Art Beyond the Norms: Art of the Insane, Art Brut, and the Avant-Garde From Prinzhorn to Dubuffet (1922-1949)

Art Beyond the Norms: Art of the Insane, Art Brut, and the Avant-Garde from Prinzhorn to Dubuffet (1922-1949)

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Abstract

From the early 1920s to the late 1940s, in a time of dramatic socio-historical upheavals, avant-garde movements challenged the boundaries of the "normal" and the "pathological", of "art" and "non-art", as part of a program of social and institutional critique. This dissertation focuses on one aspect of this broader phenomenon: the notions of "art of the insane" and "art brut" (today often referred to as "outsider art") as specific instantiations of an elusive "elsewhere" for which avant-garde artists and writers seem to have been consistently longing, from Hans Prinzhorn's *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) to Jean Dubuffet's *Art Brut Preferred to Cultural Arts* (1949).

I argue that while this "elsewhere" was consistently described as being located outside of the field of artistic production and validation, this discursive object acted mostly as a reflective surface, shaped by the evolution of the esthetic and socio-political priorities of avant-garde movements such as German Expressionism, French Surrealism, and *art informel*.

It was traversed by conflicting currents and ideologies, the locus of various attempts at redefining the role of the artist, the nature of the work of art, and the mechanisms of visual and verbal expression. The following study also sheds light on the limits and problematic aspects of such attempts, especially those pertaining to the exoticizing or essentializing tendencies of avant-garde primitivism.

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Introduction: The Many Lives of Joseph Wagenbach

In 2006, the Toronto art world was rocked by a stunning revelation. The city's little-known but remarkably diligent Municipal Archives Assessment Unit had stumbled upon a treasure trove of materials that they were now revealing to the public: the hundreds of bizarre, but highly compelling drawings and sculptures amassed throughout his life by the recluse German artist Joseph Wagenbach in his otherwise unremarkable home at 105, Robinson Street. Works by Wagenbach had never been previously exhibited or even shown to art connoisseurs; but the viewers who were allowed into Wagenbach's now vacant house were immediately aware of the significance of this discovery. Sprawled across the rooms as part of an immersive sculptural project, the whimsical, vibrantly expressive sculptures made of earth, cement, wax, and a variety of found materials irresistibly evoked Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, while the compelling figure of a reclusive artist who spent his life in complete isolation, lost in an idiosyncratic creative pursuit far from the glitz and glamour of the art market, called to mind the outsider artist Henry Darger. Like Wagenbach's works, Darger's epic cycle *In the Realms of the Unreal* had been created over decades in a small apartment, unbeknownst of even Darger's neighbors. It included hundreds of colorful, fiercely original large-scale drawings on paper and a 15,145-page manuscript detailing the adventures of the Vivian girls in their fight against evil forces.[1] When Darger was forced to leave his apartment to receive intensive care, his work would probably have ended up in a

[1] John MacGregor, *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*. New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002.

landfill, if his landlords Nathan and Kyoko Lerner hadn't understood its value and intervened to preserve it.

The discovery of Joseph Wagenbach's oeuvre thus promised to be of a similar caliber; and it undoubtedly would have been, had the artist ever existed. Causing much outrage among the Toronto residents, journalists, and art critics who had whole-heartedly embraced the revelation of this new artistic luminary, it emerged that Joseph Wagenbach, his boldly expressive work, and even the ever-so-diligent Municipal Archives Assessment Unit were the brainchild of the German conceptual artist Iris Häussler.[2] Even though Häussler had created similar works in the past, "Joseph Wagenbach" was her most intricate and layered installation to date. Beyond the daunting task of recreating in a superficially convincing way an entire lived environment and a body of work extending over several decades, one of the boldest choices of the installation and accompanying performance by the "archivist" (often impersonated by Iris Häussler herself) was not to reveal itself for what it was: an elaborate hoax. Through this hoax, and the shock effect of the ultimate revelation of the non-existence of Wagenbach, Häussler was hoping to encourage us to reflect upon a number of unaddressed prejudices that tend to lie behind the reception of the work of artistic "outsiders", linking the esthetic value of their production to narratives of marginalization, isolation, or mental disorders.[3]

These prejudices seem to reflect a longing for a different kind of artistic expression, for a near-utopian locus, the coordinates of which would point to an ever-elusive "elsewhere", the desert

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[2] Drea Carson, "Inside the Outsider's Mind: Iris Häussler's 'The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach'." *Border Crossings* Issue 102, Vol. 26, Nb.2, May 2007, pp. 64-70.

[3] Monica Kjellman-Chapin (2009) "Fake Identity, Real Work: Authenticity, Autofiction, and Outsider Art", *SPECS journal of art and culture*: Vol. 2 , Article 51. (2009), online resource: https://scholarship.rollins.edu/specs/vol2/iss1/51 Accessed on August 1st, 2018.

island of a 105, Robinson Street of the mind that would remain unambiguously outside of the usual circuits of art production, validation, and consumption. The ultimate irony is that, of course, the untainted, deeper register of reality represented by the artistic outsider might itself turn out to be yet another mirage, "the shadow of the avant-garde", to use a term coined by the German curator and art historian Kasper König.[4] The fiction, originating from deep within the art world, of a more authentic "outside"—mythical point of origin, anti-institutional counterpoint, or model for future artistic endeavors—that would ultimately act as a convenient reflective surface, endlessly appropriated and shaped according to the esthetic or ideological priorities of the day.

The Wagenbachs of this world thus simply cannot be left to their own devices: as concretely and symbolically isolated as they might be, they often unwittingly serve a key function within the art world at large, to the extent that the meaning of their own artistic projects, if not their very existence, might turn out to be immaterial to the role they are required to play.

If such "outsiders" didn't already exist, avant-garde artists would have gladly invented them. As a matter of fact, they did: the strange case of Joseph Wagenbach has a number of precedents among the historical avant-garde. In 1924, a vibrant homage to the unbridled creativity of the mentally ill was published in the Paris-based avant-garde literary journal *Feuilles libres* by the French surrealist Paul Éluard.[5] It featured a manifesto, and numerous examples of poems and drawings produced by mentally ill patients in a Polish psychiatric hospital. But the title of the article, "The Genius Without Mirror", seemed to gesture at several layers of irony: beyond the apparent meaning, referring to the miraculous ability to observe one's psychic mechanism

[4] Kasper König and Falk Wolf (eds.): *The Shadow of the Avant-Garde*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2015.
[5] Paul Éluard [Robert Desnos], "Le Génie sans miroir", in: *Feuilles libres*, Issue 35, January-February 1924, pp.301-18. Republished in Paul Éluard, Œuvres Complètes, Vol. 1, pp.785-792. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

directly, as if looking at oneself "without a mirror", it was also hinting at the fact that the article was using the barely disguised figures of "mad" creators to hold up a mirror to prominent members of the avant-garde.

The touching story of a little-known mentally ill female poet from Poland, Anne-Ilde Salon, whose poem was followed by a flattering and obviously parodic close reading, was entirely fictional: the name itself was an inside joke, the anagram of the poet and woman of letters Anna de Noailles. So were all the other names mentioned in the article: "Joana Tucce" for Jean Cocteau, "Mona Dreiguer" for Raymond Radiguet, etc.[6] Stylistically, the anagram is not too far from the palindrome: in Desnos' disorienting hall of mirrors, key players of the avant-garde were half-jokingly invited to peer at their own reflection in the deforming mirror of mental illness, offering a glimpse of their fantasized personas transposed into the enigmatic idiom of the unconscious and the surreal.

Adding insult to injury, the text itself, although published under the name of Paul Éluard, had in fact been written by fellow Surrealist Robert Desnos, who has also created nearly all of the drawings of mentally ill patients reproduced in the magazine as "authentic" documentation: the author himself, though he might appear in disguise, seemed to self-identify with a "mad creator". In spite its multiple layers of parody and irony, this hoax was meant to deliver a message that seems crucial to the surrealists' experiments with the unconscious, of which Desnos was one of the boldest practitioners:

> Open your eyes, I beseech you, on those virgin landscapes [of madness]! Accept as a postulate the principle of absolute freedom and recognize, as I do, that the worlds inhabited by the insane have no equivalent today.[7]

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[6] As mentioned in the footnotes of the critical edition of the text (Éluard, op. cit, p.1252), these various anagrams are deciphered in the following article: [Anonymous], "On dit que…" [rubric], in: *Almanach des lettres françaises et étrangères*, April 29th, 1924, p.113.

[7] "Ouvrez les yeux, je vous en prie, sur les paysages vierges [de la folie] ! Acceptez comme un postulat le principe de la liberté absolue et reconnaissez, avec moi, que le monde où vivent les

In other words, "The Genius Without Mirror" was a powerful manifesto wrapped in a hoax: demonstrating that, if necessary, the avant-garde could invent its "others" as a mere reflection of itself without having to worry about the accuracy of these others' portrayal, or indeed about their actual existence.

In his book *Rules of Art*, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offered an insightful description of the ways in which artistic "outsiders" such as the self-taught French artist Henri Rousseau were, in fact, *created* creators [*créateur créature*], whose reception was shaped and conditioned by the preoccupations of key players of what he called the artistic "field" [*champ*].[8] For Bourdieu, the notion of art is inherently linked to the broad network of institutions, journals, artists, art critics, etc. that ultimately decide on a work or an artist's legitimacy. Furthermore, due to the all-encompassing nature of this "field"[9], it also dictates the formal and thematic characteristics of any work of art: for Bourdieu, being engaged in any artistic activity necessarily requires an individual choice that determines the work's position vis-à-vis the "field". This "field" is inescapable: even attempting to rebel against the main actors and institutions that constitute it at any given time still amounts to a personal positioning *within* this field. Given the totalizing nature of his sociological analysis of artistic creation, reception, and legitimation, it goes without

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fous n'a pas d'équivalent à notre époque." Robert Desnos, "Le Génie sans miroir" [1924], in Paul Éluard, *Œuvres complètes*, I: Paris, Gallimard, 1968, p.792.

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire.* Paris : Seuil, 1992, pp.317-8

[9] The concept of "field" plays a major role in Bourdieu's sociological writings. It designates an ensemble of institutions and individuals forming an extensive network that partly abides by its own rules. Using a methodology borrow from structuralism and previously applied mostly to language or mythology, Bourdieu combines it with a Marxian view of capital as a system of power relationships in order to offer a theory of several kinds of "capitals" or "fields" (economic, but also artistic, intellectual, or literary) that remain interconnected and interdependent while partly abiding by their own rules. For a comprehensive discussion of Bourdieu's notion of field and the way it relates to Marxist political economy and structuralism, and is partly a reaction against sociological typologies, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Séminaires sur le concept de champ, 1972-1975", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Issue 200, Paris: Seuil, May 2013.

saying that for Bourdieu, the notion of an artistic "elsewhere"—that is, of a mirror image of the avant-garde that would be somehow situated completely outside of the artistic "field"—necessarily amounts to a theoretical impossibility. If "the field" is synonymous with any kind of artistic activity, it has no "outside", and any claims to the contrary are little more than a mystification. Bourdieu has particularly harsh words for Henri Rousseau, whom he perceives as an inferior creator merely echoing the most conventional aspects of the "field"—not unlike his acerbic depiction of amateur photography in *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (1965)—and literally invented as a major artistic creator by savvy insiders like Picasso or Apollinaire. For Bourdieu, all so-called outsiders, from Henri Rousseau to schizophrenic painters like Adolf Wölfli, are necessarily a mere reflection of priorities and agendas originating from the heart of the artistic field: its immaterial, illusionary shadow.

Understandably, Bourdieu's definitive dismissal of the notion wasn't particularly well received among the partisans of one of the latest ideologies of an artistic "outside": Jean Dubuffet's "art brut", usually translated as "outsider art", the definition of which rests upon the assumption that it might be possible for a handful of creators to escape the strictures of the cultural norms of their time. Lucienne Peiry, for instance, in her magnum opus *L'art brut* (1995),[10] criticizes Bourdieu for what she perceives as the conventionality of the esthetics that his overly dogmatic definition of "the field" would ultimately lead him to deem legitimate.

My study will follow a different course: it will, in effect, be premised upon the working hypothesis that Bourdieu's insight is fundamentally correct. It will closely examine key works that attempt to describe this "elsewhere" – from Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill (*1922) to Jean

[10] Lucienne Peiry, *L'art brut*. Paris: Flammarion, 1995, p.7

Dubuffet's *Art Brut Preferred to Cultural Arts* (1949). These works seek to adumbrate a subject position that would lie outside of the dynamics and expectations of the artistic "field." But under the multiplicity of its metamorphoses in the dreams and aspirations of Expressionist, surrealist, or *informel* artists and writers, this Protean "elsewhere" invariably gives itself away for what it is: a self-portrait of the historical avant-garde.

However, the methodology of the present study diverges from Bourdieu's approach in at least one major way. First and foremost, Bourdieu's depiction of created creators [*créateurs créatures*] as a mere reflection of advanced elements from within the "field" of artistic production is premised upon the assumption that such mirror image can be easily dismissed as a fabrication. In traditional Enlightenment fashion, the demystifying acumen of Bourdieu's sociological inquiry is meant to dispel the benighted illusion of an impossible artistic "elsewhere": to a certain extent, this seems to be a mere reversal of the rhetoric of authenticity that lies at the heart of the ideology it purports to deconstruct. For the zealots of *outsider art*, the fact that a specific artistic production would somehow be able to situate itself outside of the artistic "field" is meant to endow it with a kind of ontological supplement, a heightened authenticity far superior to the artificiality of what Dubuffet dismissively called "cultural arts". Conversely, for Bourdieu, such mystification is necessarily devoid of ontological content and esthetic value, as a paltry, inauthentic fabrication. Bourdieu even goes so far as to compare the work of Henri Rousseau with the proverbial monkey that, when given a typewriter, eventually manages to produce the text of *The Iliad* after an infinite number of trials. For Bourdieu, the fact that the "naïve" productions of Rousseau were praised as the pinnacle of artistic expression by Wilhelm Uhde, Guillaume Apollinaire, or André Breton is nothing else than a stroke of luck: Henri Rousseau simply offered them the right reflective surface at the right time.

I would contend, however, that it might be more productive to leave aside such questions of (in)authenticity when attempting to describe the inner workings of this "shadow of the avant-garde". The constructed, reflective nature of this utopian "elsewhere" does not necessarily mean that it does not constitute a worthwhile object of study. Quite the opposite: as the avant-garde repeatedly confronted itself with its fantasized "other", it was mostly attempting to define itself, its esthetic priorities, and its socio-political agenda.[11]

My dissertation had to avoid three major pitfalls. The first one is a direct consequence of Bourdieu's notion of field, and has to do with the precise definition of the object of the present study. The utopian "elsewhere" in which a number of avant-garde artists attempted to find their own reflection is a relational notion. This is to say that it is defined by its (assumed) position vis à vis the artistic "field", rather than the provenance or formal characteristics of the works it is meant to designate. Accordingly, the identity of these artistic "outsiders" varied across time: they were primarily meant to encompass mentally ill patients in psychiatric institutions, but the so-called "art of the mentally ill" was occasionally lumped together with the automatic drawings produced by practicing psychics, the works of self-taught creators like Henri Rousseau and Ferdinand Cheval, or even traditional non-European art, all in the name of a primitivist paradigm according to which these various "others" were described as a paramount of artistic freedom, or a trace of a primeval expressive impulse that might lead back to the origins of art.

[11] The fact that the works of artistic "outsiders" were repeatedly appropriated and used as mere reflective surfaces to illustrate and promote avant-garde agendas does not necessarily imply that such works should be dismissed as irrelevant. On the contrary, it is a testament to the enduring qualities of the artistic expression of often marginalized, handicapped, or mentally ill figures that their works retained the ability to puzzle, irritate, or fascinate artists, critics, and historians alike. Their mere existence seems to take the shape of an open question, forcing us to reconsider received assumptions about what constitutes a work of art.

In other words, if these "outsiders" might structurally occupy a similar position in the esthetic theories of Hans Prinzhorn, André Breton, or Jean Dubuffet, each of these thinkers picked a different cast of characters. The fluidity of such associations and groupings poses a fundamental methodological problem. Prior studies have tended to privilege one particular grouping at the expense of the others, a view often premised on an uncritical sense of historical teleology. Prinzhorn's "artistry of the mentally ill" or Breton's surrealist primitivism are routinely described as being part of the notional "prehistory" of Jean Dubuffet's *art brut* (Lucienne Peiry, Michel Thévoz); the latter, in turn, has also been included in a long history of the "discovery of the art of the insane" (John MacGregor), even though Dubuffet's *brut* esthetics also include a number of self-taught artists who never had any dealings with psychiatric institutions.

Including all such groupings in a broader history of modernist primitivism (Colin Rhodes, Eva Geulen) seems justified, but exceeds the boundaries of the present study. It might run the risk of conflating strands of primitivist thought that are linked to very different historical dynamics: the geographically distant, exoticized "elsewhere" that was the object of colonial appropriation and exploitation, and the "elsewhere" that, for a variety of reasons (such as disability, illness, or lack of artistic training) was deemed to be outside of the field of artistic legitimation while occupying the same geographical coordinates as the artists, critics, and writers who were involved in producing those primitivist discourses. The distinction between both "elsewheres" isn't fundamentally clean-cut, but is rather a question of polarities and external influences. While the former largely echoes tropes of colonial adventurism found throughout the imperialist literature of the period, the latter is more closely in dialogue with the history of psychiatry.[12]

[12] There are, of course, numerous echoes between both blends of primitivism, as elements from the colonially-inflected discourses of anthropology and ethnography were repeatedly employed to characterize the mentally ill, while, conversely, diagnostic tools developed by psychiatric discourses were applied to described extra-European social structures. Sigmund Freud's *Totem*

An additional difficulty arose from the fact that one of the discourses that originates from the period in question, namely Jean Dubuffet's notion of "art brut", still informs a number of scholarly works and curatorial projects today. It is defended by a number of institutional actors including museums (Collection de l'art brut in Lausanne, Halle Saint-Pierre in Paris), foundations (Dubuffet Foundation, Paris), and art magazines (*Raw Vision*, *Elsewhere*). As I will attempt to argue in the following pages, discourses of "art brut" or "outsider art" rest upon a basic misunderstanding, taking this notion to represent a trans-historical category defined by a number of objective criteria, rather than the projection of a historically specific esthetic and ideological agenda upon an arbitrarily selected number of works. In other words, mistaking the accidental for the essential, the eminently "cultural" construct of Dubuffet's *brut* esthetics for a self-evident "natural" register of artistic creation. Such confusion constitutes what one could call "Dubuffet's trap": previous studies of "art brut" tend to subscribe to Dubuffet's agenda as a methodological prerequisite, without sufficiently interrogating the reasons that led Dubuffet to champion his *brut* esthetics as part of his broader critique of modern art.

I attempted to avoid such pitfalls by defining my object of study as the discursive category of the artistic "elsewhere" understood as a structural position within the esthetic theories of the historical avant-garde rather than describing it as the "discovery" (or inversely, the misrepresentation) of a previously existing phenomenon. This methodology is borrowed and

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and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics (1913) constitutes an exemplary conflation of both discourses, and was a major influence on Hans Prinzhorn and the French surrealists. We will mention a number of similar examples in the following pages, including the notable influence of French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality* (1922) or Scottish anthropologist's James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) on André Breton's understanding of the way in which the "art of the insane" reflects deeper mythical and psychoanalytical structures.

adapted from Foucault's early writings on madness. As demonstrated by Pierre Macherey, Foucault first attempted to oppose "mental illness" as a discursive artefact created by psychiatric institutions to the real-existing category of "madness" in his 1954 study *Mental Illness and Personality*.[13] But in the second version of the text, *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1962), Foucault retroactively integrated the analytical tools developed for his *History of Madness* (1961), by introducing a major change in his methodological approach. Instead of structuring his analysis around a binary opposition between the real and the artificial—i.e. between the trans-historical "personality" of the patient and "mental illness" as a historically determined diagnosis—Foucault decided to retrace the evolution of historical discourses, while evacuating the question of their referent. In the words of Pierre Macherey, "inquiring about the historical constitution of mental illness thus amounted to renouncing to look for the objective basis that would lie behind such discourse, of which it would be a mere manifestation."[14]

Accordingly, for the purposes of the present study, it seemed more productive to describe the historical evolution of a specific type of discursive configuration, while methodologically abandoning the question of its possible referent(s). As a matter of fact, the various artistic "outsiders" that we will evoke in these pages, such as August Natterer, Adolf Wölfli, Joseph Crépin, or Auguste Forestier, will appear in the guise of so many Joseph Wagenbachs, whose oeuvre and biographies might as well be a total fabrication. This is not to say that these works and artists are not worthy of our consideration: quite the opposite. In fact, I hope that a critical

[13] Pierre Macherey, "Aux sources de 'L'histoire de la folie': une rectification et ses limites", in : *Critique*, "Michel Foucault: du monde entier", n° 471-472, August-September 1986, pp. 753-774

[14] "Poser le problème de la constitution historique de la maladie mentale, c'est donc renoncer à chercher en arrière de celle-ci la base objective dont elle serait la manifestation. " Pierre Macherey, ibid.

analysis of the various layers of historical discourses that have determined their reception might allow for a better understanding of such works, one that would do away with at least some of the white noise of ideological projections such as the "raw", the "brut", the "visionary", etc.

Another pitfall that the present study had to avoid was that of merely cataloguing such projections in a doxographical accumulation that would lack internal cohesion precisely because of the Protean nature of its object. Narrowing down the study's geographic and chronological scope to France and Germany between the early 1920s and the late 1940s allowed for the emergence of a more specific narrative, even though one could cite numerous contemporary examples of similar configurations in different national and linguistic contexts, from the Soviet Yiddish writer Der Nister's *From My Estate* (1929) to Japanese novelist Yumeno Kyusaku's *Dogra Magra* (1935).[15]

Historically, a form of avant-garde primitivism that paid particular attention to the latest developments of psychiatry and to the textual and visual productions of the mentally ill (then usually referred to as the "art of the insane") first emerged in the German-speaking realm, pioneered by Expressionists such as Wieland Herzfelde and Georg Heym in the early 1910s, and continued by Dadaists such as Kurt Schwitters and Bauhaus members like Paul Klee in the late 1910s and early 1920s. This narrative was also fueled by the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as the work of the Heidelberg school of psychiatry (Karl Jaspers, Karl Wilmanns) who paid specific attention to the patients' "self-testimonies" [*Selbstzeugnisse*]. A member of the Heidelberg School and an art historian who largely shared the esthetic priorities of German

[15] Raphael Koenig, "The Mad Book: Der Nister as Unreliable Author in *From my Estate* (1929)", in: Mark H. Gelber, Sami Sjöberg (eds.), *Jewish Aspects in Avant-Garde: Between Rebellion and Revelation.* Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 207-226

Expressionism, Hans Prinzhorn stands at the crossroads of both movements, with his *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) thus serving as a logical point of departure for my study.

Only a couple of years later, in the mid-1920s, this movement reached the French literary world: French surrealism's sustained interest in the "art of the insane" as another *via regia* to the Freudian unconscious constitutes a highly significant milestone. A partial continuation of this surrealist approach, though motivated by a markedly different esthetic and ideological agenda, the early history of Jean Dubuffet's *art brut* in the late 1940s is also part of this history; so was the backlash against the avant-gardes' fascination for the "art of the insane", which constituted one of the major and relatively understudied aspects of Nazi discourses on "degenerate art" in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

As for the chronological extension of this dissertation, its boundaries are partly symbolic, corresponding to the major cultural events that constitute the publication of Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) on the one hand, and Jean Dubuffet's provocatively titled exhibition and accompanying manifesto *Art Brut Preferred to Cultural Arts* (1949) on the other. However, they also correspond to a historical moment when the "art of the insane" assumes a central position in the preoccupations of the French and German avant-garde. This specific historical dynamic follows principles that are akin to aspects of the "polysystems theory," elaborated by the Israeli literary scholar Itamar Even-Zohar. In his article "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem",[16] Even-Zohar posits that the "major" literatures of imperial powers such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, or Russia generally relegate translated literature to the margins of their respective literary "systems": only in periods of symbolic and artistic crisis, when

[16] Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem", in: *Poetics Today* Vol. 11, No. 1, Polysystem Studies, Spring, 1990, pp. 45-51

traditional esthetic values are considered to have lost their legitimacy, can translated literature occupy the center of such systems, as artists and writers are looking for alternative models that could provide a basis for a renegotiation of esthetic values. Without assuming that the "art of the insane" constitutes a form of artistic production that truly originates from "outside" of these systems—a point hotly contested by Bourdieu—this artistic production plays a similar role of structural counterpoint in France and Germany in the aftermath of the two world wars. The then recent horrors of each of these global conflicts seemed to compel avant-garde artists and writers to reject traditional symbolic orders and the range of esthetic values that were associated with them, and to embark upon a quest for new esthetic and ethical models. In so doing, such artists seemed to fulfill the dual mission of the avant-garde, linking formal innovation with a desire for broader socio-political changes.

The first chapter will offer an analysis of Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) as an answer to the broader crisis of the symbolic order that followed Germany's defeat in 1918 and the ensuing socio-political turmoil. It will attempt to describe Hans Prinzhorn's work as a point in which various artistic and philosophical trends of the Weimar period in Germany converge. These trends encompass an upsurge of a Nietzschean form of vitalism in life sciences and psychology, a quest for unbridled expressivity that privileged abstract rhythmicity over figuration, and a holistic understanding of the human mind attempting to link its inner mechanisms with broader external forces. This chapter also identifies Prinzhorn's purposeful use of the "art of the insane" as a form of "anti-art" intended to bring about a radical redefinition of received esthetic values as the most innovative aspect of his contribution. In other words, I argue that by placing marginalized artistic production into the center of esthetic inquiry, Prinzhorn opens up of the concept of art by focusing on its potential limits.

The second chapter retraces the trajectory of the conservative backlash against the avant-garde's interest in the "art of the insane" that constituted one of the major aspects of the "degenerate art" exhibitions from 1937 onwards. Given that this particular aspect of the avant-garde's esthetic program was used as a polemical weapon to disqualify its entire project as pathological, paying closer attention to Nazi discourses on the question, for instance to Carl Schneider's infamous essay "Degenerate Art and the Art of the Insane" (1939), allows us to better understand what is exactly at stake in this backlash. I argue that this backlash entails a defense of traditional binary systems of normativity in the name of a pseudoscientific "bio-positive" outlook, against the more inclusive view of mental illness promoted by the avant-garde.

The third chapter will focus on French surrealism's keen interest in the "art of the insane", by examining both the corpus of poetic, narrative, and theoretical texts produced on this topic by key members of the movement André Breton and Paul Éluard, and the concrete strategies mobilized by the movement to exhibit such works, especially within the representative 1936 *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects*. This chapter will attempt to establish that such interest was part of the broader movement of surrealist primitivism, in the context of which works produced by mentally ill patients were discussed and exhibited alongside traditional non-European artworks from Africa or Polynesia. They were equally taken to be concrete traces of a primitive stage of human evolution predating the separation between dreams and reality introduced by modern rationalism. In their writings and exhibitions, figures such as Breton or Éluard suggested a path towards the dialectical overcoming of such opposition that the surrealist movement hoped to bring about. The chapter also demonstrates that surrealism's relative indifference to the nature and provenance of these objects—which it appropriated to support its own esthetic and socio-political agenda—was explicitly formulated as a direct consequence of the theory and practice of

the found object, of which the surrealist reception of the "art of the insane" seems to be a specific instantiation. This, in turn, constitutes a contribution to the theory of the surrealist found object by focusing on one of its fundamental, but surprisingly understudied aspects: the fact that the provenance of an object is absolutely immaterial to its being "found".

The fourth and final chapter examines what I argue to be the anti-modern esthetic theory of Jean Dubuffet, whose *art brut* constitutes a partial continuation of surrealist primitivism while embracing a markedly different ideological agenda. Subsuming the preexisting corpus of the "art of the insane", largely inherited from the interwar avant-gardes, into a notion that rejects the Freudian unconscious and the surrealist quest for the surreal, Dubuffet seems to situates himself in a different set of intellectual traditions. He combines a praise of immanent corporeality, an emphasis on spontaneity and irrationalism, and a problematic mythicization of the soil as a locus of ethno-nationalist belonging. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that the ambiguities of Dubuffet's project led him to embrace an ultra-reactionary agenda that partially reenacts the binary logic of "degenerate" and "bio-positive" art, by relying on a Manichean opposition between the pathological artificiality of "culture" and the alleged authenticity and superior vitality of the *brut*.

By using methodologies drawn across comparative literature, art history, and the history of ideas, this dissertation demonstrates that the historical avant-garde's sustained interest in a utopian "elsewhere", of which the "art of the insane" was meant to offer a glimpse, was not a solely esthetic pursuit. It was intimately connected to a range of epistemological and socio-political issues related to the enforcement or contestation of systems of normativity. The French and German avant-garde could be broadly described as consistently rejecting binary oppositions between the "normal" and the "pathological" in order to advocate for a more inclusive view of

the place of mental illness in society. It seemed to be both driving these developments and reflecting them through visual and literary means. However, the following study equally sheds light on the limits and problematic aspects of such attempts, especially those pertaining to the exoticizing or essentializing tendencies of avant-garde primitivism.

The ambiguities of the avant-garde's engagement with the "art of the insane" call for a nuanced *sfumato* of interdisciplinary analysis rather than the flash of hagiographic pizzazz perpetuated by much existing scholarship on the subject and art institutions alike. This seems to be a necessary condition for reaching the main goal of the present study: understanding the extent to which artists and institutions in moments of historical crises renegotiated issues of normativity – and how these have in turn shaped our comprehension of these issues to this day.

Chapter 1: Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922)

1.0 Introduction

Guests who entered the small exhibition held at the house of the German art historian Wilhelm Fraenger in 1924 Heidelberg were in for a surprise: visual works produced by self-taught mentally ill patients in asylums were mounted on easels, an apparatus traditionally constituting one of the trappings of fine arts.[17] The exhibition had been curated by the young psychiatrist and esthetic philosopher Hans Prinzhorn,[18] as an extension of his study on *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, published two years prior. This symbolic displacement, granting an elevated status to visual productions that had hitherto been taken to be mere medical documents devoid of esthetic value, was a deliberate curatorial provocation in line with the editorial strategy of *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. The impeccable design, stylized typography, large format, and lavish illustrations of the book, obtained by Prinzhorn through a long process of negotiation with his editor, [19] were

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[17] Mirbach, Werner, *Psychologie und Psychotherapie im Leben und Werk Hans Prinzhorns (1886-1933)*. Beiträge Zur Geschichte Der Psychologie ; Bd. 20. Frankfurt Am Main: Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003, p.129.

[18] Prinzhorn organized a touring exhibition of the collection in several major German cities (often accompanied by public readings of the *BdG*), including Frankfurt (January 1921), Hannover (February 1921), Leipzig (September 1922), and Mannheim (1923), and nine other cities including Berlin in a second round of exhibitions between 1930 and 1933 (Brand-Claussen 1996, 31-35).

[19] This is apparent from Prinzhorn's correspondence with his publisher, partially reproduced in Heinz Sakowski's anthology *Dear Sir! Authors' Letters from the Springer Archive* [*Sehr geehrter Herr! Autorenbriefe aus dem Springer-Archiv*], Springer, 1982, 35-37. See for instance Hans Prinzhorn's letter from November 6th, 1921, in which he provides detailed instructions about the design of the book, noting that its layout would be significantly different from usual scientific monographies, which might shock other scientists in the field ["auch wenn eine leichte Schreckwirkung entsteht"] (op. cit., 36). Heinz Sakowski mentions that such detailed instructions on the part of the author are highly unusual: "No other author has expressed such specific wishes about the layout of his book in his correspondence with the [Springer] publishing house" ["In

highly unusual for what was originally meant to be a scientific monograph published by a medical doctor, and put it squarely in the category of the modernist *livre d'art*. As Prinzhorn himself noted, works that had previously been displayed in specialized psychiatric collections often resembling 18th-century "cabinets of curiosities" ["im Stile alter Raritätenkabinette"] (*BdG* 3) were deliberately launched into the orbit of the art world.

For the Swiss literature scholar and cultural historian Jean Starobinski, the importance of Prinzhorn's inaugural gesture should not be underestimated, as his provocative boldness provided an impetus for a sustained, tumultuous love affair between the art world and what came to be known as the "art of the insane":

> Prinzhorn's book constitutes a decisive historical threshold, the space in which a first encounter, or in other words a recognition takes place. On the one hand, the gaze of a doctor, a "universal" man who carries within him all the anxieties of the culture of his time. One the other, documents that have just freshly been gathered, originating from the lost continent of schizophrenia, whose outlines have just been sketched out by nosographers on the map of mental pathology. The result of this encounter is that these documents leave the other parts of the hospital file behind and go their own way: they are now receivable as works of art.[20]

In Starobinski's narrative, Prinzhorn's encounter with the "art of the insane" takes on a glamour rarely associated with scholarly endeavors: it is described as the beginning of a romance. This seems to be a direct allusion to Jean Rousset's *Their Eyes Met: Scenes of First Encounters in Novels* [*Leurs yeux se rencontrèrent: La scène de première vue dans le roman*],[21] an in-depth analysis of the literary

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vergleichbarer Weise hat kein Autor dem Verlag mit Gestaltungswünschen zugesetzt"] (ibid, 36). Prinzhorn even provided instructions about a specific typeface (ibid, 125).

[20] ." ["Le livre de Prinzhorn marque un seuil décisif. Il est le lieu d'une première rencontre, ou, si l'on préfère, d'une reconnaissance. D'une part, le regard du médecin, d'un homme 'universel' qui porte en lui les inquiétudes de la culture contemporaine. D'autre part, les documents qui commencent à se rassembler, issus de ce continent, la schizophrénie, dont les nosographes viennent de délimiter les contours sur la carte de la pathologie mentale. Ce qui résulte de la rencontre, c'est que ces documents faussent compagnie aux pièces du dossier hospitalier : ils sont recevables comme art."] (Starobinski 1984, VII).

[21] Jean Rousset, *Leurs yeux se rencontrèrent: La scène de première vue dans le roman.* Paris: José Corti, 1981.

topos of "love at first sight".[22] The notion of Prinzhorn amorously gazing into the works of mentally ill creators like Adolf Wölfli or Karl Brendel is undoubtedly entertaining. However, Starobinski, without further elaborating on this notion, appears to be hinting at one specific aspect of Rousset's narratological analysis: the link between encounter and recognition, or the fact that literary depictions of "first encounters" often deploy a rhetoric that paradoxically describes the unknown "beautiful stranger" as somehow already known. This narrative is often justified in a variety of ways, detailed by Rousset in the fifth chapter of his study: predestination, reunion of the two halves of Plato's hermaphrodite, or mesmeric sympathy (89-99). Crucially for our understanding of Prinzhorn, one could say that his encounter with the "art of the mentally ill" didn't introduce a fundamentally new element into the culture of Weimar Germany, but was rather a logical continuation of a longstanding interest in the complex relationship between madness and creativity on the part of the German avant-garde.

Without necessarily going as far as nineteenth-century German Romanticism's praise of the irrational as a way to bypass the impossibility of accessing the thing in itself [*noumenon*] theorized by Kant,[23] it should be remarked that madness played a key role in early German Expressionist prose and poetry, because it was perceived as a disruptive paradigm and the perfect antidote to bourgeois respectability. As German literary scholar Thomas Anz puts it in the afterword of his anthology *Imagining Madness : Expressionist Texts* [*Phantasien über Wahnsinn : Expressionistische Texte*]:[24]

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[22] Rousset's essay was published in 1981, only three years before Starobinski's preface: most of its readers would have immediately understood Starobinski's intention of "elevating" this encounter to the status of key literary scene.

[23] On this topic, see Manfred Frank, *'Unendliche Annäherung.' Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997

[24] Thomas Anz, *Phantasien über Den Wahnsinn: Expressionistische Texte*. Munich: C. Hanser, 1980.

The role of the madman in [German] Expressionism is to be the polar opposite to the figure of the hated bourgeois and its normalcy. Together with the ill, the criminals, prisoners, prostitutes, beggars, Jews, and artists, it is part of a series of types of social outsiders, with whom the literary avant-garde of the day identifies.[25]

Among the works present in Anz's anthology that best encapsulate the disruptive potential attributed to madness, Georg Heym's short story *The Madman* [*Der Irre*, 1913] might be one of the most violent ones. It describes a patient of an insane asylum let loose in an unnamed city, gratuitously smashing the skulls of small children, and wreaking havoc in a department store which he mistakes for a cathedral, a powerful if rather heavy-handed metaphor of symbolic disorientation in the emerging consumerist society. In a less gory fashion, Wieland Herzfelde's[26] essay "The Ethics of the Mentally Ill,"[27] published in 1914 shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, polemically claims that madness's radical break from reality is an expression of absolute freedom that should be emulated by the avant-garde while it was attempting to reject conventional esthetic and behavioral norms.

The avant-garde had tended to praise madness as an uncontrollable outbreak of unbridled freedom that had the capability to do away with both the stuffy respectability of the hated bourgeois and with the frustrating immovability of the Wilhelminian Empire. Such praise of the disruptive potential of madness took on a largely different coloration immediately after the war. Instead of being merely an antidote to an oppressive stability, individual madness was now seen as an apt reflection of the madness of the times, and of the irrational nature of a power

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[25] ["Der Irre fungiert im Expressionismus als Kontrasttyp zum verhaßten Bürger und seiner Normalität. Er bildet darin zusammen mit Kranken, Verbrechern, Gefangenen, Dirnen, Bettlern, Juden und Künstlern eine Beispielreihe von sozialen Außenseiter, mit der sich die damalige literarische Avantgarde identifiziert."; Anz 1983, 149].

[26] Wieland Herzfelde (or Herzfeld, 1896-1988), was a German publicist and left-wing activist, brother of Helmut Herzfeld, also known as John Heartfield.

[27] "Die Ethik der Geisteskranken", *Die Aktion* 4, 1914, 298-302

structure that had unleashed death and destruction on an unprecedented scale. For Dadaists like Kurt Schwitters, Max Ernst, or Hans Arp, making use of artistic and literary nonsense, often under the invocation of madness, amounted to fighting fire with fire, the sanctioned nonsense of a symbolic order run amok on the one hand with the provocative, demystifying irreverence of Dadaist nonsense on the other. This irreverence extended to the esthetic realm: according to the German poet and literary scholar Reinhardt Döhl, "for Arp and the other Dadaists, the bourgeois power structure and symbolic order had taken on a distinctly pathological dimension since the outbreak of the First World War: they saw [conventional] art as a kind of sanctioned nonsense, and war itself as madness."[28] It thus makes sense that a direct predecessor to Hans Prinzhorn's controversial display of works of mentally ill patients with all the trappings typically reserved to traditional fine arts would have been a Dada provocation. In November 1919, the "Group D" exhibition in Cologne, organized by the Cologne Dadaists such as Max Ernst, and Johannes Theodor Baargeld, featured a series of ready-mades and found materials (such as educational lithographs or even empty flower pots), but also, crucially, a series of enigmatic, non-professional "childish" drawings parodically described as the "Works of an unknown master of the beginning of the twentieth century."[29] According to a testimony given by Max Ernst, the

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[28] "Für Arp und die anderen Dadaisten hatte das bürgerliche Ordnungs- und Sinnsystem mit Kriegsbeginn eine nahezu pathologische Dimension angenommen. Als *sanktionierter Unsinn* erschien ihnen die Kunst, als *Wahnsinn* der Krieg."
Reinhard Döhl, "Narrenspiel und Maulwürfe oder vom Unsinn der Kunst gegen den Wahnsinn der Zeit", in: *Möglichkeiten, Umfang und Wurzeln experimenteller Literatur Kunst und Musik im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein Projekt*, [undated], online publication: https://www.netzliteratur.net/experiment/unsinn.htm Accessed on June 15th, 2017.

[29] On the Group D exhibition of 1919, see Jörgen Schäfer, *Dada Köln: Max Ernst, Hans Arp, Johannes Theodor Baargeld und ihre literarischen Zeitschriften*, Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1993, pp. 71-81, and William A. Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* [exhibition catalogue], Munich: Prestel, 1993, p.57s

reliability of which has however been questioned by scholarship, this ensemble of non-professional works included drawings produced by patients in psychiatric institutions.[30] Whatever the exact provenance might have been, the irreverent, satirical intent of the homage to the "Unknown Master" wasn't lost on the anonymous art critic of the local *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*:

> It spells out the end of any feeling of duty towards a society (including towards our contemporary society, which, all things considered, isn't entirely made up of complete imbeciles), when some childish drawings are exhibited under the title "Works of an unknown Master of the beginning of the twentieth century.[31]

Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* should thus be placed in the context of a general attack against received esthetic and societal norms. His work, however, is more in line with the vitalist ideology of German Expressionism[32] than with the radical nihilistic critique of Dada. The ten

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[30] The inclusion of works produced by mentally patients as part of the homage to the fictional "Unknown Master" remains contested in scholarly literature. According to William A. Camfield, (op. cit., note 15, p.333), such drawings are not mentioned in the exhibition catalogue or in contemporary review. The only source indicating their presence are Max Ernst's own autobiographical writings, published more for fifty years after the fact (Max Ernst, *Écritures*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, p.38). Jörgen Schäfer doesn't mention such works, hypothesizing that the works of the fictional "Unknown Master" included children's drawings and works by "Sunday Painters"; he also mentions that at least some of the works might have been created by fellow Dadaist Willy Fick (Schäfer, op. cit., p.75-6), which would put the exhibit in the same category as Desnos' hoax in *Feuilles libres*. However, even though Max Ernst's later recollections might have been faulty, it might be possible to leave him the benefit of the doubt: his interest for psychiatry and works produced in psychiatric contexts predating the First World War, it seems thoroughly plausible that Ernst might have included them in the 1919 exhibition. Furthermore, the satirical intent of the fictional "Unknown Master" was partly based on the impossibility of attributing these works to anyone with any degree of certainty: the mention of "childish drawings" by the anonymous art critic of the *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* is rather vague, and might as well fit the description of works produced by self-taught patients in psychiatric contexts.

[31] "[Es ist] der Tod des Verantwortungsgefühls gegenüber einer Gemeinschaft (und selbst der bestehenden Gesellschaft gegenüber, die doch nicht aus lauter Idioten zusammengesetzt ist) irgendwelche kindliche Zeichnungen als 'Werke eines unbekannten Meisters aus dem Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts' hinzustellen." [Anonymous], "Ausstellung im Kunstverein. I. Die Gruppe 'D'" In: *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 12.11.1919. As quoted in Jörgen Schäfer, op. cit., p. 76.

[32] The Expressionist dimension of Prinzhorn's esthetic theories was described and criticized by Ernst Kris (Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*. New York: International Universities Press, 1964, p.88).On this topic, see also Bettina Brand-Claussen and Malcolm Green, "The Witch's

"schizophrenic Masters" celebrated by Prinzhorn in his book have relatively little in common with the satirical "Unknown Master" of the Cologne Dadaists. While the latter is first and foremost meant as a form of institutional critique, Prinzhorn's "Masters" are meant to be taken seriously as ushering the advent of new esthetic values. This major difference between Dadaist critique and Prinzhorn's late Expressionist esthetics was rightly spotted by one of the founders of the Dada, Hugo Ball, in *The Artist and the Disease of Our Times* (1926).[33] The "disease" in question is meant in a broad metaphorical sense as a general crisis of the symbolic order, which according to Ball would be felt more acutely by artists. "[Artists] have lost the means to relate to reality," he writes. "The link that previously united them to the rest of society is severed. They have nothing to lean on, no point to anchor themselves".[34] For Ball, there is no discernible way out of this crisis. The previous system of conventional normativity has failed, but its potential replacement is still out of reach:

> The concept of disease implies that of health, i.e. of a norm according to which one could measure such disease; or that such a norm would be at least thinkable. […] Whichever might be the case, it is impossible to render such a norm visible, or even credible, in our current situation. The normativity that prevailed for hundreds of years has collapsed, and a new stabilization is still far on the horizon.[35]

Head Landscape", *American Imago*, Volume 58, Number 1, Spring 2001, pp. 407-443

[33] Hugo Ball, *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit*, Suhrkamp, 1984 [1926], VII-X.

[34] ["Fragt man die Künstler, woran sie leiden, so kann man immer wieder dasselbe hören. Sie haben keine Beziehung mehr zur Wirklichkeit. Das Band, das sie in früheren Zeiten mit der Gesellschaft einigte, ist zerrissen. Es ist keine Tragfähigkeit, kein Anknüpfungspunkt mehr vorhanden."] Hugo Ball, op. cit., IV.

