the road seems to stop. Vincent, the child, did not know how his road in life would look starting with that moment, this is why he didn't paint it. At the base of the bridge there is a cross. The cross is one of the first important forms of medieval symbolism. In official doctrine, the Christian cross includes the double symbol of the mystery of death as a way to rebirth and of the revelation of God-The Father, of love.

The spatial symbolism of Grunwald-Koch was used to interpret the visual sings in the Tree Test. The mother symbolized by the water, would end up being the one who encouraged his first steps towards art. He was 16 when he started his first job, in Hague, at an uncle who was an art merchant. We could interpret the presence of the father (the sun) through the light that gently falls on the first part of the bridge, which would correspond to Van Gogh's childhood and adolescence, when his father, a protestant minister, tried to open him up to the mystic world and cultivated his spirit. The two shores are drawn separate but also they are united by the water. The curved lines are soft, not at all aggressive, and they symbolize the search, the unrest, the tension. It is interesting that his first drawing (from what we know today) represents

a bridge; a bridge that inspired him, enticed him and defined his existence.

The Van Gogh from the beginning is different from the one at the end. His **last work** has a strong symbolism; from a shy but careful pencil drawing, to a painting done in a fury of colour, lines and sentiments, as a discharge against everything that happened in his life until then. *Wheat field with crows*, considered to be his last work, was done in the summer of 1890, after Van Gogh returned from Paris where he visited his brother. In this painting, Van Gogh, alone and anguished, stretches out his arms around everything that was dear to him, in a last embrace, seemingly becoming one with the flight of birds and the gust of wind, with the wallow of the wheat and the turmoil of the clouds towering above the discontinued path, just as his short and tumultuous life which was about to end very soon.

Categorically, in both cases we speak of symbols: the bridge, the water, the cross, the fields of wheat, the crows. These are symbols through which the artist expressed his experiences and his relation with nature. He never ceased to be himself until the last moment, with all his turmoil and expressivity strongly highlighted, in a space and time that was only his, in which He needed the privacy to talk to Himself. The communication with the self was extremely necessary and it was best done in his paintings.

In chapter **VI. The Aesthetic of ugliness in the first masterpiece**, we analyzed the painting entitled *The Potato Eaters*, in which Vincent managed to express everything that he truly felt towards the world in which he lived, profound sentiments, full of compassion admiration towards the people that lived the drama of daily life. Van Gogh's virtue is not only that he knew how to observe the ugliness around him, but also that he knew to show it with sincerity in his canvases. He was impressed by the tragedy of the lives of simple people, by the experiences of the people who worked extremely hard,

and accentuated these in lines, strokes and colours. Thus, the painter defined already existing expressions that his contemporaries avoided just for their ugliness.

In chapter **VII**, entitled **The symbolism of chromatics in Van Gogh's works**, we highlighted the fact that in the creation of the painter, the colour does not represent a visual element that is sufficient, but rather it is a symbol for the humanity that defines areas of the soul. To Van Gogh, the objects had his colours, and his vision of the colour of objects was shared with Blanc and Delacroix.

Chapter **VIII**, entitled **The Object – plastic metaphor**, finds us seduced by the stylistic beauty of the representation of objects, one that is not at all pretentious but has a fascinating expressivity, admiring the series of still natures done by Van Gogh, a true Dutchman that did not betray his origins and who could feel the drama of the surrounding objects, portraying the rugged expressivity of their ugliness. The still natures with shoes or boots have a very rare expressive quality, the painter finding a philosophy of the shoe with a hole in the bottom and its stillness in the row of abeyance along with other pairs.

In chapter **IX** we presented **The madness of Van Gogh's genius**, this case in which the human genius manifested itself deliberately in art, in a very short period of time, showing the measure of his talent, his dramatic existence and the inner-turmoil of his restless spirit, his creation reaching a level of *madness* through the effervescence of the creative genius.

