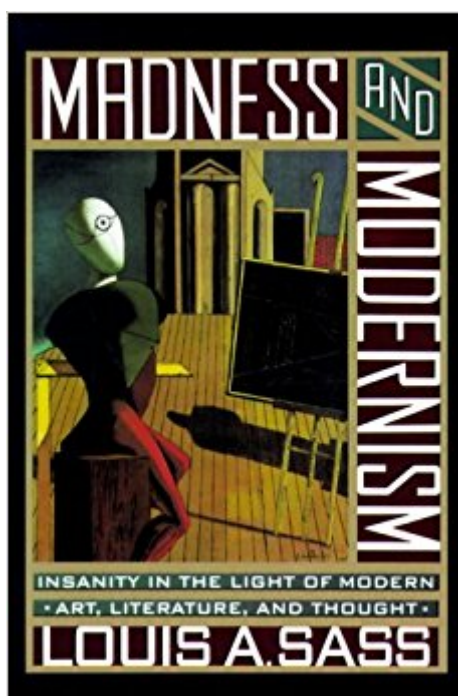


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Madness And Modernism: Insanity In The Light Of Modern Art, Literature, And Thought



Synopsis

The similarities between madness and modernism are striking: defiance of authority, nihilism, extreme relativism, distortions of time, strange transformations of self, and much more. In this book, Louis Sass, a clinical psychologist, offers a new vision of schizophrenia, comparing it with the works of such artists and writers as Kafka, Beckett, and Duchamp and philosophers including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida. It provides a portrait of the world of the madman, along with a commentary on modernist and postmodernist culture.

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Customer Reviews

Does the schizophrenic's chaotic inner world resemble modern art and literature? Sass, a clinical psychologist and Rutgers professor, argues that schizophrenia and modernism display striking affinities: fragmentation, defiance of authority, multiple viewpoints, self-referentiality and rejection of the external world in favor of an omnipotent self or, alternately, a total loss of self. While the parallels he draws often seem superficial, there is much to ponder in Sass's notion that schizophrenia's core traits are exaggerations of tendencies fostered by our culture. This dense, startling work examines schizophrenic inauthenticity in light of the thought of Nietzsche, that champion of self-invention and the mask. Sass analyzes Kafka's introversion, Baudelaire's esthetics of disdain, Alfred Jarry's robotlike persona and the loss of self suffered by Antonin Artaud, a diagnosed schizophrenic. Further, he likens schizophrenics' deviant language to the prose of Rimbaud, Sartre, Beckett and Barthes. Photos. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print

or unavailable edition of this title.

In this fascinating book...Sass sets out in largely uncharted directions...Displaying an impressive command of philosophical, literary and clinical literature on subjects of enormous complexity...[he] arrives at some highly original and profoundly disquieting insights. (Brigitte Berger New York Times Book Review) This marvelous book...provides the richest description of the schizophrenic's inner world since R. D. Laing's deservedly classic *The Divided Self*...An inspired documentation of the interrelationships of modernism, schizophrenia, and our current cultural life. (Richard Restak, M.D. Washington Post Book World) A monumental, exciting, and troubling book, a new landmark in the study of the modern era. (Kenneth Baker San Francisco Chronicle) Wholly fascinating...*Madness and Modernism* is rooted in a thorough knowledge of the psychological literature, but [Sass] also draws on an extensive acquaintance with 19th and 20th-century art, literature and philosophy...Powerful, lucid and original...Should revolutionise our thinking about the workings of the human mind. (Iain McGilchrist London Review of Books) [A] brilliant study...An important contribution, not only to our understanding of schizophrenia but also to our comprehension of the nature of mental illness in general. (Contemporary Psychology)

This book has a wonderful thesis wherein much modern literature is associated with traits of schizophrenia. Reading the mentioned literature is a lot of fun. In addition to recognizing the relationships to Sass's text the books are enjoyable in and of themselves.