[35] ["Der Begriff der Krankheit aber setzt doch wohl voraus, daß es eine Gesundheit, eine Norm gebe, an der die Erkrankung meßbar wird, oder daß eine solche Norm zum wenigsten denkbar ist […]. Wie immer es sich damit verhalten mag: heute ist eine solche Norm und Gesundheit nicht sichtbar, oder zum wenigsten nicht glaubhaft zu machen. Der Normbegriff ganzer Jahrhunderte ist erschüttert und eine neue Stabilisierung erst im Werden. "] Hugo Ball, op. cit., IV.

Ball's description of pervasive symbolic disorientation is akin to Descartes' hyperbolic doubt: deprived of a stable point of anchoring, Ball seems to be looking for new certainties. For Ball, Prinzhorn's work was part of a broader movement in which psychiatry and psychoanalysis would offer a way out of the moral and symbolic distress of the post-First World War era, bringing out a spiritual rejuvenation that he did not hesitate to equate with the role of early Christianity in the aftermath of the fall of the Roman Empire (op. cit., VIII). But while he salutes Prinzhorn's contribution to the dismantling of discredited esthetic norms, Ball also notices that *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* seems to be turned towards the future, purposefully hinting at the advent of a new system of normativity of which Prinzhorn would be a forerunner. Such claims would be necessarily incompatible with Ball's own diagnosis pertaining to the impossibility to ascertain the nature of such normativity of the future, which might explain the puzzlement evoked by Ball later in his essay:

> [Prinzhorn] knows that an entirely new system of normativity [Aufstellung eines neuen Normbegriffes des Menschen] would need to be put in place in order for his book, and for the new art in general, to find its rightful place. But that sounds quite puzzling. On the basis of what system of normativity are contemporary esthetics premised? – a basis that seems to be shared by the healers of the soul, the psychiatrists (as we just evoked a strange similitude between artists and doctors).[36]

The rest of Ball's essay fails to offer a cogent definition of such a basis. Unable to put his finger on a redemptive *cogito*, the former "magical bishop" of the Cabaret Voltaire can't fully embrace Prinzhorn's agenda, and remains plagued by doubt. To an extent, Ball's puzzlement provided

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[36] ["[Prinzhorn] weiß daß die Aufstellung eines neuen Normbegriffes des Menschen nötig wäre, um seiner Publikation und der neuen Kunst überhaupt ihren Rang anzuweisen. Das ist ein Satz, der nachdenklich stimmt. Von welchem Normbegriffe geht die heutige Ästhetik und gehen, nachdem wir eine merkwürdige Verwandtschaft zwischen Arzt und Künstler festgestellt haben, die Seelenärzte, die Psychiater, aus?"]

the impetus for the present chapter, which starts from the assumption that Ball's description of the singularity and precariousness of Prinzhorn's position is largely accurate.

Caught in an acrobatic balancing act between demolition and reconstruction, Prinzhorn seems to be opening up a new field of critical inquiry while dogmatically closing it in the same paradoxical gesture. On the one hand, Prinzhorn uses the "art of the insane" as a critical weapon aimed at simultaneously undermining two binary systems of oppositions, art—non-art and health—sickness, with the explicit goal of opening up the concepts of "art" and "health" – and this gesture resonates through later iterations of the debate that surrounded the "art of the mentally ill" among the French and German avant-garde. On the other hand, the psychiatrist also advocates for a definition of "new norms" based on irrationalism and vitalism, a not-so-hidden agenda perceptible throughout the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* that consistently hinders his ability to carry out his primary goal of formulating an anti-normative critique, and leads him to affirming a set of dogmatic claims, the problematic political resonance of which will be more fully investigated in the next chapter.

The first part of the following chapter offers an analysis of Prinzhorn's work in the context of narratives of symbolic and historical crisis. In his prominent study of the avant-garde's reception of the "art of the insane", Hal Foster has described this phenomenon as a form of ironic appropriation aiming primarily at critiquing the established symbolic order. This section will attempt to nuance such theories by describing the precarious balance between "destructive" and "reconstructive" tendencies of Prinzhorn's study.

The second section situates Prinzhorn's *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in the context of the genre of medical "pathographies" of famous artists on the one hand, and of previous works on

the "art of the insane" on the other. It demonstrates that Prinzhorn's attempt at contesting systems of normativity (both medical and artistic) constitutes a significant departure from both traditions.

The third and last section of this chapter provides an outline of the main characteristics of the new system of normativity that Prinzhorn simultaneously attempted to promote. In this section, I argue that this system was in fact underpinned by the author's problematic praise of irrationalism, vitalism, and an emphasis on rhythmicity as the primary criteria of evaluating artworks, while partially overlapping with contemporary investigations of embodied esthetics.

1.1 Crisis and Reconstruction

Both the redaction and the reception of *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* are deeply embedded in a narrative of symbolic and historical crisis. In fact, this "crisis" was explicitly mentioned as a selling point to convince the editor Julius Springer to publish the book in the first place. Karl Wilmanns first wrote to Julius Springer in February 1920 on behalf of his protégé Hans Prinzhorn, emphasizing the "close relationships" between his work of the preoccupations of Expressionist artists and art critics.[37] In a follow-up letter of October 1920, written jointly by Wilmanns and Prinzhorn, the work's shock value and irresistible *parfum de scandale* are even touted

[37] "There are very close links with Expressionism, which could be of the greatest interest for artists and art critics" ["Es bestehen sehr enge Beziehungen zum Expressionismus die für die Künstler und Kunstkritiker von größtem Interesse sind."]. Letter from Karl Wilmanns to Julius Springer (13.02.1920). Reproduced in Heinz Sarkowski, *Dear Sir! Authors' Letters from the Springer Archive* [*Sehr geehrter Herr! Autorenbriefe aus dem Springer-Archiv*], Springer, 1982, 35.

as another major selling point: "in the confusion of contemporary aesthetic theories, [this book will] stir up new unrest" [*in der Wirrnis der heutigen Kunstanschauungen von neuem Unruhe aufrühren*].[38] Prinzhorn expressed similar feelings in *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (henceforth abbreviated as *BdG*[39]), hinting at "how deeply this thirst for knowledge [about the visual and literary productions of the mentally ill and the way they relate to the latest artistic developments in Germany] is rooted in the driving forces of our times" (BdG 6).[40] According to Prinzhorn, as German society in general –and avant-garde artists in particular– experienced the "breakdown of the traditional worldview" [*Zerfall des traditionellen Weltgefühls*] (*BdG* 347) in the aftermath of the First World War, a thorough study of the "artistry of the mentally ill" could offer a template for a new beginning.

Any study of *BdG* is confronted with the difficulty of understanding the theoretical impulses of the work without uncritically coopting the world historical narrative already embedded in it, and largely echoed by its contemporary reception. As the German cultural historians Moritz Föllmer, Rüdiger Graf, and Per Leo remind us in *The Culture of Crisis the Weimar Republic* [*Die Kultur der Krise in der Weimarer Republik*],[41] research on the culture of the Weimar period runs the risk of turning the notion of crisis into a "quasi-magical concept" ["*quasi magischer Begriff*"] if it fails to recognize that a "crisis" does not have an existence in and for itself, but

[38] Letter of Hans Prinzhorn and Julius Springer to several recipients including Julius Springer (5.10.1920). Reproduced in Heinz Sarkowski, ibid.
[39] For brevity's sake, we will use the abbreviation *BdG* for *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* [*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*].
[40] "wie tief diese angeregte Wißbegier wohl in treibenden Kräften unserer Zeit verankert ist" (BdG 6).
[41] Moritz Föllmer, Rüdiger Graf, and Per Leo, "*Die Kultur der Krise in der Weimarer Republik*", in: *Die "Krise" der Weimarer Republik : Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005.

already implies "narrative dramatizations".[42] Such "narrative dramatizations" seem to abound in the *BdG*.

The first such dramatization pertains to the causal relationship between the avant-garde[43] and what Prinzhorn calls the "breakdown of the traditional worldview": is the avant-garde the *cause* of this crisis, or its *consequence*? Prinzhorn alludes to this debate in the last section of the *Bildnerei*, entitled "The Schizophrenic Worldview and Our Times" [*"Das Schizophrene Weltgefühl und unsere Zeit"*]:

At any rate, Expressionism is not behind [the breakdown of the traditional worldview], as some short-sighted people seem to hope even today, but it is the other way around: the movement is the expression of this breakdown and an attempt to make the best of it.[44]

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[42] Moritz Föllmer, Rüdiger Graf, and Per Leo argue that instead of coopting these narratives, a process they describe as "historiographic redoubling" [*historiographische Verdoppelung*], cultural historians should focus on these narratives themselves as objects of study (23). Crucially for our understanding of Prinzhorn, the authors point out that "crisis" as a narrative structure is politically multivalent, being susceptible of fitting into a variety of ideological discourses, ranging from progressive utopias to calls for a reactionary "return to order".
Indeed, the notion of crisis was massively used by Weimar thinkers and writers to come to terms with the reality they experienced. One could mention, in chronological order, Rosa Luxemburg's *The Crisis of Social Democracy* [*Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, 1919], Walter Benjamin's *Crisis of the Novel* [*Krisis des Romans*], Edmund Husserl's The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology [*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und Transzendentale Phänomenologie*] (1936), or Erich Welter's socioeconomic study *The Triple Crisis: World Crisis, German Crisis, Political Crisis: German Economy in the Year 1930* [*Dreifache Krise: Weltkrise, Deutsche Krise, Politische Krise; Die Deutsche Wirtschaft im Jahr 1930*, 1931]. Föllmer, Graf, and Leo offer statistics documenting the staggering amount of publications (not even counting newspaper or magazine articles) that carried the word "crisis" in their title during the Weimar period: "As a matter of fact, readers of the Weimar period would have had every reason to be thoroughly fed up with this crisis talk, even though they might have experienced it subjectively, and were faced with objective indicators of an economic and political crisis. From 1918 to 1933, more than 370 autonomous publications about the German economy, society, or political system that carried the words *Krise* or *Krisis* [both "crisis"]." ["Tatsächlich könnte man in der Weimarer Republik, auch wenn man subjektiv eine Krise erlebte und objektive Krisenindikatoren in Wirtschaft und Politik auf der Hand lagen, des Geredes über die Krise überdrüssig werden. Von 1918 bis 1933 erschienen über 370 selbstständige Schriften, die sich auf die deutsche Politik, Wirtschaft oder Gesellschaft bezogen und „Krise" oder „Krisis" im Titel trugen."]. (10).
[43] In Prinzhorn's terminology "*die letzte Kunst*" or "most recent art", by which he refers mostly to late German Expressionism.
[44] "Jedenfalls ist es keine Angelegenheit des Expressionismus, wie Kurzsichtige anscheinend heute noch hoffen, sondern dieser ist umgekehrt der Ausdruck dieses Zerfalls und ein Versuch,

If this causal relationship is taken in absolute terms, with artists perceived as prime movers of this breakdown [*Zerfall*], we end up with the highly reactionary thesis of a decay or "degeneration" of culture, art, and society brought about by the avant-garde. This thesis is alluded to by Prinzhorn in this chapter, in which he denounces the idea that the interest of Expressionist artists in the productions of the mentally ill would in turn constitute a proof that their works would be pathological in nature.[45]

But Prinzhorn's somewhat elliptic mention of "short-sighted people" [*Kurzsichtige*] who would *hope* that Expressionism would bring about the "breakdown of the traditional worldview" seems to refer to a different debate, one that wouldn't play out between the avant-garde and its reactionary detractors, but rather *within* the avant-garde itself. In Prinzhorn's sentence, "even today" [*heute noch*] seems to refer to "out-of-date" (i.e. pre-1914) positions. In the early 1910s, Futurists like Marinetti or early Expressionists like Georg Heym were calling for a violent conflagration as the only way out of turn-of-the-century *ennui* and, more broadly, as a salutary shock that would do away with what they perceived as a heavily conservative society (in the case of Germany, the Wilhelminian regime). But according to Prinzhorn, this position makes little sense in post-1918 Germany, where such violent conflagration has already taken place: according to him, in the aftermath of the First World War and the ensuing political, social, and economic turmoil, the emphasis should be laid on reconstruction rather than destruction.

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das Beste daraus zu machen." (*BdG*, 347).

[45] It later became a staple of reactionary and Nazi interpretations of the "art of the mentally ill", leading up to the inclusion of works from the Prinzhorn Collection in the *Degenerate Art* [*Entartete Kunst*] exhibitions from 1938 onwards. Prinzhorn's *Bildnerei* itself was then presented as a deliberate attempt to sabotage German culture. On this topic, see the next chapter.

But these terms are far from being mutually exclusive. It is, rather, a question of priorities: is the "breakdown of the traditional world view" sufficiently advanced to envision and sketch out a path towards a novel form of society, or is the most pressing task of the avant-garde to do away with its last remnants?[46] According to Föllmer, Graf, and Leo, one of the conclusions that can be drawn from works of cultural studies that problematize crisis narratives as object of study *per se* would consist in reevaluating the importance of the "reconstructive" impulse, i.e. optimistic outlooks on crises that tend to define them as opportunities for the creation of new values, whereas studies devoted to the Weimar era to date have tended to focus mostly on the impulse toward the destruction of old values.[47]

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[46] In that sense, destruction and reconstruction should be described as polarities or valences that can be combined in varying quantities within a range of individual artistic or philosophical projects of the Weimar era, both options being fully compatible with Peter Bürger's definition of the historical avant-garde as aiming at having a profound impact on society by inventing new forms of socio-political organization: in his *Theory of the Avant-garde* [*Theorie der Avantgarde*, 1974], Peter Bürger contrasted the socio-political ambitions of the "avant-garde" to "Modernism's" exclusive focus on style and aesthetics.

[47] Taking their cues from Reinhardt Koselleck's groundbreaking study *Critique and Crisis. A Study on the Pathogenesis of the Bourgeois World* [*Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, 1989], Föllmer, Graf, and Leo insist on the openness of the concept of crisis as defining "an open situation, in which 'a decision is imminent, but has not yet been taken'" [eine offene Situation, in der 'eine Entscheidung fällig ist, aber noch nicht gefallen", 13]. According to them, historians of the Weimar period have tended to focus on the dramatic end of the Weimar era (i.e. the Nazis' rise to power), thereby falling prey to a form of retrospective illusion that lead them to neglect the existence of more "optimistic" or forward-looking understandings of the notion of crisis before 1933: "In so doing, one often loses sight of the fact that the crisis was not only understood pessimistically as a threat to the old order, but also optimistically as a chance of renewal. This is particularly true of the historiography of the Weimar Republic, in which "crisis" is rarely described as a productive notion opening up a space for new possibilities, but rather entirely pessimistically as a preparatory phase for the Nazi era that followed it." ["Damit gerät aus dem Blick, dass die Krise nicht nur pessimistisch die Bedrohung des Alten, sondern eben auch optimistisch die Chance zur Erneuerung bedeuten kann. Dieser Befund gilt insbesondere für die Historiographie zur Weimarer Republik, in der die Krise oft nicht als produktiver Modus und Möglichkeitsraum begriffen wird, sondern viel mehr rein pessimistisch als Vorstufe zur anschließenden nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft.", 14].

The *BdG* was primarily designed as a work of reconstruction, even though one would be reasonably allowed to question the idea that in 1922, the "traditional worldview" would have been sufficiently weakened within Weimar society to allow for the emergence of the new.[48] In the course of its reception history, however, the *BdG* was also perceived as invested with a "destructive" potential. The most insightful description of the reception of the *BdG* can be found in Hal Foster's article "Blinded Insights" (2001).[49] Here, Foster offers a different take on the relationship between "destructive" and "reconstructive" tendencies in the context of the reception of the "artistry of the mentally ill" by attributing the former, destructive tendency to the avant-garde's various appropriations of these works, and the latter, reconstructive one to the works themselves. According to Foster, the popularity of the *BdG* is due to a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature and intentions of the works by the mentally ill, leading to productive misinterpretations, which he calls "blinded insights."[50] In Foster's view, European avant-garde artists appropriated these works in the name of a radical critique of social and artistic conventions, whereas their original purpose was rather to reconstruct an idiosyncratic but internally coherent "world order" (*Weltordnung*), to use a word coined by Daniel Paul Schreber.[51]

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[48] According to Peter Gay in his magnum opus *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, the "failure" and eventual demise of Weimar Germany would precisely be due to the fact that inherently reactionary power structures from the Wilheminian regime lingered on with relatively few changes of personnel: "These were fateful strategic mistakes, but the men of Weimar made an even more fateful mistake when they failed to tame, or transform, the machinery of the old order—the military, the civil service, and the courts. […] In the light of the traditional authoritarian structure of German society, which the revolution had done little to shake, the consequences of this policy were predictable." (Gay 2001, 18).

[49] Hal Foster, "Blinded Insights", *October*, Vol. 97, Summer 2001, pp. 3-30, republished in a modified version in Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, MIT Press, 2004, pp. 193-225.

[50] After the title of Paul de Man's famous essay *Blindness and Insight.*

[51] Daniel Paul Schreber expounded his intricate, multilayered – and thoroughly delirious – personal cosmology in his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (*Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, 1902), a book paradoxically aimed at convincing psychiatrists and the general audience of the necessity of releasing him from a mental hospital. Since the publication of Sigmund Freud's seminal essay on Daniel Paul Schreber, entitled *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of Paranoia*

The work of Josef Heinrich Grebing, a major artist of the "Prinzhorn Collection", would be particularly telling in that regard:

> Grebing reassembled a symbolic order out of the perceived debris of the official one: he issued financial certificates, painted religious icons, drew "world maps", and, most extraordinarily, developed an entire calendar of the twentieth century – a "chronology for Catholic youths and maidens" – replete with astrological tables […]. What Freud remarks of the paranoid system of Judge Schreber seems true here as well: "The delusion-formation, which we take to be a pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, *a process of reconstruction*."[52]

Hal Foster notes that the obsessively detailed "overelaborate systematicity" (215) of these idiosyncratic "world orders" ends up undermining their coherence and claim at legitimacy. They remain tragically precarious, "panicked attempts […] both to record the breaking of an old order and to project the founding of a new one" (221), condemned to remain ever-expanding universes that can never achieve the definitive closure that they so desperately seek. Conversely, avant-

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(*Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen zu einem autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, 1911, often referred to as *The Schreber Case*), Schreber has become the paradigmatic example of "paranoid dementia": according to Freud, Schreber attempted to come to terms with repressed homosexual desires by re-imagining a "world order" that would entirely revolve around the absolute necessity for him to be turned into a woman in order to save the world by having sex with God himself, who allegedly communicated with him through a complex system of "divine rays" directly connected to his nervous system. Freud's *Schreber Case* constitutes the first psychoanalysis based on the reading of a text, as opposed to an actual cure involving meetings with a flesh-and-blood patient. Even though several aspects of Freud's analysis of Schreber were later criticized, most notably by Jacques Lacan in *Seminar III: Psychoses* (*Séminaire III: Les psychoses*, 1955-1956), it remains a key text of the psychoanalytic canon. For a thorough and insightful analysis of *The Schreber Case*, shedding new light on the way it relates to the crisis of the symbolic order in Wilhelminian Germany, Freud's own "crisis of investiture", and his homosexual attraction to his colleague Wilhelm Fliess, see Eric L. Santner's book *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (1996).

[52] Foster 2004, 205 (emphasis mine). The reference to the Freud quotation is mentioned by Hal Foster in a footnote, and is drawn from the English translation of Freud's important essay on Daniel Paul Schreber, *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of Paranoia* (*Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen zu einem autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, 1911), often referred to as *The Schreber Case*.

garde artists mostly read these works as performing "a carnivalesque overturning of society", in line with their own project of radical social critique.[53]

Walter Morgenthaler[54] uses the powerful metaphor of a pile of rubble [*Trümmerhaufen*] to describe the "world order-shattering" qualities of the avant-garde's appropriation of the works by the mentally ill. Ascribing a purely "destructive" potential to such works, he claims that avant-garde works that might display similar formal qualities only do so in the name of a deliberate attempt at aesthetic and socio-political critique ultimately aiming at a form of reconstruction:

> When a master builder [*Baumeister*] purposefully destroys an old house because he plans to build a new and better one in its place, or when a house is destroyed by an earthquake, both piles of rubble, under certain circumstances and at a specific point in time, might look very similar, as they are indeed made up of the same formal elements.[55]

For Morgenthaler, avant-garde artists act according to a predetermined plan, whereas the metaphor of the earthquake assimilates mental illness to a form of natural disaster, channeling

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[53] Hal Foster mentions Paul Klee's *Room Perspective with Inhabitants* (1921) and Max Ernst's *The Master's Bedroom* (1920) as being based respectively on a "paranoid" and "schizophrenic" perception of reality. According to Foster, these works establish a parallel between "disruptions in images and in subjectivity" (211), and "adapt the art of the mentally ill into an indirect critique of the symbolic order of [their] age" (209), either by superimposing two apparently irreconcilable realities onto the same plane, in the case of Max Ernst, or by "[pushing] the old project of perspective – which Panofsky once defined, in its Renaissance epitome, as the humanist reconciliation of subject and object – to the point of an inhuman reversal" (219), in the case of Paul Klee. In both cases, the shattering of the symbolic order is expressed visually in terms of a radical upheaval of the basic tenets of mimesis, also subverting the principle of perspective, which Erwin Panofksy described as a major achievement of Western rationality and "will to form in his celebrated essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form* [*Die Perspektive als "symbolische Form"*, 1927].

[54] Walter Morgenthaler was Swiss German psychiatrist who, alongside with Prinzhorn, pioneered the study of the visual creations of mentally ill patients with his monographic study of the life and unbridled creativity of the schizophrenic artist Adolf Wölfli (one of the most famous residents of the Waldau psychiatric hospital, together with the writer Robert Walser) entitled *A Mentally Ill Patient as Artist* [*Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler*], published in 1921, one year before the *Bildnerei*.

[55] "Wenn ein Baumeister nach überlegtem Plane ein altes Haus abträgt, um ein neues, besseres an seine Stelle zu setzen, und wenn andererseits ein Haus durch ein Erdbeben zerstört wird, so können sich unter Umständen in einem bestimmten Moment die beiden Trümmerhaufen, die ja aus den gleichen Formelementen bestehen, recht ähnlich sehen." (Morgenthaler 1921, 89).

powerful forces but cancelling out any form of free will.[56] The question of intentionality is of course central to understand the debates around the "art of the insane"; we will encounter it again, for instance, in the discussion of Paul Éluard's anthology *Involuntary and Intentional Poetry* [*Poésie intentionelle et poésie involontaire*, 1942].[57] But one could privilege another criterion, based on the work's communicability: the kind of reconstruction that, according to Freud, would be the goal of the "delusion-formation" ultimately remains tragically idiosyncratic and makes sense for its creator alone, while, according to Peter Bürger, the avant-garde aspires to a form of reconstruction as part of a broader aesthetic and socio-political program.

The difficulty in describing the specific balance of "destructive" and "reconstructive" tendencies at play in avant-garde appropriations of the "art of the insane" stems from the fact that these apparently conflicting impulses seem to be present simultaneously, and vary according to a number of factors including the specific context of creation, exhibition, or publication. One example for this oscillation between destruction and reconstruction can be found in Hans Prinzhorn's short contribution to the third issue of *G: Journal for Elemental Form-Creation* [*G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung, 3,* June 1924], a Berlin-based avant-garde journal published by Hans Richter. It entails the following description, accompanying the reproduction of a photograph of a wooden statue of Hindenburg by the schizophrenic sculptor Karl Brendel[58] [Figure 1.1]:

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[56] The metaphorical link established by Morgenthaler between the unconscious and an earthquake could be interpreted as influenced by German Romantic ideas of a necessary relationship between natural forces and irrational or pre-rational aspects of the human mind, explored for instance in Heinrich von Kleist's novella *The Earthquake in Chile* [*Das Erdbeben in Chili*, 1807].

[57] See Chapter 3, pp. …

[58] The name of Karl Brendel (pseudonym of Karl Genzel, 1871-1925) is not mentioned in Prinzhorn's article in *G*: the sculpture is simply not attributed. However, the first of the ten biographies that make up the seventh chapter of the *Bildnerei*, entitled *Ten Schizophrenic Artists* is devoted to him. Genzel was a patient of the Eickelborn psychiatric hospital, whom Wilmanns

Hindenburg. (like the "gentle animal," works of a mentally ill artist.) With the help of this mentally ill patient's own statements, it is indeed not difficult to associate this figurine's individual features with its model. The armor identifies him as a warrior; the fantastic crown symbolizes the great esteem in which he is held by the people. Brendel even said: 'he is wearing it in case Emperor Wilhelm should abdicate' (he said this during the war). He has big ears because he has to hear everything; the nose points forward because he has to smell everything; the typical officer's moustache speaks for itself; the fat cheeks go particularly well with the popular portrayal of him as a contented family man. The ruff and hands indicate that he must pray together with his soldiers… At any rate, we find here, in highly concentrated form, something like the mythologizing of a contemporary… So convincing that some may find this ancestral portrait by a schizophrenic preferable to the usual barroom photograph as the genuine image of the popular contemporary.[59]

The photograph of Brendel's *Hindenburg* and its description are quoted from the *BdG*. In the latter, Prinzhorn seems to perceive the comical potential of such unconventional portrait of the former Chief of the General Staff of the German imperial army.[60] His suggestion that Brendel's sculpture could be preferred to the official portrait of Hindenburg, to which he casually refers as

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and Prinzhorn visited regularly during the establishment of the coillection and the writing of the *BdG*.

[59] "In der Tat ist es nicht schwer, mit Hilfe der Äußerungen des Schnitzers die einzelnen Züge des Figürchens mit dem Urbild in Zusammenhang zu bringen: der Panzer, technisch wie der Vogel (Abb. 83) ausgeführt, kennzeichnet ihn als Krieger, die phantastische Krone symbolisiert die Hochschätzung, die ihm vom Volke widerfahrt. Einmal sagte Brendel sogar: "Die trägt er für alle Fälle, wenn Wilhelm einmal abdankt." (noch in Kriegszeiten). Die großen Ohren hat er, weil er alles hören muß, die Nase steht nach vorn, weil er alles riechen muß. Der typische Offiziersschnurrbart spricht für sich, die dicken Backen entsprechen besonders der Schilderung, die man von dem behaglichen Familienvater populär entworfen hat. Halskrause und gefaltete Hände sollen darauf hinweisen, daß er mit den Soldaten beten muß... Immerhin erlebt man hier doch in ganz konzentrierter Form etwas wie die Mythisierung eines Zeitgenossen... so überzeugend, daß mancher lieber dies Ahnenbild des Schizophrenen, denn die übliche Wirtshausphotographie als gültiges Bild des volkstümlichsten Zeitgenossen gelten lassen wird. " (G 4, 54, adapted from *BdG*,162s).

[60] Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934) was Chief of the General Staff between 1916 and 1919. He was elected President of the German Republic in 1925, a position he occupied until his death in 1934. The importance of Hindenburg as a crucial symbol of the "traditional world view" shouldn't be underestimated; the German General Staff is famously mentioned, for instance, by the reactionary French writer Paul Bourget as one of the four "fortresses" of Western values, alongside the Vatican, the French Academy, and the House of Lords (*Echo de Paris*, July 24th, 1908). Besides, his accession to the presidency in 1925 and his subsequent endorsement of Hitler as chancellor in 1933 can be described as illustrating Peter Gay's thesis that the continued presence of representatives of the old order in German institutions contributed to the downfall of the Weimar Republic and to the rise of the Nazi party.

a "barroom photograph", is meant to be humorous. However, caricaturing the powers that be hardly seems to be his point. The *BdG* is not a work of social critique, and political activism is virtually excluded from it, if we except maybe a passing remark about Wilhelm II's arrogance (*BdG* 164). Rather, Brendel's *Hindenburg* is part of a demonstration that analyzes the formal features of the work (and occasionally refers to Brendel's own explanations) in order to formulate the following thesis: cut off from mainstream art and society at large, Brendel would "reinvent" a form of statuary (the ancestor statue or *Ahnenbild*) based on idiosyncratic mythological elaborations. This idea is both Evhemerist and Primitivist. It describes the "mythologizing of a contemporary", who ceases to be perceived as a historically located person and assumes godlike characteristics; it also posits that mentally ill patients can reproduce in "modern", Western societies inherently "primitive" processes described in ethnographic literature,[61] thus proving the existence of a number of invariants present in the unconscious (that are allowed to resurface due to the "regressive" nature of mental illness).[62]

However, the passage in *G* describing Hindenburg is not only cut off from the broader context of this analysis of Brendel's work in the BdG, it is also abridged in a way that emphasizes the statue's potential as a biting political satire over its function as an example illustrating a thesis. In the excerpt quoted above, the two cuts, signaled by Prinzhorn's use of ellipses in brackets in the original, correspond to sentences that are essential to Prinzhorn's demonstration.

[Cut 1]: We can see that there is always a very meaningful, provable connection between Brendel's objectively presented, if somewhat absurd, details, and his model, regardless of whether

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[61] Describing "exotic", non-Western, and often colonized societies, which is the case here, as Prinzhorn explicitly compares Brendel's Hindenburg to an ancestor statue from New Guinea (*BdG* 162), whose North-Western part (then known as "German New Guinea") was a German protectorate from 1884 until 1914.

[62] This notion is partly derived from Freud's *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* [*Totem und Tabu: Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker*] (1913), a work explicitly mentioned by Prinzhorn as a source of inspiration (*BdG* 323).

his explanations actually describe the sequence of the steps he took during production or whether part of it can be accounted for only as a subsequent invention

[Cut 2]: Such mythification, very foreign indeed to the last century, which was unable to free Napoleon, let alone Bismarck, from the dissolving light of rational inquiry, takes place so convincingly in this carver who has cut himself off from the world[63]

The first deleted sentence minimizes the comical potential or "absurdity" of the work by underlining its mimetic aspects; the second deleted sentence situates Hindenburg within the conceptual framework of Prinzhorn's Primitivist-Evhemerist analysis. By deleting them, Prinzhorn emphasized the satirical potential of the work at the expense of the consistency of his analysis. These changes might have been introduced in order to conform to the political views held by a number of contributors and readers of *G*, or simply for practical purposes, improving the efficiency of this short quote from the *Bildnerei* as a form of advertising.[64]

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[63] [Cut 1]: Wie man sieht, ist durchweg ein recht sinnvoller Zusammenhang zwischen den anschaulich gegebenen, zunächst etwas absurd wirkenden Einzelheiten und dem Vorbild nachweisbar, ganz unabhängig davon, ob diese Erklärungen nun tatsachlich den Hergang der Produktion klarlegen oder ob ein Teil nur als nachträglicher Einfall in Rechnung gestellt werden kann
[Cut 2]: Und dieser Vorgang, der dem letzten Jahrhundert zum mindesten völlig fremd geworden ist, da es noch nicht einmal Napoleon, geschweige denn Bismarck aus dem auflösenden Licht rationaler Sachforschung zu befreien wußte, vollzieht sich bei diesem Manne in seiner Weltabgekehrtheit."
One should add that a third sentence was modified by Prinzhorn in the version published in *G*, namely the mention "he said this during the war" ["noch in Kriegszeiten"], which replaces a longer sentence about Brendel's "prophecy": "This sculpture was carved during the war, anyone who wishes to do so is free to see in it a prophecy uttered by our mason" ["Da die Figur noch zur Kriegszeit geschnitzt ist, mag man nach Neigung die Prophetie des Maurers einschätzen."]. However, this modification seemed less significant than the following two, as it seems to have been introduced mostly for concision's sake.

[64] This hypothesis is further supported by the typography of his article in *G*, in which the name HINDENBURG in large capital letters is added vertically alongside the reproduction of Brendel's work, emphasizing the discrepancy between Hindenburg's usual representations (the "barroom photographs") and Brendel's "ancestor statue" to obvious comical effect. The full references of the *BdG* are provided within Prinzhorn's article, and potential readers are implicitly encouraged to buy it.

Moreover, Prinzhorn's intervention is sandwiched between two short texts penned respectively by the Dadaists Georg Grosz and Kurt Schwitters, both major proponents of social critique with a marked tendency to depict the powers that be (the bourgeoisie, the military, etc.) in a rather unfavorable light. As Prinzhorn's short description of Brendel's *Hindenburg* dwells on the exaggerated facial features (giant ears) and hyperbolic accumulation of regalia and other signs of power (crown, armor, etc.) it could evoke the figure of Alfred Jarry's *Père Ubu*. *Père Ubu* was a well-known figure for German Dadaists, first popularized by Jarry in the shape of a wooden puppet of approximately the same size as Brendel's Hindenburg statue , thus turning it into another caricature of an absurd authority figure.[65] Alternatively, it could evoke the merciless caricature of the cigar-smoking reactionary bourgeois sitting at a tavern's table [*Stammtisch*] with two equally unpalatable acolytes by Grosz, published in the same issue G only four pages before the reproduction of Brendel's *Hindenburg* [Fig. 1.2].

The figure on the left is not directly identified as a veteran, but does display the "fat cheeks" and "typical officer's moustache of Brendel's *Hindenburg*. This visual parallel would not have been lost on the readers of *G*. The use of a reproduction of Brendel's *Hindenburg* in *G* fits Hal Foster's description of a work by a mentally ill patient used for critical purposes, while it was in fact aiming at a form of reconciliation or reconstruction.[66] However, the opposite poles of

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[65] One could also add that the only two sculptures selected by Prinzhorn to illustrate his short contribution to *G* are *Hindenburg* and *The Gentle Animal*, also by Karl Brendel, which depicts a supposedly "Catholic" cow in the process of kneeling down, apparently as an expression of religious worship. Given the general context of the journal, one can reasonably surmise that a form of irreverent visual equivalent is suggested by Prinzhorn between Hindenburg and the "pious" cow.

[66] Prinzhorn's analysis does not lie very far from Hal Foster's (or indeed Freud's, whose essay on the Schreber Case is also mentioned in the *Bildnerei*) when he posits the protective or even apotropaic function served by Brendel's personal mythology: "A large number of single experiences are paranoiac. The pastor wants to shoot him, often orderlies and fellow patients are suspected of wishing him ill, and Christ wants to crucify and poison him. […] But his nature does not let him be delivered up to them helplessly. He opposes stronger powers to the oppressive,

"destruction" and "reconstruction" remain inextricably linked. As stated in Hans Richter's opening manifesto:

G, the "Journal for Elemental Form-Creation", owes its existence to a *comprehensive optimism* in regard to the means and possibilities of our age. This optimism consists above all in this: in the will to *recognize the possibility of a culture in the utter chaos of our days*, in the thoroughgoing *disintegration* in which we find ourselves, in the excess and deficit of civilization.[67]

Richter's declaration echoes Prinzhorn's own sentiment that the task of the modern artist is to take into account the disintegration of the old order and use it as an opportunity for reconstruction. Alongside Grosz's devastating social critique,[68] the third issue of *G* also features articles and essays that address the task of reconstruction in the most literal sense, including Mies van der Rohe's study of glass and iron functional architecture ("Industrial Structures", 120-125),

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overpowering outside world which his understanding can no longer master: suddenly we find the bricklayer [Brendel] fully prepared to fight the world with magic and witchcraft." ["In das Gebiet des Verfolgungswahns fallen noch eine ganze Reihe von Einzelerlebnissen: der Pfarrer will ihn erschießen, zeitweise stehen Wärter und Mitkranke im Verdacht, ihm übel zu wollen, Christus will ihn kreuzigen und vergiften. [...] so ist er seiner Natur nach diesen nun doch keineswegs hilflos ausgeliefert. Vielmehr setzt er der andrängenden übermächtigen Außenwelt, deren sein Verstand nicht mehr Meister wird, stärkere Kräfte entgegen; unversehens finden wir den Maurer [Brendel] in vollem Zuge, sich durch Magie und Zauberei mit der Umwelt auseinanderzusetzen."] (BdG, 105).

[67] "G, die Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung, verdankt ihre Existenz *einem umfassenden Optimismus* bezüglich der Mittel und Möglichkeiten unserer Zeit. Dieser Optimismus besteht vor allem darin: in dem heillosen Chaos unserer Tage, in der gründlichen *Auflösung*, in der wir uns befinden, in dem Über- und Untermaß von Zivilisation, noch die Möglichkeit einer Kultur erkennen zu wollen. ." (Hans Richter, *G*, in *G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung* [*Journal for Elemental Form-Creation*], 3, June 1924, 11, as translated in Michael Jennings and Detlef Mertins (eds.), *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film*, Tate Publishing, 2011, 113-114 [emphasis mine]

[68] Even Georg Grosz's contribution in the third issue of *G* strikes a relatively optimistic tone, describing his personal trajectory from full-blown misanthropy to a more upbeat form of political activism. More crucially, Grosz's evokes the inspirational and "elemental" qualities of folk art in terms strikingly similar to Prinzhorn's own ideas: "In order to arrive at a style that would reproduce the dramatic and blunt callousness of my subjects, I studied manifestations of the *drive to create art*. I *copied the folkloristic drawings found in urinals*; they seemed to me to be the most direct expression and the most concise translation of strong feelings. I was also inspired by *children's drawings* because of their unambiguousness." (151) [emphasis mine].

a reproduction of his iconic project for a high-rise on the Friedrichstraße in Berlin (115), or Ludwig Hilbersheimer's emphatic praise of the use of concrete and reinforced concrete ("Construction and Form", 126-129). Prinzhorn's contribution to the third issue of G also participates in this architectonic optimism: it is presented as an open letter directly addressed to Mies van der Rohe, and as an answer to a question from Mies about the "usefulness" of the lessons drawn from the *BdG* for modern art and architecture.[69] More generally, Richter's and Mies's understanding of the notion of "Form-Creation" [*Gestaltung*] are in line with Prinzhorn's own application of concept to the visual productions of the mentally ill, on which I will elaborate in the next section of this chapter.

1.2 Health—Sickness and Art—Non-Art: Hans Prinzhorn's "Devaluation of Values"

Prinzhorn's "reconstructive" program is announced in the very title of the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* [*Bildnerei der Geisteskranken*]: why did Prinzhorn choose the term *Bildnerei*, , which is both antiquated and inappropriate, in lieu of the more obvious *Kunst* (art)?[70] To answer that question,

[69] For an in-depth analysis of the notion of Form-Creation [*Gestaltung*] in *G*, see Detlef Mertins' excellent article "Architecture, Worldview, and World Image in *G*", in particular his study of Hans Prinzhorn's involvement in *G*3 (88-91).

[70] *Bildnerei* had already mostly fallen out of use by 1922. According to the DWDS [*Das Wortaufkunftssystem zur deutschen Sprache in Geschichte und Gegenwart*], the word "Bildnerei" peaked around 1800 and had already fallen out of common parlance by 1900; it is not included in contemporary German dictionaries. Moreover, it was generally considered to be a synonym of "sculpture" [*Skulptur* or *Bildhauerei*], as attested by its definition in the *German Dictionary* of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, or the 1906 edition of the *Brockhaus* dictionary, which seems hardly appropriate as the *BdG* deals with the visual and literary works of the mentally ill produced in all kinds of media. A handful of examples indicate that *Bildnerei* can also mean "visual productions" (in a broader sense closer to the etymology of *Bild/bildnerisch*), as is the case here.

it could be useful to refer to Prinzhorn's own reflections on the Nietzschean term *Übermensch* (*Superhuman*):

We have ample reasons to avoid using [the word *Superhuman*] altogether. Words are like living beings: once they are spoiled due to the constant abuses they suffered […], the damage is irreparable, and all attempts to restore them to the glory of their former selves through good, attentive care would be in vain.[71]

Bildnerei (artistry) is a placeholder for another irreparably "spoiled" word, *Kunst* (art). Far from shying away from awarding the exalted status of "artworks" to the visual productions of the mentally ill, Prinzhorn's analysis is inextricably linked with a radical critique of artistic values. In the opening paragraphs of the *BdG*, he takes issue with the way *Kunst* (art) functions as an exclusionary concept, based on a judgment of value [*Werturteil*] that discriminates between art and non-art. The same applies, according to Prinzhorn, to the second half of the title. According to him, "mental illness" [*Geisteskrankheit*] is also a cultural construct, based on an arbitrary divide between "health" and "sickness":

Neither the opposition health—sickness nor the opposition: art—non-art is truly unambiguous, if not taken dialectically. But if we proceed empirically, and with unabashed honesty, we realize that those concepts are more akin to polarities with innumerable bridges and gradations between them; and that they can only be considered unambiguous in regard to the specific cultural conventions that apply *here* and *now*, whose limitations will then appear to us in excruciating clarity.[72]

Prinzhorn considers that the "artistry of the mentally ill" should not be evaluated according to preexisting artistic values (like Réja's immutable concept of "Art"): rather, he claims that the

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[71] "[...], dass wir allen Grund haben, das Wort zu meiden. Worte sind wie lebendige Wesen: ist es einmal geschehen, dass sie durch ständigen Missbrauch [...] verrottet sind, so wäre es eine vergebliche Mühe, sie durch gute und pflegliche Behandlung in ihrem alten Glanze beleben zu wollen. (Prinzhorn 1928, 24)

[72] Weder der Gegensatz Krank—Gesund noch der Gegensatz: Kunst—Nichtkunst ist anders als dialektisch eindeutig. Vielmehr findet der Empiriker, wenn er rückhaltlos ehrlich ist, nur polare Gegensätze mit zahllosen Übergängen, die er eindeutig benennen kann, aber nur in Anlehnung an eine jetzt und hier gerade herrschende Kulturkonvention, die ihm vielleicht in ihrer Beschränktheit quälend klar ist. (*BdG* 7).

apparent "abnormality" of such works should provide an impetus for a far-reaching redefinition of the notion of art itself. In other words, these works ought not to be discarded or marginalized on account of their apparent incompatibility with the norms, but signal the inadequacy and inherent limitations [*Beschränktheit*] of these norms as cultural constructs.[73] Nietszsche's radical critique of morality as a cultural construct in *Beyond Good and Evil* [*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*] (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* [*Zur Genealogie der Moral*] (1887) provided Prinzhorn with the conceptual tools that allowed him to question the normative binary oppositions "health—sickness" and "art—non-art".

Reflecting upon Nietzsche's work led Prinzhorn to a wholesale contestation of pathography [*Pathographie*], a genre that he considers to be a symptom of a kind of short-sighted positivism first evidenced by the pathologization of genius by Lombroso in *Genius and Madness*. Such "pathographies," which provided, for instance, a psychological evaluation of the life and work famous artists such as Van Gogh or Hölderlin, were popular in Germany in the early twentieth century;[74] they ranged from serious inquiries into the role of mental illness in artistic

[73] Such reversal of the relationship between the work of art and its evaluative criteria seems to announce the notion of "limit-experience" [*expérience limite*], popularized by Bataille, Blanchot, or Foucault: a "limit-experience" (ecstasy, madness, death, eroticism, etc.) is defined as what appears to lie beyond the realm of the possible, thus forcing us to question aesthetic, philosophical, and axiological systems (Antonini 2015, 579-588). This parallel between Prinzhorn and 1960s French philosophers is hardly surprising if one considers that in both cases, this far-reaching contestation of systems of normativity is a direct consequence of their respective reception of the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.On the impact of Nietzsche on 1960s French thought, see for instance Alan D. Schrift's article "Nietzscheism as Epistemology: French Reception of Nietzsche in the Philosophical Moment of the 1960s" ["Le nietzschéisme comme épistémologie : la réception française de Nietzsche dans le moment philosophique des années 1960"], in Patrice Maniglier's *Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France* (2011).

[74] On this point, see Bettina Gockel's useful summary of the history of pathographies in her book *The Pathologization of the Artist: Artists' Legends of the Modern Era* [*Die Pathologisierung des Künstlers: Künstlerlegenden der Moderne*] (2010), pp. 77-83. According to Gockel, the number of pathographies published in Germany, France, and Italy rose steadily from 1830 onwards, to reach its highest point between 1900 and 1910 (an estimated total of 300 pathographies were then published in these three countries). Prinzhorn's condemnation of pathographies corresponds to a moment

creation to unapologetically voyeuristic accounts of the sufferings of "mad" artists, often surrounded by the aura of the late Romantic myth of the "cursed poet" [*poète maudit*].[75] Prinzhorn singles out the pathography of Nietzsche by famous German neurologist Paul Julius Möbius (1853-1907), *On the pathological character of Nietzsche* [*Über das Pathologische bei Nietzsche*] (1902):

> It became fashionable to write some kind of medical history of famous personalities, the so-called "pathographies", to supplement their biographies […] When such a smart and truly educated man as Möbius unapologetically attempted to locate pathological symptoms in the work of Nietzsche, precisely at the point where his own understanding reached its limits—what would one expect from mediocre intelligences? It is hardly surprising that in all such attempts to take the measurements of exceptional personalities by using the measuring tools of psychiatry, someone was time and again found way too short for the job: the one taking the measurements [*der Messende*].[76]

Paul Julius Möbius was one of the most celebrated neurologists of his time, often considered to be on a par with the renowned psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin.[77] Prinzhorn doesn't question his scientific accomplishments, but points at what he perceives as a fundamental methodological flaw: for Prinzhorn the "greatness" of some individuals (Möbius was also the author of pathographies of Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Rousseau) would make their life and work incompatible with an average psychological interpretative framework, and would make it

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when this genre was already relatively less successful as a publishing phenomenon (around 175 pathographies were published in the 1910s, and 110 in the 1920s) (ibid., 78): to a certain extent, one could consider that Prinzhorn formalized an ongoing shift in the public perception of this genre, which was increasingly considered as too narrowly positivist.