J.S. Mill said that *the genius can only breathe in an atmosphere of freedom*. Van Gogh wanted to be a free man and he was. He never acted in any other way. If he wanted to leave, without anyone's permission, to visit his parents for Christmas, he did so. If he wanted to give away his clothes to a person poorer than him, he did, without concern that this gesture might cost him his job. If he wanted to sleep

on the floor, to give away his wealth, to love a prostitute, to cut off an ear, he did all of these without caring about the consequences. He lived in the moment with maximum intensity. He was only 37 years old when he died, but, as long as he lived his flame burned brightly. It is true that, all his actions, as a manifestation of freedom only understood by him, brought him sorrow. But sorrow also gave him the strength to create masterpieces.

Vincent van Gogh was truly a genius and today he is recognized as one. However, we cannot pass over the persistent question if Van Gogh was also insane, given that we know about the odd behaviour of the painter, especially in the last two years of his life. A healthy person does not cut off his ear because he had an argument with his friend. But no crazy person will ever recognized the fact that they are crazy. To better support this we quoted from Costantin Enăchescu, *Phenomenology of madness - the meaning of alterity of the individual as self-denial*. However, Van Gogh recognized this fact and wanted to go to the hospital in order to get treatment. He was aware of the fact that his thinking and behaviour was different from the one of most people but never stopped being a free person. Starting with the definition of stress given by Nicu Gavriluță as *our daily curse*⁶, he states that one of the countless effects of the stress after an episode of depression is suicide. Vincent was met with disappointments, repeated failures in his career and his love-life. With an artistic style that is not easy to digest, he pioneered a new art movement, *Expressionism*, but he was only understood and appreciated much too late. His art has made its way into the category of “brute art”, as Dubuffet called it, the art of the lunatics, that sometimes reaches the level of genius. Was Van Gogh sick or was the eccentric behaviour just a way to express the dissonance in everything that governed society. Referring to the diagnostics

⁶ Nicu Gavriluță, *Mama proștilor este mereu gravidă*, Institutul European Publishing House, 2010, Iași, p. 133

proposed by different people, we named a few hypotheses put forth by D Jablow Hershman and Julian Lieb along with Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison, according to which Van Gogh was suffering from a form of bipolar disorder. Reference to his health will be also made by the doctors Doițeanu and Leroy⁷, who will say that the abuse of absinthe was the cause of the problems Van Gogh was fighting against. Other authors believe he was suffering from schizophrenia. In addition to these conditions, which crushed him both physically and mentally, it appears that Van Gogh had glaucoma, according to doctor F.W. Maire⁸. We quoted from *Creation and Malady*, coordinated by Arlette Bouloumie, in which the names of great authors are associated with a disease they were suffering from: Thomas Mann and tuberculosis, Nietzsche and insanity, Dostoievski and epilepsy, Harve Guibert and AIDS (...) ⁹.

Out of the many types of psychosis, creativity seems to strongly linked with mood disorders, especially bipolar disorder. Jaspers identifies in the Dutch painter's mental crises, the symptoms of schizophrenia and not of the initially diagnosed epilepsy, therefore it is believed that he was affected by this very serious mental disorder. ¹⁰

⁷ The doctors Doițeanu and Leroy conclude as it follows: epileptoid psychosis without epileptic attack (latent epilepsy, mental) whose causes must be sought especially in hereditary and personal history.

⁸ The existence of haloes on his canvases around light sources is argued by doctor F.W. Maire who claims that these appear in Van Gogh's paintings after 1888. The doctor associates the coloured umbrellas and iridescences in Van Gogh's paintings with the symptoms of patients suffering from glaucoma who see around a source of light an edge with many colors similar to the rainbow.

⁹Arlette Bouloumie, *Creație și maladie*, Artemis Publishing House, București, 2006,p.10

¹⁰ Kay Redfield Jamison, a psychologist and professor at Johns Hopkins University, stated at the Vth annual edition of the World Science Festival, that the results of about

Research shows that the two extremes of the mind, genius and insanity are interlinked, and scientists have begun to understand why Kay Redfield Jamison, psychologist and professor at the John Hopkins University points to the notion of “tortured genius”.