I read this book almost two decades ago and I just read it again. This is a book that deserves several readings. Sass has given us analogies to the understanding of madness that we can, for once, actually look at...opening up a new road to understanding "modern art" and chronic mental illness. Since madness is always a broken, puzzling departure from what is considered "normal

...if you can endure the clinical tech talk, but it does make a connection between the destruction of art and the mental illness of those who are destroying it.

This is one of my favorite books. As a work on psychological styles and the nature of rationality, I rank it right up with *The Greeks and the Irrational*, by E.R. Dodds. The basic argument is that madness is not irrationality, but extreme and excessive rationality, and that the totalizing reasoning of madness shows parallels to the totalizing reasoning of philosophical, artistic, and literary

modernism. This is an intriguing view in its own right, and it is a valuable response to the romanticization of madness by those such as Norman O. Brown, who declared that "schizophrenia is the dissolution of the false boundaries of self." I do have some reservations about this fascinating argument. First, I don't think Sass ever makes clear the nature of the connection between madness and modernism. Does he see the former as caused by the latter? Are both manifestations of the organization of an industrial society? Second, Sass doesn't seem to recognize that he is actually working within a well-established intellectual tradition. The psychological and aesthetic literature on decadence in the late nineteenth century, as exemplified by Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, saw both madness and avant-garde artistic expression as products of hypertrophy of the intellect. Third, there may be important differences between the deterministic world of madness and that of modernism. Specifically, the rationality of modernity can be seen as connecting causes and effects on a single surface of reality that neither reflects nor penetrates any other dimension. Madness, on the other hand, seems to work within a rationality of depth, giving thoughts and occurrences a metaphysical resonance.

Louis Sass has written a fascinating comparison of modernism and schizophrenia and related disorders -- I couldn't put this book down. Sass' knowledge of modern art and literature, coupled with his experience as a clinical psychologist and professor at Rutgers, makes this book. It's extremely well-written -- the language is complex, but by no means stilted and academic for the sake of being academic. Sass' words will catch you and draw you through fascinating discussions about identity, language, visual representation, and much more. He presents balanced observations and makes appropriate connections -- he doesn't romanticize schizophrenia. One story he relays expresses this perfectly (pardon my paraphrasing): James Joyce discussed the creative similarities between him and his daughter, a schizophrenic, with Carl Jung. Jung described the difference between Joyce's creativity and his daughter's seeming creativity by saying that the difference was that Joyce was diving down into the depths while his daughter was falling. This is a perfect analogy to put Sass' book into perspective. If you have any interest in issues of identity, psychology, and modern culture, you will want to read this book.

With an interpretation so rigorous and self-critical that it is almost cruel, Sass teases out the threads of experience joining madness to modernism. Unlike some who do this sort of work, Sass is well-versed not only in psychology and psychiatry but also in contemporary intellectual discourse, and makes sophisticated use of the work of figures such as Foucault and de Man in his reading. He

argues provocatively, using literary, artistic, and autobiographical works as well as empirical data, that schizophrenia is not (as many say) a form of Dionysian primitivity but rather a kind of violent entanglement in the paradoxes of hyperconsciousness. This book is absolutely a must read for anyone interested in schizophrenia or in modernism. Luckily, Sass is a fine writer and makes the book quite an enjoyable read as well.

This book really floored me at first. After getting into it, I kept asking 'why doesn't he make the connection?' Why is he holding back? It's been a while since I browse/read it, but if I remember, he discusses schizophrenia as having some aspects of supra-normal cognition so that it is not a purely regressive disorder. This would seem to tie in so neatly to Nietzsche's own catastrophic breakdown, as an example of the wannabe-Overman losing his balance on the tightrope over the abyss between man and the overman. If I remember right, Sass doesn't pursue this connection. I also thought his thesis could have benefitted greatly from studies of Indian religious extremes, such as 'Masts' and Kundalini. Both forms of self-induced permanent altered consciousness. Related also, perhaps, to the Berserker phenomena described in 'Achilles in Vietnam'. Anyway, a fascinating and frustrating book, the author is so thoroughly anal about noting innumerable references and sources, yet misses the BIG PEEKSHUR. sigh.

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