[75] For a thorough analysis of this genre in Germany, see also Matthias Bormuth (ed.) *Kunst und Krankheit. Studien zur Pathographie.* [*Art and Disease: Studies on Pathography*]. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003.

[76] Als es dann gar noch Mode wurde, in „Pathographien" eine Art Krankheitsgeschichte bedeutender Persönlichkeiten zur Ergänzung ihrer Lebensgeschichte anzulegen [...] Wenn ein so gescheiter und auch ernsthaft kultivierter Mann wie Möbius [...] ganz unbefangen Krankheitssymptome in Nietzsches Werke dort beginnen ließ, wo sein eigenes Verständnis versagte—was will man da von Durchnittsköpfe erwarten. Es ist nicht zu verwundern, dass bei allen derartigen Versuchen, große Persönlichkeiten mit psychiatrischem Maße zu messen, einer regelmäßig als zu kurz befunden wird: der Messende. (*BdG* 8)

[77] Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926) is generally considered as one of the founders of modern psychiatry. He is best known for formulating a general theory of psychosis distinguishing between manic depression and "dementia praecox" (later renamed schizophrenia by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler).

necessary to create new tools and concepts, not necessarily borrowed from the field of psychiatry proper. Ultimately, one could argue that Prinzhorn's argument is motivated by a form of anti-democratic aristocratism borrowed from Nietzsche,[78] which one could contrast with the egalitarianism of Freud's essay on da Vinci[79]: "there is no one so great [i.e. even da Vinci] as to be disgraced by being subject to the laws which govern both normal and pathological activity with equal cogency".[80]

Prinzhorn does not reject the genre of pathographies as a whole: on his own admission, he shares the "guilt" of pathographers (*BdG* 12) inasmuch as the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* could also be considered as belonging to this genre, especially the series of ten pathographies of schizophrenic artists that, even though they are supposed to correspond to the subsection VII of part C: *The Visual Works* [*Die Bildwerke*], actually take up nearly half of the book (149 pages out of 352). It would be more accurate to say that Prinzhorn advocates for a new kind of pathography. His rejection of what he perceived as the short-sighted positivist agenda of previous pathographies is based on the notion that the works themselves, considered "without prejudices", should dictate the hermeneutic structure that will allow for their interpretation.[81] Among the

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[78] In line with this notion of boundary-breaking exceptionalism, Prinzhorn coins the term "Schizophrenic Masters" [*schizophrene Meister*] (*BdG* 12) to describe the ten schizophrenic artists analyzed in the second part of the of the *BdG* (even though the title of this section itself refers to them by using the more neutral term *schizophrene Bildner*, "schizophrenic image-makers". a term based on the notion of "Old Masters" [*alte Meister*].

[79] On the opposition between Nietzsche's aristocratism and Freud's egalitarianism, see Steven E. Aschheim's *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*, 55-56. Aschheim quotes Phillip Rieff's summary of the differences between Freud and Nietzsche: "For Freud, nobody is dull through and through, for there is no such thing as a dull unconscious. What makes Freud more useful and plausible than Nietzsche is that he does not relegate the vast majority of humanity to the status of dying animals" (Phillip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*, New York, Harper and Row, 1961; quoted in Aschheim, op. cit., 55).

[80] "Es sei niemand so groß, dass es für ihn eine Schande wäre, den Gesetzen zu unterliegen, die normales und krankhaftes Tun mit gleicher Strenge beherrschen" (Freud, op. cit., 91).

[81] "Our analysis should derive from the material itself. The visual works should not be measured and evaluated according to a predetermined criteria [Maßstab]. But we should analyze them

most significant examples of this new trend, one should mention Karl Jaspers' *Strindberg and Van Gogh: An Attempt of a Pathographic Analysis with Reference to Parallel Cases of Swedenborg and Hölderlin* [*Strindberg und van Gogh. Versuch einer pathographischen Analyse unter vergleichender Heranziehung von Swedenborg und Hölderlin.*], published at the same time as the *BdG* (1922), and by the same publishing huouse (Springer).[82] Like Prinzhorn, Jaspers considers these artists' "limit-experiences" as an exceptional kind of primary material, inasmuch as it leads him to question the validity and extension of the concepts that frame his general line of inquiry: according to Doris Kaufmann, in *Strindberg und Van Gogh*, "Jaspers first asks whether there is something 'specifically' schizophrenic in these artworks, then answers this question by problematizing the concepts of art and schizophrenia themselves" (Kaufmann 2003, 62).[83]

Kaufmann's description of Jaspers also applies to Prinzhorn, as fellow members of the Heidelberg School; such dual contestation seems to ultimately constitute Prinzhorn's main contribution to discourses on the "art of the insane". Prinzhorn, of course, is far from being the

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without prejudices" ["Unsere Darstellung soll vom Material ausgehen. Die Bildwerke sollen nicht nach einem festen Maßstab gemessen und geprüft werden. Sondern so vorurteilslos"] (*BdG* 10).

[82] The proximity between the ideas of Jaspers and Prinzhorn is hardly surprising given the fact that they were then both active in the psychiatric circle known as the "school of Heidelberg". Jaspers' book was first published by Ernst Bircher Verlag in Leipzig, in the collection *Studies on Applied Psychiatry* [*Arbeiten zur angewandten Psychiatrie*] directed by Walter Morgenthaler, the author of a 1921 monograph on Adolf Wölfli, whom Prinzhorn considered to be his main rival. There are further parallels between Jaspers' *Strindberg und Van Gogh* on the *BdG*: the latter was republished in 1926 by Julius Springer, the publishing house that published the *BdG* in 1922. Moreover, one of the last sections of *Strindberg und Van Gogh*, entitled *Schizophrenia and the Culture of Our Times* [*Schizophrenie und die Kultur der Zeit*] (148-151) is strikingly similar to the section of the *BdG* entitled *The Schizophrenic Worldview and Our Times* [*Das schizophrene Weltgefühl und unsere Zeit*] (341-345), as it also posits a deep affinity between the contemporary Zeitgeist and schizophrenia. According to Jaspers, this proximity would explain, for instance, the rediscovery of Hölderlin or the popularity of other schizophrenic artists such as Van Gogh or Strindberg in the 1920s—or, indeed, the success of the "art of the insane", briefly mentioned by Jaspers in that section (Jaspers 1926, 148).

[83] "Die selbstgestellte Frage, ob sich in diesen Kunstwerken etwas „spezifisch" Schizophrenes auffinden lasse, beantwortete Jaspers mit einer Problematisierung der Begriffe Kunst und Schizophrenie."

first psychiatrist to be interested in the visual and literary productions of mentally ill patients from an aesthetic point of view, i.e. not purely as documents allowing him to reach a specific diagnosis. But if previous studies about the "art of the insane" often questioned Prinzhorn's first binary opposition between "health" and "sickness", none of them included a critical discussion of the binary "art—non-art". One could mention, for instance, Cesare Lombroso's collection of psychopathological art and his book *Genius and Madness* [*Genio e Follia*] (1864), Auguste-Armand Marie's *Museum of Madness* [*Le musée de la folie*] (1905),[84] or Marcel Réja's *Madmen's Art* [*L'art chez les fous*] (1907). Each of these works is based on the assumption that the "art of the insane" can allow us to redefine the boundaries between "normal" and "pathological": Lombroso describes both "genius" and "madness" as symptoms of hereditary diseases; Réja, seems to agree on the idea of important parallels between genius and madness, based on neo-Romantic notions of an intrinsic difference between the latter and the normality of "philistines" (Réja 1907, 103); Auguste-Armand Marie offers insights about the relative nature of the notions of normal and pathological.[85] However, aesthetic values remain thoroughly outside of the scope of the

[84] Auguste-Armand Marie's *Museum of Madness* [*Le musée de la folie*], whose collection was accumulated over several years, was presented by its founder in an eponymous article in the journal *Je suis partout* (October 1905). As the museum left relatively few other traces, this article is the most comprehensive document at our disposal to understand the composition and history of the museum.

[85] "Montaigne a dit jadis qu'on enferme quelques hommes comme fous pour faire croire aux autres qu'ils ont leur bon sens. […] L'aliéné n'a pas un cerveau tellement différent du nôtre ! Il n'y a de différence entre lui et nous que des exagérations, parfois seulement partielles. C'est une erreur trop commune de considérer les aliénés comme des êtres en dehors de l'humanité, que de croire que leur incohérence mentale et leur imagination déréglée s'appliquent à un monde qui nous est étranger. " ["Montaigne once said that some people are locked up and declared mad in order to let the others believe that they themselves are sane. […] A mentally ill patient's brain isn't fundamentally different from ours! There are only quantitative differences, sometimes even partial ones. It is an all-too-common mistake to believe that the mad are outside of humanity, to believe that their mental incoherence and unruly imagination are part of a world that's entirely foreign to us."] (Marie 1905, 353).

psychiatrists' investigation. The most telling example is offered by Marcel Réja's[86] analysis of visual and literary productions of mentally ill patients. His evaluation of the "art of the insane" combines symptomatology and aesthetic evaluations based on his experiences as a literary critic. "Art" (usually written by Réja with a capital A) constitutes a conceptual *terra firma*, an absolute yardstick guaranteeing the legitimacy of a set of aesthetic criteria. The title itself, *L'art chez les fous*, literally "Art *at* the Madmen's", implies that the work will describe how a preexisting concept, namely "Art", will fare in a specific and unexpected situation (when created by "madmen"). Réja's book is mostly referenced today for his illustrations, offering striking examples of the "art of the insane". But as evidenced in his own book of poetry *Heroic Life* (*La vie héroïque*, 1897), regular verse, especially traditional French alexandrine, constituted for Réja the pinnacle of artistic expression. [87] As mentioned by Fabienne Hulak, Réja's relatively traditional aesthetics can be explained by its historical context, as the book "predates most of the major aesthetic upheavals of the twentieth century" (Hulak 1994). But even among the psychoanalytical school, major works that offer bolder insights into the problem of the psychopathology of artistic expression seem reluctant to question traditional artistic values.

Sigmund *Freud's Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of his Childhood* [*Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci*] (1910) starts with a formal apology, reaffirming the "greatness" of da Vinci, as Freud defends himself from wanting to annex the realm of aesthetics, or, as he says quoting

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[86] Marcel Réja is the pseudonym of Paul Meunier, who was active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century France as both a trained psychiatrist and a man of letters. He was the author of psychiatric monographies, but also of a book of poetry, a short theater play, and a number of texts of literary criticism, including a foreword to the French translation of Strindberg's *Inferno* (1898).

[87] While noting the "naïve charm" of pathological self-taught creations (both visual and literary), or offering insightful remarks on the use of puns and wordplays in pathological prose, the bulk of Réja's *Madmen's Art* is devoted to classical poetry composed by mentally ill patients, and more specifically to a series of literary pastiches by Victor Hugo (Réja 1907, 150), Baudelaire (ibid., 161), or Verlaine (ibid, 149).

Schiller, from wanting to "drag the sublime in the dirt" ["das Erhabene in den Staub zu ziehen"] (Freud 1969 [1910], X, 91). There's no reason to doubt the sincerity of Freud's apology, and of his reaffirmation of the autonomy and exalted status of the aesthetic sphere: as mentioned by Peter Gay, Freud's aesthetics remained rather conservative, as he mostly "slighted the European avant-garde of his age" (Gay 1988, 166).[88] Freud's disciple Otto Rank's *The Artist: A Psycho-Sexual Inquiry* [*Der Künstler: Ansätze zu einer Sexual-Psychologie*] (1907) opens with a bold affirmation of the relative nature of the concepts of "normal" and "pathological" (Rank 1907, 3); however, the analysis focuses on the individual urge to create (a form of "self-therapy" according to Rank), never on the way in which Rank's hypotheses could impact our understanding of the "aesthetic value" of a given work of art.

From the point of view of the history of medicine, Prinzhorn's contestation of the first binary between "health" and "sickness" likewise testifies to the fact that the "Heidelberg school" to which he belonged largely adhered to the notion that there was no *ontological* difference between "normal" and "pathological" states.[89] Major nineteenth century neurologists and psychopathologists, including Claude Bernard, subscribed to what Georges Canguilhem (following Auguste Comte) later theorized as the "Broussais principle" [*principe de Broussais*]: "the

[88] Freud also remained largely indifferent to the purported "applications" of his theories by the avant-garde, for instance by André Breton (Aleksic 2011, 98; de Mijolla 2010).
[89] On the main features of the "Heidelberg school", see Werner Janzarik, "Jaspers, Kurt Schneider and the Heidelberg school of psychiatry", in: *History of Psychiatry*, 9, 1998, 241-252. As mentioned by Doris Kaufmann, the Heidelberg school's frontal attack on essentialized nosographies lead to a backlash on the part of more conservative scientists who insisted on maintaining a closed definition of disease. For instance, Leipzig-based scientist Oswald Bumke warned against a "dissolution" of the pathology labeled as "dementia praecox" in his essay "The Dissolution of Dementia Praecox" ["Die Auflösung der Dementia Praecox"], in: Klinische Wochenschrift 3 (1924), 437-440. Bumke disagreed with those who defined dementia praecox as a "thickening" [*Verdichtung*] of normal psychological processes (ibid., 438; quoted and commented in Kaufmann, op. cit., 59).

normal and the pathological are identical, quantitative variations notwithstanding" ["il y a identité du normal et du pathologique, aux variations quantitatives près"].[90] François-Joseph-Victor Broussais (1772-1838) famously held that any pathology (mental or otherwise) could ultimately be analyzed in terms of an "irritation" of specific organs: diseases don't have an existence in and of themselves; rather, a series of quantitative gradations separate what we consider to be "normal" and "pathological" states, just like a fever could be defined as an outlier, a statistical of body temperature.[91] In the German context, the Broussais principle closely matches what we could call the "Ebbinghaus principle" , as quoted by Walter Morgenthaler as the epigraph of the preface of his monograph on Adolf Wölfli *A Madman as Artist* [*Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler*] (1921): "Pathological phenomena in their relationship to normal states function like a magnifying glass by allowing us to perceive things that would escape the naked eye."[92] Such statements were fairly widespread in the early 1920s; in effect, and even though it would express "gradations" between the normal and the pathological in less strictly statistical terms,[93] Freudian

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[90] Georges Canguilhem, "Auguste Comte and the Broussais Principle" ["Auguste Comte et le principe de Broussais"], in: *The Normal and the Pathological* [*Le normal et le pathologique*], 1966 [1943], 18-31.

[91] On Broussais' notion of irritation and his quantitative approach to nosography in general and psychopathology in particular, see Jacques Chazaud, *François-Joseph-Victor Brousssais, de l'irritation à la folie*. Paris: Erès, 1992, pp. 81-128.

[92] ["Die pathologischen Erscheinungen bedeuten für das Verständnis der normalen Zustände häufig etwas ähnliches wie das Vergrösserungsglas für Dinge, die mit unbewaffneten Augen schwer vernehmbar sind."] (Morgentaler, op. cit., VII)

[93] On the notion of "gradations", see for instance the opening paragraph of Otto Rank's *The Artist* [*Der Künstler*]: "A true knowledge of the essence of the artist can only be reached on the basis of an all-encompassing psychology, in which both the normal and the pathological, and *all the gradations between them* [*Übergangsstufen*] are accounted for. Because the inner life of the artist is not fundamentally different from that of other people, but only *gradually*." ["Eine richtige Erkenntnis vom Wesen des Künstlers kann nur auf der Grundlage einer allgemein giltigen umfassenden Psychologie erreicht werden, in der sowohl das Normale als auch das Pathologische sowie *alle dazwischen liegende Übergangsstufen* ihren Platz finden. Denn das Seelenleben des Künstlers ist von dem der anderen Menschen nicht prinzipiell, sondern nur *graduell* verschieden. "] (Rank, op. cit., p. 3) [emphasis mine].

psychoanalysts also posited that there was no ontological difference between pathological occurrences and "normal" states: the analysis of the former could shed new light onto the mechanisms of the latter, and vice versa (hence Freud's interest the psychopathology of everyday life).

Prinzhorn's take on the gradations [*Übergangsstufen*] between normal and pathological corresponds to a reversal of the "Ebbinghaus principle": the visual and literary productions of mentally ill patients do not offer an *enlarged* image [*Vergrösserung*] of the "normal" mechanisms of artistic expression, but rather strip it down to its bare essentials, in a process closely related to Husserl's phenomenological *reduction*. Prinzhorn explicitly acknowledges that his methodology, in which he attempts to withhold characterizations and judgments of value in order to gain the essential core of the phenomenon (i.e. of the artwork), is loosely inspired by Husserl's phenomenology (BdG 11).[94] The results of this "reductionist" approach are in effect indistinguishable from those of the "Ebbinghaus principle": the pathological is perceived as offering a golden opportunity for the study of "normal" phenomena (which it either "trims down" or "enlarges"). This reductionism explains some of the key aesthetic choices of the *BdG*, for instance its focus on the works of *unskilled* patients (i.e. patients with no prior artistic training), as Prinzhorn considers that they would thus be free of the cultural determinism that constitutes a form of interference, an unwanted addendum to the primal human drive for form-creation [*Gestaltung*]. Any kind of *intention* (i.e. predetermined composition, iconography, narration) is also considered to be a form of interference: according to Prinzhorn, "spontaneous" image-making, ranging from complex abstract images to simple doodles—for instance "the doodles on telephone

[94] Prinzhorn does not use the term "phenomenological reduction" [*phänomenologische Reduktion*], but mentions the equally Husserlian notion of "Wesensschau", literally "essence-gazing", as the cornerstone of his own methodology (BdG 11).

pads" ["die Kritzeleien auf Telephonblocks"] (BdG 22)—is the purest reflection of the "image-making pulsion" [*Gestaltungsdrang*]. This is reflected by the fact that the most "barebones" or "stripped-down" form of visual expression, "object-free, order-less scribbling" [*objektfreie ungeordnete Kritzelei*] literally stands at the center of Prinzhorn's schema of "form-making tendencies" [*Gestaltungstendenzen*], which intends to provide nothing less than a synthetic overview of the various forms of human self-expression (*BdG* 20) [Fig. 1.3].

Beyond his phenomenology-inspired reductionism, Prinzhorn also intended to overcome the binary opposition between "normal" and "pathological" by narrowing the gap between himself as a psychiatrist and his patients. In this regard, he was directly influenced by the other members of the Heidelberg school of psychiatry, especially the director of the Heidelberg psychiatric hospital Karl Wilmanns, who advocated for more immersive approaches. For instance, in order to write his study *Psychopathology of the Vagabond* [*Psychopathologie des Landstreichers*] (1906), Karl Wilmanns lived among itinerant homeless people for an extended period of time, observing their behavior and scrupulously collecting their drawings and personal stories (Kaufmann, op. cit., 59). The particular attention given to patients' self-descriptions [*Selbstschilderungen*] characteristic of the "Heidelberg school" is one of the most striking features of the book: the ten pathographies of "schizophrenic image-makers" that take up nearly half of its length are the result of a painstaking process (supervised by Wilmanns) that included research trips, sustained correspondence with various psychiatric hospitals across Europe,[95] and direct

[95] For a thorough description of the constitution of the collection, and the respective roles of Hans Prinzhorn and Karl Wilmanns in this endeavor, see Bettina Brand-Claussen's article "Das 'Museum für pathologische Kunst' in Heidelberg. Von den Anfängen bis 1945" ["The 'Museum for Pathological Art' in Heidelberg. From the Beginning Until 1945"], in: *La Beauté insensée*, 1996, 7-11.

interviews of schizophrenic patients[96] over the period of three years. Schizophrenic patients' explanations of their own works are sometimes quoted verbatim, for instance Peter Moog's [Peter Meyer] painstaking description of his own watercolors (*BdG* 195-196; 199).

The most significant of these direct encounters with schizophrenic artists took place in the context of the numerous trips undertaken by Prinzhorn to the Eickelborn psychiatric hospital, where over a period of several months he conducted interviews with Peter Meyer (Moog) and Karl Genzel (Brendel), whose "pathographies" are both included in the *BdG* (Brand-Claussen 1996, 19-20; Mirbach 2003, 87).[97]

The reception and analysis of the visual and literary production of mentally ill patients by Prinzhorn also tends to narrow the gap between psychiatrist and patient by methodologically privileging a form of empathy over diagnosis: Prinzhorn insists on the fact that the goal of the *BdG* is not to offer a set of practical tools that would help psychiatrists diagnose a specific type of mental illness based on the formal characteristics of these works. Prinzhorn doubts that such correlation could even be systematically established (*BdG* 5), thus running against the methodology of previous works on the same topic, including the taxonomy of the Heidelberg collection of pathological art (established from 1917 onwards, two years before Prinzhorn's arrival in Heidelberg), which was entirely based on a nosography of mental illnesses (*BdG* 4, note 5).

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[96] See for instance John MacGregor's description of the sustained "dialogue" between August Natterer's "self-description" and Hans Prinzhorn's own analysis of his work (MacGregor, op.cit., 199-202).

[97] According to Bettina Brand-Claussen, Karl Wilmanns insisted on the importance of the "self-descriptions" of mentally ill patients, and started the sustained dialogue with Meyer and Genzel that was later continued by Prinzhorn: for instance, in 1919, Karl Wilmanns sent back some of Meyer's works to the Eickelborn mental hospital in order to ask Moog for additional comments on his own works. Wilmanns specified that these comments had to be written down in full, including Meyer's own expressions and speech patterns (Brand-Claussen 1996, 19).

1.3 Prinzhorn's New Normativity

But Prinzhorn freely admits that this contestation of preexisting norms is driven by the specific agenda of introducing what he sweepingly calls the new norms:

> However carefully we tried to avoid any judgement of value based on any given set of norms, it won't escape the attention of the most informed of our readers that such apparently haphazard attention given to both the smallest detail and the broadest context alike in the name of the overarching concept of "form-making" [*Gestaltung*] points towards the edification of new norms.[98]

This movement that proceeds from a thorough critique of existing norms as a prerequisite for the (future) formulation of news ones, constitutes perhaps the most distinctively Nietzschean aspect of the *BdG*.[99] More specifically, it is symptomatic of the reception of Nietzsche in the first half of the twentieth century: as Steven E. Aschheim notes in *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*, "today's Nietzschean message is deconstructive, its canonic text the posthumously published fragment "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" […]. But a hundred years ago Nietzsche's modernist appropriators […] concentrated on creative, positive reconstruction, enlisting Nietzsche as champion of sweeping visions of cultural and political redemption" (Aschheim 1994, 52-53).[100] Prinzhorn fully subscribed to Nietzsche's call "to *be* something new, to

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[98] Wie sorgsam aber das Werten im Geiste irgendwelcher Normen vermieden wurde, so wird doch dem Kundigen kaum entgehen, dass diese oft anarchisch anmutende Hingabe an Kleinstes wie an Größtes im Namen des einen Leitbegriffes „Gestaltung" dennoch auf neu zu errichtende Normen hinblickt. (*BdG* X)

[99] On the question of Prinzhorn's Nietzscheanism, and his conflictual relationship with Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, see Elisabeth Schürer, "Prinzhorns Nietzsche-Bild", in: Franz Tenigl (ed.). *Klages, Prinzhorn und die Persönlichkeitspsychologie*. Bonn: Hestia 1986/87, 1987, pp. 90-98. On Hans Prinzhorn's encounter with the work of Nietzsche and its implications for his general project of cultural criticism [*Kulturkritik*], see Thomas Röske, "Nietzscheanismus" ["Nietzscheanism"], in: *Der Artzt als Künstler, Ästhetik und Psychotherapie bei Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933)*, Aisthesis Verlag, Bielefeld, 1995, pp. 129-135.

[100] Prinzhorn's "reconstructive" optimism thus constitutes the main difference between his work and 1960s French Nietzscheanism (one could argue that Bataille, Foucault, or Blanchot tend to

signify something new, to *represent* new values" ["etwas Neues zu *sein*, etwas Neues zu *bedeuten*, neue Werthe *darzustellen*"],[101] the motto of what Steven E. Aschheim calls "the not-so-discreet Nietzscheism of the Avant-Garde" (ibid., 50).[102]

However, along the lines of Nietzsche's "philosophy *of the future*" [*Philosophie der Zukunft*], the subtitle of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Prinzhorn did not conceive the *BdG* as a series of concrete proposals and stable conclusions, but rather as a first step towards a *future* union of aesthetics, art history, and psychology based on the notion of *Gestaltung*.[103] This relative lack of closure of the

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be much more reluctant when it comes to championing "new values").On the crucial importance of the reception of Nietzsche's critique of the notion of truth for "post-structuralist" authors (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault), see Alan D. Schrift, op. cit., pp. 102-109. In Alan D. Schrift's description, their "Nietzschean epistemology" does not lay the emphasis on "resolutions" (for instance, hypothetical "new values"), but rather on a new form of radical questioning: "Deleuze finds in Nietzsche an encouragement to replace an epistemology that lays the emphasis on the *resolution of problems* by an epistemology that lays the emphasis on the *creation of problems* […]. He criticized philosophy for asking the wrong questions; […] new problems had to be laid out. Not 'What is true?', but rather 'What is the value of truth?'." ["Deleuze trouve chez Nietzsche un encouragement à remplacer une épistémologie qui met l'accent sur *la résolution des problèmes*, par une épistémologie qui met au contraire l'accent sur *la création de problèmes*. […] Il a critiqué la philosophie pour avoir posé les mauvaises questions […] de nouveaux problèmes devaient être posés. Non pas 'Qu'est-ce qui est vrai ?', mais 'Quelle est la valeur de la vérité ?'"] (ibid., 105) [My emphasis].

[101] This quote from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* [*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*] (*Werke*, Vol. VI, 2, p.205) is singled out by Harry Kessler in his *memoires Faces and Times* [*Gesichter und Zeiten. Erinnerungen.*] Frankfurt Main, Firscher, 1988 [1921], p. 210. It is itself quoted as representative of the Nietzschean mindset of the early 1920s in Steven E. Aschheim, op. cit., p. 210.

[102] One could add that Prinzhorn's use of Nietzschean turns of phrase in the *BdG* constitute a series of "not-so-discreet" hints, for instance the allusion of the distrust of psychiatry caused by the short-sightedness of positivist pathographies on the part of "all those for whom the spiritual value of these works stood so high, that they considered their authors to have reached a position so to speak *beyond 'health' and 'sickness'*" ["alle die, denen die geistigen Werte gestalteter Werke so hoch standen, dass ihnen deren Urheber dadurch sozusagen *jenseits von 'Gesund' und 'Krank'* gerückt waren"] [My emphasis] (BdG 8).

[103] "And thus we can only say that the goal of this book, corresponding to its subtitle, is to be a contribution to a *future* psychology of form-making [*Gestaltung*] and to provide a vivid overview of a fringe topic [*Grenzgebiet*]. […] To what extent our conclusions […] can be considered to bring *solutions* to these problems remains to be seen. But we are deeply convinced that a clear and relevant *question* is always more useful than a somewhat ambiguous answer, be it even the right

BdG, could be interpreted as a shortcoming. Even though the "new norms" announced with much fanfare in the first pages of the book remain rather nebulous (MacGregor 1978, 196), the following section will attempt to sketch out the most salient characteristics of these "new norms".

The "new values" promoted by Prinzhorn, supposed to replace the misguided values of "pseudo-culture" as a result of a successful "transvaluation of values", privilege "form" over "content". More specifically, Prinzhorn is remarkably indifferent to the symbolism of what the Swiss art curator Harald Szeemann later called the "personal mythologies" of mentally ill artists like Wölfli or Genzel. In that sense, his analysis of the "art of the insane" is fundamentally different from a Freudian interpretation according to which the unconscious would express itself through a series of symbols or "hieroglyphics" [*Bilderschrift*] that the psychoanalyst is attempting to decipher.[104] Even though C.G. Jung is briefly mentioned in the *BdG*, Prinzhorn remains largely indifferent to the notion of "archetypes" structuring the collective unconscious. In terms of art historical analysis, Prinzhorn doesn't engage in the iconographic readings championed by Aby Warburg, and later comprehensively theorized by Erwin Panofsky, privileging instead formalist interpretations insisting on notions such as rhythmicity, spatial embodiment, and

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one. " ["Und somit können wir als das Ziel dieses Buches, seinem Untertitel entsprechend angeben, dass es als Beitrag zu einer *künftigen* Psychologie der Gestaltung ein Grenzgebiet lebendig darstellen soll. [...] Wieweit unsere Schlüsse [...] schon als *Lösungen* von Problemen gelten dürfen, wird sich erst erweisen müssen. Dass eine richtige klare *Fragestellung* oft wertvoller ist als eine halbklare, obzwar richtige Antwort, gilt uns für ausgemacht. "] (*BdG* 7) [My emphasis].

[104] See for instance Freud's allusion to the decipherment of hieroglyphics as a methodological simile in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "The dream-content is, as it were, presented in hieroglyphics, whose symbols must be translated, one by one, into the language of the dream-thoughts. It would of course be incorrect to attempt to read these symbols in accordance with their values as pictures, instead of in accordance with their meaning as symbols." ["Der Trauminhalt ist gleichsam in einer Bilderschrift gegeben, deren Zeichen einzeln in die Sprache der Traumgedanken zu übertragen sind. Man würde offenbar in die Irre geführt, wenn man diese Zeichen nach ihrem Bilderwert anstatt nach ihrer Zeichenbeziehung lesen wollte."] (*Freud Studienausgabe*, Vol. II: *Die Traumdeutung*, VI, 280).

gestural expressivity. In a rare declaration of principles that lifts the veil on the core of the aesthetic "new values" he envisions, Prinzhorn unambiguously states in the last paragraph of the theoretical part of the *BdG* that rhythm is the only true criterion [*Wertmaßstab*] to determine the value of a work of art: "the degree of rhythmic dynamism of a work determines its rank as a formal arrangement".[105]

Conversely, the form of phenomenological "essence-gazing" [*Wesensschau*] championed by Prinzhorn (*BdG* 11) is based on the notion that the "form-making pulsion" [*Gestaltungsdrang*] would somehow leave a perceptible trace in the work (as a visual configuration or *Gestaltung*), which in turn could be empathetically perceived by the spectator: the visual work thus becomes a kind of conduit facilitating this transfer of form-making "energy" between producer and receiver, mostly described as a form of rhythmical wave.

Significantly, around the time of the publication of the *BdG* (1922), Prinzhorn took part in a procedure that promised to open up the door for new possibilities of empathetic connection between psychiatrists and patients: medical experiments with mescaline, a drug that was thought to be "psychotomimetic", i.e. temporarily replicating the symptoms of mental illness, and in this case of schizophrenia (ten Berge 279-8).[106] Prinzhorn's mescaline experiments were part of a broader research program of the Heidelberg psychiatric hospital, launched by Karl Wilmanns,[107] and supervised by Kurt Beringer, who summarized the results of this study in *The Mescaline*

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[105] ["Der Grad der rhythmischen Belebtheit eines Werkes bestimmt seinen Rang als eines Gestalteten."] (*BdG* 49).

[106] Hans Prinzhorn's texts on mescaline were published much later, in 1927-1928, but they both mention that these experiments took place in 1922 (Prinzhorn 1928, 33; Prinzhorn 1927, 279).

[107] Wilmanns was a disciple of Emil Kraepelin, who spearheaded medical research on the relationship between psychotropic drugs—including hallucinogenic drugs—and mental illness.

Intoxication: Its History and Symptoms [*Der Meskalinrausch: Seine Geschichte und Erscheinungsweise*] (1927).[108]

However, Hans Prinzhorn's essays on his involvement with the program[109] show little interest in investigating the inner mechanisms of schizophrenia: rather, he seemed to hope that psychotomimetic drugs would provide him with an embodied experience of phenomenological reductionism, trimming down sensory perceptions to their mere essence. His1928 mescaline essay is particularly significant in that regard. Prinzhorn, reaching the climax of his mescaline high, feels the irrepressible urge to emulate the "rhythmical tendency" he described in the *BdG* as the main feature of the "artistry of the mentally ill" and the only true criterion for aesthetic evaluation:

In addition to this humming in which I later realized that isolated words started to appear, as if forced upon me by an alien force, another tendency started to manifest itself more and more forcefully: an urge to impose a rhythm to this humming through repetitive noises like "nen—nen—nen", for instance. This rhythmical tendency [*Rhythmisierungstendenz*] derived from the gradual oscillation I mentioned between reality and the realm of dreams [*Traumreich*] and manifested itself periodically as a regular undulation of space itself, with which I was at one. Whenever I was put back in contact with reality—which felt distinctly unwelcome—I was

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[108] Hans Prinzhorn was a willing and eager participant of this study; he appears in Beringer's book as patient "2a" and "2b". On Hans Prinzhorn's involvement in this Heidelberg research program, see Jos ten Berge, "Experimental Madness in Heidelberg" ["Experimentele waanzin in Heidelberg"], in: *Drugs in the Arts: From Opium to LSD, 1798-1968* [*Drugs in de kunst: Van opium tot LSD, 1798-1968*], Free University of Amsterdam Press, Amsterdam, 2004, 279-284. See also Thomas Röske, "Erdentrückung 1922: Hans Prinzhorn im Meskalin-Rausch", in: *Rausch im Bild – Bilderrausch: Drogen als Medien von Kunst in den 70er Jahren*, Prinzhorn Collection, Heidelberg, 2004, 117-126.

[109] The longest of the two, "The Soul that could be raptured away from the Earth" ["Die Erdentrückbare Seele"], was published in 1927 as an article in the eight volume of the book series *The Human and the Earth* [*Mensch und Erde*], directed by Hermann von Keyserling. The title is an homage to Ludwig Klages' famous speech *The Human and the Earth* [*Mensch und Erde*], pronounced in 1914, that vigorously condemned technological progress and called for a more holistic form of society based on a form of balance between mankind and nature. The second article, entitled "Rapture by Intoxication" ["Entrückung durch Rauschgift"], is a condensed version of the former focusing on the description of mescaline-induced hallucinations, published in 1928 in the *Journal of Parapsychology* [*Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie*] (alongside descriptions of Poltergeists, enigmatic apparitions, etc.).

somewhat scared and introduced the ebb and flow of this rhythm into my own humming: I did that several times, deliberately intending to prolong this fragile contact with the overwhelming beauty of this realm of pure ecstasy [*Rauschreich*]. I was briefly reminded of the theoretical introduction of my book *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, in which I insisted on the crucial importance of order-imposing drives [*Ordnungstendenzen*] for form-creation [*Gestaltung*], without being able to reach full conceptual clarity on this subject, which I thought would be impossible. Sometimes the rhythm would move into my right hand, and would thus be expressed by knocking on the deck chair on which I was lying.[110]

According to Prinzhorn, mescaline allowed him to physically experience the very essence of the expressive urge [*Ausdrucksbedürfnis*]: it is described as an answer to an overwhelming, de-individualizing force, likened to a tidal wave, with which he has to maintain contact at all cost. The "order-imposing drives" [*Ordnungstendenzen*], manifesting themselves through sound (humming) and movement (rhythmical knocking), allow him to do so by inducing a kind of trance state akin to a Sufi *zikr*.

In spite of the rhetoric of unmediated bodily experience deployed by Prinzhorn in this passage, his account of his experience is heavily filtered through his own aesthetic theories, a peculiar blend of late Expressionism directly influenced by August Schmarsow, Wilhelm Worringer, Gottfried Semper, Alois Riegl, and Ludwig Klages.[111]

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[110] ["Zu dem Summen, in das mir dann auch zwangsmäßig Worte einflossen, die ich erst nachher bemerkte, wie wenn sie von einer fremden Instanz produziert wären, gesellte sich zunehmend eine andere Tendenz: den Summton zu rhythmisieren durch Laute wie „nen—nen—nen" z.B. Diese Rhythmisierungstendenz wurzelte schon in dem erwähnten schwellenartigen Schwanken zwischen Realität und Traumreich und erschien zeitweise wie ein gleichmäßiges Wogen des Alls, mit dem ich eins war. Trat nun, stets unwillkommen, der Kontakt mit der Realität ein, so nahm ich diesen wallenden Rhythmus in einer gewissen Angst in den Summton mit hinein, mehrmals deutlich in dem Sinn, hierdurch den Kontakt mit dem überwiegend schönen Rauschreich nicht zu verlieren. Für Augenblicke tauchte dann eine Erinnerung an die theoretische Einleitung meines Buches „Bildnerei der Geisteskranken" auf, in der die Funktion der Ordnungstendenzen in der Gestaltung mir stets besonders wichtig war, ohne dass ich zu voller begrifflicher Klarheit darüber je hoffte gelangen zu können. Manchmal ging der Rhythmus auch in die rechte Hand über und wurde auf dem Liegestuhl geklopft.] (Prinzhorn 1928, 28)

[111] See Bettina Brand-Claussen's analysis of the BdG as a "late Expressionist manifesto" in: Bettina Brand-Claussen, "Prinzhorns Bildnerei der Geisteskranken—ein spätexpressionistisches Manifest" ["Prinzhorn's Artistry of the Mentally Ill, a Late Expressionist Manifesto"], B. Brand-

First of all, art is perceived as the product of an inner world of vision, not as a reflection of external reality. Prinzhorn's description of any contact with reality as "unwelcome" echoes German Expressionism's rejection of nature: "Expressionism is the enemy of nature. It revokes its powers, and it questions its 'truth'" ["Der Expressionismus verhält sich gegenüber der Natur feindselig. Er aberkennt ihre Übermacht; er zweifelt an ihrer 'Wahrheit'"], as Friedrich Markus Huebner programmatically declared in 1920.[112] Even though this explanation is criticized by Huebner himself as simplistic (ibid.), Expressionism's rejection of nature is often characterized as a reversal of its etymological antonym. While *Im*pressionism describes the subject's perceptions of external reality, *Ex*pressionism (from *ex-primere*, literally to "squeeze out") taps into the inner world of the subject and manifests it in the shape of a verbal, visual, or musical representation. Klages' theory of expression [*Ausdruckslehre*], one of Prinzhorn's main philosophical references throughout the *BdG*, thus leaves no room for realism or any form of mimetic representation of reality, and could thus be described as the polar opposite of the theories later formulated by Erich Auerbach in his magnum opus *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* [*Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*] (1946). To a certain extent, Expressionism's rejection of reality partly explains both Prinzhorn's interest in the "art of the insane" and the overwhelming success of the work in specific artistic circles, for instance Alfred Kubin's enthusiasm for these works. The schizophrenic artists of the collection were perceived as cut off from external reality (i.e. with a partial or complete loss of the sense of reality or *Realitätsbezug*) which, combined with the fact that they were seen as relatively "uncontaminated"

Claussen and I. Jadi (eds.), *Vision und Revision einer Entdeckung*, Heidelberg: Sammlung Prinzhorn, 2001.

[112] Friedrich Markus Huebner, "Der Expressionismus in Deutschland" ["Expressionism in Germany"], in: *Europas neue Kunst und Dichtung*, Berlin: Rowohlt, 1920. Reprinted in: *Theorie des Expressionismus*, Otto F. Best (ed.), Reclam, Stuttgart, 1976, 37s.

by artistic convention (i.e. as mostly self-taught artists) accounted for the exceptional "purity" and intensity of their artistic accomplishments. In the words of Alfred Kubin in his enthusiastic account of his visit to the collection, these artists had shut themselves off "in the workshop of their mind":

> On the subject of their disease, [Karl Wilmanns] mentioned that most of these artists suffer from what is called *schizophrenia*, a type of illness that has proven until now impossible to bring under control, lasts for an entire lifetime, and is shrouded in a peculiar fantasy life [*Phantasieleben*]. *These artists are entirely shut off from the outside world and won't allow anyone to peek into the workshop of their mind.* […] we were in presence of wonders of the artistic spirit, shining through from the depths, beyond any intentional, conscious thought […]. These works have a value that points at the universal; that's why they made such a deep impression upon me, eliciting a feeling of unadulterated joy.[113]

For Kubin, these schizophrenic artists are in a sense "better Expressionists" than the Expressionists themselves, pushing the aesthetic tenets of Expressionism (rejection of reality, cultivation of one's "fantasy life", direct expression of inner visions) to their ultimate conclusions.[114] Prinzhorn insists on the fact that such distance from reality [*Realitätsferne*] is not so much due to a lack of observation (for instance of the proportions of the human body, as would be the case for the stick figures of children's drawings), but rather the result of a process of stylization, of a turn away from mimesis to privilege forms that best express the artist's inner

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[113] "Über die Krankheit selbst bemerkte [Karl Wilmanns], dass es sich bei diesen Künstlern vorwiegend um sogenannte Schizophrenie handelt [...], welche auf bisher unkontrollierbare Weise gewöhnlich fürs ganze Leben andauert und in ein eigentümliches Phantasieleben gehüllt ist. *Diese Kranken sind völlig in sich abgeschlossen und gewähren keinen Einblick in die Werkstatt ihres Geistes.* [...] wir standen vor Wundern des Künstlergeistes, die aus Tiefen jenseits alles Gedanklich-Überlegten heraufdämmern [...]. Hierin liegt der Wert, der ins Allgemeine weist; darum war es auch ein Gefühl erhebendster Freude, mit dem ich diese Eindrücke aufnahm." (Alfred Kubin, "Die Kunst der Irren", ["The Art of the Insane"], in: *Das Kunstblatt*, 5, May 1922, Verlag Gustav Kiepenheuer, Potsdam-Berlin) [emphasis mine].

[114] Prinzhorn's use of the term *Traumreich* in his 1928 mescaline essay, as well as the state of seclusion and absolute solipsism it describes, could be interpreted as a reminiscence or allusion to Kubin's own 1909 novel *The Other Side* [*Die andere Seite*], set in the Land of Dreams [*Traumreich*], a strange, absurdist society led to its apocalyptic downfall under the hypnotizing guidance of an all-powerful leader called Patera, cut off from the outside world by a gigantic and impenetrable wall.

vision. This idea is formulated, for instance, in his discussion of the way the schizophrenic artist Karl Genzel (Brendel) solved the formal problems associated with representing Christ on the cross [*Kreuzproblem*] by sculpting his arms and legs as mere stumps: "it is obvious that no realistic tendency guided his hand, but rather a tendency to adopt non-realist […] solutions".[115]

In the context of Prinzhorn's aesthetic theories, the primacy of *expression* leads him to formulate a new hierarchy of artistic media. Paradoxically, according to him, the visual arts do not correspond to the pinnacle of artistic expressivity. Due to the pivotal role attributed to the "order-imposing drives" [*Ordnungstendenzen*], this exalted position is reserved to the art forms that are characterized by the creation and variation of rhythms: music and dance. It is thus hardly surprising that, at the climax of his mescaline high, Prinzhorn would describe himself as "spontaneously" experiencing the urge to express his vision through rhythm by *humming* and *knocking*, corresponding respectively to music and dance, reduced to their bare essentials.

Prinzhorn's understanding of the crucial importance of rhythm in artistic production is part of a broader conversation whose origins predate the beginning of the Expressionist movement by a solid half century. Ironically for an advocate of a radical break with the past presented with Zarathustra-like theatrics, Prinzhorn's "new values" are here deeply indebted to nineteenth and early twentieth-century German art history and aesthetics. More specifically, the main art historical category mobilized by Prinzhorn to offer a set of interpretative criteria for the "artistry of the mentally ill" is the notion of ornament. This might be the most surprising and counter-intuitive aspect of Prinzhorn's thought, at least from a contemporary perspective. I would argue that this has to do with the fact that we still operate within a "Dubuffet paradigm"[116] that dates

[115] ["klar ist, dass keine naturalistische Tendenz seine Hand führte, sondern eine Tendenz zu […] realitätsferner Lösung"] (*BdG* 143)
[116] See Ch.4.

back to the early 1950s, which focuses largely on *figurative* works (especially those featuring schematic or out-of-proportion depictions of the human body) to analyze visual materials produced in psychiatric institutions. They are part of a conceptual landscape that includes figurative cave paintings (Lascaux, Altamira), Brassaï's photographs of graffiti, the faux naïve stick figures of CoBrA painters like Asger Jorn, and the elongated, emaciated silhouettes of the second period of Giacometti: this paradigm of "raw" figuration based on a notion of "human nature" inspired by existentialism is usually defined as the polar opposite of the rarefied atmosphere of Greenbergian abstraction. The notion of ornament is usually absent of *both* paradigms: irrevocably condemned by Modernist figureheads like Loos, Gropius, or Corbusier as the epitome of bad taste in the name of minimalism and functionalism,[117] too overwrought and finely crafted to be compatible with the raw spontaneity of *art informel*.