Perfectly lucid and with a dose of self irony, after he left the hospital he wrote to his brother, describing his gesture of self-mutilation as *artist’s craziness*. As an argument for this hypothesis we quoted Michel Foucault, who in *The History of Sexuality*, concludes by saying the following: *social differentiation will be affirmed not by the ‘sexual’ quality of the body, but by the intensity of its repression*¹¹ We put forth the hypothesis according to which, maybe, in Van Gogh’s case, these two aspects overlapped. In this way, creativity, talent, the will to succeed, amplified by the manifestations of the mental disorder, had unleashed the genius qualities through an avalanche of creation, his imagination through eccentricity, thus he experienced a paroxysm of emotions and feelings which seeped through into his paintings. Therefore, as Nietzsche said, *his work is just a battle he offers to anyone who looks towards him*. Regarding Van Gogh’s madness, D.N. Zaharia minimizes its importance and gives the deserved credit to his work: *if it was madness or not, it is not clear even today*.

He signed himself *Vincent*, which in Latin (*vincere*) means *to win, to conquer*. He acted as a winner, without being aware of this fact. Winners are allowed to stray and are forgiven for it. What matters is the meaning of the fight and the *victory* that was achieved. What was Vincent’s victory? Naturally, the immortality of his work, which gave birth to a new art.

20, 30 scientific studies show the existence of the “tortured genius”.
<http://www.livescience.com/20713-genius-madness-connected.html>

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Istoria sexualității*, Vest Publishing House, Timișoara, 1995, p.97

X. In chapter **X**, entitled **The faces of Van Gogh – the philosophy of the mirror**, we tried to present an overview that defines the *approximately forty self-portraits that were made according to the evolution of his style* as stated by Enrica Crispino in *The Life and Works of Van Gogh*. The self-portraits made by Van Gogh appear to be a scream of colour from a tribal dance, with profound significance, and they set up a barrier beyond which one cannot pass in order to decipher the message of the stern look, because even though he immortalized himself in different moments of his life, in each instance he has that unsatisfied, rough, dismissive, self-assured and firm look in his eyes. Van Gogh does not let us to see the entire mirror in front of which he stands, but only that one he wants to see reflected in the mirror. It is a matter of self-preservation of the inner self.

In this sense, Van Gogh's mirror becomes a metaphor, because its usefulness is purely formal. Seen from a symbolic point of view, the mirror reflects truth, sincerity, the contents of the heart and of the conscience. Could he have adopted the philosophy of sincerity from the Chinese? When painting himself with the bandaged ear, is he honest with himself or with the people around him? Is this self-pity or a way to punish himself? A lesson from which his society and us missed.

Van Gogh, the one who would sign himself as *Vincent (Winner)* passes from the prudent style of portraits used at the beginning to a strong and self-assured style, with exuberant colours in the final portraits, showcasing without hesitation or uncertainty his artistic credo.

In Chapter **XI**, entitled **Van Gogh's artistic genius**, we presented different points of view on the genius which, through the rarity and eccentricity of the way in which it manifested, is the equivalent of madness in the view of some people. We have shown how the geniuses are perceived and treated by society and that Vincent knew in his time that he was seen as different, giving quotations from his

letters to Theo. Yes, Van Gogh was an atypical personality, misunderstood and not accepted by his society and *although he didn't have only aptitudes and creative talent, he was also a genius, yet he was struck by the rejection that was mentioned in the First Book of Gay Science by Friedrich Nietzsche, according to which the strong, innovative spirits, were always meant to rekindle passions about to fall asleep.*

The sacrificial spirit of the painter, the renunciation of self for those who elevated his spirit or fuelled his feelings are characteristic to the condition of genius. Immanuel Kant explains genius through the faculty of aesthetic ideas, faculty by which he creates *the products of the genius*. Here is the definition of art by Van Gogh, definition that he first mentions in June 1879, a time in which he was in the period of **denial of the artistic genius**, as we called it: *Art is man added to nature, nature, reality, truth, but with a meaning, with an interpretation, with a character that the artist brings out and to which he gives expression, which he sets free, which he unravels, releases, elucidates.*¹²

