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Psychiatry in pictures

Images of recovery: the shovel

Andrea Barbieri 

G is a man in his 80s who lives in the farmhouse where he was born. This is in the countryside of Piedmont, Italy. He returned home in the 1990s, after the asylum where he had spent many years closed down owing to the 'Basaglia Law'. During my last visit to his house, a shovel leaning against the wall of his barn caught my attention. The worn out blade and the new wooden handle were kept together by a rusted wire and a piece of iron. Although not functional, this shovel allows us to grasp G's vision of the world. It reveals a tendency to always repair, a disposition that is part of G's family history and the peasant tradition. Repeating gestures observed since childhood provided G with security and continuity. The purpose is not instrumental, but rather symbolic and ontological. The broken shovel constitutes something that needs to be transformed. I feel that I just caught a glimpse of this man – and I photograph his shovel. G tells me: '*veni torna*' (in vernacular: 'come back'), then he disappears into the fields.



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