Alina Payne's recent scholarship on the notion of ornament, most notably her book *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (Yale University Press, 2012) offers a way out of this interpretative aporia. For Payne, the rhetoric of a clean break with ornament as a foundational moment of Modernist aesthetics is largely misleading:

> What emerges is a profound continuity between nineteenth-century theory and modernism that existed precisely at the point where the break was most decisive and obvious: in the realm of ornament. Paradoxically, through its demise and necessary replacement ornament emerges as a significant nerve ending of modern culture, and ties the theory of architectural modernism back into a historical continuum. (Payne 2012, 21)[118]

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[117] See for instance Wolfgang Pfleiderer's introduction to the Werkbund exhibition *Form Without Ornament* [*Die Form ohne Ornament*] of 1924, and Adolf Loos' celebrated essay *Ornament and Crime* [*Ornament und Verbrechen*], first published in 1913 and generally considered to be the first manifesto of architectural functionalism.

[118] According to Payne, the discourse on ornament as an addition to architectural structure gradually shifted to the understanding of the role objects (furniture, utensils, etc.) within a functionalist architectural space between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century.

The German architect and art historian Gottfried Semper (1803-1879)[119] plays a key role in Payne's analysis: she describes the crucial role of ornament (under various guises, including as ergonomic object) in twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics as "Semper's heritage" (Payne 2012, 25-64).[120] In its own way, Prinzhorn's use of the notion of ornament as a key motif in his description the "artistry of the mentally ill" is also part of this heritage. This is easily explained through Prinzhorn's intellectual biography: he received his doctoral degree in philosophy in 1908 from the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich with a dissertation on Semper entitled *Gottfried Semper's Fundamental Aesthetic Insights* [*Gottfried Sempers Grundanschauungen*]. The topic of this dissertation, and indeed his move from Leipzig (where he began his Ph.D.) from Munich had been suggested by August Schmarsow (1853-1936)[121], another major theorist of ornament (Payne 2012, 138-146), whose seminars Prinzhorn had attended at the university of Leipzig. In 1905-1906, Prinzhorn even acted as his *Famulus*, or research assistant.[122] The notion that imposing a specific order on abstract structural elements would constitute the essence of art is directly taken from Gottfried Semper's writings on architecture. To borrow from Prinzhorn's own summary in

[119] Gottfried Semper was a celebrated architect who designed numerous buildings in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland in the mid-nineteenth century, including the Municipal Theater [*Burgtheater*] and the Museum of Art History [*Kunsthistorisches Museum*] in Vienna. He was also an influential theoretician of architecture, famous for his book *The Four Elements of Architecture* [*Die vier Elemente der Baukunst*] (1851) and for *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, or Applied Aesthetics: A Handbook for Technicians, Artists, and Art Connoisseurs* [*Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik: ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*] (1860).

[120] According to Payne, Semper was a pioneer in defining the study of objects as a legitimate field of inquiry for art history, in direct relationship with architecture (ibid.).

[121] August Schmarsow was a leading German art historian of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, specializing in Italian Renaissance and French nineteenth century neoclassical painting. He provided a systematic tableau of his aesthetic theories in his *Fundamental Principles of Art History* [*Grundbegriffe der Kunstgeschichte*] (1905). His work on ornament can be compared to the aesthetic theories of fellow turn-of-the-century art historians Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin (Payne 2012, 112-157).

[122] Röske, *Der Arzt als Künstler*, 92. On the combined influence of Gottfried Semper and August Schmarsow on Hans Prinzhorn, see Thomas Röske, *op.cit.*, 91-110.

his doctoral dissertation, Semper defines three "form-creating moments" [*Gestaltungsmomente*]: "symmetry—proportionality—direction" ["Symmetrie—Proportionalität—Richtung"] (Prinzhorn 1909, 41).[123] Schmarsow essentially elaborated on the last member of this triad, "direction", to promote a form of psychological aesthetics based on the respective spatial relationships between the human body and the work of art: Schmarsow theorized the notion of *Raumgefühl* (literally "feeling of space"), from which he derived both a theory of artistic expression as space-shaping gestures (most notably, but not exclusively in three-dimensional media such as architecture and sculpture) and a phenomenology of art reception as an intuitive, empathetic response [*Einfühlung*] to the former. In turn, the theory of *Einfühlung* was part of a broader movement at the crossroads of German art history and aesthetics. It was championed by philosopher Theoder Lipps (1851-1914), who deeply influenced both Schmarsow's and Prinzhorn's own theories. Lipps was also a key figure in Prinzhorn's intellectual trajectory; Prinzhorn attended Lipps' seminars in Munich between 1906 and 1908 (alongside with Ernst Bloch), and Lipps ultimately became Prinzhorn's *Doktorvater*, even though the topic of the dissertation itself had been suggested by Schmarsow, with the explicit goal of referring Prinzhorn to the conceptual "common ground" between himself and Lipps, in the guise of a return to Semper.[124] The "psychological turn" in aesthetic theory is common to all turn-of-the-century

[123] Although these "moments" are supposed to apply to all forms of artistic expression, Prinzhorn notes that they are most easily perceptible and at their purest when dealing with "crystalline, fully regular forms" (ibid.): for instance geometric, non-representational architectural elements such as a cymatia, metopes and triglyphs, which Prinzhorn compares with elements of musical composition. "The composition of rhythmical figures [in architecture] is similar to the rules of musical composition, and is determined by laws governing the return of specific elements, by cadencies and caesuras, by rises and falls, combined in such a way as to eventually form a closed figure" ["Die Gliederung rhythmischer Figuren erfolgt ähnlich wie in der Musik nach bestimmten Gesetzen der Wiederkehr, nach Kadenzen und Cäsuren, Erhebungen und Senkungen, aus deren Verkettung die geschlossene Figur entsteht."] (Prinzhorn, op. cit., 42).
[124] See Schmarsow's letter to Werner Deubel (17.10.1933, Marbach Literature Archive), as mentioned in Röske, op. cit., p. 101.

"Semperian" philosophers and art historians (Payne 2014, 132-156): Schmarsow and Lipps are part of the same generation as Alois Riegl or Heinrich Wölfflin.[125]

The *BdG* is fundamentally a work of the Semperian school, to an extent that, in my opinion, has not been sufficiently emphasized in contemporary scholarship. The Semperian influence can of course be felt in the theoretical part of the book, whose categories largely follow the ones established by Prinzhorn in his 1908 dissertation (Röske 1995, 107; Weber 1984, 3-4). However, I would argue that this influence is much further reaching than previously assumed, and can be perceived throughout the book on at least two levels: first, in its turn to details and "marginal" phenomena, and second, in its particular emphasis on embodied aesthetics.

First of all, choosing the "artistry of the mentally ill" as a legitimate topic for aesthetic investigation is arguably a Semperian gesture. One could turn to Walter Benjamin's praise of Riegl in his lesser-known essay on the methodology of art history entitled "Rigorous Study of Art: On the First Volume of *Art Historical Studies*" ["Strenge Kunstwissenschaft: Zum ersten Bande der 'Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen"] (1931) to find a compelling description of one of the most striking features of the Semperian school: "devotion for the insignificant" ["Andacht zum Unbedeutenden"].[126] In that phrase, the "insignificant" is only what could *superficially* appear as

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[125] Wölfflin produced what can be considered as the manifesto of this movement, in the shape of a small, spirited essay entitled *Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture* [*Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur*] (1886); his student Wilhelm Worringer was the author of *Abstraction and Empathy* [*Abstraktion und Einfühlung*] (1908) a work that largely contributed to enshrine the concept of *Einfühlung* in the conceptual vocabulary of German Expressionism. There were however, tensions between Wölfflin and Schmarsow.

[126] See "Strenge Kunstwissenschaft", in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, p.371. Translated by Thomas Y. Levin, "Rigorous Study of Art", in: October, Vol. 47 (Winter, 1988), pp. 84-90 (the "devotion for the insignificant" appears on p.371 of of the English translation). As mentioned by Levin in a footnote, the term is repeatedly misattributed by Benjamin to the brothers Grimm as a supposed motto of their philological inquiries, whereas it first appeared in the writings of Sulpliz Boisserée, (attributed to Schlegel) as a critique of the Grimm brothers (see Roland Kany, *Mnemosyne als Programm*, 234-235, quoted by Levin, op.cit., 87). Levin translates the

such, for instance because it is generally considered as a lowly artefact which might not even qualify as "art" in the traditional sense. Semper and his followers were interested in the humble beginnings of architecture in the shape of a Rousseauist "Primitive Hut"[127], but also consider ancient or contemporary peasant tools, and "folk arts" such as weaving, basketry, or pottery as worthy, even crucial objects of aesthetic investigation because they provide deep insights into the fundamental principles of architecture, and even of artistic creation at large.[128] One could say that Prinzhorn simply transposes the Semperian conceptual toolbox to a different context, by devoting himself to his own "insignificant" (or "non-artistic") object of inquiry, an "artistry of the mentally ill" to which he ascribes similar primordial qualities more in tune with the notion of a notion of the primacy of *expression* that does not appear in Semper's original formalist system. Another student of August Schmarsow, Aby Warburg, who attended Schmawsow's seminar in Florence in 1888, displays a similar "devotion for the insignificant" by incorporating objects of daily life in the *Mnemosyne* atlas, investigating the "tragic" dimension of tools, but also by explicitly rejecting the traditional boundaries of art and non-art. For instance, in his 1907 essay "Peasants at Work in Burgundian Tapestries" Warburg states his refusal to be "distracted by the current

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word *Andacht* in the expression "Andacht für das Unbedeutende" as "*reverence* for the insignificant". However, the word has religious connotations that must have been abundantly clear to Benjamin, especially given the fact that he also used this expression in his correspondence with Gershom Scholem (Kany, ibid.): it seems more appropriate to translate it as *devotion*.

[127] On this topic, see Johnathan A. Hale, "Gottfried Semper's Primitive Hut", in: Jo Odgers, Flora Samuel, and Adam Sharr (eds.), *Primitive: Original Matters in Architecture*, Routledge 2006, 55-62. See also Joseph Rykwert's classic *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, MIT Press, 1962.

[128] Semper believed that formal characteristics of earlier stages of architecture manifest themselves at later stages: for instance, Egyptian stone walls or columns displaying features of earlier constructions in mud and reeds, or the façade of nineteenth-century building harking back to cover one's own body with cloth as a basic human need, which he calls "vestment theory" [*Bekleidungstheorie*].

tendency to regulate art-historical inquiry by posting border-guards".[129] Riegl arguably exerted a comparable influence on Benjamin's own *Arcades Project*, and more generally on his predilection for "insignificant" cultural productions, which included, among other things, a personal collection of books by mentally ill authors, which he praised for their ability to challenge established aesthetic categories in strikingly similar terms: "How could this happen? How did [madness] manage to slip past the passport control of the city of books, this Thebes with a hundred doors?" ["Wie ist es dahin gelangt? Wie hat er die Paßkontrolle dieses hunderttorigen Theben, der Stadt der Bücher, umgangen?"].[130]

The "devotion for the insignificant" describes the choice of topic, genre, or medium, but also entails a specific way of analyzing a work of art (building, image, or sculpture, for instance) by paying particular attention to "details" that might otherwise be overlooked: margins, joints, transitions between surfaces, etc.[131] This "Semperian" methodology can be felt throughout the *BdG*, as Prinzhorn's gaze consistently interrogates precisely this kind of structural details, often at the expense of other, apparently more central or obvious elements. To name but one example

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[129] As quoted in Alison Payne, op. cit., p.151. On the question of the questioning of established aesthetic categories by Warburg and Benjamin (whom one could describe as third-generation Semperians, respectively via Schmarsow and Riegl), see Payne, op. cit., 151-152, and Georges Didi-Huberman's *L'image survivante*, 419 (mentioned in Payne, 2014, note 166, p.295).
[130]Walter Benjamin, "Bücher von Geisteskranken: Aus meiner Sammlung" [Book by the Mentally Ill: From My Collection"], 1928, reprinted in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4, 619 (English translation in: Selected Writings Vol. 2, 1927-1934. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. 130)
[131] On this point, see Alison Payne's description of Gottfried Semper's method: "As he tried to establish textile as the Ur-art, embedded in all subsequent art forms, he needed to look at details that connected walling and framing with binding and sewing, weaving and braiding, and with the band, seam, hem, and edging. If textiles, and later wickerwork and clay vessels, had such patterns, their persistence had to be sought in wall treatments, joinery, and connections between parts, and not in plans, volumes, or building silhouettes." (Payne, op. cit., 56).

among many, Prinzhorn's short discussion of Moog's[132] watercolor *Adoration of the Magi* [*Die Anbetung*] (BdG 197-198, Ill. 116) focuses almost entirely on the nature of the cones made up of beams of light [*Strahlfiguren*] visible along the top and left-hand edge of the image [Fig. 1.4]; his slightly more detailed discussion of another watercolor by Moog, *Descent from the Cross and Pietà* [*Kreuzabnahme und Pieta*] (*BdG* 198-199, and Ill. 117, p.200) [Fig. 1.5] mention first and foremost the structural function of the two ladders on each side of the cross as dome-like "space-creating technique" [*raumschaffende Mittel*]. To paraphrase Confucius's saying about the finger pointing at the moon, one could say that when showed a descent from the cross, the Semperian art historian will look at the ladder:

> The *Descent from the Cross* is remarkable for its clearly delineated composition, particularly the one of its two main parts. One would be tempted to believe in the very self-conscious use of space-creating techniques. The two diagonal ladders form a curved space nearly resembling a dome.[133]

As a student of August Schmarsow, Prinzhorn also paid particular attention to the role of the body, and to what Schmarsow theorized as "bodily sensation" [*Körpergefühl*]. Building upon Lipps' *Einfühlung* theory, Schmarsow claimed that the origins of all artistic expression were to be found in the repetition and variation of *gestures*. Facial expressions and pantomime, the shaping of our bodily perceptions through architectural space, as well as the hand gestures of sculptors, all

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[132] Peter Moog (pseudonym of Peter Meyer) (1871-1930), is the third of the ten "schizophrenic masters" studied by Prinzhorn in the *BdG*. Like Karl Genzel (Brendel), he was institutionalized at the Eickelborn mental hospital, an an institution with which Karl Wilmanns and later Hans Prinzhorn had regular contacts. Moog's style is characterized by brightly colored religious scenes, whose relatively conventional iconography is balanced by hid exuberant, obsessive ornamental patterns. Moog thought that becoming a religious artist would help him atone for his previous sins: alcoholism and numerous sexual escapades (*BdG* 185-203)

[133] "Die Kreuzabnahme (Abb. 117) zeichnet sich durch die übersichtliche Komposition des Ganzen und besonders der zwei Hauptteile aus. Man ist versucht, an ganz bewußte Anwendung raumschaffender Mittel zu glauben. Die schräg gestellten Leiter täuschen fast einen Kuppelraum vor." (BdG 198-199).

played a key role in his demonstration.[134] His own version of Semper's "Primitive Hut" was prehistoric carved tools:[135] "in his view the geometric forms (ornament) that adorn the prehistoric carved tools he examines are the result of regulated expressive movements made visible (like repeated punching) and are tied to the intimate traffic between *Kunstgewerbe* and the 'warm human body'" (Payne 2014, 145). Lipps' student Wilhelm Worringer expressed a very similar idea in *Formal Problems of the Gothic Style* [*Formprobleme der Gotik*] (1911), where he theorized the expressive potential of ornamental lines as "carrier of the will to form" [*Trager des Formwillens*], both in terms of the creation of artistic forms and as a crucial element of our perception of the latter: "Because as soon as we become aware of a line, without our knowledge, we *feel* internally the process that lead to its creation" ["Denn sobald wir überhaupt eine Linie in unser Bewusstsein aufnehmen, fühlen wir innerlich unwillkürlich den Vorgang ihrer Entstehung nach."] (ibid., 33). For Worringer, abstraction best expressed the essence of artistic expression,[136] an opinion shared by Prinzhorn whose own aesthetic theories systematically privilege abstraction over figuration.[137] But unlike the artists and architects evoked by Payne (Corbusier, Gropius, etc.), Schmarsow's theory of embodied aesthetics doesn't lead Prinzhorn to formulate a general theory of the ergonomic relationship between the human body, architectural spaces, and everyday objects (encapsulated by Corbusier's *Modulor*). Quite the opposite: pushing the idea of

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[134] See for instance Schmarsow's essay *Our Relationship with the Visual Arts* [*Unser Verhältnis zu den bildenden Künsten*] (1903).
[135] August Schmarsow, "Primordial Impulses of Ornamental Art" ["Anfangsgründe jeder Ornamentik"], *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 1910, vol. 5, 191-215.
[136] On this topic, see for instance Worringer's acerbic dismissal of figurative prehistoric cave etchings, in which he refuses to locate the origins of all artistic expression, privileging instead the abstract ornamental lines of prehistoric stone tools: the former is rejected as inferior, "barbarian" products of a merely mimetic impulse, whereas Worringer doesn't hesitate in drawing a straight line between the latter and the "masterworks of Phidias" (*Abstraction and Empathy* [*Abstraktion und Einfühlung*], 67-69).
[137] Wilhelm Worringer is briefly mentioned in the *BdG* as a kindred spirit (*BdG* 356).

the primacy of expressive gestures to its ultimate conclusion, Prinzhorn seems to develop a choreographic notion of artistic production, within which sculptures or works on paper are but a (potentially superfluous) byproduct of these gestures. Among the works discussed in the *BdG*, the series of dynamic curves produced by Heinrich Welz [Hyacinth, Freiherr von Wieser] (1833-1912) seem to come closest to the tenets of Prinzhorn's own aesthetic theories. According to von Wieser, his series of "curves of the will" [*Willenskurven*] constituted powerful traces of repetitive gestures: these simple pencil drawings on paper were meant to act as receptacles of the kinetic energy that presided to their creation, which could be instantaneously communicated to the viewer. The energy in question didn't take its source in von Wieser alone, who seems to have seem himself as a kind of medium channeling higher powers: the sun itself in *Willology of the Sun* [*Willologie der Sonne*] [Fig.1.6], or, more modestly, the emperor Napoleon in *Napoleon's Curve* [*Napoleons-Kurve*] [Fig.1.7].

Prinzhorn's pathography of von Wieser in the *BdG* (BdG 249-255) provides a comprehensive overview of his delirious system, based on a form of magical thinking: a firm belief in his own telepathic (either through his own gaze or via a drawing) and telekinetic abilities (von Wieser believes he can change the position of stars just by looking at them). Prinzhorn also describes the evolution of von Wieser's drawings, first incorporating relatively naturalistic elements, then turning towards abstraction as the human face becomes a cluster of straight lines expressing both a person's individuality and a deep connection between the individual and broader cosmic forces. Significantly, the ultimate stage of von Wieser's work leads him to give up actual drawing altogether, to devote himself entirely to "telekinetic" drawing:

> Excited by our visit, he spoke for the first time in a while and revealed that he was giving up drawing for the same reason as he had given up speaking: because it was no longer necessary. He said that for his next compositions, he would simply cover the paper with graphite and, pushing it

around by the mere strength of his gaze, would force the material to form whichever lines and shapes he desired.[138]

As Prinzhorn himself noted, von Wieser's telekinetic aesthetics are uncomfortably close to his own system, of which they constitute a form of caricature. The pathography of von Wieser is permeated by a form of awkwardness that doesn't quite amount to an "anxiety of influence" (as Prinzhorn's own aesthetic principles crystallized more than a decade before he met von Wieser), but that we could call "anxiety of closeness". The aesthetics of Prinzhorn and von Wieser share a common denominator. For both of them, art is fundamentally an expression of the inner life of the soul [*Ausdruck von Seelischem*], whose movements are transcribed choreographically into lines and curves. Prinzhorn is thus forced to admit this proximity, while regretting what he perceives as the naivety of von Wieser's magical thinking, pushing his own aesthetics *ad absurdum*:

Blindly following his systematization compulsion, he gives free rein to his tendency towards abstraction, and sets himself the following goal: to represent ideas graphically, i.e. with curves and a handful of lines. He apparently believes that by purely by focusing his attention on an idea, he can magically impart the curve that he draws in this state of deep concentration with an extract of this idea. But if one looks at one of his catalogues of expressive curves [*Ausdruckskurven*], for instance his *Willology of the Sun* (Ill. 144), even the most benevolent critic will be forced to admit that this work is a pathetic failure: *though based on a thoroughly correct apprehension of the mechanisms of the psychology of expression*, it was drawn *ad absurdum* by the artist's lack of critical distance. *The fundamental insight of this thought process is entirely true: what is filling the soul must necessarily find an expression through gestures.* But it is of course entirely misguided that these might constitute material "ideas". This would be magic and enchantment […].[139]

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[138] "Durch unseren Besuch angeregt, sprach er seit langem zu erstenmal wieder und verriet, dass er auf das Zeichnen aus ähnlichen Grunde verzichte, wie auf das Sprechen: weil es für ihn nicht mehr nötig sei. Er werde künftig einfach das Papier mit Graphit bestreuen und, mit dem Blick darüberhinfahrend, die Körner zu Linien und Formen zwingen." (*BdG* 255).

[139] "Er schreitet, dem blinden Systematisierungsdrang folgend, mit seinen Abstraktionstendenzen weiter vor und steckt sich das Ziel, Idee graphisch zu versinnbildlichen, und zwar in einer Kurve oder in wenigen Linien. Offenbar glaubt er, durch Versenkung in eine Idee es so weit so bringen, dass die aus solcher Konzentration entstandene Kurve auf magische Weise etwas von dem Extrakte jener Idee mitbekomme. Schaut man sich nun einen solchen Katalog von Ausdruckskurven an, etwa die Willologie der Sonne, Abb. 144, so wird auch der Gutwilligste über das klägliche Fiasko dieses *an sich ausdruckspsychologisch richtig konzipierten*, aber durch Kritiklosigkeit wörtlich ad absurdum geführten Gedanken nicht im Zweifel sein. *Richtig nämlich ist bei diesem Gedankengang die Grundvorstellung, es müsse, was die Seele ganz erfüllt, in Bewegungsniederschlägen*

Prinzhorn's uncharacteristically harsh criticism of the Willology der Sonne as "pathetic failure" could be read as a defensive gesture caused by this "anxiety of proximity". Prinzhorn also took issue with the outright telepathic ambitions of *Napoleon's Curve*: by following the N-shaped curved, which is also somehow supposed to reproduce the trajectory of Napoleon's campaigns through Europe (hence the dots on the curve, bearing the names of various European cities and famous battles such as Moscow and Saragossa), the viewer is supposed to enter a process of kinetic identification: "The meaning of the curve is: if you reproduce this movement several times a day with your head, thus describing a similar curve in the air, you are meant to acquire something of the internal and external attitude of Napoleon".[140] However, confronted with the uncomfortable closeness of his theories with von Wieser's own delirious system of telepathic and telekinetic artistic expression, Prinzhorn seems to struggle to define what precise *contents* can be expressed through kinetic abstraction: "what is filling the soul" is a rather vague and elusive formulation. Prinzhorn seems to privilege a more abstract definition of artistic expressivity more in line with André Breton's "seismographic heart"[141] or even with the metaphor of the "meteorological instrument" used to described the noble and entirely fictional art of abstract rhythmical "psychographics" outlined by Alfred Kubin in his novel *The Other Side* [*Die andere Seite*] in 1909.[142]

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zum Ausdruck kommen. Falsch dagegen, dies könnten irgendwelche materiellen 'Ideen' sein. Dazu bedürfte es allerdings der Magie und Zauberei […]." (*BdG* 254) [emphasis mine].

[140] "Der Sinn dieser Kurve ist: fährt man ihn täglich mehrmals mit dem Kopfe nach, indem man eine ähnliche Kurve in der Luft beschreibt, so gewinnt man etwas von der äußeren und inneren Haltung Napoleons." (*BdG* 255).

[141] André Breton, *Nadja*, O.C. I, 753.

[142] "I then tried to create new shape configurations immediately, by following secret rhythms of which I had just become aware. […] I renounced everything but the stroke iself, and in those months I developed a peculiar system of lines. A fragmentary style, more like a kind of writing than proper drawing: it expressed like a highly sensitive meteorological instrument the smallest oscillations of my vital state [*Lebensstimmung*]. I called this technique: 'Psychographics'". ["Hier versuchte ich unmittelbar neue Formgebilde nach geheimen, mir bewußtgewordenen Rhythmen zu schaffen. [...] Ich verzichtete auf alles bis auf den Strich und entwickelte in diesen Monaten

Paradoxically, it is also attested that Prinzhorn made ample use of both drawings, which he viewed as exemplary of the expressive processes described in the *BdG*. To promote his book, Prinzhorn gave a series of guest lectures on the topic of the "art of the insane" at several institutions and private homes in Germany and Austria between 1920 and 1922, including at Freud's International Psychoanalytical Association in Vienna, and at the Bauhaus in Weimar (April 9th, 1922). These talks were abundantly illustrated, as Prinzhorn showed original works from the collection, color reproductions, and slide shows.[143] Even though very few details remain of the works presented during these lectures, one can reasonably assume that Karl Brendel's [Genzel] sculptures and a series of von Wieser's *Willenskurven* were major highlights and discussed at length during those talks (ibid., 240), an assumption partly based on the works he chose to publish in his two short interventions in *G*: as previously mentioned, Brendel's *Hindenburg* featured in the third issue of *G* (June 1924); *Napoleon's Curve* was reproduced is a separate, one-page article also penned by Prinzhorn in the following issue of *G* entitled *The Magic of Signs* [*Magie der Zeichen*] (issue 5-6, April 1926, 133).[144] But the most compelling eye-witness account of the showing of the *Willenskurven* during one of these talks, and of the effects they had on the audience, is to be found in the correspondence of Oskar Schlemmer, who attended a conference given by Prinzhorn at the house of Hans and Lily Hildebrandt in Stuttgart in 1920. Praising the richness of the material

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ein seltsames Liniensystem. Ein fragmentarischer Stil, mehr geschrieben als gezeichnet, *drückte es wie ein empfindliches meteorologisches Instrument die geringsten Schwankungen meiner Lebensstimmung aus*. 'Psychographik' nannte ich dieses Verfahren [...]."]. (Kubin 1909, 126).

[143] Thomas Röske, "'Sie wissen nicht, was sie tun' - Hans Prinzhorn spricht am Bauhaus über 'Irrenkunst.'" in: Bernhard, Peter, and Ackermann, Ute. *Bauhausvorträge: Gastredner am Weimarer Bauhaus 1919-1925*. Neue Bauhausbücher ; Neue Zählung, Bd. 4. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2017, 239s.

[144] *The Magic of Signs* is a one-page collage of quotations directly taken from the pathography of von Wieser in the *BdG*, with one major difference: instead of criticizing the shortcomings of von Wieser's magical thinking, Prinzhorn appears to uncritically endorse it, possibly for comical effect: "[Von Wieser] is producing pure magic with Napoleon's Curve" (ibid.).

and the proximity of the visual realizations of the "art of the insane" with avant-garde artists like Paul Klee, Schlemmer wrote: "There was a sheet of paper in it, with the words 'Dangerous to look at!' written at the top. I keep thinking about it, there were beautiful signs symbolizing love, life, childhood, humor, organized in a systematic fashion".[145] As noted by Thomas Röske, Schlemmer was then busy developing his system of choreographic notation: it is entirely possible that the systematic organization of the *Willenskurven* according to a grid pattern, mentioned explicitly in his correspondence, could have played a role in the creation of his *Bodengeometrie* of 1920-1922, in which the movements of three dancers are represented through abstract curves organized along a similar grid pattern. Furthermore, Schlemmer's encounter with the work of von Wieser happened at a crucial turning point of his career, which might have made him more receptive to outside influence (Röske 2003, 96).

Whichever the case, Schlemmer's enthusiastic remarks about the works of von Wieser also hints at his close proximity with Prinzhorn's own aesthetic theories: for both of them, aesthetics is mainly defined by the way in which the body reacts and relates to its surrounding environment through expressive gestures. This primary concern with the "sense of space" [*Raumgefühl*] can easily be explained by the fact that like Prinzhorn, Schlemmer was deeply influenced by August Schmarsow's aesthetic theories. Both Schlemmer and Prinzhorn seem to be part of an alternative lineage that runs parallel to the Semper-Riegl-Schmarsow-Gropius-Corbusier trajectory

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[145] "Ein Blatt war dabei, stand oben: 'Gefährlich, es zu betrachten!' Geht mir noch sehr im Kopf herum, waren feine Symbolzeichen für Lieben, Leben, Kindheit, Witz, systematisch angeordnet." (Oskar Schlemmer, letter to Helena Tutein, Cannstatt, June 20th or 21st, 1920, quoted in Hüneke 1989, 63 and in Röske 2003, 85). Thomas Röske notes that even though he seems to remember it as one single sheet of paper, Schlemmer is actually referring to elements taken from several works on paper by von Wieser, including *Curves of the Will* [*Willenskurven*], and *Willology of the Sun* [*Willologie der Sonne*]. These works have been preserved and are part of the collection of the Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn in Heidelberg.

described by Alina Payne in *From Ornament to Object*. Instead of transitioning to architect-designed objects via the notion of ergonomics, the Semper-Schmarsow-Prinzhorn-Schlemmer-Laban lineage emphasized the gestural aspect of ornament to reach a choreographic definition of the work of art privileging ephemeral, performance-based forms developing through space and time (dance, music, and film) over the stability of architecture and objects.

Indeed, Prinzhorn himself seems to have gradually moved away from architecture, which was at the center of his 1908 dissertation, and remained the art form of reference for both Semper and Schmarsow. The works of the Heidelberg collection of psychiatric art are predominantly works on paper, entirely lacking the monumentality of architecture.[146] As evidenced in the pathography of von Wieser, Prinzhorn's analysis further emphasized the importance of the gestures that presided to their creation and the way they give shape to space.[147] Even though Prinzhorn did not elaborate a comprehensive theory of choreographic expressivity that could be compared with Schlemmer's *The Stage at the Bauhaus* [*Die Bühne im Bauhaus*] (1925),[148] this notion is echoed by several articles and essays published by Prinzhorn after 1922, including the two mescaline essays of 1927-1928 already mentioned, and his article "Rhythm in Dance" ["Rhythmus im Tanz"]

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[146] Even the wood carvings and sculptures of Karl Genzel [Brendel] are rather diminutive, as most works measure between 15 and 30cm in height, with some exceptions such as *Double Portrait, Man-womanly* [*Doppelfigur, mann-weiblich*] at 70cm. It is also worth mentioning that the sculptures of his first period, such as Head [Kopf] (*BdG* 133, Ill. 79) were made out of kneaded bread.

[147] The choreographic dimension of the BdG thus resonates with discourses on *brut* and outsider works, with exhibitions such as Valérie Rousseau's *When the Curtain Never Comes Down* at the American Folk Art Museum in New York (2015), or Christian Berst's *Brut Now: Art Brut in the Technological Era* in Belfort (2016-2017), both of which emphasizing the gestural and or performative aspects of such works. In the words of Valérie Rousseau: "Most self-taught artists can be perceived as performance artists. Their work is infused with daily rituals, public actions, gestures, and enactments, defining a lifelong artistic practice for which *the curtain never comes down*." (Rousseau 2015, 3).

[148] For a thorough discussion of Schlemmer's *The Stage at the Bauhaus* [*Die Bühne im Bauhaus*] as a manifesto of "Choreographic Modernism", see Guédon 2014, 80-107.

(1927).[149] In this article, which could be read as a logical development of the notion of rhythm as ultimate yardstick for artistic value affirmed in the *BdG* (BdG 49), Prinzhorn proposes a new hierarchy of the fine arts. Dance is ranked first, as the artistic medium best corresponding to the notion of embodied rhythm expressed in the motto "the person as instrument of the work" ["die Person als Instrument des Werkes"] (Prinzhorn 1927b, 277),[150] followed by music (second) and architecture (third). Furthermore, Prinzhorn insists on the ephemeral nature of dance as best corresponding to the embodied spontaneity of rhythm, and as an improvement upon the static nature of the visual arts. Prinzhorn's mention of a frozen, museified drawing of a curve as a counter-example strongly evokes both the *Willenskurven* and von Wieser's own eventual abandonment of actual drawing and turn to "telekinetic" drawing as a more direct expression of artistic "will":

> Visual arts can […] let us see the rhythmical oscillations of the pen, brush, or chisel in crystallized form, so to speak, as traces of the development of the artwork. […] Even the playful curve dreamily thrown unto the paper by a painter in the blink of an eye: apply some fixative, gold, and a frame, and it will live on for eternity in the drawers of a museum. A rhythmical curve like millions of others, […] granted eternal life through the trivial means of pen and paper. Impenetrable ways in which history bestows its grace and blessings upon the chosen few! Dance on the other hand: everything, from the traces of the first drafts and virtuosic sketches […] to the finished work, to those precious moments that might stir the feelings or even change the lives of thousands of people, that are able to shatter the limits of the individual and, for a few minutes, to glide seamlessly from the rhythm of one's own movements into the oscillation of the cosmos […], yes everything is bound to disappear without a trace, like wind and weather.[151]

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[149] "Rhythm in Dance" ["Rhythmus im Tanz"], in: *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 1927, vol. 21, 276-287.

[150] "Rhythm is its life element, its soul, in which all those secrets are woven and revealed, for which no other art form can ever offer such a strong expressive medium, but the most-elusive, most-aerial, tragically blissful art of dance" ["Rhythmus ist sein Lebenselement, seine Seele, darin alle jene Geheimnisse weben und sich offenbaren, für die keine Kunst so starke Ausdrucksformen hat, wie diese flüchtigste, luftigste, tragisch beglückende Kunst des Tanzes"] (Prinzhorn 1927b, 287).

[151] "Bildkunst aber vermag […] die rhythmische Schwingung von Stift, Pinsel und Meißel als Entwicklungsspur sozusagen kristallisiert zur Schau zu tragen. [...] Noch die spielerische Augenblickskurve, die ein Maler träumend auf Papier wirft, kann durch die Anwendung von etwas Fixatif, Gold und einem Passepartout eine Art Verewigung in den Sammelschranken eines Museums finden. Rhythmische Kurve wie Millionen andere [...] und durch das Allerweltsmittel:

Even though this passage embraces the somewhat bombastic rhetoric of the Nietzschean Dionysiac, its conclusion is entirely logical: prioritizing gestural spontaneity leads Prinzhorn to abandon "crystallized" finished works altogether to privilege dance as an entirely choreographic form of art. To a certain extent, this notion is a radicalization of a provocative stance, already expressed in the BdG: the idea that "the best drawing of Rembrandt and the poorest scribble of a paralytic" ["in der souveränsten Zeichnung Rembrandts und in dem kläglichsten Gesudel eines Paralytikers"] should be considered of equal ranking inasmuch as they derive from the same basic human drive [*Kernvorgang*] towards self-expression (*BdG*, X). "Rhythm in Dance" thus demonstrates Prinzhorn's willingness to apply the notions first developed in the *BdG* to a range of other media, as he continued to work towards a general aesthetics theory based on the notion of embodied rhythm.

1.4 Conclusion: "a mystical avant-garde"?

Hans Prinzhorn had set itself a wildly ambitious program: using the "art of the insane" as a kind of Archimedean point, a degree zero of human expression that would allow him to completely overhaul our understanding of art and of mental illness. In his view, *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* constituted the first step of a Nietzschean transvaluation of values, invalidating previous systems of esthetic evaluation and providing the basis for the establishment of a new one. It only seems

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Papier und Stift, unsterblich! Seltsame Auslese historischer Gnadenwahl. Und demgegenüber im Tanz: nicht nur die Spuren der Vorarbeit, des Ringens, sondern noch die meisterhafte Skizze, ja [...] noch das vollendete Werk, noch jene vielleicht tausende tief aufwühlenden oder gar wandelnden Augenblicke, die es gelingt, die Schranken der Person zu zersprengen und für wenige Minuten aus dem Rhythmus der eigenen Bewegung hinüber zu gleiten in die Schwingung des Alls [...] müssen spurlos zerrinnen wie Wind und Wetter. " (Prinzhorn 1927b, 277-278).

fair to hold Prinzhorn accountable to his own program: did the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* eventually deliver on its fantastical promises?

From the start, Prinzhorn's project was plagued with contradictions and conceptual tensions that made its eventual failure near-inevitable. Not only because Prinzhorn's general lack of rigor, cavalier use of an eclectic range of concepts gleaned in the theories of some of his contemporaries, and conceptual vagueness made him an unlikely candidate for the completion of such Promethean task. But also because the promising initial gesture of his work, opening an important debate on the notion of normativity, was immediately negated by the dogmatic reintroduction of a supposedly new normativity that, even though it was consistently touted as the normativity of the future, was very much old wine in a new bottle: a combination of late Expressionist mottos (rejection of reality, inner vision) and preexisting art historical interpretative models (the embodied rhythmicity of Gottfried Semper and August Schmarsow).

On the other hand, in spite of its conceptual shortcomings, Prinzhorn succeeded in making a major impact on the art and culture of his time, putting the marginal productions of the "art of the insane" at the center of esthetic inquiry. Previously a psychiatric curiosity, mentally ill artists were now seen as trailblazing creators or even, as Hugo Ball called them, as a "mystical avant-garde". Hugo Ball summarized the main takeaway points of *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* as follows:

> The mentally ill could even be seen as a mystical avant-garde. […] They live in a world of direct perception […] and, in spite of their suffering, they can grasp the ineffable [*das Unerhörte*]. It is strange enough that, in their anonymity and isolation, they might produce works that look similar to those of intentional artists. But it is miraculous that they don't operate by reaching, and then destroying a kind of deeper rationality; on the contrary, such deeper rationality seems paradoxically strengthened by the progressive decline of linguistic and interpretative abilities.[152]

[152] "Der Geisteskranke kann dabei sogar als mystische Avantgarde gelten. [...] Er lebt in einer Welt direkter Wahrnehmung [...] und er kann, bestürzt, das Unerhörte doch noch fassen. Seltsam genug, daß er in seiner anonymen Abgeschiedenheit zu ähnlichem Gestalten kommt wie der bewußte Künstler. Wundersam aber ist es, daß eine Art tieferer Ratio nicht einmal von der

Hugo Ball's reading is arguably symptomatic of the reception of *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. What the historical avant-gardes seemed to retain from their reading of Prinzhorn was that the "art of the insane" was a form of artistic creation offering surprising parallels to their own. In their perception, madness promised to grant access to a higher register of reality, a "surreal" that, though it remained hazily defined, acted as a utopian horizon that continuously exerted a powerful attraction on their own researches.

Geisteskrankheit erreicht und zerstört wird; ja diese Ratio nimmt bei fortschreitendem Verfall der Sprach- und Deutfähigkeit eher noch zu." Hugo Ball, ibid.

Chapter 2: "Degenerate Art" and the Battle for the "Art of the Insane"

2.0 Introduction

The Demon of Crime: this is the melodramatically villainous title of the book that the protagonist of Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1932) -- a former psychiatrist-turned-hypnotist and ruthless criminal -- writes day after day before succumbing to madness himself, scribbling away manically in a padded cell. Fritz Lang's second Mabuse film depicts the evil machinations and eventual downfall of Dr. Baum, the director of the psychiatric hospital where Mabuse was institutionalized. In the fictional world of the movie, in spite of Mabuse's disturbed mental state and the chaotic, near-illegible character of his handwriting, *The Demon of Crime* is meant to contain a set of detailed practical instructions on how to overthrow the social order through a broad range of criminal activities.

The Testament of Dr. Mabuse is even more explicitly political than its 1922 predecessor. Baum, who has come to identify himself with Mabuse and follow in his footsteps, is meant to evoke the rising tide of Nazism, and more broadly the impact of a broad array of new "technologies of power" (Crary) on society during the Weimar period. Significantly, Lang's political commentary is conveyed through a series of elements borrowed directly from the thematic and visual repertoire of the "art of the insane". Not only is the redaction of *The Demon of Crime* depicted as a stereotypical representative of the genre, the uncanny result of a deep state of manic psychosis: its visual presentation as a movie prop, created by Lang's iconic costume and stage designer Walter Schulze-Mittendorf, is a direct quotation of a work collected by Hans Prinzhorn in the early 1920s that was featured among the illustrations of *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. This work is an untitled drawing by Barbara Suckfüll, which presents a similar combination of a sketched still life

seen surprisingly from a bird's eye view and superimposed on dense lines of handwriting going in several directions at once.[153] Several other quotations of works from *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* – namely, the reproductions of three very recognizable drawings by Prinzhorn collection artists Johann Knopf, Heinrich Anton Müller, and Adolf Schudel -- appear ominously on the walls Dr. Baum's office which, in spite of its bourgeois, professional appearance, stands at the epicenter of Baum's criminal activities.[154] In the absence of direct textual evidence, one can only wonder how much Fritz Lang and his scriptwriter and longtime associate Thea von Harbou knew about Prinzhorn's work, or whether the inclusion of direct reference to *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* were the result of individual decisions taken by their collaborators. But the presence of such references necessarily poses the broader question of the way in which avant-garde discourses on the "art of the insane" intersect or interact with the sphere of the political.

In the 1920s, the "art of the insane" had been perceived by the avant-garde as invested with a mission to renovate aesthetic norms; in the 1930s and 1940s, it became a battleground, as the Nazi regime instrumentalized the avant-garde's interest in the "art of the insane" to serve a broader agenda that aimed to discredit the avant-garde in the eyes of the German public,

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[153] Torsten Kappenberg, "The Testament of Dr. Prinzhorn: Quotes from *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in a Fritz Lang Movie" ["Das Testament des Dr. Prinzhorn : Zitate aus Bildnerei der Geisteskranken in einem Film von Fritz Lang"], in *Unseen and Unheard I: Artists React to the Prinzhorn Collection* [*Ungesehen und Unerhört I: Künstler reagieren auf die Sammlung Prinzhorn*], Ingrid von Beyme and Thomas Röske (eds.), Verlag Wunderhorn, Heidelberg 2013, pp. 88-95.

[154] The creations of mentally ill patients, either real or fictional, have occasionally been used as a comparative tool to investigate the pathological aspects of Nazi ideology. For Siegfried Krakauer in *From Caligari to Hitler*, the mad Mabuse is an avatar of the figure of the tyrant, a leitmotif of Weimar cinema consisting in ruthless, egomaniacal, and seemingly omnipotent characters who are simultaneously decried for the senseless brutalities they unleash while being also problematically depicted as invested with near-irresistible powers of suggestion and fascination. In a similar vein, Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1962) analyzes the paranoid nature of Hitler's political discourse by comparing it with the complex, delirious system of Daniel Paul Schreber and its underlying authoritarian tendency (including, for instance, an enduring fascination for the linguistic purity of "angelic" speech).

portraying its project as inherently pathological.[155] According to this narrative, avant-garde artistic production was itself the symptom of a "degeneration" of German culture. In spite of internal squabbles, for instance on the status of Expressionism in the first half of the 1930s, all avant-garde currents were progressively accused of being complicit in a vast conspiracy – outlined with convenient haziness – that was allegedly aimed at bringing about the biological decline of the German population.

The Nazi regime's official endorsement and further dissemination of such rhetoric wasn't merely theoretical; in fact, the battle for the "art of insane" could be described as both violent and murky. Violent, because the regime unleashed an unprecedented attack against the avant-garde. The symbolic aspect of this violence was best encapsulated by the 1937 "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich and its later iterations across Germany and Austria which, from the 1938 "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Berlin onwards, included works from the Prinzhorn collection. For avant-garde artists, the consequences of this policy were mostly institutional: works of modern art were pulled from the collections of German museums, and either destroyed or auctioned off abroad. The artists who didn't fall into line were usually forbidden to produce and exhibit their works: some of them silenced into what is generally known as "domestic exile", while many others were forced to flee the country. As for the patients of psychiatric hospitals in

[155] From the early 1920s onwards, several pseudoscientific publications aimed at demonstrating the pathological nature of the avant-garde by juxtaposing works produced in psychiatric institutions with paintings, drawings, or sculptures by avant-garde artists. The general purpose of these publications was to stage a defense of traditional modes of visual representation against what was perceived to be intolerable distortions—first and foremost, non-realist representations of the human body—introduced by Cubist, Expressionist, Surrealist, or Neo-Objectivist artistic innovations. The underlying idea was that any such distortion was necessarily the symptom of an underlying psychiatric condition. In other words, a simple examination of the visual productions of the avant-garde would suffice to confirm a diagnosis of mental illness, and would not necessitate further verification.

Germany and Austria however, the Nazi regime's obsession with pseudoscientific discourses on biological "degeneration" had even more dire consequences: nearly 300,000 of them were massacred between 1939 and 1945 as part of a so-called "euthanasia" program, a campaign of mass murders meant to eliminate a part of the population that the regime perceived as a threat against the purity and vitality of the race. Eighteen patients whose works were part of the Prinzhorn collection were among the victims.