Gauguin's *expressionist thesis* formulated in 1885 in a letter about Rafael, thesis in which was stated that the "outside indicates an interior", was anticipated in a letter even since 1882 in which he describes two of his drawings, *Sorrow* and *The Roots*. He decided not to quit, knowing not only his talent, but also the justness of his artistic credo which he did not want to abandon, especially when he had accepted the fact that he had the *hand of a drawer*. He is, without hesitation, a member of the guild of artists. In Vincent van Gogh's case, the refusal to please society by making facile, mediocre works, can be found in the remaining correspondence. Himself aware of his own

¹² Vincent van Gogh, *Scrisori*, vol I, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 59

mission, he will confess those thoughts that troubled his silence: *Since when in a state of excitement, my feelings lead me rather to the contemplation of eternity, and eternal life.*¹³ We assume that in the case of Van Gogh, the two aspects overlapped in a joyful coexistence.

In subchapter **XI.1., The artistic credo of the genius Vincent van Gogh** we presented the genesis of his artistic credo, which is likely to have troubled him from the very young age when he started drawing the portraits of his schoolmates and sought refuge outside of the village in order to draw *The Bridge*. Then he felt that his artistic mission is to cross that bridge to follow a path whose end was not yet seen. He accepted his genius and the fact that it was his only way, being aware that it would not be easy to pass through it, yet knowing that this was his calling. Yes, Vincent van Gogh proves throughout his work that life can appear as a form of art. He will forthrightly express his artistic credo and he will declare without hesitation, in the letters sent to his brother, the mission of the artist and the grim expression of the aesthetic taste of the creator of the artistic act: *My belief is that working with the purpose of selling is not quite the best way, but rather a way to mock the art amateurs.*

From his point of view, Van Gogh frequently regarded himself as *fabulously wealthy*, even if he had not money, as mentioned in a letter sent in March 1883 to his friend Rappard in which he wrote that he considered himself rich *because he found his way*.

We quoted from the first volume of Letters in order to substantiate these assertions. Being aware that he has a mission to accomplish, he will say to his brother: *My dear brother, my debt is so great that when I've paid it, which I think I'll succeed in doing, the hardship of producing paintings will, however, have taken my entire*

¹³ Ibidem, p. 164

life, and it will seem to me that I haven't lived. The acceptance of genius, as well as the decision to accomplish his artistic credo will be achieved, as Ștefan-Sebastian Maței mentions in *Geniul artistic: Nietzsche și problema creației artistice (Artistic Genius: Nietzsche and the issue of artistic creation)*, by relying on intuition. He confirms what was said above, by respecting and listening to both his aesthetic sense, by embodying his creative essence through deeds that echoed his *taste* and intuition: *I feel that this is the destiny that I accept, that will never change.*

In sub-chapter **XI.2. The dramatic realism of Van Gogh's characters**, we highlighted the way in which Vincent Van Gogh renders his characters in his works, with the serious expressions, with their faces streaked with the toil when they work the land. In terms of the aesthetic and moral value of these works, we can state that Van Gogh is the one who buries his societies' obsolete ideas by bringing through his work new life to the entire artistic phenomenon.

Van Gogh's characters were immortalized in a realistic perspective, without being embellished, with chapped hands and wrinkled faces, with eye circles of tiredness, burdened with worry and trouble. Out of his love for his more unfortunate neighbours, who he wanted to serve as shepherd or preacher, Van Gogh felt more and more acutely the need *to draw only figures for a while*, as he confesses to his brother in a letter. This was his way of showing love to those people and to serve them, to show them how important they are, by choosing to be like them in their harsh reality, full of imperfections and at the same time real, a trenchant expression affected by difficulties. The faces of the peasants betray a dramatic realism, as though they lack a certain sensitivity, with exaggerated features to emphasize the hard lives they live. In order to render them, Van Gogh was aware that you should not paint the peasants as if you were one of their own, *but to think like*

them. As if you could not be anything else than what you are. I quoted from his letters to Theo.