However, focusing on the "art of the insane" as one of the major battlegrounds of the Nazi regime's attack against the avant-garde also reveals the murky, complex nature of this historical phenomenon. Nazi discourses on "degenerate art" never evolved into a coherent body of doctrine. The spectacular mise-en-scènes of the "degenerate art" exhibitions were premised upon a binary opposition between the "sane" and the "insane", the "bio-positive" and the "degenerate";[156] but in spite of this simplistic, supposedly self-explanatory rhetoric, the comparison between the avant-garde and the "art of the insane" was never fully explicated. Even Nazi psychiatrist Carl Schneider's essay "Degenerate Art and the Art of the Insane" [*"Entartete Kunst und Irrenkunst"*] (1939), a relatively sophisticated attempt at providing a justification for this rationale from the point of view of modern psychiatry, offered several, logically incompatible narratives simultaneously.

Conversely, the avant-garde's own fascination for the "art of the insane" was itself based upon a primitivist narrative marred with inconsistencies and internal contradictions that, in the words of

[156] On the presentation of the "Degenerate Art" exhibition and its mobilization of the viewer through an appeal to "common sense", see Neil Levi, "'Judge for Yourselves!'-The 'Degenerate Art' Exhibition as Political Spectacle", *October*, Vol. 85 (Summer, 1998), pp. 41-64

Christoph Zuschlag, made it an "easy target" for Nazi propaganda.[157] As a result, when the latter was attempting to conflate avant-garde artistic production with the "art of the insane", avant-garde artists were often unable to elaborate a cogent line of defense. The attitude of Hans Prinzhorn himself, who in the early 1920s had been one of the most vocal advocates of a rapprochement between the avant-garde and the "art of the insane", seems to encapsulate the murky, paradoxical nature of this battle for the "art of the insane". Contrary to expectations, in 1933, even as "art of the insane" and avant-garde productions were first displayed alongside each other as part of one of the propagandistic "Artistic Chamber of Horrors" [*Schreckenskammer der Kunst*] in Mannheim —a series of local initiatives that preceded and partly announced the 1937 "Degenerate Art" exhibition —Prinzhorn had other concerns. Enthusiastically rubbing elbows with the dignitaries of the new regime, he saw Hitler's rise to power as an excellent career opportunity, and briefly toyed with the idea of becoming the chief editor of a new literary supplement of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the main daily newspaper of the NSDAP.

This chapter thus attempts to move away from the binary narrative enforced by Nazi discourses on "degenerate art". In view of the baseless claims, logical contradictions, and manipulative oversimplifications of this discourse— a textbook example of the combination of proliferating propagandistic mottos and gaping inconsistencies of Nazi rhetoric described by the linguist Viktor Klemperer's classic study *Lingua Tertii Imperii*—"complicating" the narrative is not only the best way to gain insight into the root causes and implications of this phenomenon: it could also be described as moral imperative for scholarly forays into this topic. Recent studies by German historians, including Zuschlag's reference work on the "Degenerate Art" exhibition of

[157] Christoph Zuschlag, "'Chambers of Horrors of Art' and 'Degenerate Art': On Censroship in the Visual Arts in Nazi Germany", in: Childs, Elizabeth C. (ed.): *Suspended license: censorship and the visual arts*, Seattle 1997, p.226

1937 and its forerunners, Laura Lezemis's thorough description of the "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Berlin in 1938, or Bettina Brand-Claussen's equally comprehensive study of the fate of the Prinzhorn collection under the Nazi regime, have provided a wealth of new information, painting a factually much more accurate picture of these dramatic events. While drawing on the findings of these historical studies, this chapter adopts a different methodology, by paying closer attention to the discourses that accompanied the "Degenerate Art" exhibition, by examining first and foremost relevant aspects of the writings of Nazi psychiatrists like Carl Schneider, but also of Hans Prinzhorn and other avant-garde figures. By restricting the scope of the investigation to the instrumentalization of the "art of the insane" within the broader discourse of "degenerate art" and the possible antecedents of this phenomenon in the writings of both reactionary and avant-garde German thinkers of the 1920s and 1930s, a specific set of questions emerges. I argue that at the center of the battle for the "art of the insane" are the age-old contestations of the possibility or value of individual free will, that in the interwar period became opposed to a deterministic view of artistic creation and human actions in general that tends to depict them primarily or exclusively as the expression of a set of mechanistic, biological, or even ethno-racial determinations. Such notions could be seen as modified continuations of Herder's contestation of the primacy of individual volition, subsumed under the transindividual will of a community or *Volksgeist*. However, the introduction of notions of pathology and mental illness in this century-old debate, and the very real consequences that it had on human lives and artistic creation in Germany, set the battle for the "art of the insane" that unfolded between 1933 and 1945 apart from the notably more urbane controversies that opposed anti-Enlightenment thinkers like Herder and defenders of Enlightenment principles of individual agency like Goethe and Schiller in the genteel atmosphere of Weimar literary salons at the turn of the eighteenth century.

The first part of this chapter offers a first attempt at "complicating" the narrative of the "degenerate art" exhibition by describing a demonstrable link between *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* and Nazi ideology, retracing Prinzhorn's vocal opposition to the notion of individual free will between 1922 and 1933. I argue that, as paradoxical and counter-intuitive as it may sound for a work that is usually described as the cornerstone of the avant-garde's fascination for the "art of the mentally ill" in the 1920s, this highly problematic aspect of *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* puts it squarely in what Adorno called "the Ur-landscape of fascism" [*Urlandschaft des Faschismus*].[158] This proto-fascist tendency of the conceptual framework of the *BdG* is all the more demonstrable as an already-present potentiality of Prinzhorn's work because it was actualized by Prinzhorn himself in a number of articles in support of the Nazis published in the early 1930s, most notably in an essay published in 1932 under the telling title "Community and Leadership" [*Gemeinschaft und Führertum*].

The second part of this chapter elaborates on Christoph Zuschlag's passing remark that the avant-garde's primitivist fascination for the "art of the insane" made it into an "easy target" for Nazi propaganda. It points up inconsistencies between the artistic practice of the avant-garde and aspects of the primitivist ideology embraced by a number of its most prominent figures. Paradoxically, even as artists like Paul Klee attempted to develop a new form of artistic education intended to empower artists and allow for formal innovations, the negation of individual free will that was part and parcel of their primitivist agenda weakened their position, opening the avant-garde a-g up for attacks from its reactionary and Nazi critics.

The third part of this chapter offers an analysis of the evolution of Nazi discourses surrounding the "art of the insane" between the 1937 "degenerate art" exhibition in Munich and

[158] Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1952, p.52.

its later iterations, starting from the 1938 "degenerate art" exhibition in Berlin. Paying attention to both concrete exhibition strategies and theoretical writings such as exhibition catalogues, articles in the popular press, and Carl Schneider 1939 essay "Degenerate Art and the Art of the Insane"—a text that was originally meant to be presented during a lecture held at the occasion of the 1937 "Degenerate Art" exhibition—I argue that the rejection of the notion of individual free played a key role within this broader strategy of "pathologization" of the avant-garde.

2.1 "Curves of the Will"

Prinzhorn seems to have relatively little interest in engaging in a traditional art historical analysis that would attempt to distinguish the recurring stylistic features of each of the ten "schizophrenic masters" he described and their evolution in time, i.e. in the course of their artistic "careers".[159]

Prinzhorn seems to consider his "masters" as "unskilled" in the strongest sense of the word: not only does he emphasize their lack of artistic education, but he also mostly disregards the question of whether these artists might not have developed their own set of "skills" through isolated, idiosyncratic but persistent experimentation with techniques and materials. If the "schizophrenic master" is merely a conduit for the expression of "forces" that are entirely beyond his control, he is necessarily denied any serious form of artistic know-how: in other words, such artists aren't portrayed as self-taught, but rather as entirely "non-taught", so to speak. This is the reason for Prinzhorn's enthusiasm for the work of August Klotz (pseudonym of August Klett,

[159] This is rather paradoxical, given that such engagement revolves around Klages' *Ausdrucksbedürfnis*, or "need to express oneself", Prinzhorn's analysis tends to be either of each individual work's formal characteristics or of broad aesthetic categories that each of these works would allegedly exhibit (such as "drives" towards order, imitation, or symbol -- *Ordnungstendenz*, *Symbolische Gestaltung*, and *Abbildtendenz* respectively).

1866-1928). According to Prinzhorn, the arresting formal diversity of the works of August Klotz testifies to the fact that, as a "pure", unskilled schizophrenic artist, he didn't develop a personal style, but produced a highly heterogeneous body of work:

> He is entirely driven by momentary impulses: his works […] constitute an extraordinarily pure embodiment of the unconscious components of the form-creating process. […] He creates entirely passively, nearly like a spectator, and attempts to describe *a-posteriori* what he has created.[160]

Accordingly, Klotz's work would manifest no stylistic continuity, but would rather constitute a discontinuous series of individual works, each depending on the configuration of each inspired "moment" (BdG 179).[161] According to Prinzhorn, such formal heterogeneity would culminate in his properly Protean watercolor *Egyptian Sickbed* [*Ägyptisches Krankenbett*] (BdG 183, Ill. 112), a combination of disjointed formal elements that would enable the work to make an equally strong impression on professional artists of very different sensibilities (*BdG* 183).

Conversely, even though their existence is alluded to in this passage, the role of the voluntary or deliberate elements within the form-making process remains the blind spot of the *BdG*.

Thus, it is highly paradoxical that Prinzhorn would select a series of works called *Curves of the Will* [*Willenskurven*] as a paradigmatic illustration of the aesthetic principles of the *BdG*: in fact, Prinzhorn's analysis of the "artistry of the mentally ill" presupposes the complete abolition of the will on the part of his "schizophrenic form-makers".

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[160] "Er läßt sich grundsätzlich von Augenblicksimpulsen treiben, so daß seine Bilder […] die unbewußten Komponenten des bildnerischen Gestaltens in seltener Reinheit verkörpern. […] Er schafft völlig passiv, als Zuschauer fast, und sucht nachträglich zu deuten, was entstanden ist. " (*BdG* 183-184).

[161] Some of his watercolors would thus evoke a painting by Emil Nolde (BdG 183), some others would look more like a press caricature (BdG 177), or a decorative ornament (BdG 175), whereas his idiosyncratic mathematical "color theory" (BdG 172), on the other hand, would be a manifestation of the tendency to find order in visual representation, or *Ordnungstendenz* (BdG 172).

Prinzhorn's article "The Magic of Signs" ["Magie der Zeichen"] was published in the April 1926 issue of *G*, a special issue devoted to abstract avant-garde animation films. The reproduction of von Wieser's *Napoleon's Curve* on page 231 formed a visual pendant to the reproduction of several slides taken from Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*, featuring several concave shapes floating on a white background and reproduced on the "opposite" page (230) [Fig. 2.1].

The similarities with the black, curved lines of von Wieser's work cannot be accidental, and it is fair to assume that the two works and accompanying texts were matched by Hans Richter on purpose. The short text penned by Rudolf Kurtz on p.230 (which has to be read as a comment of the *Symphonie Diagonale*), an extract from his book *Expressionism and Film* [*Expressionismus und Film*], confirms this hypothesis as it seems to echo the fantasies of telepathic and telekinetic omnipotence expressed in von Wieser's *Curves of the Will* (and recapitulated by Prinzhorn on p.231): "The new art does not want to passively accept; it wants to produce form. The new direction starts as an attitude of the will […]: metaphysical volition determines creation."

However, Prinzhorn had to make significant compromises to at least superficially embrace Kurtz's Expressionist paean to individual volition, which stood at the polar opposite of his own esthetic theories. This conceptual U-turn involved altering his description of von Wieser's *Napoleon's Curve* to make it fit within the editorial line of *G*, and more specifically with Kurtz's volitional aesthetics.[162]

[162] By adding the sentence "[von Wieser] is producing pure magic with *Napoleon's Curve*", Prinzhorn seems to uncritically endorse notions of telepathic and telekinetic artistic expression which he dismissed in the *BdG* as a form of naïve, uncritical thinking resulting from von Wieser's mental illness.

Prinzhorn's esthetic theories were premised upon a two-tiered classification. Unintentional, non-figurative scribbling stands at the center of his "Schema of the Form-Making Tendencies". Similarly, the "artistry of the mentally ill" is central to Prinzhorn's attempt at redefining the nature and boundaries of artistic expression inasmuch as is defined as the polar opposite of an act of free will. The mentally ill patients studied in the *BdG* are presented as the unwitting, "automatic" instruments of the pathological mechanisms to which they succumb, thus supposedly allowing them to directly tap into the forces of the unconscious and the general "oscillation" of the cosmos. As rather bluntly expressed in the last pages of the *BdG*, mentally ill patients become privileged objects of study precisely because "they don't know what they are doing" (*BdG* 343):

> But, to an extent that none of us could ever hope to reach by any other means (except on other continents), they stand at a considerable distance from any form of expertise on the topic of the form-making process, divorced from all knowledge and know-how, when they start to create spontaneously. We can witness the manifestation of the form-making process, caused by no demonstrable outside stimulus, and under no guidance: without goal, led by unconscious drives [*triebhaft*]: *they don't know what they are doing*. […] One thing is certain: nowhere else can one observe so well the various components of the form-making process, which is built into the fabric of every human and lies there in a dormant, unconscious state. Here it lies in front of us in its purest form, like in a Petri dish [*in Reinkultur*], so to speak.[163]

The abolition of free will logically derives from Prinzhorn's praise of the "purity" of the self-taught. In this passage, "they don't know what they're doing" asserts both the absence of technical know-how and the abolition of freedom resulting from mental illness. This notion is

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[163] "Aber in einem Grade, den man unter keinen anderen Umstanden mehr wird erreichen können (außer in anderen Erdteilen), stehen sie allem Erlernbaren der Gestaltung, allem Wissen und Können fern, wenn sie anfangen, spontan zu schaffen. Aus diesen Menschen bricht ohne nachweisbare äußere Anregung und ohne Führung der Gestaltungsvorgang zutage, triebhaft, zweckfrei - *sie wissen nicht, was sie tun*. [...] gewiß ist, daß wir nirgends wie hier jene Komponenten des Gestaltungsvorganges, die unbewußt in jedem Menschen vorgebildet liegen, sozusagen in Reinkultur vor uns haben." (*BdG* 343) [emphasis mine].

already present, to a certain degree, in all works of the Semperian school, for instance in Riegl's *Kunstwollen*. It does not refer to a personal "will to art" on the part of the artist, but rather to an impersonal form of volition (not unlike the way the Hegelian Spirit dictating the main stylistic features of each historical period), resulting in the necessary manifestation of forms corresponding to the Zeitgeist, the memory of previous technical stages embedded in the materials, etc. But the decisive influence that could explain Prinzhorn's paean to the abolition of free will is to be found in Ludwig Klages' theory of expressivity [*Ausdruckslehre*]. Klages (1872-1956) was, like Prinzhorn himself, originally a disciple of Theodor Lipps (albeit from an older generation than Prinzhorn), and developed his own theory based on the phenomenology of embodied perception and expression. From 1920 onwards, Klages became Prinzhorn's *maître à penser*, and the influence of Klages' work—especially *Expressive Movement and Form-Making Energy* [*Ausdrucksbewegung und Gestaltungskraft*] and *Handwriting and Character* [*Handschrift und Charakter*]—on the *BdG* is well documented, based on the extensive and sometimes tumultuous correspondence between the two (Röske 2003, 76-85)[164]. Klages' theory of expressivity was based on a peculiar version of Nietzscheanism, "extending Nietzsche's fusion of psychology and philosophy while minimizing its stress on the will" (Lebovic 2013, 116).

[164] The most comprehensive account of Klages' influence on the *BdG* can be found in a letter penned by Klages himself, from Nov. 17th, 1921 studies (original: Literaturarchiv Marbach: NL Klages, 61.6581/24, copy in the collection of the Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn), in which he accuses Prinzhorn of using several of his key concepts including the "need to express" [*Ausdrucksbedürfnis*] and the "from-making drive" [*Gestaltungsdrang*] without quoting him explicitly. Prinzhorn's puzzling if conciliatory answer to this accusation of plagiarism is to claim a momentary confusion due to both his lack of experience and the deep influence exerted by Klages' thought on his own theory, to the extent that he could not remember which ideas were his own and which ones had to be attributed to Klages (letter from Prinzhorn to Klages from Nov. 18th, 1921, original: Literaturarchiv Marbach: NL Klages, 61.11617/18, copy in the collection of the Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn).

Klages' aesthetic philosophy could be described as an expansion of the concept of the Dionysiac developed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* [*Die Geburt der Tragödie*] (1872): Klages believed that the essence of rhythmical expressivity was to allow one to reach a state of ecstasy [*Rausch*] corresponding to the abolition of individuality [*Entselbstung*] and one's union with broader cosmic forces. This notion of *Entselbstung* directly impacted several of Prinzhorn's works, including the *BdG*, his essays on mescaline, and his essay "Rhythm in Dance". For Klages, the non-volitional "oscillations" [*Schwingungen*] are not the preserve of these extreme trance-like states, but can be found in attenuated forms in virtually all aspects of life. *Handwriting and Character* [*Handschrift und Charakter*] is the clearest illustration of Klage's "monadic vibrations".[165]

The *BdG* does not offer a graphological take on the "artistry of the mentally ill", as Prinzhorn explicitly describes such attempts at reaching a graphological diagnosis of mental illness as inconclusive and in need of further investigation (BdG 300, and Ill. 168, p. 302).[166] However, Klages' notion that a range of qualities (including disturbing, racialized notions of "Germanness" and "Jewishness") would be "expressed unwillingly by individuals who were forced by their own bodies into unconscious acts" (Lebovic, ibid., 65) is fully in line with Prinzhorn's ambiguous praise of mental illness as leading to an abolition of free will. Prinzhorn ultimately attributes this phenomenon to an expression of the unconscious, broadly defined as a "lost continent" of ego-

[165] Klages developed a theory of graphology as a pseudo-scientific method according to which each person can be linked with a predefined personality type or "character" based on a formal analysis of their handwriting. In other words, the movements of the writing hand would unwittingly but necessarily betray the "inner truth" of a person: on Klages' own admission, these ideas are partly based on a modified version of Lavater's physiognomy, combined with the notion of a phenomenology of kinetic expressivity (Lebovic 2013, 63-65).

[166] However, Prinzhorn includes several samples of handwriting from mentally ill patients (BdG 302), following on a suggestion of Klages himself who requested the publication of these samples as material for his own graphological studies (letter by Klages addressed to Prinzhorn on January 15th, 1921, original: Literaturarchiv Marbach, NL Klages 61.6581/8, copy in the collection of the Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn).

abolishing forces. In his essay *Nietzsche and the Twentieth Century* [*Nietzsche und das XX. Jahrhundert*] (1928), Prinzhorn presents both Klages and Freud as worthy continuators of Nietzsche, credited with the "Columbus-like act" [*Columbustat*] (32) of first discovering the unconscious: "Freud and Klages seem to be the only ones to have made far-reaching discoveries of their own on the path that leads from Nietzsche into the future" (Prinzhorn 1928b, 105).[167] But Freud and Klage's supposed attempts at reaching a "synthesis" under the patronage of Nietzsche is far from convincing. A closer examination of Prinzhorn's correspondence with Klages provides a much more antagonistic picture of the pair's relationship with Freud and the psychoanalytical school.[168] This antagonism can largely be explained by the paradoxical fate of the reception of Freud in Weimar Germany: as Anthony D. Kauders comprehensively demonstrated in his book *The Freud Complex: A History of Psychoanalysis in Germany* [*Der Freud-Komplex: Eine Geschichte der Psychoanalyse in Deutschland*] (2014), Freud was first decried as an "irrationalist", as his description of the unconscious directly clashed with mainstream prewar psychiatry, which relied heavily on purely physical phenomena (such as biology and anatomy) to explain mental illness. After the First World War, the pendulum swung the other way. Freud was increasingly criticized for being a narrow-minded positivist and an obstacle to the advent of a new psychology based on the grand

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[167] "Freud und Klages scheinen diejenigen zu sein, die allein tiefe eigene Funde auf dem Wege gemacht haben, der von Nietzsche in die Zukunft führt."

[168] Among many occurrences, the most explicit reference to this antagonism is to be found in a letter by Klages describing his own work: "the whole thing is a secret, cloak-and-dagger fight: Klages against Freud." [*Das ganze ist eine verkappte Schlacht: Klages gegen Freud*] (Klages, letter to Prinzhorn of August 30th, 1928 (Literaturarchiv Marbach/ Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn).More generally, the correspondence between Klages and Prinzhorn is increasingly hostile to psychoanalysis, often with overt anti-Semitic overtones alluding to a conspiracy aiming at a "Jewish takeover" of psychology: in a similar fashion, Klages suspected Emil Utitz of wanting to claim "his" characterology [*Characterkunde*] and present it as a "Jewish invention" (letter of Klages to Prinzhorn, Feb. 12th, 1926, original in Literaturarchiv Marbach: NL Klages 61.6583/3, copy in the collection of the Museum Sammlung Prinzhorn).

holistic visions of *Lebensphilosophie*.[169] Prinzhorn's own antagonistic take on Freudism (discussed in Kauders 2013, 337-339, and Kauders 2014, 89-93) is expressed at length in his article "An Attempt at Evaluating the Usefulness of Psychoanalysis for Science and for Life, from the Perspective of Intellectual History" ["Versuch einer geistesgeschichtlichen Einordnung der Psychoanalyse in Wissenschaft und Leben"], published in the volume he co-edited with Kuno Mittenzwey, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* [*Krisis der Psychoanalyse*] (1928). After praising Freud's work on the unconscious, Prinzhorn explicitly mentions his main bone of contention with Freud:

> Insofar as psychoanalysis imposes rational interpretations in the name of pure empiricism, it is the final example of an Enlightenment system that is directed against the whole stock of culture [*Kulturbestand*] by exposing it as […] a façade that hides the actual force, the drive, which in turn is described—and this is perhaps the even more dangerous adventure in Enlightenment—as a rationalized purposeful will.[170]

This passage has the merit of drawing clear and explicit lines between the neo-Nietzschean irrationalism of Klages and Prinzhorn and the Freudian Enlightenment project. Of course, Freud also believes that we are all in thrall to the forces of the unconscious, which are expressed unwittingly through a variety of linguistic and bodily means, as Freud famously claimed in the case study of "Dora".[171] But Freud's aim is to offer a technique of freedom, restoring the ability

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[169] According to Kauders, the early 1920 corresponded to a brief grace period, during which Freud's psychoanalysis was welcomed by a range of "holistic" psychologists as an ally (Kauders 2014, 85): this can explain the positive (if succinct) allusions to Freud in the *BdG*.

[170] (Prinzhorn 1928c; quoted and translated in Kauders 2013, 338)

[171] "He who has eyes to see and ears to hear becomes convinced that mortals can keep no secret. If their lips are silent, they gossip with their fingertips; betrayal forces its way through every pore." ["Wer Augen hat zu sehen und Ohren zu hören, überzeugt sich, dass die Sterblichen kein Geheimnis verbergen können. Wessen Lippen schweigen, der schwätzt mit den Fingerspitzen; aus allen Poren dringt ihm der Verrat."](Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" ["Bruchstücke einer Hysterie-Analyse"], 1905, GW V, 240. As translated by Peter Gay, *Freud : a Life of Our Time*, 1986, XIX.).

to make conscious, rational decisions through the psychoanalytical cure. [172] Prinzhorn and his mentor Klages, representatives of the most irrationalist element of German *Gestalt* theory,[173] offer no discernible way of resisting or mastering the forces of the unconscious, uncritically praising instead the sublimity of the ego's annihilation. The notion of *cure* is strikingly absent of the *BdG*, as Prinzhorn prefers parading the "artistry of the mentally ill" as allowing one to catch a glimpse of hazily defined "cosmic "vibrations" [*Schwingung*].

Such "vibrations" seem harmless enough; but the imprecision of the concept is also rather ominous. The esthetic theory of Klages and Prinzhorn is not exactly premised upon the total absence of volition: rather, the abolition of the individual will turns the human body into the receptacle of a broader, transindividual volition, a form of *natura naturans* of undefined origin and contours. But that seems to be precisely the point where Klages and Prinzhorn's *Lebensphilosophie* starts to give off a very peculiar, and thoroughly unpleasant kind of vibration. Such transindividual will is both the cornerstone of their theory and its weakest link, an empty concept

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[172] "That's why the task of becoming conscious of the most hidden recesses of the soul is far from being an impossible one." ["Und darum ist die Aufgabe, das verborgenste Seelische bewusst zu machen, sehr wohl lösbar. "] (Sigmund Freud, ibid.)

[173] As demonstrated by Anne Harrington, the debate around notions of free will and rational choice constitutes a watershed moment within Gestalt theory and *Lebensphilosophie* themselves. Directly opposed to Klages' condemnation of "conscious intellect for its inauthenticity and atomization of reality", Kurt Goldstein, for instance, promoted what he called "abstract attitude" as the epitome of holistic vital and cognitive processes. A medical doctor working on brain damaged patients (especially former soldiers of the First World War), Goldstein understood his task as aiming at restoring this higher capacity for rational choice: "The individual lacking the ability to abstract from his experience suffered a dramatic 'shrinkage from freedom' and was 'in bondage to the demands of the environment' and helpless to exercise choice: 'Choice is a decision based on the consideration and evaluation of the whole situation, which in turn presupposes a definite mental capacity, the capacity to abstract […]. Patients—such as severely brain-damaged ones—cannot make choices.'" (Harrington 1996, 154; quotes from Kurt Goldstein as translated by Harrington, taken respectively from Goldstein 1939, 30, and Goldstein 1959a, 184).

that seems to invite more substantial ideological projections. With a consummate sense of political opportunism, Prinzhorn himself recycled the notion of transindividual will in the early 1930s to make it resonate with a very specific political agenda. The ego-negating ecstasy was now described as resonating with the "will" of a community focusing on its leader as its central point, as "surge" [*Wallung*] or "wave" [*Welle*] of enthusiasm carrying the youth to the Führer.[174] The last stage of Prinzhorn's full reconversion of *Lebensphilosophie* to fit the Nazi political agenda was reached in his essay *Community and Leadership: Sketch of a Bio-centric Theory of the Community* (1932).[175] In this text, he claims that both psychology and political practice have to be rethought on the basis of a theory that would deny the existence of the individual, while also, paradoxically, claiming that a handful of elite personalities would be able to perform a Promethean "leadership act" [*Führertat*]. To this end, these figures would supposedly abstract themselves to the general law of determination of the individual by its community in order to reshape the latter from the ground up. With this last essay, Prinzhorn's slow transformation into a full-blown Nazi ideologue was complete.

2.2 "A Dangerous Game of Modernity"

Prinzhorn's frontal attack on the notion of free will created a range of difficulties. By emphasizing parallels between the creations of "schizophrenic masters" and of the avant-garde while

[174] Hans Prinzhorn, "Über den Nationalsozialismus", in: Der Ring, 02.12.1930, p.884
[175] Hans Prinzhorn, "Gemeinschaft und Führertum", in: Hans Prinzhorn (ed.), *Die Wissenschaft am Scheidewege von Leben und Geist. Festschrift Ludwig Klages zum 60. Geburtstag, 10. Dezember 1932*, Leipzig, Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1932.

minimizing the importance of the free will of the artist, it could suggest that avant-garde artists "don't know what they are doing" either. Walter Gropius seems to have been alluding to this danger of conflating the avant-garde and the productions of the mentally ill when he warned against inviting Prinzhorn to talk at the Bauhaus: "such transgressions of boundaries are dangerous and conceptually confusing" ["solche Grenzüberschreitungen sind gefährlich und begriffsverwirrend"], he noted in a letter to Lily Hildebrandt, "and people are already in over their heads around here" ["und die Köpfe sind hier genügend überfordert"].[176]

Echoing Gropius' concern, Oskar Schlemmer formulated his own misgivings more pointedly. Reacting to Prinzhorn's talk at the Hildebrandts' home, he alluded to both the ever-present danger of succumbing to mental illness and the way in which such "transgressions of boundaries" could be used by the detractors of the avant-garde:

> The whole thing is of course being used as an accusation against modern artists: look, just like the crazy people! But it's not the case, only some similarities: madmen live in a personal world of ideas to which sane people are trying to gain access: it is purer, because it is free from any outside influence. This is *a dangerous game of Modernity*, and someone like Goethe knew full well why he was so focused on reality, and why he praised common sense so much; I think it's because he was well aware of the danger of unbridled fantasy.[177]

For Schlemmer, the "artistry of the mentally ill" is a double-edged sword, its dangerous seduction ultimately having to do with the fact that it offered a path towards the "pure" origins of art. I

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[176] Letter from Walter Gropius to Lily Hildebrandt (undated, around 1920), Getty Research Institute, Hans and Lily Hildebrandt Papers, box 63, folder 3 (as quoted in Röske 2017, 237). Gropius is probably referring to the mysticism of Johannes Itten and his followers, which he vigorously opposed and eventually led to Itten's dismissal from the Bauhaus (Röske 2017, 237-238).

[177] "Wird natürlich benutzt, die ganze Sache, die modernen Künstler zu überführen: seht, wie die Verrückten! Aber es ist nicht so, wohl Änhlichkeiten: der Irre hat die Ideenwelt, die der Gesunde erstrebt, reiner, weil ganz losgelöst von allem Außen. Freilich, *ein gefährliches Spiel der Modernen*, und ein Goethe wußte es wohl, warum er sich so sehr auf die Wirklichkeit stellte, ja, den gesunden Menschenverstand pries; ich denke, weil er die Gefahr kannte, das Phantasieren ins Uferlose." (Oskar Schlemmer, letter to Helena Tutein, Cannstatt, June 20th or 21st, 1920, quoted in Hüneke 1989, 63 and in Röske 2003, 85) (emphasis mine).

would argue that this malaise is due to the fact that the *BdG* constitutes a peculiar blend of avant-garde primitivism. It is now well established that the entire discourse about the "art of the insane" that runs from Prinzhorn to Dubuffet constitutes a specific movement within the broader context of Primitivism.[178] As the avant-garde attempted to do away with the social and artistic conventions that were perceived as directly responsible for the horrors of the First World War, they strived to reconnect with the "origins" of art in various ways. Alongside the *BdG*, the year 1922 alone saw the publication of Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub's *The Genius in the Child: An Essay on the Drawing Abilities of Children* [*Der Genius im Kinde: Ein Versuch über die zeichnerische Anlage des Kindes*], and of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality* [*La mentalité primitive*].

In the words of Arthur Danto, "the history of Modernism is the history of appropriations":[179] all forms of primitivism, from Picasso's fascination for African sculpture to the avant-garde's "dangerous game" with the "art of the insane" largely disregard the original purpose of the so-called "primitive" works, appropriating their formal vocabulary at the service of a completely different agenda, or, as Danto put it, focusing on "the outward look rather than the internal motivation" (Danto, ibid., 63). Modernist appropriations of "tribal art" and of the "art of the insane" share common assumptions about the nature of the avant-garde's program as radical re-

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[178] Even though the "art of the insane" was not discussed in William Rubin's magnum opus *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1985), which focused exclusively on the encounter of the Euro-American avant-gardes with several non-European artistic traditions, this lacuna was filled by more recent scholarship, as it features prominently in Colin Rhodes' *Primitivism and Modern Art* (1994). Similarly, Nicola Gess' monumental study of primitivism in the field of early twentieth century German literature, entitled *Primitive Thinking: Savages, Children, and Madmen in Modern Literature (Müller, Musil, Benn, Benjamin)* [*Primitives Denken: Wilde, Kinder und Wahnsinnige in der literarischen Moderne (Müller, Musil, Benn, Benjamin)*] (2013) offers an in-depth discussion of the "art of the insane" and the effort to define mental illness as the origins of art as one of the three main strains of primitivism.

[179] See Arthur Danto, "Outsider Art", in *Self-Taught Art*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001, p. 67.

foundation, based on a vision of the redemptive nature of a primeval drive for artistic expression. But these two contiguous narratives operate in fairly distinct ways. Modernist appropriations of non-European "tribal art" are the result of a complex process in which the (typically white, Western, male) "I" of the artist is both reaffirmed and questioned.[180] But the auctorial "I" of the artist is arguably never seriously threatened by its confrontation with its colonial Other. Even the most radical calls on the part of European artists for a complete identification with the latter (for instance from Arthur Rimbaud's in *Bad Blood* [*Mauvais sang*]) are part of a general context of colonial appropriation, exploitation, and oppression. The fascination for the "art of the insane", on the other hand, appears to bring the "primitive" Other dangerously close to home, as appropriators and "appropriated" and granted the same legal and political rights and share the same cultural, symbolic, and geographic space.

It is, then, highly revelatory that Prinzhorn would invoke colonial hierarchies to defuse the implications of his "dangerous game". Even though he did claim to perceive common ground between the mindset of his age (as represented by the avant-garde) and the "artistry of the mentally ill", he remained wary of any conflation of the two:

> We had to refuse categorically to define the essence of schizophrenic form-making based on external characteristics: and we feel compelled to reject just as forcefully attempts to draw parallels between contemporary artists and the images we are presenting in this book based on external characteristics, of the kind that not only neophytes, but also well-established psychiatrists often do in the daily newspapers. […] It is superficial and misguided to hypothesize similarities in their mental states based on similarities in the external appearance of these works. The syllogism: "this painter paints like a madman, therefore he is a madman" is in no way more accurate or more insightful than the following one: Pechstein, Heckel, etc. make wooden figurines like the Negroes from Cameroon, therefore they are Negroes from Cameroon.[181]

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[180] On this question, see Hal Foster's essay *The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art*, *October* Vol. 34, Fall 1985, 45-70.

[181] "Wie wir es ablehnen mußten, das Wesen schizophrener Gestaltung an äußeren Merkmalen darzulegen, so lehnen wir es nicht minder ab, durch Vergleich äußerer Merkmale Parallelen zwischen der Zeitkunst und unseren Bildern zu ziehen, wie das nicht nur von Laien, sondern auch von namhaften Psychiatern in der Tagespresse geschieht. […] Es ist nämlich oberflächlich und falsch, aus Ähnlichkeiten der äußeren Erscheinung Gleichheit der dahinterliegenden

Prinzhorn was fully aware of the fact that such identification between the avant-garde and the mentally ill was often used by reactionary detractors of the avant-garde to describe all of its productions as pathological. Such comparison was part of a broader discourse dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, which enacted what Bettina Gockel called the "pathologization of the artist" in her authoritative study of the phenomenon in Germany.[182] The theories of Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), according to whom artistic genius could be considered a kind of degenerative, inherited mental illness, and of Max Nordau (1849-1923), who saw modern art as a symptom of biological degeneration, provided the conceptual basis for a thorough attack on modern art.[183]

More specifically, Prinzhorn's cryptic mention of "well-established psychiatrists" publishing in "daily newspapers" is probably an allusion to two articles published by the German psychiatrist Wilhelm Weygandt in 1921 (i.e. during the redaction of the *BdG*).[184] The following passage is representative of Weygandt's line of reasoning, that accused avant-garde artists of rampant mental illness and of fostering "degeneration":

But on the other hand, specific features of modern artworks by Cubists, Futurists, or Dadaists often appear worryingly similar to the attempts at artistic production by notoriously mentally ill patients. That is to say that people suffering from […] mental illness […] sometimes produce

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seelischen Zuständen zu konstruieren. Der Schluß: dieser Maler malt wie jener Geisteskranken, also ist er geisteskrank, ist keineswegs beweisender und geistvoller als der andere: Pechstein, Heckel, u. a. machen Holzfiguren wie Kamerunneger, also sind sie Kamerunnneger." Hans Prinzhorn, *BdG* 346.

[182] Bettina Gockel, *The Pathologization of the Artist: Artists' Legends of the Modern Era* [*Die Pathologisierung des Künstlers: Künstlerlegenden der Moderne*], de Gruyter, Berlin, 2010.

[183] On Lombroso and Nordau's theories and the echo they found in Germany, see Bettina Gockel, op. cit., pp. 25-63.

[184] Wilhelm Weygandt , "Art and Madness" ["Kunst und Wahnsinn"] (*Die Woche*, June 4th, 1921, issue 22, pp. 483-485) and "Pathological Phenomena in Modern Art" ["Pathologische Erscheinungen in der modernen Kunst"] (*Der Deutsche, Berliner Tageszeitung* [*The German, Berlin Daily Newspaper*], December 8th, 1921, p. 485).

drawings and pictures that display grotesque, abnormal features that also appear in the production of the "most modern" of our artists.[185]

An answer to such accusations, Prinzhorn's "joke" aimed at reaffirming the distinction between the avant-garde and the "art of the insane" by equating it with mechanisms of colonial appropriation and exploitation. His reasoning *ad absurdum* is premised on the fact that the appropriation of "tribal art" necessarily implied a hierarchical distance.[186]

There are of course obvious power dynamics at play within Prinzhorn's own relationship with the mentally ill patients whose works he described in the *BdG*. To a certain extent, the book is the result of a power structure in which mental illness is "invented" as an object of medical knowledge, a well-known phenomenon since the publication Michel Foucault's *History of Madness* (1962). However, this psychiatric hierarchy was arguably perceived as less rigid and stable than the colonial one. This uneasy proximity between "sane" artists and their "mad Others" occasioned a type of uneasiness that we could call a "Malaise in Primitivism". A letter by Oskar Schlemmer makes apparent, avant-garde artists were wary of being confused with the mentally ill

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[185] "Andererseits aber erinnern Einzelzüge moderner Werke der Kubisten, Futuristen, Dadaisten usw. doch bedenklich nahe an das, was die künstlerischen Versuche notorisch Geisteskranker oft erkennen lassen. Namentlich die Opfer einer [...] Geistesstörung, [...] produzieren gelegentlich Zeichnungen und Bilder mit grotesken, absonderlichen Zügen, die man bei den 'Modernsten' wiederfindet." (Weygandt 1921b, 485).
On this topic, see Steffen Krämer, "Degeneration in Art: The Relationship between Psychopathology and Modern Art from the Mid-19th Century to National-Socialism" ["Entartung in der Kunst: Die Verbindung von Psychopathologie und moderner Kunst von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Nationalsozialismus"], *Schriftenreihe der Winckelmann Akademie für Kunstgeschichte München*, Textbeitrag 6, Nov. 2014, especially the subsection entitled "Disease and Degeneration in Modern Art – A Popular Topic in the 1920s" ["Krankheit und Entartung in der modernen Kunst – ein populäres Thema der 1920er Jahre"], 20-23.

[186] The mention of Cameroon is far from being arbitrary: as was the case in his discussion of Karl Brendel's *Hindenburg*, in which he mentioned New Guinea, Prinzhorn intentionally refers to parts of the German colonial empire.

in the public perception of their work ("look, just like the crazy people", as Schlemmer puts it), but also of actually joining the ranks of the mad.

Such anxiety was not entirely groundless: the boundaries between the "art of the insane" and the avant-garde remained effectively porous throughout the Weimar period, with several major artists, writers, and thinkers noticeably "on the fence". Among the best-known figures of the Weimar era, one could name for instance the Expressionist painter Ludwig Kirchner and the art historian Aby Warburg, who both spent significant amounts of time in mental hospitals.[187] Among lesser-known figures, one could also mention the psychiatrist and writer Oskar Panizza,[188] a trained psychiatrist who was institutionalized at various mental sanatoriums, where he produced an extensive body of work consisting of phonetically spelled pamphlets based on various conspiracy theories.

The case of the painter Paul Goesch (1885-1940), one of the only professional artists to be included in the Prinzhorn collection, also seems particularly significant. Goesch was a professionally trained architect, who was institutionalized in several psychiatric hospitals from 1909 onwards, and then for a longer period between 1917 and 1919. His mental health improved around 1920, by which point he joined several Expressionist avant-garde collectives, in particular fellow Expressionist architect Bruno Taut's *The Glass Chain* [*Die gläserne Kette*]

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[187] On the question of Ludwig Kirchner's and Aby Warburg's mental illness, see Bettina Gockel, op. cit., respectively pp. 105-154 and 249-268.

[188] Oskar Panizza (1853-1921) was a trained psychiatrist and man of letters. His mental health started to deteriorate noticeably around the turn of the century, by which point he was diagnosed with acute paranoia. He rejected conventional spelling and adopted a personal phonetic writing system, writing a string of biting political satires against the psychiatric institutions (*Psichopatia criminalis* [sic], 1898) and the emperor Wilhelm II (*Parisjana* [sic], 1899 and *Imperjalja* [sic], written 1901-1904, published posthumously in 1993). On Oskar Panizza, see Peter D.G. Brown, *Oskar Panizza. His Life and Works*, Peter Lang, Bern/New York, 1983, and *The Pazjent [sic] as Psychiatrist: Oskar Panizza's Trajectory from Psychiatrist to Inmate.* [*Der Pazjent* [sic] *als Psychiater: Oskar Panizzas Weg vom Irrenarzt zum Insassen*], Jürgen Müller, Psychiatrie-Verlag, 1999.

(1920).[189] The works he created at the Schwetz Hospital [*Heilanstalt Schwetz*] between 1918 and 1919 were sent directly to Heidelberg and integrated by Hans Prinzhorn into the collection for psychopathological art in 1919.[190] However, in spite of their evident artistic quality, unorthodox subject matters, and vibrant colors, they were virtually ignored by Prinzhorn himself, who didn't mention them in any of his published writings, including in the *BdG*.[191] The work of Paul Goesch constitutes the blind spot of the *BdG*, precisely because it resists any kind of categorization. The "self-taught" qualities touted by Prinzhorn as a guarantee of the authenticity and intensity of the "artistry of the mentally ill" simply don't apply to Goesch, who had received a thorough artistic training and was periodically rubbing shoulders with fellow avant-garde artists and architects such as Taut or Gropius. On the other hand, his acute psychotic episodes had a direct impact on his work, particularly on the drawings and gouaches he created during his hospitalization in Schwetz between 1917 and 1919. The status of Goesch's work remained undecidable, trapped in a grey zone between the avant-garde and the "art of the insane". Alfred Kubin probably echoed Prinzhorn's misgivings when he wrote this disparaging comment about Goesch's work in his account of his visit to the Prinzhorn collection that was published in *The Art Bulletin* [*Das Kunstblatt*] in 1922, without explicitly mentioning him by name:

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[189] Institutionalized on a permanent basis from 1935 onwards, Paul Goesch was murdered by the Nazi authorities in 1940 as part of their program of elimination of mentally ill patients. On this topic, see Sabine Witt, "From Patient to Victim of Euthanasia. The Artist Paul Goesch. ["Vom Patienten zum Euthanasie-Opfer. Der Künstler Paul Goesch"] (1885-1940), In: Landesklinik Teupitz (eds.): Landesklinik Teupitz, Geschichte-Architektur-Perspektiven, be-bra-Verlag Berlin, 2003.

[190] On Paul Goesch's mental illness and Hans Prinzhorn's relationship with his work, see Sabine Hohnholz, "'remarkable': Hans Prinzhorn, his Collection and Paul Goesch" ["'bemerkenswert': Hans Prinzhorn, seine Sammlung und Paul Goesch"], in: *Modern Visionaries: Paul Scheerbart, Bruno Taut, Paul Goesch* [*Visionäre der Moderne: Paul Scheerbart, Bruno Taut, Paul Goesch*], Berlinische Galerie-Scheidegger and Spiess, Berlin, 2016, 173-179.

[191] The only account of Goesch's work that we have is a single, rather tepid handwritten notation beneath Goesch's gouache on paper *The dismembered Horus* [*Der zerstückelte Horus*]: "bemerkenswert", literally "worth noticing" or simply "interesting" (Hohnholz 2016, 167).

We saw several works […] by a professional artist, a schizophrenic architect. He was the least interesting artist in the collection, with his sophisticated temperament and his unpleasant technical "know-how". All other artists were self-taught.[192]

Ironically, the chief editor of *Das Kunstblatt*, Paul Westheim, had taken a diametrically opposed stance in a previous issue of the journal (Sept. 1921, Vol. 9), praising the uncritical, "primitive" rawness of Goesch's work. Even though this was meant as a compliment rather than a critique, Westheim, while obliquely alluding to Goesch's mental illness, claimed that this "raw" quality of the work made it impossible to decide whether it actually qualified as "art":

Paul Goesch. What is he, how does he stand in relation to us? A painter? An architect? An artist? In fact, none of the above. He can't be put in a category, he has something of an artist, but he is also different. In the realm of botany, one would say that he is a specific variety in and of himself. […] He couldn't take root in life, in this order of things that is defined by us normal people, and in which we can orient ourselves. […] Maybe it isn't art at all. Maybe it is a form of self-forgetting, of astonishment, but it may also possess this je-ne-sais-quoi that no other artist could have achieved.[193]

Such taxonomical undecidability points at the root cause of this "Malaise in Primitivism". The avant-garde purposefully appropriated stylistic traits that were perceived as "regressive" and belonging to an earlier state of human development (represented by children, mentally ill patients, and traditional "tribal" societies) as part of a Primitivist program whose purpose was to

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[192] "Von einem Berufskünstler, einem schizophrenen Architekten, sahen wir einige Arbeiten [...]. Dieser war der uninteressanteste von allen mit seiner geklügelten Auffassung und der unangenehmen technischen „Ausbildung". Alle übrigen Künstler waren Autodidakten." (Kubin 1922, op. cit., 185-186).

[193] "Paul Goesch. Was ist er, wo steht er für uns? Maler? Architekt? Künstler? Eigentlich nichts von alledem. Er ist in keiner der Kategorien unterzubringen, er hat auch vom Künstler etwas und ist doch anders. In der Botanik würde man sagen eine Varietät. [...] Er konnte im Leben, in einer von uns Normalen gemachten und für uns zurechtgemachten ordnung nicht verwurzeln. [...] Vielleicht ist es gar nicht Kunst. Vielleicht ist es ein Sichvergessen und ein Erstaunen und vielleicht auch dieses Etwas, was kein anderer Künstler hätte machen können." (Paul Westheim, ÉPaul Goesch", in: Das Kunstblatt, Sept. 1921, Vol. 9). In *Modern Visionaries: Paul Scheerbart, Bruno Taut, Paul Goesch* [*Visionäre der Moderne: Paul Scheerbart, Bruno Taut, Paul Goesch*], Berlinische Galerie-Scheidegger and Spiess, Berlin, 2016,, see also the facsimile reproduction of Paul Westheim's article, with an introduction by Annelie Lütgens, pp. 123-137.

breathe new life into discredited artistic institutions and techniques by harking back to the "origins" of art. But such critique of academic artistic training and militant advocating for a form of "de-skilling" left open the question of the kind of mastery that avant-garde artists were supposed to be exercising over their own work.

According to John Roberts in *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (2007), the Duchampian ready-made involved both a frontal attack on artistic know-how ("de-skilling"), and a form of compensation by which the value of the work would be determined by the acuity, originality, and relevance of the institutional critique and epistemological or aesthetic displacements it involved, a process described by Roberts as "conceptual re-skilling." But the Primitivist "re-skilling" is arguably of a different nature. If these works' claim at artistic legitimacy is indeed based on social critique in the broadest acceptation of the term, they also explicitly praised values that are difficult to reconcile with the notion of *critical* acumen, such as irrationalism, spontaneity, and naivety. The "anxiety of proximity" specifically associated with the avant-garde's appropriation of the "art of the mentally ill" made any such form of re-skilling (conceptual or otherwise) particularly problematic. Did this form of Primitivism hint at a supreme artistic refinement, a continuation of traditional artistic skills through other means? For more than fifty years, no one, of course, has seriously claimed that the avant-garde artists who looked at the "art of the insane" for inspiration, for instance Paul Klee or Max Ernst,[194] actually lacked artistic skills. But due to what one could call a conceptual shortcoming, the main tenets of the Primitivist ideology made it near-impossible for these artists to explicitly and unambiguously acknowledge the "skills" (conceptual or otherwise), mastery, and control that they effectively

[194] On the influence of the *BdG* on Max Ernst, see Thomas Röske, "Max Ernst and the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*" [Max Ernst und die *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken*], in Ingrid von Beyme and Thomas Röske (eds.), *Unseen and Unheard I: Artists React to the Prinzhorn Collection* [*Ungesehen und Unerhört I: Künstler reagieren auf die Sammlung Prinzhorn*], Verlag Wunderhorn, Heidelberg 2013, pp. 64-71.

exercised over their own artistic production. In other words, Primitivism in general, and specifically the avant-garde's fascination for the "art of the insane" proved to be a conceptual vulnerability, the avant-garde's Achilles heel, so to speak, that its reactionary (or outright Nazi) detractors were only too eager to exploit in propagandistic works that claimed to "unmask" the pathological nature of the avant-garde project as a whole.[195]

For instance, it is rather revelatory that Klee, when faced with accusations of insanity that sometimes being drew explicit parallels between his artistic production and the "Schizophrenic Masters" discussed by Prinzhorn, the artist chose not to debunk them explicitly, but seemed to acknowledge the kinship of his works with the "art of the insane", only resorting to irony as a defense mechanism that, could be read as a telltale sign of this "Malaise in Primitivism":

_The right-honorable men of letters[196] say that my pictures are actually the work of a madman." *A mood of gaiety* took possession of Klee. He took from a shelf Prinzhorn's recently published book, *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. It was at that time doing the rounds at the Bauhaus. "You know this outstanding piece of work by Prinzhorn, don't you? Let's see for ourselves. This picture is an excellent Klee. So is this, and this one too. Look at these religious images! There's a depth and a power of expression that I could never achieve in religious subjects. Really sublime art. Direct

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[195] Although such propaganda was particularly virulent in Germany, where it had devastating effects (as evidenced by the *Degenerate Art* exhibitions, which we will discuss later in this chapter), it could be more accurately described as an international phenomenon. As one example among many, we could mention the "Society for Sanity in Art", founded by Josephine Hancock Logan in Chicago in 1936. In the society's manifesto, entitled *Sanity in Art* (A. Kroch, Chicago, 1937), Josephine Hancock Logan called for a defense of "healthy" artistic productions (i.e. traditional, academic works) against the pernicious influence of modern art, presented as inherently pathological. A branch of the "Society for Sanity in Art", now called "Society of Western Artists", is still active today in California.

[196] Even though he isn't explicitly mentioned by name in this passage, it is more than likely that one of the "right-honorable men of letters" evoked by Klee would be Willi Rosenberg, the author of *Modern Art and Schizophrenia. Based on a Case Study of Paul Klee.* [*Moderne Kunst und Schizophrenie. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Paul Klee.*], Jena 1923. Rosenberg diagnosed "quiet schizophrenia" [*stille Schizophrenie*] as the key factor explaining the supposedly "unhinged" nature of Klee's work. For him, due to his mental illness, Klee blindly followed an uncontrolled, spontaneous creative impulse on par with the gestural spontaneity of Prinzhorn's "Schizophrenic Masters" (Rosenberg 1923, 13). Paradoxically, and in spite of Prinzhorn's explicit condemnation of such comparison, the *BdG* was thus used by Rosenberg as a conceptual basis to claim that avant-garde artists (and Paul Klee in particular) were suffering from mental illness. On this topic, see Bettina Gockel's thorough analysis of Rosenberg's theories in Gockel, op. cit., 63-73.

spiritual vision. Now can you say that I'm on the way to the madhouse? Aside from the fact that the whole world is an insane asylum.
I couldn't contain my irony any longer:
_Surely, there are only gradual differences between us, children, and the mentally ill. And also, if I may add, between us and the art of the so-called primitive peoples. I have a couple of little boxes at home, from Sumatra. They're made out of bamboo, with ornamental and figurative patterns carved into them, and also pictograms. Each of them is an excellent Paul Klee.[197]

The fact that both Klee and Lothar Schreyer adopted a somewhat ironical tone doesn't mean that they wouldn't adhere to the notion of a close kinship and "gradual differences" (a concept that resonates with Prinzhorn's own views) between the artist and various kinds of "Primitives". Rather, by pushing the argument originating from Klee's most vocal detractors to its histrionic extremes, praising "primitive" works as "excellent Klees", they seem to hint at a certain "anxiety of proximity". The abrupt shift at the end of Klee's tirade (as reported by Schreyer) makes his position more explicit. His rhetorical question introduces an unbridgeable gap between the artistry of the mentally ill and Klee himself: to put it bluntly, Klee is not mad. In the following paragraphs, while still seemingly deploring the fact that "direct vision" would remain the domain of "primitive peoples", children, and the mentally ill, Klee elaborates on the notion of mastery,

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[197] "Die Herren Schriftgelehrten meinen, dass meine Bilder eigentlich von einem Geisteskranken stammen.' Paul Klee kam *in eine heitere Aufregung*. Er nahm von einem Regal das vor kurzem erschienene Buch *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* von Prinzhorn. Es kursierte damals im Bauhaus.
_Sie kennen ja die ausgezeichnete Arbeit von Prinzhorn. Überzeugen wir uns doich selbst! Dieses Bild ist bester Paul Klee. Dieses auch und dieses auch. Sehen Sie diese religiösen Bilder! Eine Tiefe und Kraft des Ausdrucks, die ich im religiösen Thema nie erreichen könnte. Wahrhaft erhabene Kunst. Eine unmittelbare geistige Schau. Bin ich nun auf dem Wege ins Irrenhaus? Abgesehen davon, dass die ganze Welt ein Tollhaus ist?'
Ich konnte meine Ironie nicht zurückhalten.
_Wahrscheinlich handelt es sich um nur gradweise Unterschiede zwischen uns, den Kindern und den Geisteskranken. Übrigens auch zu der Kunst der sogenannten primitiven Völker. Ich habe zu Hause ein paar Büchsen aus Sumatra, die aus Bambusrohr gearbeitet sind. In das Bambusrohr sind ornamentale und figürliche Bilder, auch Schriftbilder eingeritzt, jede Arbeit ebenfalls bester Paul Klee." [emphasis mine]. Lothar Schreyer, *My Memories of* Sturm *and of the Bauhaus* [*Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus*], 100. English translation from Felix Klee (ed.), *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents*, 182-183. Quoted and commented in John MacGregor, op. cit., 234-235.

which would set him apart from the latter and ultimately confirm his legitimacy as an artist in the traditional sense.[198] But the most explicit affirmation of "skilled" artistic mastery and control as the main criterion allowing one to separate the professional avant-gardists from Prinzhorn's self-taught "schizophrenic masters" is to be found in the fourth issue of *G: A Journal for Elementary Form-Creation* [*G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*], only a couple of pages after Prinzhorn's own intervention. Alluding to Hans Arp's friendship with Prinzhorn, Hans Richter writes:

> Arp is a friend of Dr. Prinzhorn, one might think, as a rabbit would be to a snake: always at risk of being swallowed up by the latter's book. That is by no means the case. Arp has a bourgeois physiognomy of the best sort. However, behind this façade […], utterly alchemical things are taking place. *Under his skilled hands*, events split, and every imaginable process becomes confused in the simplest way… In daydreams, where Arp is at home *like an industrialist in his offices*… What Arp creates is the Song of Songs of split-mindedness, the Edda of schizophrenia… […] That is how Arp creates forms.[199]

Hans Richter's praise of Arp as a paragon of bourgeois virtues if of course meant to be a joke. However, as was the case with Klee's irony, this joke is rather illuminating. Here, the striking

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[198] Claiming to respect the established boundaries of art and pictorial composition [*die Grenzen des Bildbegriffs [und] der Bildkomposition*], Klee defines his artistic practices as a reasoned and fully "skilled" process consisting in expanding the repertoire of possible pictorial themes [*Bildinhalt*] as a form of higher, visionary realism, aiming at creating "images of a potential nature" [*Bilder einer potentiellen Natur*] (Schreyer, op. cit., 100). While praising the direct access enjoyed by "primitives" to this potential nature or "in-between world" [*Zwischenwelt*], Klee reaffirms in the strongest possible terms his reliance on conscious, rational free will against the perils of uncontrolled fantasy: "Fantasy is precisely the most serious danger that I, that you, that we are all facing" ["Die Phantasie ist in der Tat meine, Ihre, unser alle größte Gefahr"] (101).

[199] "Arp ist mit Dr. Prinzhorn befreundet; man sollte denken, wie ein Kaninchen mit einer Schlange: immer kurz davor von dessen Buch verschlungen zu werden. Das ist keineswegs der Fall. Arp ist eine gutgezogenste Bürgerphysiognomie. Hinter dieser Attappe [...] gehen aber völlig alchimistische Dinge vor. *Unter seiner sachkundigen Hand* spalten sich die Begebenheiten und verwirrt sich jeder denkbare Vorgang auf die einfachste Weise... In Tagesträume, in denen Arp zu Hause ist, *wie ein Großindustrieller in seinen Büros*. Was Arp schafft, ist bekannt als das Hohe Lied der Spalthirnigkeit, die Edda der Schizophrenie... [...] Das gestaltet Arp." Hans Richter, "Hans Arp", *G: A Journal for Elementary Form-Creation* [*G: Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*], issue *3,* June 1924, p. 59. As translated in Michael Jennings and Detlef Mertins (eds.), *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film*, Tate Publishing, 2011, p.161 (emphasis mine).

metaphor that compares Prinzhorn's *BdG* to a "snake" about to devour avant-garde artists whose interest in unconscious mechanisms might lead them uncomfortably close to madness is countered by the strongest possible affirmation of mastery. Both a bourgeois hero and the closest approximation of an all-powerful demiurge in the machine age, the industrialist is an image of absolute control that also hints at implicit hierarchies and mechanisms of exploitation. Like the all-seeing magnate Joh Fredersen in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Hans Arp is supposed to oversee the rationalized, systematic process of transformation of his "raw materials", namely oneiric imagery "mined" from the unconscious, into finished artistic products. Thus, the counter-measures against Prinzhorn's fascinating but deadly "snake" involve a radically different definition of form-creation or *Gestaltung*: far from being a process premised on relinquishing control (or even de-individualization or *Entselbstung*), it is now described as the rational activity of the sovereign, self-possessed individual ("That is how Arp creates forms" ["*Das gestaltet Arp*"]). The mention of Arp's "*skilled* hands" couldn't be more explicit: for Richter, the avant-garde's "dangerous game" with madness can only be understood as a continuation of traditional artistic skills by other means.

2.3 The "Degenerate Art" exhibition

The several "Degenerate Art" exhibitions that took place in Nazi Germany between 1937 and 1941 were entirely premised upon a binary logic aiming at enforcing and maintaining Manichean oppositions. Art and non-art, "health" and "sickness", it argued, had to be separated out in the most definitive and violent fashion, so as to avoid the former's "contamination" by the latter. Conversely, notions that had been carefully separated out by Prinzhorn, especially "tribal" art, the "art of the insane", and the avant-garde were equated with one another and put in the

all-encompassing rubric of "degeneration". The Nazi regime's bone of contention with the notion of an "art of the insane" -- and with Prinzhorn's project and his collection of "psychopathological art" in particular -- was intimately linked with its reactionary project of defending or reinstating a rigid normativity, presented as being under attack. One of the goals of these exhibitions was to enforce a fascist "return to order" as a restoration of normative dualism itself, forcing upon its spectators a binary logic strongly separating between "us" and "them", between a fantasized version of "pure", healthy German-ness and its equally fantasized malevolent Other: a pole of "degeneration" that included degenerative and congenital diseases, mental ill patients, avant-garde artists, Marxists, and Jews.

Since the early 1920s, theories of degeneration were explicitly presented as a defense of normativity as such. In his 1920 essay *Norm and Degeneration of Man* [*Norm und Entartung des Menschen*], Kurt Hildebrandt defended the notion of norm as a form of ideal-type that should lead concrete efforts to fight a supposed "degeneration" of the German race.[200] Hildebrandt's essay remained popular through the 1920s, and was reprinted in 1939 in an updated, more "Nazified" version under the title *Norm. Degeneration. Decline.* [*Norm. Entartung. Zerfall.*]. To a certain extent, Hildebrandt represented the "idealist" wing of Nazi ideology, inasmuch as he claimed that the

[200] Surprisingly, even though his questioning of the norms of health and disease seems fundamentally incompatible with Hildebrandt's philosophical defense of systems of normativity, *Norm and Degeneration of Man* is briefly mentioned in the *BdG* as a "strong" work of scholarship (BdG 361, note 46). It is unclear whether Prinzhorn's assertion that Hildebrandt's work would contribute (like his own) to the "advent of a new normative concept of Man" ["Aufstellung eines neuen Normbegriffes des Menschen"] (361) should be read as an artificial attempt to reconcile his position with Hildebrandt's in the name of a Nietzschean "normativity of the future", or whether Prinzhorn, as early as 1922, was already receptive to the racist rhetoric that became increasingly prominent in his work and personal correspondence in the second half of the 1920s.

idea of normativity wasn't purely based on a biological diagnosis, but should rather be considered as a deliberate, abstract construct, to be put in practice through eugenic policies.[201]

This project of violent, normative restoration was defined in more explicitly biological terms in Carl Schneider's essay "Degenerate Art and Art of the Insane" ["Entartete Kunst und Irrenkunst"], published 1939.[202] Alongside with the speeches that Adolf Hitler and exhibition director Adolf Ziegler pronounced for the opening of the 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich, Schneider's essay provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of the ideological rationale behind the exhibition. It had been intended as a speech for the first anniversary of the Munich exhibition – a speech that was not delivered in the end and was instead published in a medical journal. While being just as manipulative and propagandistic in nature as Hitler and Ziegler's speeches, it offers a much more complex theoretical approach. Schneider was a trained psychiatrist,[203] and his essay was meant to offer a "scientific" justification for the exhibition: it

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[201] In that sense, Hildebrandt could be opposed to authors belonging to the more biologist wing of Nazi ideology (Hans F. K. Günther, Alfred Rosenberg), who were relatively less concerned with abstract reflections on the concept of normativity, and directly applied binary normative frameworks in their essays about biology and world history without paying much thought to their underlying epistemological premises. Conversely, Hildebrandt's "idealist racism" arguably stems from his work on Plato. In *Plato, The Fight of the Spirit for Power* [*Platon: der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht*] (1933), he conveniently underlined the authoritarian proclivities of Platonic philosophy. His depiction of the philosopher as a fighter imposing the power of ideas onto inert matter was an expression of the Nietzscheanism of the disciples of Stefan George, and allowed him to curry favor with the Nazi regime. Hildebrandt obtained a professorship in Kiel the following year, where he replaced Plato scholar Julius Stenzel, who had lost his position on the grounds of his vocal opposition to the Nazi regime. On this topic, see Stefan Breuer, "Aesthetic Fundamentalism and Eugenics in the Work of Kurt Hildebrandt" ["Aesthetic Fundamentalism and Eugenics in the Work of Kurt Hildebrandt"], in: Bernhard Böschenstein, Jürgen Egyptien (et al.), *Scientists in the George Entourage. The World of the Poet and the Task of the Scientist.* [*Wissenschaftler im George-Kreis. Die Welt des Dichters und der Beruf der Wissenschaft.*] De Gruyter, Berlin, 2005, 291-310.

[202] Carl Schneider, "Degenerate Art and the Art of the Insane ["Entarte Kunst und Irrenkunst"], in: *Archive for Psychiatry and Neurological Disease* [*Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheit*], Vol. 110, 1939, pp. 135-164.

[203] Carl Schneider became director of the Heidelberg clinic in the Fall of 1933, after its former director Wilmanns was fired for ideological incompatibility with the new regime. He was instrumental in making the collection available for Nazi propaganda, and later became one of

should thus arguably be examined particularly closely, however repugnant its rhetoric might be. Eager to please his Nazi overlords, Schneider attributed the "degeneration" of modern art to its unhealthy fascination for the "art of the insane": according to him, Lombroso's *Genius and Madness* would be responsible for this blurring of boundaries between art and pathology. Schneider never misses an occasion to remind his readers of Lombroso's Jewish background: his essay is based on a conspiracy theory, constantly alluding to a hazily defined but supposedly highly malevolent "Freudo-Marxist" Jewish plot conspiring against the health and racial purity of the German race.[204] But in "Degenerate Art and Art of the Insane", Lombroso is more a strawman than an actual point of reference: the main interlocutor of the essay is Hans Prinzhorn, and more than two thirds of the essay are devoted to an explicit and highly detailed refutation of the *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* from the point of view of racist, biologist psychiatry. Even though Schneider's essay dwells successively on several key points of Prinzhorn's aesthetic theories, the first one he mentions, which seems to provide the conceptual impetus for the entire essay, is Prinzhorn's relativization of systems of normativity,[205] which he describes as a deliberate attempt to sabotage German culture:

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the main architects of the mass murder of mentally ill patients. On the role of Carl Schneider and his relationship to the *Degenerate Art* exhibitions, see Bettina Brand-Claussen's article "The 'Museum for Pathological Art' in Heidelberg. From the Beginnings until 1945" ["Das 'Museum für Pathologische Kunst' in Heidelberg. Von den Anfängen bis 1945"], pp. 17-19.

[204] See for instance the mention of psychoanalysis and Marxism on p. 150, note 1. Schneider presents Lombroso as a kind of Svengali, single-handedly perverting modern art by equating genius and madness. In so doing, he seems to conveniently forget that a number of assumptions of Nazi race theory and biology are directly derived from Lombroso's phrenology. As mentioned by Bettina Gockel, such vocal rejection of Lombroso is thus inversely proportional to the fact Lombroso's theories continuously shaped all discourses on "degeneration", including Schneider's (Gockel 2010, 31).

[205] Prinzhorn's affirmation of the relativity of "the opposition health—sickness nor the opposition: art—non-art" (*BdG* 7) is quoted in full on p.147 of Schneider's essay, in the long footnote that follows the penultimate sentence of this passage.

He[206] believed that the assertion that "nature does not do any leaps" could be understood to mean that that artistic creativity would be connected with the norm through innumerable intermediate stages [*Übergänge*].[207] On the other hand, as psychiatry professed that these intermediate stages also existed between mental health and mental illness in all domains of mental life, from various forms of so-called perversions and psychopathies all the way to the subtlest branches of our character, our way of thinking, and our attitude towards life, this earnest man would have been at least prepared for the political assault that was made against art, but also by using the means of art, against the life of our whole People. But when the National-Socialists came to power, this entangled web of groundless assertions and actions, supporting each other because they were all based on a common world view, went down like a house of cards.[208]

For Schneider, racial "regeneration" had to be implemented on the basis of clean-cut binary oppositions, rejecting the very notion of the existence of intermediate stages [*Übergänge*] posited by Prinzhorn between normative concepts of "health" and "sickness", "art" and "non-art". Some

[206] In this passage, "he" refers to an unnamed educated reader, who would have been misled by Lombroso's theories (the sentence "nature does not do any leaps", presented as a motto of the "pernicious" equivalence supposedly posited by Lombroso between madness and mental health). However, as evidenced in the footnote that follows the penultimate sentence of this passage, this unnamed zealot of Lombroso is meant to be easily identifiable as Prinzhorn himself: the footnote offers a long quote from the section of the BdG entitled "The Schizophrenic Worldview and Our Time", distorting Prinzhorn's argument in order to claim that Prinzhorn perceived a form of kinship between the artistic productions of the avant-garde and of his "Schizophrenic Masters", without mentioning his extremely cautious take on such a comparison.

[207] The use of the expression "with innumerable intermediate stages" [*mit zahllosen Übergängen*] provides further proof that this passage is a direct reaction to the theoretical introduction of Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, as the exact same expression is used in *BdG* 7 (*polare Gegensätze mit zahllosen Übergänge*). This expression is also quoted (and explicitly attributed to Prinzhorn) in the long footnote that follows the penultimate sentence of this passage (footnote 1, p.147).

[208] "Er meinte den Satz, dass die Natur keine Sprünge mache, in der Tat so verstehen zu dürfen, dass die künstlerische Schaffenskraft durch zahllose Übergange mit der Norm verbunden ist. Und da ihm die Psychiatrie auf der anderen Seite ebensolche Übergänge zwischen Geitesgesundheit und Geisteskrankheit auf dem Gebiet der sog. Abartigen Charaktere und Psychopathien bis in die feinsten Verästelungen des Charakters, des Denkens und der Lebensgesinnung lehrte, wurde auch er wenigstens vorbereitet für den politischen Angriff der nun auf die Kunst und auch mit Hilfe der Kunst auf das gesamtvölkische Leben versucht wurde. Mit der Machtübernahme durch den Nationalsozialismus wurde allen diesen durcheinanderlaufenden und einander infolge der gleichartigen weltanschaulichen Untermauerung stützenden Behauptungen und Wirkungen zunächst einmal den Boden entzogen. " Schneider, op. cit., p.141.

of these binary oppositions, drawing the consequences of this binary normativity in the realm of esthetics, are unambiguously announced in the second paragraph of Schneider's essay:

> We don't want abstract escapism, but rather images that would be close to nature and life; we don't want shudders of horror, of guilt, and of lust, but rather a pious immersion in the hallowed wonders of an unbridled, powerful life.[209]

Such binary logic was already at the heart of the 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich, where two separate exhibitions were supposed to mirror each other, the *Degenerate Art* exhibition constituting the "evil twin" of the traditional, neoclassical works of the *Great German Art Exhibition* [*Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung*]. Given the utter artistic mediocrity of the latter, scholars have tended to focus their attention mostly on the former, which constitutes a much more interesting – if frightening – conceptual object.[210]

The inclusion of works from the Prinzhorn collection in the several *Degenerate Art* exhibitions from 1938 onwards has received comparatively little attention;[211] it is rarely ever

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[209] "Nicht […] abstrakte Verflüchtigung, sondern natur- und lebensnahen Bilder; nicht die Schauer des Grauens, der Schuldbeladenheit und der Wollust, sondern die ehrfürchtige und andächtige Vertiefung in die Wunder des unbefangenen und kraftvollen Lebens wünschen wir." Schneider, ibid., 135.
Schneider's paean to *völkisch* aesthetics was but one of the consequences of his defense of normative binaries. Some other passages sound particularly ominous, as they sketch out some of the practical consequences of such normative binary oppositions, evoking the "suppression [of mentally ill patients and "degenerate" artists] from the life of the People" [*Ausschaltung […] aus dem Leben des Volkes*] (Schneider 1939, 163): Schneider was responsible for organizing the "euthanasia" of mentally ill patients (Brand-Claussen, op. cit., 18).

[210] On this exhibition, see the comprehensive study in two volumes by Robert Thoms, *The Great German Art Exhibition in Munich 1937-1944* [*Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung München 1937-1944*], Neuhaus, Berlin, 2010 (Vol. 1) and 2011 (Vol. 2).

[211] On this topic, see Bettina Brand-Claussen's article "The 'Insane' and the Degenerate: The Role of the Prinzhorn Collection under National-Socialism" ["Die 'Irren' und die 'Entarteten': Die Rolle der Prinzhorn-Sammlung im Nationalsozialismus"], and Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau's "'Mad at All Costs': The 'Pathologization' of Modern Art from Schultze-Naumburg to the Exhibition Guide Degenerate 'Art" ["'Verrückt um jeden Preis': Die 'Pathologisierung'

mentioned in the several reference works that have been devoted to the *Degenerate Art* exhibition of 1937 in Munich.[212] The general layout of the 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition is relatively well documented, and can be reconstructed fairly comprehensively, even if large gaps remain.[213] As far as one can ascertain, there were no comparative displays presenting an avant-garde work alongside a work belonging to the category of the "art of the insane", and more generally no pairings of works by different artists based on formal criteria: the rooms of the Munich exhibition were either organized thematically, or presented an intentionally disorganized accumulation of disparate elements.[214] The one exception is a comparison between several works by Lovis Corinth. [215] The exhibition offered a parallel between photographs of some of Corinth's early works, and paintings offering examples of his much bolder post-1912 painting style, which one could characterize as a mixture of Neo-Impressionism and Expressionism. According to the rhetoric deployed both by way of slogans written on the walls of the exhibition and in the opening speech of exhibition director Adolf Ziegler, the former would be the works of a "still sane and common-sense artist" ["Der noch gesunde und bodenständige Kunstler"], whereas the latter would be pathological in nature, resulting from the stroke suffered by Corinth in 1911:

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der Moderne von Schultze-Naumburg bis zum Ausstellungsführer Entartete 'Kunst']", both in Szeemann, Harald, (ed.), et al., *Von einer Welt zur Andern: Kunst von Aussenseitern im Dialog* [exhibition catalogue]. Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1990.

[212] See for instance the reference work on this topic, Stephanie Barron (ed.), *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991. Several articles briefly allude to Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, but the presence of works from his collection in the later instalments of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition is not mentioned.
[213] See Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, "*Entartete Kunst,* Munich 1937: A Reconstruction", in Stephanie Barron (ed.), op. cit., pp. 45-83.
[214]Rooms 1, 2, 3, 5, for instance, were organized thematically, while Rooms G1 and G2 presented accumulations of mostly unrelated elements (ibid.).
[215] On this point, see Dagmar Grimm, "Lovis Corinth", in Stephanie Barron (ed.), op. cit., 220-222, and Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, op. cit., p. 125.

these paintings were accompanied by the captions "After the first stroke" and "After the second stroke".[216] Ziegler pointed out that Corinth's early style was mostly ignored by the art world, whereas his post-1912, much bolder paintings proved much more successful, which he takes to be a "proof" of the pathological nature of the avant-garde as a whole.

The "Degenerate Art" exhibition brochure of 1937[217] wasn't meant to comment on the 1937 Munich exhibition, but rather to provide a template for later exhibitions; in the words of David Britt:

> This brochure was published in November 1937, too late to be of use to the visitors of the Munich showing, which closed on November 30, but in time for the February 26, 1938, opening in Berlin and the subsequent tour to eleven other cities in Germany and Austria. The guide's division of the art into nine distinct categories provided the organizers of the exhibition in Berlin and at the later venues with guidelines for the installation of the work.[218]

But unlike the Munich show, these later exhibitions were lacking their binary counterpart. There were eight more iterations of the *Great German Art Exhibition* [*Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung*], displaying the kind of *völkisch* aesthetics approved by the Nazi regime, but they all took place in Munich, in the purpose-built House of German Art [*Haus der Deutschen Kunst*] (Robert Thoms, ibid.). Therefore, both the booklet and the actual exhibition strategies used during later iterations of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition in several German and Austrian cities aimed at reintroducing binary oppositions by other means. In that regard, works taken from the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg served a dual purpose: paradoxically, they were sometimes meant to stand in for traditional aesthetics: such was for instance the purpose of the superposition of two drawings by Kokoschka with an as of yet unattributed drawing from the Prinzhorn Collection [Fig. 2.2].

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[216] Dagmar Grimm, op. cit., 220.
[217] Reproduced in full in Stephanie Barron (ed.), op. cit., pp. 356-390. Further quotes from this brochure will mention the page numbers of this facsimile reproduction.
[218] David Britt, "Facsimile of the 'Entartete Kunst' Exhibition Brochure", in Stephanie Barron (ed.), op. cit., p. 356.

The assumption behind the strange guessing game offered to the readers of the brochure is that some of the visual works by avant-garde artists might be even more unhinged than the ones by supposedly "degenerate" mentally ill patients. But the true purpose of such comparisons is to establish an equivalence between the mentally ill and avant-garde artists, thus suggesting that they might be "degenerate" themselves. This line of reasoning is illustrated by specific examples, purposefully selected on the grounds of their formal and thematic similarities. This is for instance the case for the comparison between avant-garde sculptor Eugen Hoffmann's *Girl with blue hair* and the schizophrenic artist Karl Brendel's [Genzel] *Head of a girl*, which are reproduced side by side in the November 1937 brochure [Fig. 13].[219] Visual documentation about *Degenerate Art* exhibitions that followed the Munich show is scarce, but thanks to a newspaper article documenting the 1939 *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Frankfurt, we know that these two sculptures were actually displayed side by side (sharing the same pedestal) in the Frankfurt iteration of the exhibition [Fig. 2.3].

Works from the collection of psychopathological art from the collection of the Heidelberg psychiatric clinic were selected with the active participation of its director Carl Schneider, in cooperation with an employee from the Propaganda Ministry. We know that these works (about a hundred in total) were then sent to Berlin in February 1938; around 25 works from the collection where then selected to appear in the successive *Degenerate Art* exhibitions in Berlin and other German cities, including Frankfurt, the rest being sent back to Heidelberg (Brand-Claussen, op. cit., 144-145). Several of these works did not appear in the *BdG*; however, Karl

[219] Hoffmann's *Girl with Blue Hair* was already exhibited in the original 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich, where it appeared in the second room of the exhibition (Barron, op. cit., p.56). One can thus assume that Karl Brendel's sculpture was selected specifically on the grounds of its formal and thematic similarities with Hoffmann's.

Brendel's *Head of a Girl* [Mädchenkopf] did feature prominently in the book (*BdG* 133, Ill. 79), its inclusion in the exhibition thus forming a grim counterpoint to Prinzhorn's 1924 article in *G*, which featured prominently Brendel's *Hindenburg* as an irreverent political satire. To a certain extent, the drawing of parallels between the "art of the insane" and the avant-garde in the successive *Degenerate Art* exhibitions from 1938 onwards corresponds to a radicalization of the show's exhibition strategy. By calling upon the visitors of the exhibition to "judge for [themselves]" in his speech pronounced on the occasion of the opening of the 1937 Munich exhibition, its director Adolf Ziegler made it clear that the *Degenerate Art* exhibition was intended as a kind of "political spectacle", to quote Neil Levi.[220] Openly inviting spectators to draw parallels between Hoffmann's and Brendel's sculptures, for instance, thus arguably constituted a decisive step in the "[suturing of] an activated spectator into the ideological state apparatuses" (Buchloh 52-53). The following *Degenerate Art* exhibition now offered "comparative materials" in a more spatially condensed way, not on opposite sides of the street (Degenerate Art/Great German Art), but rather on the same page or pedestal (Hoffmann/Brendel), in an obvious attempt to direct and control the spectator's gaze. Even though the exhibitions appealed to the spectators' own judgment, the game was of course rigged from the start: the conclusion to be drawn from this comparison (i.e. the pathological nature of the avant-garde) was already given to the spectator, not only through wall texts, speeches, and brochures, but on the basis of the highly manipulative selection of works displaying formal and thematic similarities, although they had been created in utterly different contexts.

Ironically, the use of oppositions between "sane" and "diseased" artists as a binary rhetoric supporting a bio-historical discourse on racial degeneration is borrowed directly from

[220] Neil Levi, "'Judge for Yourselves!' The 'Degenerate Art' Exhibition as Political Spectacle". October, Vol. 85, pp. 41-64.

German Jewish thinker and Zionist activist Max Nordau's *Of Art and Artists* [*Von Kunst und Künstler*] (1905), whose fourth section offered a comparison between the "decadent" Rodin and the "healthy" Jean Carriès.[221] This binary conceptual and illustrative strategy was then continued by Nazi ideologue Paul Schulze-Naumburg in his book *Art and Race* [*Kunst und Rasse*] (1928), which displayed photographs of people suffering from various physical handicaps as "comparative material" to works by modern artists; the selection of images was based on a similarly manipulative strategy that suggests "biological" equivalences based on superficial formal similarities between the two sets of images.

But as noted by Neil Levi, the discourses surrounding the *Degenerate Art* exhibition were sometimes displaying internal inconsistencies (op. cit., 47). The totalitarian ambition of its exhibition strategy (aiming at a total ideological conditioning of its "activated spectators") was at odds, to say the very least, with the actual gaps and lack of coherence of the discourse that surrounded it. One such incoherence can be spotted within Carl Schneider's "Degenerate Art and the Art of the Insane". Schneider first seems to think that "degenerate" artists would be guilty of *spreading* politically and biologically nefarious ideas through their work, without being actually mad themselves. They would be deliberately emulating madness (154), an idea that echoes one of the key slogans of the 1937 exhibition: "Mad at any cost" [*Verrückt um jeden Preis*] (Room 5, Barron, op. cit., p. 60). But on the following page, Schneider draws the opposite conclusion: "One can only emulate something for which one already has a biological predisposition" [*Man kann nur nachahmen, wozu man innerlich die biologischen Voraussetzung mitbringt*] (155).[222] In so doing, he claimed

[221] According to Bettina Gockel, this opposition is highly revelatory of the "binary conceptual basis" [*gegensätzliche Grundstruktur*] of Nordau's thought (Gockel, op. cit., 42-43).

[222] According to Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, the "biological" register of such accusations against the avant-garde is characteristic of Nazi ideology: "This allowed for a rejection of modern art not only because of the fundamental 'strangeness' of its themes, techniques, or aesthetics of its works, but it was also increasingly depicted (and this is the specifically Nazi 'solution') as being

to both continue and rectify the work of Prinzhorn by providing it with a more "coherent" biological framework: formal similarities evoked in the *BdG* between works of the avant-garde and of the "artistry of the mentally ill" would necessarily be the result of biological similarities:

> After proclaiming the formal equality of their form-making processes, Prinzhorn suddenly feigned to discover differences when it came to drawing the practical consequences of his demonstration, namely that if someone makes degenerate art, then that person is necessarily a degenerate.[223]

But even though Prinzhorn explicitly condemned such comparisons, one could reasonably wonder whether specific aspects of his esthetic theories were not inviting them. Like Willi Rosenberg in his critique of Paul Klee, Carl Schneider then alluded to what we already described as one of the most ethically and conceptually dubious aspects of the *BdG*: the idea that the form-making impulse would be fundamentally de-individualized, the work of a "de-activated subject" absolutely beyond any form of rational control. As I mentioned, this notion was based on Klages' graphology, according to which involuntary movements of the hand can be deciphered in any handwriting and betray the "secrets" of a person's inner self. It is thus rather perverse, but conceptually coherent, than Schneider would remind his readers of this specific aspect of Prinzhorn's thought to support the notion that the inner truth of each artist (namely in this

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pathological in the medical sense, enemies of rthe People, and 'racially inferior' in the context of the ideology of racial hygiene. ["Somit konnte die Moderne nicht nur wegen ihrer zugrundegelegten anderartigen Thematik, Technik oder Ästhetik abgelehnt werden, sondern ihr wurde, und dies ist die spezifisch nationalsozialistische 'Lösung', auch überwiegend krankhaftes im medizinischen Sinn, Volksfeindliches, 'rassisch Minderwertiges' im Sinne der Rassenhygiene unterstellt"]. Von Lüttichau, op. cit., 137.

[223] "Nachdem Prinzhorn das ganze Buch hindurch die formale Gleichheit der Gestaltungsvorgänge proklamiert hat, entdeckt er plötzlich ihre angeblichen Unterschiede dort, wo es nun darauf ankommt, aus der Gleichheit der Gestaltungsvorgänge die praktische Konsequenzen zu ziehen, dass der, der entartete Kunst macht, eben selbst entartet ist." (Schneider, op. cit., 155).

context biological "degeneration") would necessarily be "betrayed" by the formal characteristics of the works themselves:

> Given the fact that one cannot disguise one's artistic handwriting, just like it is impossible to disguise one's actual handwriting, a person who creates degenerate art is thus necessarily degenerate.[224]

The fact that both Willi Rosenberg and Carl Schneider would refer to the same aspect of Prinzhorn's aesthetic theories in the name of a "pathologization of the avant-garde" is far from being a mere footnote in the history of the concept of "degenerate art". Prinzhorn's reliance on Ludwig Klages' notion of de-individualization or *Entselbstung* thus arguably opened the door for such interpretations that would present the artistic production of an individual as a mere expression of broader "forces" beyond that individual's control, namely not only the "cosmic vibrations" of Prinzhorn's mescaline-fueled reveries, but also for instance biological, racial, or national determinism.

[224] "Da man die künstlerische Handschrift ebenso wenig verstellen kann wie die gewöhnliche Handschrift ist der, der entartete Kunst leistet, selbst entartet." (Schneider, op. cit., 156).

Chapter 3: Fetishizing Madness: André Breton's Found Surrealists

3.0 Introduction

One of the major hurdles facing "outsider art" today is the relative opacity of its definition. On what basis can one definitively rule that visual or written productions belong to this category, or, to go back to the original term before it was translated into English by Roger Cardinal in 1972, to "art brut"? The direct, commanding, and uncompromising tone of Dubuffet's writings on the topic, first and foremost his manifesto *Art brut Preferred to Cultural Arts* (1949) cannot but impress the reader by their sense of urgency and strident opposition to cultural conventions. But they also fail to deliver a coherent, finite set of criteria that would allow one to define their object, namely the ever-elusive *art brut*. Since then, a number of scholars and art critics (such as Roger Cardinal, Michel Thévoz, or Lucienne Peiry, to name only a few) have attempted to provide us with such criteria, seemingly without being able to bring a sense of closure to what remains to this day a hotly contested topic. The following chapter will attempt, not necessarily to solve the problem, but rather to attempt to reformulate the question by taking a step back, both historically and conceptually.

Dubuffet's art brut is part and parcel of the legacy of Surrealism. In fact, his *Compagnie de l'art brut* (1947-1951) was arguably a Surrealist offshoot. Major figures of the movement, such as André Breton or Benjamin Péret, were actively involved in its founding, as part of a broader strategy aiming at reaffirming the continued relevance of surrealism after the Second World War, in the midst of socio-historical upheavals that favored the rise of serious contenders such as

existentialism and abstract expressionism. This is a widely acknowledged fact, but its implications have attracted remarkably little scholarly or critical attention so far.

This chapter demonstrate that the notion of art brut directly derives from the theory and practice of surrealist "found objects" (*objets trouvés*). This, in turn, implies that the reason why a set of objective criteria that would allow us to describe a specific work as belonging to "art brut" with a reasonable degree of certainty is nowhere to be found, and seems to have slipped through the fingers of scholars and critics to this day: because this important task is, simply put, impossible.

The nature of surrealist found objects is, to a large extent, irrelevant. Tools, cutlery, visualizations of mathematical models, traditional votive sculptures, or natural formations such as gems, stones, and driftwood all have the potential of becoming found objects. *Objets trouvés* have elicited an extraordinary amount of interest, and been described within a number of interpretative frameworks: as visual representations of the Freudian model of free associations, as close cousins of what Winnicott later described as transitional objects[225], as a critique of what Marx defined as capitalist "commodity fetishism", or as an application of a poetics of "chance encounters" first defined by Lautréamont. All of these approaches are of course highly relevant, and have yielded immense conceptual results. But investigating found objects through the admittedly narrow prism of their unexpected posterity – art brut – might also offer a fresh perspective on their history. This line of inquiry might at first sound somewhat tautological: if the nature of these objects (i.e. the processes by which they were produced, for instance natural or artificial, utilitarian or artistic, etc.) is immaterial to their belonging to the category of found objects, then the smallest and *only* common denominator of surrealist found objects is, in fact, to have been *found*. Necessarily, one would assume, by someone.

[225] José Pierre, *André Breton Et La Peinture*. Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1987, p.161.

In other words, the definition of found objects is entirely and explicitly based on a set of subjective criteria, which also provided the basis for the different modes of production of surrealist objects. In turn, *art brut* works are equally defined by the shape and dynamics of their encounter with an individual's subjectivity, as a specific subset of *objets trouvés*. As far as I am aware, *brut* works have never been compared with, let alone equated to, surrealist objects in critical and scholarly literature to date.

However, this idea does not amount to a merely theoretical hypothesis: it is also a historical fact that works belonging to the general category of the "art of the insane" were exhibited by André Breton and his surrealist acolytes as surrealist objects from the 1936 "Surrealist Exhibition of Objects onwards". In 1937, in the manifesto entitled published on the occasion of the opening of his short-lived art gallery "Gradiva", Breton offered a short taxonomy of the various "objects" exhibited by his gallery: "objects by madmen" (*objets de fous*) appear in this list alongside ten other categories, that include found and surrealist objects, and ready-mades. Breton acquired his first "object by a madman" as early as 1929, and he kept revisiting this topic in later years, for instance in his landmark essay "The Art of the Madmen, The Key to the Fields" ("L'Art des fous, la clé des champs", 1948), up until 1962, when he wrote the foreword of Gilles Ehrmann's photo-essay *The Inspired and Their Abodes* (*Les inspirés et leurs demeures*).

As Peter Bürger insightfully noted, "those addressing the issue of surrealism and madness undergo an odd experience: madness is so ubiquitous in surrealism that it seems almost impossible to address the subject without attending to the surrealist project as a whole".[226] Indeed, the theme is addressed in virtually all Surrealist works from the first manifesto onwards, and is particularly prevalent in emblematic productions of the movement, ranging from André

[226] Peter Bürger, "The Lure of Madness: On the problem of a 'Surrealist Aesthetics'", in Surrealismus und Wahnsinn. P. 28

Breton's *Nadja* (1928) to Antonin Artaud's *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* (1947). Taking as a red thread the various ways in which surrealists appropriated the "art of the insane", especially by analyzing the concrete circumstances in which the latter was displayed (both as text illustrations and as exhibits) and the evolution of the discourses that surrounded and accompanied such displays will only provide an extremely fragmentary overview of such virtually inexhaustible field.

It has, however, the merit to offer a highly specific, easily definable way of approach that allows us to pin down at least some of the characteristics of the multifaceted, elusively Protean figure of "surrealist madness". It also works as a distorting prism: a number of major surrealist works from the interwar period recede into the distance, while André Breton, Paul Éluard, and Benjamin Péret's sustained interest in the "art of the insane" after 1945 might encourage us to bridge the gap between pre and postwar Surrealism, whereas the bulk of scholarship devoted to surrealism tends to focus mostly on the movement's "golden age", from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s.