In subchapter **XI.3** entitled **The point, the line, the stain - stylistic expressions**, clearly influenced by the confluence of styles and artistic trends with which he came into contact in the period of creative activity, Vincent van Gogh will make a synthesis of styles and philosophical ideas whose outcome announced a new artistic trend named Expressionism, a trend that shocked through the dramatic realism of the characters, through the expressivity of lines, shapes and chromatics used for the purposes of sending messages and their painfully sincere stories. Van Gogh and his work will come after the excitement and emotions of the romantics that were popular in the beginning of the nineteenth century, a century of positive or negative reactions to the artistic movements regarded as models. He will be contemporary with a series of art movements such as Realism, Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, trends that have strolled successively or simultaneously through the European art, influencing to a lesser or greater degree the chromatic palette, the manner of working and also his artistic credo, but this didn't change his the decision to be truthful to the product of his creation. At Van Gogh, the elements of the visual language are interwoven. Thus, the point is supported by the line, the line by the stain and the stain by the colour.

In subchapter **XI.4**, in which we analyzed **the colour in the work of Vincent van Gogh**, we demonstrated that in Van Gogh's work, the colour does not have a secondary role, but it both prevails and strikes. About the conditioning of the relationship between the light and colour and the way in which they contribute to the shaping of the form, I quoted Valentin Sava, who highlights the role of light and colour in creating the visual composition. *Conditioned from one another, light and colour contributed either at the emphasizing of the form or to its*

blurring.¹⁴ In this subchapter we mentioned only the chromatic valences of his palette and the way in which they evolve and succeed in the expressionist work of Van Gogh in every stage of Van Gogh's genius creation.

During the period of the denial of the genius (1862-1880), we notice the total absence of colour, Van Gogh preferring the pencil and charcoal. This period, symbolically referred to as the period of chromatic repression, characterized by the complete absence of representations translated into colour, coincides with the period of the denial of the artistic genius, during which Van Gogh refused to accept his artistic vocation.

The period of the acceptance of the genius (1881-1885) is characterized by mild colours, subservient to reality, but which have an unquestionable value, revealing a professional keen to improve.

The period of the acknowledgment of the genius (1885-1888), is a period during which a leap will be made from the imitative stage to the non-imitative one through which he will prove his value. He accomplished his work both thematically, having a content that was different from the rest, a plastic expressiveness in the achieving of the form, a variety and expressiveness of line and colour, and also through the explosion of tones and styles. His works go through a period of chromatic perfection.

About colour during the period of acknowledgment of the genius (1888-1889) one can say that for this period in which Van Gogh stops denying his genius, the ease with which the line takes the place of

¹⁴Valentin Sava, *Perenitatea problemei luminii în pictură*, paper presented at the scientific communication sessions of the "Aesthetic and artistic creativity" Research Center, University of Arts "George Enescu", Iasi, Faculty of Fine Arts, Decorative Arts and Design, Artes Publishing House, Iași, 2002, p. 82

the colour stain is remarkable. Also the chromatic verve is slightly blurred, the roar of yellow turned into a background noise, the purity of colours dimmed.

Subchapter **XI.5 – The studied books, determining factor in the shaping of the genius**, intends to be an x-ray of how the culture reflected in his works. The passion of Van Gogh's genius took shape and has strengthened on the background of knowledge and the desire of self-improvement, assertion sustained by the two tendencies for self-definition found through art and literature. Just as he was burned by the fire of creation, sometimes finishing painting a canvas in one day, he read the books with a thirst for knowledge, as soon as he had them in his possession.

The books read by him were from different fields of knowledge: history, religion, art, with growing interest for anatomy and perspective, for psychology, phrenology and literature for the soul, where he found mirrored his artistic credo as well as his emotional unfulfillments. During 1872-1890, over a period of 18 years, he wrote 652 letters that are a clear evidence of his preoccupations and his attempts of self-shaping while searching for himself as an individual.