A number of scholars have pointed to formal similarities between surrealist works and the "art of the insane": their demonstration is based either on direct, demonstrable borrowings, or on a broader structural analysis of compositional principles. For instance, Werner Spies convincingly showed that Max Ernst's collage *Oedipus* (1931) drew from August Natterer's *Miracle Shepherd*, whose reproduction constituted one of the most striking illustrations of Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*.[227] On a more abstract level, Peter Gorsen discussed structural similarities between

[227] Werner Spies. *Max Ernst - Collagen. Inventar und Widerspruch*. Cologne: DuMont, 1974. pp. 31-2 and 183-5.

Salvador Dalí's "critical paranoid" works and the visual productions of schizophrenic artists, demonstrating that Dalí's compositional principles reflected his nuanced understanding of the inner logic of delirious expression.[228] Hal Foster argued that the visual productions of the mentally ill, especially some of the works discussed by Prinzhorn, played in key role in Max Ernst's and Paul Klee's frontal attacks against pictorial perspective, thus allowing them to distance themselves from the "rational" compositional principle that had dominated painting since the Italian Renaissance.[229]

Such lines of inquiry have yielded compelling, sometimes fascinating results. Broadly speaking, they tend to rely on Dali's definition of the "critical paranoid" method, i.e. the notion that surrealist painting should be the result of a deliberate mimesis aiming at reproducing the mechanisms of free association, condensation, etc., that constitute the hallmarks of the Freudian unconscious.

However, the number of documented examples of direct borrowings from the "art of the insane" in Surrealism is relatively limited: in that regard, Max Ernst's *Oedipus* is rather the exception than the rule. The notion of a "structural" relationship is arguably much hazier, and, though valid and coherent with surrealism's aesthetic agenda, much harder to pin down.[230]

One could advocate for a different approach: instead of "skipping a beat" by focusing directly on the structural or aesthetic lessons that surrealists might have drawn from the visual productions of mentally ill patients, one could start by wondering about the *status* of such works at the moment of their reception. This would then call for a more comprehensive investigation of the way in

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[228] Peter Gorsen, *Kunst und Krankheit: Metamorphosen der ästhetischen Einbildungskraft*. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1980, p.213s.

[229] Hal Foster, ibid.

[230] Röske 2009, 55-56.

which such works were perceived, alluded to, or displayed as privileged objects of contemplation for the surrealist gaze.

In this chapter, I argue that the object status of the "art of the insane" necessarily leads back to the surrealist notion of fetishism, itself to be perceived in the general context of primitivism and the influence of anthropological literature. Both Marxist and Freudian definitions of fetishism are themselves based on the notion of fetishism as constructed in European anthropological literature since the Early Modern period. However, the link between surrealist fetishism and anthropological literature has been thoroughly neglected in scholarly literature to date: significantly Johanna Malt's recent work on the use of the concept of fetishism as a conceptual basis to analyze surrealist objects gives incredibly short shrift to the ethnographic origins of the notion.[231] I argue that surrealist fetishism is characterized by a dialectics between chance and necessity invoking the hotly debated notion of "objective chance" to balance the idea of the inherent randomness of the choice of the fetish object. Another specificity of surrealist fetishism is its self-avowedly specular nature: the producer of the fetish object or, in some cases, the objects themselves, are endowed with a form of fictional agency that can ultimately be defined as a programmatic mirror image of the subjectivity of the surrealist artist.
Ultimately, the idea of a fetishistic appropriation of so-called "primitive works", including those belonging to the category of the "art of the insane", constitute a productive detour to re-examine

[231] Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Primitivist fetishism is dismissed in three lines (!) on p.119. Conversely, most scholarly analyses of "ethnographic surrealism" tend to focus on the dissident surrealist group of the Collège de Sociologie, thereby thoroughly neglecting core members of the surrealist movement such as André Breton or Paul Eluard. This is for instance the case for James Clifford's "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1981).

the theory and practice of surrealist objects, while also shedding new light on the conceptual history of Jean Dubuffet's art brut as a subcategory of surrealist primitivism.

In the first section of this chapter, I describe surrealist engagement with the "art of the insane" in terms of a slow realignment of theory and practice, slowly overcoming initial reluctance at any close association of surrealist productions with the "art of the insane", even though such association seems to have been part and parcel of the surrealist agenda from its inception.

In the second section, I offer a brief theoretical overview of the surrealist notion of "found object", arguing that it constitutes a basis for surrealist dealings with the so-called "god-objects", i.e. "primitive" artworks.

In the third section, I analyze more closely the mechanism of reflexivity at work in surrealist fetishism, arguing that it is ultimately a result of surrealism's rejection of rationality.

In the fourth section, I focus on the motive of the key in surrealist visual productions, arguing that the "art of the insane" provides the surrealist movement with a form of utopian horizon offering a glimpse of a general reconciliatory synthesis (*Aufhebung*) while also, more specifically, solving what Rosalind Krauss perceived as the main paradox of surrealism: the gap between "writing" and "image", i.e. between automatism and "critical-paranoid" composition.

3.1 Objects by Madmen, between Theory and Practice

The paramount importance of the visual and written expressions of madness for surrealism in the late 1920s on a theoretical level has to be contrasted with the lack of practical engagement with such works on the part of the surrealists during the same period. Whereas

Salvador Dalí claimed that the most important advances made by surrealism in the late 1920s and early 1930s took place on the combined fronts of a renewed reflection on the nature of the surrealist object and an increased attention paid to the inner workings of madness culminating in Breton and Eluard's *The Immaculate Conception*, it is worth mentioning that the first work produced in a psychiatric institution acquired by Breton in 1929, an assemblage sculpture known as the *Small Tureen*—which arguably stands at the confluence of these two streams of surrealist investigations—only made a relatively low-profile appearance in surrealist printed materials, as an illustration of an article on suicide in the twelfth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, without any caption or mention of provenance, let alone a detailed analysis.

If the "art of the insane" was thus partly a blind spot of surrealism in the interwar period, its role within the movement seems quite different if we take into account the evolution of surrealism over the two decades immediately following the end of the second world war. One could cite a number of writings dedicated to this topic in the late 1940s and early 1950s, from André Breton and Benjamin Péret's series of monographic studies on psychiatric art for Jean Dubuffet's ambitious editorial project of an *Almanach de l'art brut* to the mention of Adolf Wölfli in Breton's *Magical Art* [*L'art magique*] (1957).[232] But the gradually increasing importance of the "art of the insane" in major surrealist exhibitions from 1945 onwards seems to be particularly revelatory. Whereas the *Small Tureen* was merely an uncaptioned illustration in *The Surrealist Revolution* in 1929, then a spatially and conceptually marginalized exhibition piece in the 1936 Surrealist exhibition of objects, the collection of Gaston Ferdière, Artaud's psychiatrist in Rodez, was displayed prominently in the exhibition Surrealism in 1947 [*Le surréalisme en 1947*]. The last

[232] André Breton and Gérard Legrand. *L'art magique*. Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1957.

major surrealist exhibition, *L'Écart absolu*, organized by Breton in 1965, marked the logical conclusion of this evolution: the visual works and writings of the schizophrenic Swiss artist Adolf Wölfli or of the self-taught mediumnistic artist Joseph Crépin appeared at the center of the exhibition, as artworks in their own rights, duly attributed to their authors. Such gradual movement of the "art of the insane" from the margins of surrealist displays to their very center could be analyzed in terms of a slow realignment of surrealist theory with its exhibition practice, as it progressively overcame the taboo of a close association between its productions and art produced by mentally ill patients.

The reception of Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in France offers one of the earliest examples of such a process of appropriation: for the vast majority of surrealists, Prinzhorn's work offered a treasure trove of compelling illustrations, from which they could draw inspiration all the more freely that the meaning of the original German text escaped them entirely.[233] The works featured in Prinzhorn's book were thus stripped of any context, i.e. both of Prinzhorn's own theoretical elaborations and of the respective biographical and medical history of each of his "schizophrenic masters". In the first pages of François Lehel's *Our Demented Art: Four Studies on Pathological Art* [*Notre art dément: quatre études sur l'art pathologique*] (1926), the impact of Prinzhorn's work on the guests of the fictional Montparnasse avant-garde painter "Chocholsky" is clearly not occasioned by Prinzhorn's *text*: only the title of the book is read aloud. As a collection of images, the book itself becomes a disruptive "found object", whose existence and visual presentation elicits a strong emotional response from its viewers.

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[233] Thomas Röske takes issue with the notion that *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* would have constituted a "Bible" of the Surrealist movement (Spies 1967, 12 and MacGregor 1989, 281): "[Prinzhorn's book] was mostly perceived as a collection of illustrations [*Abbildungswerk*], especially abroad. Even in Paris, only a few people could read German. Thus for the artists around André Breton, the 'Bible' was arguably above all a 'Picture Bible'" (Röske 2009, 10-11).

It was only a matter of time before French surrealists confronted themselves directly with works categorized as belonging to the "art of the insane", as opposed their mediated presentation through the illustrations of Prinzhorn's text. An "Exhibition of sick artists" [*Exposition d'artistes malades*] was organized at the Max Bine Gallery in the Spring of 1929, largely unprecedented in its size and international range—it featured around 200 works, with numerous loans from the collections gathered by major European psychiatrists, including Auguste Marie, Hans Prinzhorn, and Nikolay Bazhenov.[234] The exhibition made a lasting impact on the French Surrealists: not only did it correspond to their general interest in madness as a model for unhindered poetic utterances drawing directly from the unconscious,[235] but it also benefited from particularly favorable circumstances.

By the year 1929, the surrealist movement underwent an acute crisis that forced its members to operate a major change of direction. Surrealism was increasingly contested by a number of dissidents who contested what they perceived as the inflexible, overbearing leadership

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[234] See the exhibition catalogue: *Exhibition of Sick Artists: Catalogue of the Works of Sick Art Exhibited by Mr. Max Bine from Friday, May 31st to from Sunday, June 16th, 1929* [*Exposition des artistes malades: Catalogue des Œuvres d'Art Morbide exposées chez M. Max Bine du vendredi 31 mai au dimanche 16 juin 1929*]. Paris: Imprimeries réunies, 1929. For a detailed analysis of the works presented in the exhibition, and especially of the works of the Prinzhorn Collection loaned for the duration of the exhibition, see Ingrid von Beyme, "Asylum Art as the 'True Avant-Garde'? The Surrealist Reception of 'Mad Art', in Thomas Röske and Ingrid von Beyme (eds.), Surrealism and Madness, Heidelberg: Verlag Wunderhorn, 2009, 153-193.

[235] In August 1930, Paul Éluard and André Breton wrote *The Immaculate Conception* in 1930. One of the most important books of Surrealist poetry, *The Immaculate Conception* is particularly noteworthy for its second section, titled *Les possessions* [*The Possessions*]: in this section, Breton and Eluard offer five prose poems closely modeled after psychiatric descriptions of the characteristic speech patterns of several mental illnesses (schizophrenia, paranoia, etc.). Without arguing for a direct "influence" between the Max Bine's *Exhibition of Sick Art* and *The Immaculate Conception*, it is worth noting that the structure of the former was also based on psychiatric diagnostic categories, for instance "Mental Disturbances, the Deficient, Depressive", or "Schizophrenic compositions" (von Beyme, op. cit., 154)"

of Breton, and were interested in exploring domains relatively far beyond the realm of the Surrealist "orthodoxy" for which he stood: Georges Bataille founded *Documents* and, in January 1930, was one of the co-authors of *A Corpse* [*Un cadavre*], a violently polemical essay against André Breton signed by fellow dissidents Robert Desnos, Raymond Queneau, and Michel Leiris, among others.

Confronted with this barrage of criticism, Breton and "loyalist" members such as Paul Éluard or Louis Aragon operated a "visual turn", premised on the notion that visual arts (painting, sculpture, photography, and cinema) might offer a way to regenerate Surrealism, and develop fresh approaches. Salvador Dalí, who joined the movement in 1929, was hailed as the savior of the movement: his "critical-paranoid" method seemed to offer a way out of the aporia of surrealist painting.[236] He also collaborated with Luis Buñuel on the script of *Un Chien Andalou*, whose release in 1929 was seen as proof of the movement's continuous relevance.

In this context, it is reasonable to assume that the works of "art of the insane" acquired by Paul Éluard and André Breton at the Max Bine gallery held particular significance for them, and were the objects of intense scrutiny. Paul Éluard bought an intricate drawing by "Albert G." (also known as "Baron de Ravallet"), featuring an obsessively detailed maze of geometric lines, a standing figure whose silhouette seen in profile seems to dissolve in a network of curves and writings (originally from the collection of Auguste Marie).[237] But the two "Objects by madmen" bought by André Breton, originally also from the collection of Auguste Marie, seem even more significant. Their structure is highly unusual, even by the standards of the "art of the insane": they consist in two purpose-made wooden boxes with glass panels functioning as "display cases",

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[236] "For three or four years, Dali embodied the surrealist spirit and made it shine its brightest light." ["Durant trois ou quatre années, Dali incarnera l'esprit surréaliste et le fera briller de tous ses feux"]. André Breton, OC III, 530.
[237] See von Beyme, op. cit., 156.

featuring an assemblage of drawings and writings on paper, mass-produced objects, and pieces of cloth. One of them is usually referred to as *The Small Tureen* [*La petite soupière*], after the miniature white ceramic tureen situated in the upper left register of the work; the other one is only known as "Object by a Madman" (objet d'aliéné) [Fig. 3.1 and 3.2]. Their author remains anonymous, and Breton seems to have made no attempt to gather information about their provenance, about which he doesn't seem to have inquired from Auguste Marie, who could conceivably have shed light on this issue.

In spite of his lack of interest for their creator's biography, the significance of these works for André Breton is well attested: they remained in Breton's possession until his death in 1966, and are mentioned in one his very last pieces of writing, titled *Such my Room at the End of the Journey* [*Quelle ma chambre au bout du voyage*], a sketch consisting in a list of artworks held in his personal collection, which would have provided the basis for a "text on the objects and paintings that surrounded [him]", according to the publisher Albert Skira, with whom Breton had signed a book contract shortly before his death.[238]

They were thus continuously on display in Breton's atelier from 1929 to 1966. The contents of the atelier were not only part of Breton's private space. They were purposefully put in dialogue with each other in highly self-aware fashion, as part of a complex exhibition strategy targeted at a very specific viewership, a not-insignificant number of "happy few" consisting in artists, art critics, writers, and other literati. The constantly evolving displays thus offered both a visual manifesto of Surrealist principles and a demonstration of their practical applications for an emerging surrealist "canon". The two *objets d'aliénés* were integrated within this broader

[238] André Breton, *Quelle ma chambre au bout du voyage*, in : *Œuvres complètes*, IV, 1176-1178; Albert Skira as quoted by Étienne-Alain Hubert (op. cit., 1481), originally published in *Skira. Bulletin trimestriel*, 4 décembre 1966.

exhibition strategy in a variety of ways. Their exact location in the atelier over time is documented in several photographs. On an unattributed photograph titled *Atelier d'André Breton, Rue Fontaine*, from ca. 1931 [Fig. 3.3], the objects appear in the upper part of a wall, on each side of Pablo Picasso's *Head* (1913), and alongside of various elements related to the genealogy of the found object, the poem-object, and the ready-made: Georges Braque's *Palette* (1930), Valentine Hugo's *Objet* (1931), and two insect boxes probably acquired by Breton. On a photograph of André Breton taken by Hilmar Lokay[239] in 1939, both objects appear in the background, displayed prominently above a sofa in Breton's living room [Fig. 3.4], on each side of an oil painting by Yves Tanguy titled *The Armoire of Proteus* [*L'armoire de Protée*] (1931), alongside a poem-object by André Breton (untitled) from January 18th, 1937, and next to "Eau de Voilette", a modified ready-made by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray.[240] Significantly ,the two masks that appear in the upper part of the wall on which the *objets de fou* are displayed in Hilmar Lokay's photograph are representative of surrealist Primitivist reception of non-European traditional arts: one of those masks can be formally identified as a *Devil Mask* from Southern Mexico.[241]

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[239] Hilmar Lokay was a Swiss photographer based in Basel, mostly known for her work on portrait photography. Although few biographical information is available, her work is discussed in Susanne Bieri and Heuser, Mechthild (dir.): *Vom General zum Glamour Girl. Ein Porträt der Schweiz*, Basel, Schwabe 2005.; it was showed in the group exhibition 1952, Luzern, Kunsthaus, "Weltausstellung der Photographie" in Lucerne in 1952. Source: https://www.foto-ch.ch/?a=fotograph&id=22882&lang=de, accessed on 03.07.2018. The work folder of the André Breton foundation incorrectly refers to her as "Lo Kay".

[240] Objects and artworks as identified in Katia Sowels and Sean O'Halan, "De l'asile d'aliénés à l'atelier de la rue Fontaine : parcours poétique d'une trouvaille d'André Breton", in : *André Breton et l'art magique – Yuksel Arslan*. Villeneuve-d'Asq : LAM Lille métropole musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain, et d'art brut, 2017, p. 35.

[241] The "devil mask", probably originating from Guerrero State in Mexico, was used in dancing ceremonies celebrating the Virgin of the Conception; it is a composite figure, featuring a human face with the mouth of the jaguar, a large snake on the forehead, and a lizard on the cheek. Source: http://www.andrebreton.fr/work/56600100039040?back_rql=Any%20X%20ORDERBY%20FTIRANK%28X%29%20DESC%20WHERE%20X%20has_text%20%22Masque%22&back_

The function of the *objets de fous* in this sophisticated hall of mirrors deserves further investigation, and arguably plays out on a least three separate levels at once.

As suggested by Sowels and O'Hanlan, these objects constitute miniature images of the broader structure of the atelier, offering a strikingly similar "profusion of objects and images arranged on shelves in a mysterious, chaotic fashion, with no apparent hierarchy".[242] Their contents, exhibited on miniature shelves, seem to paradoxically redeem banal, even discarded objects deprived of use value. The short text accompanying the "Small Tureen" must have delighted Breton by its explicit allusion to the uselessness of the miniature tureen (taken from a toy dining set), which seems to announce another "useless" piece of crockery, Meret Oppenheim's *Object (The Luncheon in Fur)* [*Objet (Le déjeuner en fourrure)*] from 1936. In a fictional dialogue between the anonymous artist and his or her mother, the latter states:

Darling, you won't have any success;
It is impossible to serve soup in your small tureen
So should I do with my paintin [sic][243]

Most the other elements—small cogs and wheels, pieces of cloth and string, hooks, buttons—evoke the notion of linking, or piecing together heterogeneous parts: their apparent loss of use value seems to hint, in the context of Breton's atelier, at another kind of linkage of heterogeneous

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url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.andrebreton.fr%2Fview%3F_fsb%3D1%26__start%3D20%26subvid%3Dtsearch%26__fromnavigation%3D1%26rql%3DMasque%26__stop%3D39, accessed on 03.08.2018.
The other mask on the upper left corner of the image could unfortunately not be identified.

[242] Sowels and O'Hanlan, op. cit., 35.

[243] "Mon Chéri tu n'auras pas de succès;
C'est impossible de tremper la soupe dans ta petite soupière ;
Alors que faut-il faire de mon tablo [sic]. " The Small Tureen, lower section, as transcribed in Röske and von Beyme, op. cit., p.146.

parts that would challenge both concrete and semantic mechanisms of production, i.e. eventually the boundary between sense and nonsense.

Such questioning of traditional esthetic norms, in line with Breton's own institutional critique, is made explicit in the handwritten text that constitutes one of the elements of the *Small Tureen*:

Ah is it possible; My God is it possible
too [sic] see such a paintin; above
the paintin there are drawers; look my poor
dear boy, people don't put drawers ontop [sic]
of a paintin; and they'll be able to tell
That you are no furniter [sic] maker;

Ah it doesn't make sence [sic]; at your age
you hold a children's toy in your hands;
should that continew [sic]; then you will
play with dolls; and don't hope that your paintin [sic]
is ever gon [sic] make it to the *Musée du Louvre*[244]

The last line of the central panel, with its bitter reference to the Louvre Museum, must have taken on a particularly ironic tone in the context of Breton's atelier, of which *The Small Tureen* was a highlight. Not only did it seem to advocate for a redefinition of artistic and literary values—which was arguably already underway: self-taught artist Henri Rousseau's *The Snake Charmer*

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[244] "Ah si c'est possible; Mon Dieu ci [sic] c'est possible
de voire [sic] un tableau de la sorte; en hauteur
du tableau c'est un bahut; voyons mon pauvre
petit homme; on ne place pas un bahut deçu [sic]
un tableau; a regarder ce tableau on verra
que tu nai [sic] pas ébéniste;

Ah mais c'est incensé [sic]; comment à ton âge
tu a [sic] un jouet d'enfan [sic] dans tes mains;
pour peu que cela continu; alors tu va [sic]
jouer à la poupée; enfin tu n'espaire
pas que se tableau va rentrer au Musée du Louvre" Anon., *The Small Tureen*, middle section, as transcribed in Röske and von Beyme, op. cit., p.146 [translation R.K.].

actually entered the collection of the Louvre Museum in 1936—it also unmistakably, and apparently with a certain sense of self-irony, was characterized as an anti-conformist artistic gesture in its own right, conflating aspirations to enter the temple of "high art" and several markers of de-skilling, from the artists' self-avowedly[245] limited command of furniture making to the accusation of puerility or even mental retardation.[246] The presence, in the 1939 configuration documented by Hilmar Lokay, of a poem-object created by André Breton himself with intentional clumsiness,[247] would reinforce the idea of a conflict between the specific goals of his collection and the notion of an esthetic appreciation of the work of art based on a traditional judgement of taste: the *Small Tureen* is the work of a self-avowedly unskilled artist, both an amateur furniture maker, as humorously stated in its accompanying text, and a self-taught visual artist. As such, both the poem-object and the *objets de fous* correspond to extreme forms of de-skilling, as "war machines aimed squarely at destroying painting and sculpture as traditional activities pursuing esthetic goals", in the words of José Pierre.[248] But as José Pierre immediately adds, surrealism's proclaimed ambition of staging an all-out attack against painting and sculpture

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[245] Such degree of self-awareness on the part of the artist, both its self-deprecatory tone and the ambiguous mention of the Musée du Louvre, seems at odds with Dubuffet's notion that *art brut* would defined by a total disregard for its potential viewership and for institutional mechanisms of validation of artistic production.

[246] The artworks in the immediate vicinity of the *objets de fou* seem to confirm such interpretation: put on alongside paintings by Pablo Picasso or Yves Tanguy, they are also flanked by Georges Braque's 1931 *Palette*, an unusual ready-made consisting of the actual palette used by the artist, but signed by him like a "traditional" painting: both formally and thematically, the palette seems to announce a far-reaching reflection on the nature of the work of art and its processes of production.

[247] Elza Adamowicz, "Le poème-objet", in: Henri Béhar (dir.), *Dictionnaire André Breton*, Paris: Garnier, 2012, p.803. André Breton's skills in the realm of visual arts were limited; as a matter of fact, nearly all poem-objects were produced by writers, as opposed to trained painters or sculptors.

[248] José Pierre, *André Breton et la peinture*, Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1987, p.173 [translation R.K.]. (ibid.).

was not actually put into effect (the poem-objects representing one of the most radical realizations in that direction):

But if such a war machine eventually failed to smash its adversaries, it is probably due to the fact that those who were at its helm did not sincerely wish such an outcome. Neither Dalí, nor Dominguez, nor Valentine Hugo, nor Miró […], nor Tanguy really hoped for the abolition of painting. As for those who defined themselves as sculptors around those years, Arp, Giacometti, Picasso, Calder, Brignoni, Max Ernst and Moore, they were not really calling for the elimination of sculpture: significantly, they did not produce 'surrealist objects', or only in an ambiguous, non-orthodox sense.[249]

At this point, it might be useful to dwell on the specific terminology of the surrealist object, and to attempt to pinpoint the location of the *objets de fou* in this sprawling taxonomy. The first explicit mention of the *objets de fous* in a comprehensive list of surrealist objects dates back to 1937, in the pamphlet printed on the occasion of the opening of *Gradiva*,[250] an art gallery run by André Breton for a couple of months in a short-lived and ill-fated attempt to make a living by selling works of art:

Natural objects
Interpreted natural objects
Perturbed objects
Found objects
Interpreted found objects
Savage objects
Mathematical objects
Objects by madmen
Ready-mades and assisted ready-mades
Surrealist objects
Etc. [251]

[249] José Pierre, ibid. [transl. RK].
[250] The Gradiva art gallery was in operation from May to October 1938; in spite of the quality of the works he displayed in the gallery (Magritte, Dalí, Duchamp, etc.), very few works were sold, which forced Breton to file for bankruptcy after only six months. He left for Mexico on a mission of cultural diplomacy for the French government immediately after the closing of the gallery, letting the surrealist painter Yves Tanguy take care of the remaining administrative matters. On the history of Gradiva, see Renée Mabin, "La gallerie Gradiva", *Mélusine*, December 2012.
[251] "Objets naturels
Objets naturels interprétés
Objets naturels incorporés
Objets perturbés
Objets trouvés
Objets trouvés interprétés
Objets sauvages
Objets mathématiques
Objets de fous
Ready-made et ready-made aidés

Objets surréalistes
Etc. " André Breton, *Gradiva* (1937), in: Œuvres complètes, III, p. 674. [emphasis mine]

This first mention of "objects by madmen unambiguously proves that they were explicit considered by André Breton as a subcategory of the surrealist object.

But one could also point out that the absence of the "objets de fous" within interwar surrealism is at least as significant as their presence. Apart from this mention in the opening manifesto of the Gradiva gallery, the surrealist movement produced no comprehensive theoretical text about the "objets de fous" in the interwar period, even though they were eagerly collected and displayed by the likes of Breton and Eluard: the first surrealist texts dedicated to the "art of the insane" were produced more than a decade later, in 1948, the year of the publication of André Breton's essay "The Art of the Insane: The Key to the Fields" ["L'art des fous, la clé des champs"] in the *Cahiers de La Pléiade*.

Such relative absence becomes all the more striking if one considers the textual genealogy of the list of surrealist objects[252] published in 1937: its first version was drafted in 1936 on the occasion of the Surrealist exhibition of objects at the Charles Ratton gallery in Paris. The latter version is largely similar to the list that was published in 1937, with one notable exception: it does not include a mention on the *objets de fous*. As a matter of fact, the short catalogue of the "Surrealist exhibition of objects" fails to mention them altogether, even though May Ray's photographs documenting the layout of the exhibition offers irrefutable proof that the two *objets de fous* acquired by Breton in 1929 were featured prominently at the

[252] The notion of "surrealist object" to designate the ensemble of objects exhibited, appropriated, or produced by the surrealist movement is at odds with the actual terminology used by the surrealists themselves. As noted by Henri Béhar, surrealists refer merely to "objects", "surrealist objects" being specifically designating objects produced by the surrealists themselves (for instance Giacometti's sculptures). Béhar reminds us that properly speaking, in the title of the 1936 Surrealist Exhibition of Objects, "the exhibition is deemed surrealist, not the objects themselves" ["C'est l'exposition qui est surréaliste, non les objets"]. But Béhar also adds that once this terminological shift established and duly mentioned, it is "allowed" to talk about "surrealist objects" in a more general, and actually anachronistic sense. See Henri Béhar, "Objet", in Henri Béhar, op. cit., 746.

center of the Charles Ratton gallery [Fig. 3.4 and 3.5]. They function as specular framing devices, appearing on each side of the largest vitrine in the exhibition, offering a miniature image of its exhibition strategy, as was already the case in Breton's atelier from 1931 onwards: but this time, instead of constituting an "esoteric" commentary of surrealist collecting and exhibiting practices for a select number of viewers, it was integrated within one of the most momentous public shows of strength of the movement. Why did their presence in the show remain unacknowledged?

The so-called "Dermée scandal" of 1919 might help shed some light on interwar surrealism's ambiguous embrace of the "art of the insane". Paul Dermée, a Belgian Dadaist who was also Apollinaire's protégé, gave a lecture on the poetry of Max Jacob at the art gallery of Léonce Rosenberg, in which he drew a parallel between the former's use of puns and semantic ambiguities and the mechanisms of verbal delirium, which he knew from attending the lectures of famed French psychiatrist Pierre Janet. This parallel between the avant-garde and mental illness elicited a furious reaction from the attendees, which included André Breton, Louis Aragon, Jean Cocteau, and Pierre Reverdy. They all vehemently protested against what they perceived as an insult, equating the poetic production of the avant-garde to the ravings of lunatic, a position that was also defended by conservative detractors of the avant-garde. Anouck Cape suggested various ways of interpreting this puzzling reaction in which future members of the surrealist movement such as Breton and Aragon seemed inflexible in their desire to distance themselves from the productions of the "art of the insane":[253] as a defense mechanism aiming at defending the artistic legitimacy of the avant-garde against its perceived

[253] Anouck Cape, *Les frontières du délire: écrivains et fous au temps des avant-gardes*. Paris : Genève: Honoré Champion, 2011, p.25s.

pathologization by Dermée, or as the expression of an internal power struggle within the Paris avant-garde whose stakes were nothing less than the legacy of Apollinaire and the proprietary use of the term "surrealism". But unlike Cape, who theorizes a shift in André Breton's positions between the Dermée affair of 1919 and the defense and illustration of madness in Breton's first surrealist manifesto of 1924, I would be more inclined to emphasize the logical continuity of Breton's take on the issue through the 1920s and 1930s. Dermée attempted to formulate a nuanced comparison between the works of Max Jacob and examples of verbal delirium taken from Marcel Réja's *L'art chez les fous*: even though Surrealists also embraced the notion of a common ground between madness, art, and even daily life based on their reception of Freudism, they also held the belief that their own subject position and that of the mentally ill were fundamentally opposed. Madness and poetic "inspiration" might derive from a common source: however, the surrealists' close encounters with madness are generally conceived of as the result of a deliberate experiment or carefully crafted observational process that might even allow them to reach a higher level of consciousness such as Breton's "surréalité". Far from potentially impinging upon the author's artistic legitimacy, it seems to be largely perpetuating what Paul Bénichou described as the Romantic "Consecration of the Writer" by other means. Indeed, the surrealists' observer position vis-à-vis madness are derived both from individual surrealists' knowledge and even—for instance, in the case of Breton—past practice of psychiatric observational procedures, but also of Rimbaud's renegotiation of the Romantic myth of the poet as inspired prophet in his *Letter of the Seer*, in which he advocates for a "dérèglement *raisonné* de tous les sens": in other words, a rationalized process of exploration of the realms of the irrational.

3.2 Found Objects and God-Objects

As we just mentioned, numerous texts delineate the role of the "art of the insane" in postwar surrealism, from 1948 onwards. But in the absence of an explicit definition of its role during the "golden age" of the surrealist object, from the visual turn of 1929 to the International surrealist exhibition of 1938, one can arguably triangulate its conceptual coordinates based on the characteristics of other subcategories of surrealist objects: namely found objects, poem-objects, and "savage objects".

Found objects and poem-objects are closely related, albeit corresponding to different processes of production. Although the first theory of the poem-object was formulated in 1925, its first manifestations in surrealist practice appeared several years later, in the late 1920s and early 1930s: poem-objects amount to a relatively marginal practice within surrealism, mostly embraced by writers rather than trained sculptors, but correspond to the core of the surrealist doctrine, as attempts to both put into practice and question the fundamental assumptions of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*.

Combining visual elements and the written word, they are meant to provide an accurate representation of a dream as a highly self-aware expression of the subjectivity of its author, as explicitly stated in the title and accompanying description of Breton's *Rêve-Objet* (1935). In so doing, it relies heavily on Freud's analysis of the inner mechanisms of dream images, turning the interpretative grid he provided in *The Interpretation of Dreams* into practical tools for artistic production. Paradoxically, its goals are also diametrically opposed to Freud's views: by providing a material representations of the artist's mental space**,** they constitute one of the numerous surrealist attempts at bridging the gap between the realms of what Freud called "psychic" and

"material" reality. Taking issue with Freud's reminder, in the last pages of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that "*psychic* reality is a specific form of existence that should not be confused with *material* reality", Breton advocated for a dialectical overcoming of such opposition, i.e. an *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian sense.[254] Poem-objects are not to be merely artworks whose structural principles emulate the grammar of the unconscious.[255] They are designed as an irruption of the psychic reality of its author into the material plane or, in other words, a beachhead preparing a full-on invasion of reality by the realm of dreams, as the pleasure principle is given precedence over the reality principle: "the defining feature of the surrealist attitude is its attempt to let desire be the master of the world".

The found object corresponds to the agenda as the poem-object, and derives from it both logically and chronologically: it offers a material configuration that corresponds to a given structure already present within its founder's psyche. For instance, according to Breton's description in *Equation of the Found Object*, his request to Giacometti to create a "cendrier Cendrillon" or "Cindarella ashtray", which was based on a dream sentence recorded by Breton shortly after waking up (itself model after an assonance, one of the structuring principles of

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[254] On this point, see Emmanuel Rubio, *Les Philosophies d'André Breton (1924-1941)*. Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 2009, p.236s.

[255] On this point, I would take issue with the interpretation of André Breton's esthetics as based on a relatively traditional notion of imitation, as a mimesis of an "interior model" proposed by Dominique Combes, and quoted by Thomas Augais in the context of his explanation of the cooperation between Breton and Giacometti during the latter's creation of his sculpture *The Invisible Object*: if such notion does certainly apply to some surrealist practices (especially automatic writing), its reliance on rhetorical models of mimesis (Boileau, Abbé Batteux, etc.) seems at odds with practices that distance themselves from subjective lyricism (where would one locate the "interior model" of Dalí's paranoid-critical method, for instance?), while also failing to take into account the philosophical ambitions of Breton's questioning of material reality. On this point, see Dominique Combes, "Rhétorique de la peinture", in: Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron (ed.), *Lire le regard: André Breton et la peinture*. Lachenal et Ritter, 1993, p.134. See also: Thomas Augais, *Giacometti et les écrivains: L'atelier sans fin*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2017, p.230-1.

unconscious associations), was unexpectedly granted when they encountered a wooden spoon whose extremity was supported by a miniature shoe, a "found object" whose presence and subsequent acquisition amounted to a form of wish fulfillment. In other words, while poem-objects were premised on a poetic transmutation of "psychic reality" into material reality, found objects are defined as a recognition of an element of "psychic reality" already embedded into a material object.

The found object is thus primarily a surface of projection of its founder's desire; Breton describes how, under his gaze, the wooden spoon was slowly metamorphosed into Cindarella's shoe:

> It is only when I was home and had laid the spoon on a piece of furniture that I witnessed how the associative and interpretative potentialities that had remained inactive while I was carrying the spoon suddenly took hold of it. Under my gaze, it was obviously changing. Seen in profile, from a certain height, the small wooden shoe that protruded from its handle—due to the latter's curve—looked increasingly like a heel, and the whole silhouette of the spoon was now a slipper with an upturned tip, of the kind worn by dancers. […] Thus, one of the most moving teachings from the old tale was concretely specified: the fabled shoe as a potentiality contained within a humble spoon.[256]

Even though Breton makes use of the Aristotelian distinction between potentiality and actuality, implying that the spoon's transformation into the "fabled shoe" that featured in his dream was a potentiality (δύναμις) of the object rather than an accident, his instance on the primordial importance of his own gaze, that seems to initiate the spoon's metamorphosis, and on the

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[256] "C'est rentré chez moi qu'ayant posé la cuiller sur un meuble je vis tout à coup s'en emparer toutes les puissances associatives et interprétatives qui étaient demeurées dans l'inaction alors que je la portais. Sous mes yeux il était clair qu'elle changeait. De profil, à une certaine hauteur, le petit soulier de bois issu de son manche—la courbure de ce dernier aidant—prenait figure de talon et le tout la silhouette d'une pantoufle à la pointe relevée comme celle des danseuses. […] Ainsi se trouvait spécifié concrètement un des plus touchants enseignements du conte : la pantoufle merveilleuse en puissance dans la pauvre cuiller. " André Breton, *Équation de l'objet trouvé*, 21-2.

concrete conditions of such contemplation strongly suggest that such "potentiality" is merely the result of a process of projection.

Consequently, the nature of the found object itself, its provenance and potential use value is immaterial to its being "found": on Breton's own admission, "desire appropriates whatever can serve its purposes indiscriminately: […] any object […] can be made to represent whatever we want." In *Equation of the Found Object*, the triviality of the spoon's use value only emphasizes such disconnect, while the exact nature of the object "found" by Breton and Giacometti during the same visit to the flea market, a metallic mask of a highly unusual shape, seems to be of little concern to them.

However, when it comes to the irrelevance of their nature (i.e. use value and processes of production), specific kinds of found objects seem to be "more equal" than others. In the preface to the catalogue of the Surrealist exhibition of objects at the Charles Ratton Gallery (1936), André Breton seems to grant a special, exalted status to so-called "primitive" artworks from Africa and Polynesia, which were displayed alongside found objects:

> Alternating [with found objects], those are the only ones to hold their ground […]: the *god-objects* of certain places and certain times, standing above the fray due to their unique ability to utterly rout the laws of representation that govern our visual productions. We are particularly envious of their evocative powers, which we believe to be the depositaries, in the realm of artistic production, of the very grace that we wish to reconquer.[257]

The choice of the word "grace" is particularly significant in that it does not seem to be simply

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[257] "Alternant avec les précédents et seuls fixes, […] les objets-dieux de certaines régions et de certains temps, distingués entre tous en raison de l'échec éclatant qu'ils infligent aux lois de représentation plastique qui sont les nôtres, dont nous jalousons très particulièrement le pouvoir évocateur, que nous tenons pour dépositaires, en art, de la grâce même que nous voudrions reconquérir."

synonymous with elegance, but rather to betray the religious undertones of the special ontological status granted to the "god-objects": like in the Paulinian doctrine of divine grace as gratuitously bestowed upon the chosen few by God,[258] the "god-objects" are "saved" from the chaotic, alienated stated state of affairs that characterizes all other objects.[259] They offer a picture of disalienation inasmuch as they are perceived as successfully abolishing the distinction between "psychic reality" and "material reality", thus reaching the surrealists' ultimate goal.[260] The superior ontological status granted to them by the surrealists also translates into the fact that, unlike found objects, their provenance and use value (i.e. votive, apotropaic, etc.) is perceived as relevant, and is considered to be a valid object of inquiry. In "Oceania" ["Océanie] (1948), Breton deplored the "great indeterminacy […] in respect of the provenance and the initial role of

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[258] The Paulinian doctrine of grace as "antinomist" (i.e. bestowed by God independently of someone's moral conduct, or "works") is still an object of scholarly dispute; however, it was adopted as the official interpretation of the Catholic and Lutheran Churches. A number of passages support this interpretation, for instance: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, King James Bible translation).

[259] "God-objects" are thus meant to correspond to the prelapsarian, Edenic state of "primitive" humanity, but also a programmatic utopian horizon of surrealist action: as pointed out by Philippe Sabot, surrealist primitivism is both descriptive and prescriptive, corresponding to an unresolved tension between "the primitive as it is […] in the anthropological descriptions of ethnographers" and "the primitive as it should be, i.e. as the surrealists would like it to be in order to exactly coincide with their notion of a full human being, in full possession of its spiritual powers" (Philippe Sabot, "Primitivisme et surréalisme: Une 'synthèse' impossible?", in: *Methodos* 3, 2003, p.6).

[260] According to Philippe Sabot (op. cit., p. 7), the following passage of one of the surrealists' main points of reference on the topics of myth and "primitive" mentality (see for instance Breton's homage to the book in OC IV, 703), James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, provides one of the most succinct and substantial summaries of this notion: "The Indians of the Gran Chaco are often heard to relate the most incredible stories as things which they have themselves seen and heard; hence strangers who do not know them intimately say in their haste that these Indians are liars. In point of fact the Indians are firmly convinced of the truth of what they relate; for these wonderful adventures are simply *their dreams, which they do not distinguish from waking realities*." [emphasis mine] (James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, "Absence and Recall of the Soul", p.162).

[so-called "savage"] objects, and the lack of rigor and method"[261] on the part of Western collectors of the first half of the twentieth century, hailing the recent progress of ethnographical knowledge and art historical expertise as one of the conditions that allowed for a broader reception of traditional Polynesian art, which he personally favored over traditional African art. For Éluard and Breton, such knowledge was not merely a hobby of well-informed amateurs and collectors, as they occasionally drew monetary profits from their own expertise in that field.

Even though the surrealist movement was actively involved in denouncing French colonialism from 1925 onwards, its critique focused mostly on military operations such as the French intervention in the bloody Rif war in Morocco (1925-1926), and did not extend to the appropriation of traditional artworks in the colonies for the benefit of the French art market. André Breton infamously intervened to defend the looting of Cambodian temples by the young André Malraux; such defense is symptomatic of the deep ambiguities of surrealist primitivism. While constantly proselytizing for the artistic cult of the god-object, Breton didn't seem to be particularly concerned about the material and socio-political conditions under which such objects were fed into US and Western European art markets, i.e. as part of a regime of colonial exploitation. Breton's professed respect for such "god-objects" is a function of their mythical status: significantly, Breton systematically grants a form of agency or visionary status to the objects themselves, as opposed to their producers, who are rarely mentioned. The assumed prelapsarian state of "primitive" societies is thus a double-edged sword: on the one hand, they are presumed to be superior to alienated, inauthentic Western societies that have irremediably lost an immediate connection to the realms of the surreal. In that quality, they are described as role

[261] "la très grande indétermination […] en ce qui concerne la provenance et le rôle initial [d'objects dits 'sauvages'] et le peu d'exigence méthodique qu'ils apportèrent à les réunir" ("Océanie", in Breton, OC III, 835).

models for the surrealists themselves, who attempt to draw lessons from "primitive" rituals and artistic practices: the most extreme example of such attitude could be found in Antonin Artaud's participation in Mexican *peyotl*-based ceremonies, whose hallucinogenic qualities are described as the *voie royale* to the surreal in his essay *The Peyot Dance* [*Les Tarahumaras*] (1947).

On the other hand, surrealism's attempt to bridge the gap between psychic and material reality is described as scientifically informed, deriving from a position of heightened knowledge and awareness. Aiming for such Hegelian overcoming of the dialectical contradiction, surrealists posit themselves as a vanguard actively laying the groundwork for the third stage of human evolution, necessarily superior to the former two, i.e. respectively a "primitive" reliance on a direct imposition of "psychic" structures on material reality, and "enlightened" materialism relying on scientific objectivity. Significantly, and somewhat counterintuitively, André Breton defined surrealism as a continuation and expansion of historical materialism. In a largely counterfactual reconfiguration of the history of philosophy first formulated in the second half of *Self-Defense* [*Légitime Défense*] (1926), Breton claims to champion historical materialism *against* materialism.[262] Ultimately, "in Breton's strange dialectical materialism, dialectics is put to work against materialism" (Rubio 122), aiming at a reconciliation of the philosophical traditions of idealism and materialism that would ultimately lead to privileging the former, i.e. to a paradoxical re-Hegelianization of materialist dialectics in order to bring about "the future reconciliation of dream and reality" evoked in the movement's first Manifesto in 1922 (OC I, 319).

[262] Historical materialism is more commonly understood as a "negation of the negation" of materialism, i.e. as a negation of Hegelian idealism making use of the conceptual tools of historical dialectics to put the latter's system "back on its feet" (Rubio 121).

Applied to the notion of "primitive" art, Breton's use of historical dialectics would thus ultimately justify its appropriation by the surrealists as part of an evolutionary rhetoric whose penchant for social critique stands in marked contrast with garden variety justifications of colonial exploitation premised upon the idea of an inherent superiority of Western civilization (for instance Kipling's infamous "white man's burden"), while often leading to similarly problematic practical outcomes. Breton might appear to reject such notion of civilizational superiority, but arguably simply shifts the practical and ontological privileges it entails onto a smaller group, i.e. the surrealist movement and its allies within the Western avant-gardes defined as a trailblazing historical vanguard (thus superior to both contemporary Western and so-called "primitive" societies), whose legitimacy would be directly derived from their proximity to a kind of Hegelian Zeitgeist. Such paradoxical combination of an inferiority complex *and* a superiority complex within the surrealist movement's reception of "primitive" art are arguably at work in Breton's defense of the looting of the Cambodian temple of Banteai Srey by André Malraux in 1924:

> This is another instance of the famous dilemma of desire and possession that led [André Malraux] to take away what he loved. […] Who really cares whether these works of art remain in their country of origin? I don't even want to think about it, but I cannot help but be moved by the fact that, because of such a petty, unimportant theft, André Malraux, who was condemned by the Phnom Penh tribunal to spend three years in jail, will be momentarily—and alas! maybe definitively –unable to contribute to the art of our time in France, and to produce—who is to tell—a work of a higher order than the one that he threatened.[263]

[263] "C'est ici le fameux dilemme du désir et de la possession qui poussera [André Malraux] à emporter ce qu'il aime. […] Qui se soucie réellement de la conservation, dans leur pays d'origine, de ces œuvres d'art ? Je ne veux pas le savoir, mais je ne puis penser sans émotion que, du fait de la découverte de ce larcin sans importance, André Malraux, condamné par le tribunal de Phnom Penh à trois ans de prison sans sursis, va se trouver empêché momentanément, et peut-être, hélas! définitivement, de servir l'art de notre temps en France, de réaliser, qui sait, une œuvre plus haute que celle qu'il a menacée. " "Pour André Malraux", first published in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, August 16th, 1924, in André Breton, OC I, 474.