Certainly, he read much more than he mentioned in his writings, because the letters show only fragments of the artist's activities. From the period in which he stayed in Paris there are no writings left to attest his preoccupations, but in order to build an informed opinion, the titles extracted from the two volumes of letters, from which it is clear not only the passion for reading, but also the effect that these books had on the creative genius, are sufficient. Therefore, a man who was considered insane by his contemporaries was a man of impressive culture. The books that were part of the basis of his education have helped in shaping his controversial personality, capable of unique, original manifestations, which speak of the existence of a creative genius.

In sub-chapter **XI.6 Van Gogh's spiritual testament** we showed that the letters that remained from him as well as his paintings speak to us about a type of person who can have intuitive perceptions, if we are guided by the extremely intense emotional sensations of which he speaks to his brother, as well as to the entire world. It was found, especially in the case of artists, that the power of emotion surpasses the ordinary mind, allowing the manifestation of the super-consciousness. And this manifestation may take the form of intuitive perception.

The artist's foretelling or intuition regarding his end, determined him to do certain things in the last months of life. This extrasensory perception is manifested more strongly in persons with increased sensitivity and Van Gogh was an extremely sensitive person. We pointed out the view of Carl Gustav Jung - founder of the analytical psychology regarding the intuition, which he defines as being the highest form of creative thinking. Rudolf Steiner states that *that kind of knowledge that leads to the most intimate nature of beings is achieved in intuition*. Intuition or premonition represents the power to know your soul beyond the world of senses and thoughts. And Van Gogh knew himself. He always knew what he really wanted, but complied with the pre-existent reality. He wanted to develop a distinct personality, but as the second son, his parents gave him the name of his older dead brother, thus living in the shadow of this guilt. He wanted to become an artist, but he started to follow the path chosen by his father, who taught him the rigors of the church and prevented him from following his intuition. He wanted to love and to be loved, but he had to suppress these desires because of the mentality of the society in which he lived and to which he obeyed by respecting the decisions of his father that restricted his feelings. He would have liked to start a new life, with all that it entails, but he couldn't bear the thought that he will not have the means to subsist, since he didn't sell his work and given that Theo had family obligations and could no longer take care of him. Somewhere inside him he knew that, under these conditions, there is only one solution. So

he hurried to do everything that was to be done. He rewarded and loved all those who accepted and supported him, knowing he was a capricious and difficult person: he painted Dr. Gachet, his daughter, he promises to Gauguin, in the letters he sends, to give him a gift: *the Arlésienne's portrait, which was based strictly on your drawing and is to your liking.*

This obscure world that Van Gogh idealizes in colour and feeling would quickly notice his loss and especially his genius. Van Gogh left behind, beyond the value of his works, letters - evidence of his tormented life - and a series of regrets expressed in writing or in colour. And his unconscious manifested its form of intelligence, by sensing the imminent end: *I rather fear that toward say forty - or rather say nothing - I declare I know nothing, absolutely nothing as to what turn this may take. (...) As for me, I can't go on. I am at the end of my patience, my dear brother; I can't stand any more - I must make a change, even a desperate one*¹⁵.

In subchapter XI.7 entitled **The confession of van Gogh the artist and the man we analyzed the ideas drawn from the works he completed in the last two months of his life: The Town Hall at Auvers, Young Man with Cornflower, Wheat Field with Crows, the Mask series, in which the artist decides to cry out the sacrament of his confession to the entire world to liberate himself in these last works.** The man kneeling down is the radiography of his state of helplessness to further bear the suffocating state of things. Loneliness and emotional unfulfillment overwhelmed him and he was knelt down, the revolt he felt reflects in his immortalized masterpiece. Revealing his heart through art is a way of releasing the accumulated frustrations. In this regard, Marius Dumitrescu states: *The work, the creative activity in art are for Freud only forms of transfer of sexual or aggressive energy,*

¹⁵ Ibidem , p. 388

*the intimate engine of the human psyche that no one is willing to admit it*³⁷¹.

The interpretation of this series of masks cannot be something else, at this end, than his last confession. The painter sensed that his end is near, although he wanted to change the condition in which he was (ill, with his face cut, without money, rejected by friends, society and especially alone and unloved by a woman). He sensed that his journey will end very soon, therefore he bid farewell in his characteristic manner. If in **Mask 1**, Van Gogh- the artist identified himself with the pharaoh, a part of his self, who looks at the same time determined and indulgent at Van Gogh the man, the mortal, in **Mask 2**, the artist melded with Van Gogh the man in the face of the pharaoh, expressing his sorrow towards the woman who didn't love him, rendering her with her head slightly bowed to one side, giving the impression of a person who assumes the criticism, **Mask 3**. This represents the third stage in which the man and the artist Van Gogh, on his final journey, separates from the loved ones. The mummy's eyes appear as if in tears, the sad smile expresses the sorrow of Vincent for what he loved. **Mask 4**. This expression of the pharaoh rendered by Van Gogh seems to be of a man at peace with himself, ready to face death. And the **Mask 5**, his last sketch, seems to be the last stage in which the artist, who passed away, looks with a superior gaze to what he left behind, for he died aware of the artistic value of his work, aware of the power of his genius.

In **Conclusion**, we presented an overview on the theme proposed for research. The characteristics of this personality are particular to those of creative genius, because they amaze through the increased sensitivity, talent and the genius of work. Vincent van Gogh has

³⁷¹ Marius Dumitrescu, *Teoria pulsionilor în perspectivă freudiană*, Romanian Academy, Iasi Branch, „Gh. Zane”, Economic and Social Research Institute, Symposium, Journal of Social and Humanistic Sciences, Volume VIII, Issue 1 (15), 2010, p. 152

imposed his aesthetic taste by anticipating the course of fine arts in time. Through his work, Vincent would bring a new breath to society. The overall features, common to men of genius are, in conclusion: sensitivity, creativity, imagination, hard work, desire for self-improvement. What differs from one another are the fields in which they are professing, life experiences and genetic inheritance, which influence to a lesser or a greater extent the personality of the genius.

We mentioned in the chapter dedicated to this primordial concept of the quality of genius that both aestheticians and researchers in the field of art psychology accepted, with no exception, that in the process of creation, the way in which the creator selects aspects from his close proximity is achieved differently by the artists.

Van Gogh is a special case in the history of art, in which the human genius deliberately manifests in art, in a short period of time, proving the value of his talent, of his dramatic existence and of his tumult and uneasiness which accompanied the restless spirit of the painter, whereas his creation reached the madness of genius through the ferment of his creative genius.

The artist had a late debut, as it was said. For 18 years (1862-1880) he oscillated in choosing his vocation, because his will, rationality and his feelings embraced different things. The remaining time in which the artist accepts, acknowledges and confirms his genius span over 10 years, during which Van Gogh created more than 2,000 works, about 900 paintings and 1,100 drawings. An impressive qualitative and quantitative work in which he did not betray his artistic credo, did not renounce at his core values and principles in which firmly believed.

The genius is formed through perseverance, through the desire for self-improvement. And Van Gogh faithfully fulfilled this rule. **A** and **T** are concepts included in **G**, and Van Gogh was gifted with **A**

(aptitudes), and **T** (talent), and with a strong desire to carry out his dream, which led to the genius of his creation. He pursued in depth the essence of the human being, developing it and exaggerating it in order to emphasize its importance. The man painted by Van Gogh, as he was perceived, which he loved and immortalized was a sad man, tormented by worries, needs, by poverty, with a pure and hardworking soul, always sentenced to pain.

Van Gogh's genius was recognized and thus lives over time, because he imposed his taste through his work, his sole aim being the perfection of the creative work. He understood art as a *way of living* by giving to his life *the form of art*. Vincent Van Gogh gave to the *fundamental ethical and aesthetic values the good and the beautiful*, the highest forms in a *scenario where the art of living is subordinated to the creative life that remains under the sign of physical and moral self-perfection, generosity and solidarity*¹⁶.

¹⁶ Petru Bejan, *Amurgul frumosului*, Fundației Academice Axis Publishing House, Iași, 2012, p. 99