Breton's disturbing embrace of the colonial appropriation of artworks is far from being a mere footnote in the history of surrealism: in fact, "For André Malraux" is arguably a highly significant text, fully in line with the movement's ideology. Not only does it affirm the superiority of Malraux' writings over classical Khmer statuary,[264] but it also posits the primacy of desire over any other concern: Malraux theft is also justified by his assumed "love" for the temple's statues.

According to Breton, love and desire are the main drives that dictate the form of the reception and potential acquisition of the "god-objects**".** The notion of desire is at the heart of the surrealist doctrine. Applied to so-called "primitive art", it relativizes the importance of the surrealist's expert knowledge of the object: as mechanism of subjective reception and projection (i.e. "desire") take precedence over knowledge about the nature of the object, the surrealist collector stands in sharp contrast with the perceived coldness of an ethnological discourses that is ultimately discredited as an expression of the positivist "materialism" that the movement is striving to overcome.[265] Thus, even though they might be awarded an ontologically exalted position that distinguishes them from the alienated productions of Western culture, the alleged state of grace of the "god-objects" does not allow them to escape the common fate of the surrealist object: their nature (process of production and use value) is ultimately also deemed irrelevant, their esthetic worth being ultimately defined by the "desire" they elicit, i.e. their ability to attract the surrealist collector's gaze.

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[264] In fact, the text emphasizes the avant-garde's superiority over both non-European traditional art and traditional Western artistic values (thus corresponding to the first two, contradictory stages of the historical dialectics) by alluding to the fact that Apollinaire was briefly suspected of having stolen the *Mona Lisa* when it disappeared from the Louvre in 1913, and explicitly claiming that the former's artistic worth was much higher than the latter's (OC I, 475).
[265] On Breton's privileging of immediate empathy over ethnographic knowledge, see Jean Claude Blachère, *Les totems d'André Breton : Surréalisme et primitivisme littéraire*, p. 120-121.

3.3 The Human Reflector: Fetishes, Mirrors, and Jumping Beans

Breton doesn't absolutely oppose the relevance of expert knowledge about the nature of the object informed by modern science: his active interest in "primitive" art and the "art of the insane" led him to conduct extensive readings in psychiatry and ethnology. However, such investigations remain tentative and deeply ambiguous: for Breton, scientific discourses are inherently suspected of the kind of narrow-minded materialism that his own paradoxical blend of idealist historical dialectics is meant to overcome. For him, all roads start with desire, and lead back to it: confrontation with scientific knowledge is a non-necessary evil, a detour that is only meant to strengthen and deepen Breton's fascination with the objects of his desire.

Breton's suspicion of "dead" positivism extends to what he once called its "classificatory mania", echoing similar concerns already expressed in the *First Manifesto*.[266] The definition and upholding of rigid categories is anathema to surrealism, whose professed end goal is to reach a utopian point of absolute synthesis, where even logical dichotomies would be abolished, where "life and death, reality and imagination, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, up and down cease to be perceived contradictorily".[267] Breton's visceral rejection of rigid systems of classification explains the relative laxity and fluidity of his own taxonomies. As we just mentioned, the borders between different categories of surrealist objects (poem-objects, objects by

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[266] According to Gérard Legrand quoting from a conversation with André Breton, in: Gérard Legrand, "André Breton, les idées et les idéologies", Le Magazine littéraire, issue 64, p.20. On Breton's critique of ethnographic positivism and dislike of inventories and taxonomies, see Jean-Claude Blachère, *Les totems d'André Breton*, p.133-6.

[267] "Tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut le haut et le bas cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement." André Breton, "Second Manifeste", in OC I, 781. See Henri Béhar, "Point sublime/suprême" in Henri Béhar, *Dictionnaire Breton*, p.812-3. See also Emmanuel Rubio's insightful analysis of the notion's Hegelian, occultist, and Marxist echoes in Emmanuel Rubio, op. cit., p.180-4.

Madmen, god-objects, etc.) are extremely porous and lax.[268]

Such anti-taxonomical stance seems to be at odds with the scholarly consensus on the emergence of outsider art: a number of scholars in the field (Lucienne Peiry, Michel Thévoz, Céline Delavaux, to name only a few) maintain that André Breton remained a steadfast defender of the singularity and separate nature of the "art of the insane", taking issue with Jean Dubuffet's attempt to bring the artistic productions of mentally ill patients, practicing psychics, and autodidacts under the unified banner of *art brut*.[269]

Such notion seems largely counterfactual, or at least rooted in an overly fragmentary perception of the evolution of Breton's position on the subject. In fact, lumping together works of different provenance in exhibition displays, magazine illustrations, or essays was a constant practice of the surrealist movement. The conflict between Dubuffet and Breton can be described in generational terms, as the result of power dynamics by which a younger artist rebelled against what he perceived as the overbearing presence of the pope of surrealism[270] to pursue a course of action that wasn't fully in line with surrealist orthodoxy, not unlike the founders of *Documents* (Bataille, Caillois, Leiris) less than two decades prior. But Breton's critique of *art brut* should also

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[268] Moreover, these categories evolved through time, with objects moving seamlessly between seemingly incompatible categories. The relative "messiness" of surrealist taxonomies seems to have been both intentional and extremely self-aware: parodies of positivist scientific knowledge produced by the movement often target one of the prototypical forms of the scientific ordering of knowledge: dictionaries.

[269] Lucienne Peiry, for instance, claimed that Dubuffet's esthetic approach, based on the formal qualities and symbolism of the works, "rejects all classifications", whereas Breton "intuitive" method would remain relatively superficial, inasmuch as it would lead him to defend the specificity of the "art of the insane": "[Breton's] esthetic reception is first and foremost guided by his remarkable intuition, but remains attached to the criteria of the works' provenance, notably for psychiatric and meduimnistic works" [my translation]. Lucienne Peiry, L'art brut, Paris: Flammarion, 1997, p.96.

[270] John MacGregor, op. cit., p.398, note 14.

be taken into consideration: on a more conceptual level, Breton condemned the suturing [*soudure*] of self-taught and psychiatric art not on the basis of its heterogeneity, but as a heavy-handed gesture that would create an overly stable compound, as opposed to the relative openness and flexibility of surrealist conceptual bricolages, constantly going back and forth between various forms of supposedly "primitive" works and the artistic productions of the surrealist movement itself.[271] In fact, by calling attention to the pioneering work of Marcel Réja and Hans Prinzhorn in his essay "The Art of the Insane, The Key to the Fields", Breton was not only paying homage to earlier investigations of the "art of the insane", thus contesting the legitimacy of Dubuffet's attempt at describing himself as a discoverer of these productions: he was also arguably trying to remind the reader of his own long-standing interest in these works.

As Roger Cardinal pointed out in his analysis of the illustrations of Breton's essay "The Automatic Message",[272] published in *Minotaure* in 1933, it included works that have little to do with the Spiritist drawing and writing practices analyzed by Breton in the text of the essay, which offers a "secular" take on the pseudo-religious practice of letting "spirits" guide the psychic's hand, thus, according to Breton, unknowingly drawing from the resources of the practitioner's unconscious according to a methodology that provided the basis for his own practice of automatic writing from 1919 *Magnetic Fields* onwards. If the "Martian" landscapes created by Hélène Smith do fall into the category of Spiritist art, the article also featured illustrations drawn from the work of iconic self-taught artist Ferdinand Cheval, and drawings by Nadja (also

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[271] See the heated exchange between André Breton and Jean Dubuffet by means of open letters addressed to the members of the *Compagnie de l'art brut*, reproduced in Jean Dubuffet, *Prospectus I*, p. 491-8.

[272] Roger Cardinal, "André Breton and the Automatic Message", in: Fotiade, Ramona. *André Breton: The Power of Language*. Elm Bank Modern Language Studies. Exeter: Elm Bank, 2000, pp.23-36.

reproduced as illustrations in Breton's eponymous novel) that arguably fall into the category of psychiatric art. Roger Cardinal criticized the relatively haphazard nature of Breton's choice of illustrations for his apparent disregard for the works' provenance, offering an incoherent potpourri that did not seem to be directly relevant to the topic of the text itself. But considering that Roger Cardinal is also the author of *Outsider Art* (1972), a game-changing work that popularized Dubuffet's main ideas to the English-speaking art world, it is relatively surprising that he did not comment on the fact that this specific configuration of heterogeneous works (psychiatric, self-taught, and Spiritist art) is eerily similar to another esthetic mishmash: Jean Dubuffet's *art brut*.

This is not to say that art brut should be interpreted as a direct continuation of Breton's "Automatic Message". Rather, *Art brut*, which was originally an offshoot of the surrealist movement actively championed by Breton, Éluard, and Péret,[273] is only one of the numerous constellations of works tentatively produced by the movement, and should be placed within a series that would also include Paul Éluard's "Savage Art" (1929), André Breton's "Magical Art" (1957), and even Karel Kupka's ethnographic study of Australian aboriginal art published under the title *Art in a Brut State* [*Un art à l'état brut*] or Gilles Ehrmann's photobook dedicated to self-taught environments *The Inspired and their Abodes* [*Les inspirés et leurs demeures*], both published in 1962 under the patronage of André Breton, who wrote substantial forewords for each of these publications. They all combine, in varying proportions, elements from non-European traditional art, psychiatric art, self-taught art, and Spiritist art: such distinctions were largely irrelevant for

273 The *Almanach of Art Brut*, with a number of contributions from André Breton and Benjamin Péret, was compiled by Dubuffet in 1948 but remained unpublished until very recently. See Sarah Lombardi and Baptiste Brun (eds.), Jean Dubuffet et al., *Almanach de l'Art Brut:* Lausanne/Milan: Collection de l'Art Brut/SIK-ISEA/ 5 Continents Editions : 2016.

Breton, who indiscriminately integrated short essays dedicated to artists belonging to all of these categories in the definitive edition of his magnum opus *Surrealism and Painting* (1965).

Such relative epistemological nonchalance seems to derive from the movement's deep-seated irrationalism: not only did Breton vehemently reject rigid taxonomies, but he also practiced and advocated for an esthetics of reception privileging direct emotional impact over comprehension. For Breton, attempting to understand the root causes of a phenomenon was an inherently suspicious maneuver: rational analysis was ultimately perceived as inherently destructive and counter-productive, inasmuch as it might annihilate the fascination, the immediate drive attaching the surrealist subject to an object of desire. Consequently, surrealist primitivism is premised upon the notion that a range of objects standing outside of Western culture would be invested with a particular form of visionary powers, with little regard to their provenance or inner workings. Such attitude could call to mind one of the most incongruous disputes that broke out within the surrealism movement during the interwar period: Roger Caillois' dispute with Breton over a humble Mexican jumping bean, which led Caillois to leave the surrealist movement altogether. It is referred to in both Caillois' and Breton's writings as the Quarrel of the Jumping Bean, described by Roger Caillois in the following terms:

> Someone had brought from Mexico several of these jumping beans that are sold there in souvenir shops. Breton wanted us to dream, to be in awe of this miraculous occurrence. I said that one should rather open up one of these beans to check whether there was some insect or larva in it (which incidentally was the case). For me, this problem had become crucial. It was the proverbial straw that broke to camel's back. The next day, I left the surrealist group.[274]

[274] "Quelqu'un avait apporté du Mexique plusieurs de ces haricots sauteurs qu'on y vend dans les boutiques de souvenirs. Breton voulait qu'on rêvât, qu'on s'extasiât sur le prodige. Je préconisais qu'on ouvrît plutôt une des graines pour vérifier si un insecte ou une larve, serait pas contenu, ce qui (par parenthèse) était le cas. La question pour moi était soudain devenu décisive. C'était la goutte d'eau classique qui fait déborder le vase. Dès le lendemain, je rompis avec le groupe. " Roger Caillois, "Intervention surréaliste", in Roger Caillois, *Œuvres*, Paris: Gallimard,

While Caillois' account might seem anecdotal, the momentous Quarrel of the Jumping Bean is indicative of a fundamental divergence of views: whereas Caillois was convinced that all forms and phenomena, whether natural, man-made, or imaginary, were in finite number and could be described and classified rationally, Breton maintained that the absolute synthesis, the ever-elusive surreal, was essentially inaccessible to reason and could only be approached by emotional and esthetic means. Breton's "encounters" with specific objects and people were as many glimpses of the surreal: they could be crystallized by the means of narration, poetry, or visual arts, but were in no way reducible to a set of rational categories. To a certain extent, the jumping bean is thus an apt image for the aporia of surrealist primitivism: whether produced by psychics, schizophrenics, children, non-European traditional artists, or the result of a chance encounter in a flea market, the objects appropriated by Breton and his acolytes were perceived as possessing near-magical qualities that allowed them to transcend their object status. While they would occasionally inquire about the provenance of an object, they refused to proceed to a rational analysis that they saw as a process of dissection, a violation of the marvelous qualities of the object. But this is not to say that surrealist primitivism isn't premised upon an underlying logic. Even though the "primitive" object collected by the surrealists might appear heterogeneous from the point of view of their provenance, they all seem to share a common denominator: they are the products of a fiction, describing their respective producers as mirror images of the surrealist artists themselves.

As early as 1929, Paul Éluard had already proposed his own syncretic blend of "primitive" artworks in an essay entitled "Savage Art", published in the special issue of the

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2008 [1970], p.214.

Belgian avant-garde magazine *Variétés* "Surrealism in 1929" that was meant to be a programmatic show of strength of the movement.[275] Significantly, Éluard's short text did not offer an overarching definition of "savage art", but rather a lyrical manifesto in defense of what he perceived as an inherently poetic operation, in the context of which the "savage" would invent a series of gods and spirits by drawing from the "mysterious domain of the silent caves of the heart" ["mystérieux domaine des caves silencieuses du cœur"], in an operation that would lead to the blending of dream and reality: "now reality becomes the image of the unconscious, now language is allowed to exist, shapes can be fixed in order to witness the departure of the gestures of delirium".[276] While Eluard's text, alluding to ethnographic research on the topic of totemism and fetishism, takes its cues from non-European traditional art, it is quite obvious that his text, far from being an anthropological description, is a highly self-aware artistic manifesto, a programmatic self-portrait of the surrealist artist as an uninhibited "savage". In that sense, Éluard's description of the fetish as a reflection of its creator's interiority could be read as an accurate description of his own subject position, of which the phantasmal "savage" is but a thinly disguised mirror image.[277] As Eluard himself put it, "Subjectivity creates an objectivity that

[275] Paul Éluard, "L'Art sauvage", in: "Le surréalisme en 1929", Brussels: *Variétés*, June 1929, pp.36-7.

[276] "Voici que la réalité devient l'image de l'inconscient, voici qu'il est permis au langage d'exister, aux formes de se fixer pour assister au départ des gestes du délire."

[277] According to Jean-Claude Blachère, the "Negro model" privileged by Western avant-gardes corresponded to specific ethical and esthetic needs that often led to it being a mere projection of the Western artists themselves. Such mechanism of projection didn't go unnoticed, and was first described by Jules Monnerot in the context of his critique of French anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl's book *Primitive Mentality* [*La mentalité primitive*] (1922): The Primitive described in Lévy-Bruhl's work is an 'ideal type' […] but what it allows us to find is ourselves." ["Le primitive dont elle nous parle est un 'type idéal' […] mais ce qu'elle nous permet de trouver, c'est nous-mêmes."]. Jean-Claude Blachère, *Le modèle nègre : Aspects littéraires du primitivisme au XXe siècle chez Apollinaire – Cendrars - Tzara.* Dakar: Nouvelles Éditions africaines, 1981, p. 17.

progressively leads back to that same creative subjectivity."[278] Such notion seems to have been widely shared within the surrealist movement; as a matter of fact, it was also embraced by Michel Leiris in the fourth issue of the dissident surrealist journal *Documents*.[279] In a short essay on Giacometti, Leiris contrasted a "bad fetishism" of "our moral, logical, and social imperative" broadly associated with alienation and false consciousness and a "true", positively connoted fetishism very close to Eluard's: for Leiris, fetishism ultimately amounts to a projection of self-love, "contained within the solid shell of a specific object, like a piece of furniture that we can use as we see fit, in the vast, foreign bedroom called space".[280] The notion of the fetish being both a vessel for narcissistic projections and a container holding an image of the self in crystallized form is expressed by Eluard in the same text in the guise of an impossible object: "When the savage discovered mirrors, he broke them and turned their shards into eyes for his dolls, fathers to his children. Imagine a mirror with silvering on both sides, within which a man dreams that his eyes, on the outside, prove that he is actually inside."[281] Significantly, Eluard's explanatory model to

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[278] "La subjectivité crée une objectivité qui retourne au fur et à mesure de sa création à la subjectivité créatrice." Paul Eluard, ibid.

[279] André Breton seems to have defended such notion of self-reflective narcissism until the 1960s, alluding to the utopian, emancipatory potential of the perceived "primitive" historical regression of Australian aboriginal art in the foreword of Karel Kupka's *Art in a Brut State* [*Un art à l'état brut*] (1962) by means of an elegant quotation from Lautréamont's *Songs of Maldoror* [*Chants de Maldoror*]: "[In those paintings], Man should be made to see the full extent of his lost powers; the one who, when all are alienated, resists his own alienation should 'go back into himself like an Australian boomerang, in the second period of its trajectory'". ["Que l'homme […] mesure là ses pouvoirs perdus; que celui qui, dans l'aliénation générale, résiste à sa propre aliénation, 'recule sur lui-même comme le boomerang d'Australie, dans la deuxième période de son trajet."] André Breton, 'Main première' [1962], OC IV, 1027.

[280] "L'amour—réellement amoureux de nous-mêmes, projeté du dedans au dehors et revêtu d'une carapace solide qui l'emprisonne entre les limites d'une chose précise, ainsi qu'un meuble dont nous pouvons user, dans la vaste chambre étrangère qui s'appelle l'espace." Michel Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti", *Documents*, vol. 1, issue 4, p.209.

[281] "Quand le sauvage a connu le miroir, il l'a cassé et en a fait des yeux à ses poupées, des pères à ses enfants. Imaginez une glace recouverte de tain sur ses deux faces et dans laquelle un homme

account for the narcissistic nature of fetishism constitutes the blueprint for a surrealist object, an oxymoronic, intentionally illogical contraption akin to the Lichtenberg's reverie about "a knife without a blade, which is missing handle" mentioned by André Breton in his *Anthology of Black Humor*. The narcissistic reflection of the self is also linked to a disquieting shattering of identity (broken shards), and to a non-functioning mirror combining the notion of transparency and opacity: if the mirror has silvering on both sides, one would assume that it cannot refract light. The notion that a mirror image of the subject would be contained (and presumably multiplied ad infinitum) *within* the mirror itself is thus the result of a leap of faith that runs counter to the laws of optics. But within the realm of Eluard's "dream physics", the very opacity of the mirror seems to be an integral part of its mechanism: surrealist fetishism isn't premised on the notion that the fetish object would be merely a mimetic rendition of the self, akin to a naturalist self-portrait: its reflective properties are due to a form of poetic thickening of visual and literary signs that seem to become free-floating signifiers, whose relationship to the self cannot be accounted for by means of reason or logic.

In *Nadja*, Breton's eponymous muse can be described as the object of an observational procedure under the gaze of the male author, for medical, erotic, and esthetic purposes. Significantly, Breton compares his own relationship with Nadja to the one between the psychic Hélène Smith and the Swiss psychiatrist Théodore Flournoy, who investigated her eyebrow-raising claims of being able to leave her own body to travel "ectoplasmically" to other continents even to outer space in his medical monograph *From India to the Planet Mars*.[282] Nadja's delirious utterances,

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rêve que ses yeux, à l'extérieur, prouvent qu'il est à l'intérieur." Paul Eluard, ibid.

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pathological and even sometimes self-threatening behavior, and intriguing drawings might be meticulously recorded by a fascinated Breton as documents of a sublime encounter with a personification of the surrealist ideals. But Nadja herself seems to be appropriated by Breton as an object of desire and knowledge, a surface of projection more than an individual in her own right, let alone an artist on equal footing with Breton. As Walter Benjamin insightfully noted, in Breton's description, Nadja is less a person than a heuristic device, a "conduit" allowing Breton to channel the energy of the surreal: "The lady, in esoteric love, matters least. So, too, for Breton. He is closer to the things that Nadja is close to than to her."

In that sense, fetishism is connected to the core of the surrealist project, as a paradoxical combination of arbitrariness and necessity. As comprehensively demonstrated by William Pietz, the very notion of fetishism applied to religious and magical practices of non-European traditional societies was a negative one from the start, corresponding less to an actual anthropological reality than to a discursive construction resulting from the violent encounter of radically different symbolic orders.[283] One of the most common criticisms of fetishism formulated in the eighteenth and nineteenth century[284] directly took aim at the assumed arbitrariness that presided over the choice of the object(s) of fetishistic worship. In Charles de Brosses' influential essay *Of the Cult of Fetish Gods* [*Du culte des dieux fétiches*] (1760), where he coined the word "fetishism", de Brosses insisted on the random nature of the fetishized object in Ancient Egypt

[283] On that topic, see William Pietz, Problems of the Fetish I and II. The surrealist movement (and its dissidents of *Documents*) critically engaged with this legacy by promoting a new, positive reading of fetishism (Apter 1991, 10).
[284] According to William Pietz, Western discourses on fetishism correspond to four main historical periods: Early Modern travel narratives, Enlightenment-era applications to larger theories of primitive religion, later diffusion of the concept and use in various contexts of social sciences (including Marx's "commodity fetishism") in the course of the nineteenth century, and eventually twentieth-century metadiscourses (Pietz 1985, 5).

and modern West Africa as a telltale sign of what he decried as the superstitious, unenlightened obscurantism of such societies. De Brosses drew an intentionally puzzling and long-winded list of potential fetish objects as part of a militantly ironic rhetorical strategy typical of 18th century Enlightenment[285]: "Such divine fetishes are nothing but *the first material object that each nation or individual saw fit to choose and have consecrated by its priests*: it is a tree, a mountain, the sea, a piece of wood, the tail of a lion, a pebble, a seashell, some salt, a fish, a flower, a certain species of animal like cows, goats, elephants, or sheep; or anything else that might strike their fancy."[286]

Describing a decision as "arbitrary" was probably one of the eighteenth century's worst insults: in the realm of political philosophy, it was associated with the abuses of power of tyrannical governments; in terms of epistemology, it characterized the errors and prejudices that stood in the way of historical progress and had to be dispelled by the light of Reason. The structures of human societies and human knowledge thus had to be determined according to a set of rationally determined rules, as opposed to the inherent randomness of obscurantist tradition. Hegel's critique of fetishism was to a large extent a continuation and systematization of de Brosses' positions. According to Hegel, the fetish object, whose nature is determined purely by

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[285] De Brosses' anti-obscurantist witticisms are reminiscent of the satirical descriptions of the perceived irrationalism of religious practices in Fontenelle's *History of Oracles* [*Histoire de oracles*] (1687) or Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* [*Dictionnaire philosophique*] (1764).

[286] "Ces fétiches divins ne sont autre chose que le premier objet matériel qu'il plaît à chaque nation ou à chaque particulier de choisir et de faire consacrer en cérémonie par ses prêtres : c'est un arbre, une montagne, la mer, un morceau de bois, une queue de lion, un caillou, une coquille, du sel, un poisson, une plante, une fleur, un animal d'une certaine espèce, comme vache, chèvre, éléphant, mouton ; enfin tout ce qui peut s'imaginer de pareil. " Charles de Brosses, *Of the Cult of Fetish Gods, or Parallel between the Ancient Religion of Egypt and the Modern Religion of Nigritia* [*Du culte des dieux fétiches, ou Parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie*], Paris, 1760, p. 18-19.

chance, is the "self-image" [*Selbstanschauung*] of "individual arbitrariness" [*individuelle Willkür*].[287] Significantly, this development is included in the notorious second chapter of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*: the essential arbitrariness of the fetish is meant to prove that Africans are still marred in the earlier developmental stage of mankind (in which the human spirit hasn't established a distinction between itself and the natural world), a "land of children" separated from world history at large (characterized by the movement of the Spirit becoming progressively aware of itself).

Surrealist primitivism seems to generally subscribe to Hegel's highly problematic theory that specific populations would be left outside of the general movement of world history; however, notions of an immediate connection between the human spirit and the natural world, and Hegel's definition of the fetish as the specular image of individual arbitrariness were considered positively by the surrealists, as proofs of the ontologically *superior* nature of fetish objects.

Early discussions of the surrealist object were based upon a dialectics of arbitrariness and necessity that, while formally presenting itself as a continuation of Hegelian esthetics, constituted a significant departure from it, as part of a risky "conceptual balancing act" interpolating the notion of "objective chance" within Hegel's short outline of "objective humor" as the last stage of Romantic art in his *Esthetics* (Rubio 2009, 464).

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[287] "Das, was sie sich als ihre Macht vorstellen, ist somit nichts Objektives, in sich Festes und von ihnen Verschiedenes, sondern ganz gleichgültig der erste beste Gegenstand, den sie zum Genius erheben, sei es ein Tier, ein Baum, ein Stein, ein Bild von Holz. Dies ist der *Fetisch*, ein Wort, welches die Portugiesen zuerst in Umlauf gebracht, und welches von *feitizo*, Zauberei, abstammt. Hier im Fetische scheint nun zwar die Selbständigkeit gegen die Willkür des Individuums aufzutreten, aber da eben diese Gegenständlichkeit nichts andres ist als die zur Selbstanschauung sich bringende individuelle Willkür, so bleibt diese auch Meister ihres Bildes. " Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Chapter 2

Breton himself was fully conscious of the precariousness of such conceptual bricolage: it led him to claim that fact that would be generally considered as falling under the general category of coincidences—i.e. "the combination or encounter of phenomena belonging to independent series in the order of causality", to use Carnot's terse definition quoted by Breton in *Mad Love* [*L'amour fou*] (1937) (OC II, 690)—would be the manifestation of a higher form of necessity. Thus, major surrealist motives such as the *encounter* (*rencontre*, for instance in the context of romantic relationships such as Breton's first encounters with Nadja or Jacqueline Lamba) or the *find* (*trouvaille*, such as Breton and Giacometti's spotting and acquisition of the first "found objects" at the Saint Ouen flea market) are defined as glimpse of this higher necessity paradoxically on the basis of their apparent randomness or arbitrariness.[288] As Breton puts it in *Mad Love*, chance would thus be defined as "*the form of the manifestation of external necessity, slowly opening a path for itself in the human unconscious* (I am thus attempting to boldly interpret and reconcile Engels and Freud on this point)."[289] On Breton's own admission, such interpretation is "bold": this is still largely an understatement, as it is based on a fundamental misreading of both Engels and Freud.

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[288] "The attention […] drawn on certain troubling facts and striking coincidences in works like Nadja, The Communicating Vases, and in other later works raised, with a renewed sense of urgency, the problem of objective chance: i.e. the kind of chance through which a mysterious necessity is manifested to us. It still escapes us, even though we experience it, on a vital level, as necessity." ["L'attention […] sur certains faits troublants sur certaines coïncidences bouleversantes dans des ouvrages comme *Nadja*, *Les Vases communicants*, et dans diverses communications ultérieures a eu pour effet de soulever, avec une acuité toute nouvelle, le problème du hasard objectif, autrement dit de cette sorte de hasard à travers quoi se manifeste encore très mystérieusement pour l'homme une nécessité qui lui échappe bien qu'il l'éprouve vitalement comme nécessité."] André Breton, "Situtation surréaliste de l'objet : situation de l'objet surréaliste. " OC II, 485.

[289] "*Le hasard serait la forme de manifestation de la nécessité extérieure qui se fraie un chemin dans l'inconscient humain* (pour tenter hardiment d'interpréter et de concilier sur ce point Engels et Freud) " (André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, OC II, 690).

As demonstrated by Emmanuel Rubio, Breton's definition of "objective chance", introduced on the basis of a quotation of Engels mostly fabricated[290] by Breton himself, is miles away from the former's "scientific socialism" (Rubio 2009, 286). If Engels did suggest that apparently random phenomena are in fact the necessary results of natural and/or historical laws, historical dialectics in their Hegelian and later Marxian and Engelsian definitions are only meant to be applied to large ensembles: the cultural or socio-economic development of whole societies, nations, and historical periods. In other words, they are only relevant to large entities, and do not purport to offer explanatory models for individual trajectories, least of all for the chance encounter of a singular subject and a "found object" in a flea market. Similarly, if Freud does insist on the significance of coincidences for unconscious thought, his remarks are based on the notion that random coincidences are not the result of the action of higher powers, supernatural or otherwise:[291] rather, perceiving a form of agency at work in random coincidences is, according to Freud, the expression of an evolutionary regression leading the individual back to a form of magical thinking prevalent in early childhood.[292]

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[290] On the fabricated nature of this quotation, see André Breton, OC II, p.1604, note 4, and Rubio 2009, 279.

[291] In that sense, Freud's definition of the uncanny is absolutely incompatible with Breton's "objective chance". This is particularly apparent if we compare Breton's earliest definition of the concept, claiming that a coincidence (receiving a letter sent from Switzerland about the antireligious campaign in the USSR, at the moment when he was discussing the matter with friends) was in fact based on a causal relationship (OC II, 168) with Freud's own illustration of "uncanny" coincidences. One of the examples mentioned by Freud is also related to the reception of letters: "Or take the case that one is engaged at the time in reading the works of Hering, the famous physiologist, and then receives within the space of a few days two letters from two different countries, each from a person called Hering; whereas one has never before had any dealings with anyone of that name." (Freud 1919, 13). Any notion of real causality is here dismissed by Freud as mere "superstition", thus reactivating the Enlightenment-era critique of magical thinking.

[292] "It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us

The religious undertones of Breton's notion of "objective chance" were, according to Breton himself, explicitly criticized by Trotsky during their meeting in Mexico City in 1938 as a possible expression of his intention to maintain "a small window opening up to transcendence" ("une petite fenêtre ouverte sur l'au-delà").[293] In a similar sense, in his preparatory notes for "Savage Art", Eluard defined the fetish as a concrete representation of the "divinization of chance" [*déification du hasard*],[294] explicitly linked to the "absolute power of the unconscious". Eluard and Breton seem to have shared similar views regarding the definition of objective chance, which they attempted to define on two distinct levels. Some of their investigations directly aimed at collecting testimonies related to lived experience of the "mysterious necessity" underlying "troubling" coincidences.[295] Such notion of "mysterious necessity" underlying apparently haphazard encounters is also, crucially, translated into the realm of esthetics: it should be reminded that the foundational formula of the surrealist image constitutes an attempt to

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as "uncanny" fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression." (Freud, ibid). In a note, Freud also calls the reader's attention to the third chapter of *Totem and Taboo*, on "Animism, Magic, and the Omnipotence of Thoughts."

[293] André Breton, La Clé des champs, OC III, 702. As we have to rely on Breton's own account of his conversation, it is impossible to ascertain whether it might be partly or entirely a figment of Breton's imagination. Should it be entirely apocryphal, it is nevertheless indicative of the fact that Breton might have given some thought to the religious undertones of his notion of "objective chance". It is also significant to note that in the first mention of "objective chance" by Breton (OC II, 168), the letter from Switzerland evoked the *antireligious* campaign in the USSR: it seems plausible to think that the incompatibility between his own idealist and mystical leanings and the radical anti-transcendentalism of Marxism-Leninism might have been of concern for Breton, both the letter and the detail of his conversation with Trotsky allowing him to externalize and offer a dramatic rendition of this internal tension between logically incompatible positions. On this point, I would disagree with Henri Béhar, who affirmed that Breton's "objective chance" had nothing to do with transcendence (Béhar 2012, 491), a claimed that seems at odds with the vocabulary used by Breton who explicitly compared objective chance to a "revelation" in the mystical sense of the word (OC II, 485).

[294] Gateau 1982, 403.

[295] For instance through a questionnaire whose results were published in *Minotaure* in December 1933 (see also André Breton, *L'amour fou*, in OC II, 688s).

redefine metaphor as an "arbitrary" bricolage of heterogeneous parts, meant to be "beautiful like the *chance encounter* of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table", in the words of Lautréamont often quoted by Breton.[296] In fact, the role of chance in the constitution of the surrealist image has given rise to heated debates. Roger Caillois criticized the professed randomness of the surrealist image as conceptually unsatisfactory:

> I did not subscribe to the *Surrealist Manifesto*'s theory of the image, which states that the poetic strength of the image is directly proportionate to the arbitrariness of the rapport between incompatible elements. […| In order for this rapport to be fully efficient, it should not be founded in sensation, in reason, or even in imagination. […] The surrealist theory of the image requires the human mind to applaud gratuitously and arbitrarily metaphors whose unique virtue is to discourage any attempt at justification. In other words, I admit that the image will be stronger if its elements are more removed from each other, but I posit that such rapport must still be recognizable: […] an image can only be efficient if it is accurate.[297]

In fact, Caillois' misgivings about the surrealist image seem to have been shared, to a certain extent, by André Breton himself.[298] A constant preoccupation of Breton's from the first *Surrealist Manifesto* onwards seems to have been to justify the unjustifiable, i.e. to produce a discursive

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[296] "Beau comme la rencontre fortuite, sur une table de dissection, d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie. " See for instance André Breton, OC II, 492.

[297] "Je n'acceptais guère la théorie de l'image avancée dans le *Manifeste du Surréalisme* et qui lui accorde d'autant plus de force qu'elle rapproche avec plus d'arbitraire des termes éloignés. […] Pour que le rapport proposé obtînt sa pleine efficacité, il fallait qu'il ne fût ratifiable ni par la sensation, ni par la raison, ni même par l'imagination. […] La conception surréaliste de l'image amène [l'esprit] à s'extasier à vide et de parti pris devant des métaphores dont l'unique vertu est de décourager la moindre justification. Autrement dit, j'admets que la force de l'image croisse avec l'éloignement des termes, mais je pose en principe que le rapport doit continuer à être reconnu : […] [une image] n'est efficace que parce que d'abord elle est juste." Roger Caillois, op. cit., 218-9.

[298] See for instance André Breton's significant semantic readjustment in his discussion of the relationship between the surrealist object and chance in *Surrealist Situation of the Object* [*Situation surréaliste de l'objet*] (OC II, 492-3): Breton first paraphrases Lautréamont's formula as "chance encounter of two distant realities on an inappropriate plane" ["rencontre fortuite de deux réalités distantes sur un plan non convenant"], to then introduce a major caveat in the following paragraph: "coupling of two realities that *apparently* cannot be coupled together on a plane that is *apparently* inappropriate" ["accouplement de deux réalités *en apparence* inaccouplables sur un plan qui *en apparence* ne leur convient pas"] [emphasis mine]. The introduction of "apparently" as a modifier leaves the door open for a justification of the "coupling" on a different level.

structure that would simultaneously uphold the *arbitrary* and the *necessary* nature of the surrealist image. As was to be expected, such justification is appropriately hazy. In his dialogue with Trotsky in 1938, Breton claimed that "objective chance" wasn't an irrational or transcendental notion in and of itself as it was essentially explainable *de jure* but simply couldn't be "in the current state of human knowledge": according to Breton's account of the meeting, Trotsky deemed himself satisfied with such a justification. The notion that "objective chance" would receive an explanation in the future isn't merely a somewhat unconvincing conceptual somersault: it also created a productive—if unresolved—conceptual tension within the visual and literary productions of the surrealist movement. Breton described such tension as an attempt to over "objective chance" and "objective humor". In this context, "objective humor" is defined as a way to achieve a balance between the internal reality of the subject and the natural world: not as a way to overcome the ironic "subjective humor" characteristic of Romanticism, as "objective humor" was first defined in Hegel's *Esthetics*, but rather as a way to introduce "psychic reality" into "material reality", for instance in the case of Dalí's paranoid-critical method.[299]

Breton meant to claim for the surrealist image defined as "objective humor" the same degree of necessity that he claimed for the various "chance encounters" that offered him a glimpse of "objective chance" on an existential level. Both the lived experience and the visual and literary productions of the surrealist movement would thus be characterized by this dialectical tension between chance and necessity, allowing him to "justify" the heuristic gap between the parts that constituted the surrealist metaphor. Just like for objective chance, the ultimate

[299] "Objective humor" received different definitions within the surrealist movement in the course of the 1930s: first defined as a form of reconciliation between the subject and the world amounting to a surrealist redefinition of Hegel's rather open-ended concept of "objective humor", it led Breton to formulate a definition of "black humor" that corresponds to its actual opposite. "Black humor", as defined in Breton's Anthology of Black Humor, is a form of defense mechanism, a rejection of an unbearable reality amounting to a denial (Rubio 2009, 457-72).

justification of artistic practices based on "objective humor" was defined as a form of utopian horizon to be reached at a later stage of human development, thus providing the impetus for further surrealist research and creation:

> *Contemporary poetry is facing this crucial contradiction* [between objective chance and objective humor], *and the need to resolve it constitutes the very secret of its movement.*[300]

Breton then suggested that the privileged tool for such investigation would be an increasingly hermetic form of poetic expression, "always widening the gap that separates it from prose."

3.4 Unlocking Vision: Keys and Palaces

The utopian nature of an ultimate resolution of the contradiction, as the nature of the necessity underlying both objective chance and objective humor is perpetually withheld, leads to the anticipation of such revelation, translated into an esthetics of perpetually withheld meaning that leads to an increased autonomy of linguistic and visual signs.[301] Such notion of a withholding of ultimate truth later motivated Breton's interest in occultism, a tradition that, in its name alone,

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[300] "C'est devant cette contradiction capitale [entre hasard objectif et humour objectif] que la poésie d'aujourd'hui se trouve placée et c'est, par suite, le besoin de résoudre cette contradiction qui est tout le secret de son mouvement." André Breton, OC II, 485. [italics as found in Breton's text].

[301] One should note that the increased autonomy of signs leads to unexpected combinations of words that defy linguistic and logical expectations, without questioning the basis of linguistic expression itself (syntax, conventional spelling, etc.). As explained by Michel Ballabriga, "Surrealists don't intend to change the words themselves, but grant them, within conventional syntagmatic structures, theoretically infinite combinatorial possibilities. […] Surrealists thus intend to criticize the laws that govern such combination of words, in order to produce previously unheard statements." Michel Ballabriga, *Semiotics of Surrealism: André Breton or Coherence* [*Sémiotique du surréalisme: André Breton ou la cohérence*], Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1995, 111-2.

promotes a notion of "hidden" meaning and knowledge.[302] But it is arguably also operative in earlier works as a formal, structuring principle. I would here fully subscribe to José Pierre's insightful remark in *André Breton and Painting*, linking the surrealist object, and specifically Breton's first poem-objects, to an esthetics of withheld meaning potentially derived from his reception of the *objets de fous*:

It seems beyond doubt that […] the encounter with objects by madmen had a crucial influence on the actual creation of the 'surrealist object', which had been latent within the movement for a long time. […] The object by a madman on page 43 [of the 12th issue of *The Surrealist Revolution*] is formally very similar [to the poem-object]: a meticulous imbrication of various elements, within an ensemble that draws its coherence from the fact that it seems to be derived from a single message, in spite of its apparent complexity. The certainty to be in presence of such a message is the most striking impression felt by the spectator in front of this *Object by a Madman*. Unutterable message, undecipherable labyrinth to all but its original architect, in which I suppose that Breton wanted to introduce the poetic writing as Ariadne's thread.[303]

Even though José Pierre added the caveat that there was little textual evidence to support such link, I would argue that Salvador Dalí's *Board of Delirious Associations, or: Fireworks* [*Planche d'associations démentielles ou Feux d'artifices*] from 1930-1931 [Fig. 3.5], dedicated to Paul Eluard, bears more than a passing resemblance to the *objets de fous* acquired by Breton in 1929. The painting is in fact a trompe-l'oeil, a constellation of objects whose illusionistic qualities are reinforced by the light reflections on the objects: in other words, a painting masquerading as a

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[302] As a matter of fact, taking his cues from René Guénon's reflections on occultation in Islamic mysticism, Breton explicitly called for the "occultation" of the surrealist movement itself in the movement's *Second Manifesto*. (OC I, 821) On Breton's sustained interest in occultism, see Michel Carrouges, "The dynamics of occultation" ["La dynamique de l'occultation"], in: *Mélusine II : Occulte-Occultation*, 1981, and Henri Béhar, "Occultism", in Henri Béhar (ed.), op. cit., p.747-748.

[303] "Il me paraît hors de doute […] que la rencontre avec des objets d'aliénés a eu une influence déterminante sur la naissance effective de « l'objet surréaliste », depuis longtemps en gestation. […] L'objet d'aliéné de la page 43 donne la même impression [que le poème-objet] d'imbrication méticuleuse au sein d'un ensemble qui tire toute sa cohérence d'un message unique en dépit de sa complexité apparente. C'est d'ailleurs la certitude d'être en présence d'un tel message qui est le sentiment le plus frappant que l'on éprouve devant cet objet d'aliéné. Message indicible, labyrinthe indéchiffrable pour tout autre que son architecte, et dans lequel je suppose que Breton aura voulu introduire le fil d'Ariane de l'écriture poétique. " José Pierre, op. cit., 172.

"delirious" assemblage sculpture. Chronologically posterior to the acquisition of the *Objets de fous*, it was publically displayed three years earlier: as a matter of fact, its integration within the 1933 Surrealist Exhibition at the Gallery Pierre Colle, in which it offers a miniature image of the exhibition itself, could be described as a prefigurating the role of the objets de fous in the 1936 Surrealist Exhibition of Objects.

The assumed underlying logic of "delirious associations" is expressed formally through the extreme sense of axial symmetry that characterizes the pictorial composition, but also through the number cards attributed to each element of the trompe-l'oeil assemblage: the painting, of course, provides no explanatory material listing its constitutive elements according to these numbers, thus ironically gesturing towards an explanation that seems perpetually withheld. However, this idea of a retention of knowledge should be read mostly a rhetorical device, as the symbolism of the constitutive elements of the trompe-l'oeil assemblage is in fact rather transparent. The sexual symbolism of the shoe, both as a traditional fetish object as described in Freud's *Fetishism* essay and as a metaphor for female genitalia (later mentioned by Breton in Equation of the Found Object), is made explicit in the object number 6, which features a penis and a vagina. It thus identifies all firework rockets present in the picture as phallic, even though they also serve different symbolic purposes: they might, for instance, be a somewhat heavy-handed reference to Breton's definition of beauty as "exploding-fixed". Other elements are explicitly self-referential, such as the object number 32, which recycles compositional elements (a cicada under a head with a large nose, the latter also doubling as an anthill) from Dalí's famous 1929 painting *The Great Masturbator*. The possibility to interpret such objects in at least three different ways is thus consistent with Dalí's work on ambiguous images, described by André Breton as "guesswork images" [*image devinette*] in *Mad Love*.

But the central motive of the painting seems to explicitly extend the notion of guesswork to the meaning of the artwork as a whole. The presence of a cross is ambiguous at best: it does shed light on the rest of the composition as an ironic take on the altar picture, but might also be perceived as putting the hidden mysteries of the surrealist image in a "transcendental" perspective.[304] The four branches of the cross are each adorned with a key, with several other keys scattered around the composition, including one in the base of the back of one of the four heads of object 32, in lieu of an anthill. Keys and keyholes regularly appear in surrealist compositions. They combine the notions of liberation, hidden meaning, and sexual union: peeping through the keyhole puts the spectator in the position of a voyeur, a notion cherished by Marcel Duchamp who made use of it to design the entrance of André Breton's Gradiva gallery, but also, most famously, as the main structuring device of *Étants donnés*. A "key" also refers to "a word or system to solving a cipher or code" (OED):[305] but in surrealist art, the code becomes a value in and for itself, taunting the reader or spectator by deceptively promising a "glimpse" of truth without ever fully delivering on its promise.[306] The emancipatory dimension of the key motive is already implicit in Dalí's *Board of Delirious Associations*: the key stuck in the head of object

[304] As mentioned by Henri Béhar with a certain amount of caution, Breton's ever-elusive "sublime point" where all logical contradictions are eventually overcome has sometimes been identified with the symbolism of the cross, specifically at the intersection of its two branches, representing the abolition of the differences between up and down, left and right, according to René Guénon in his Symbolism of the Cross [*Le symbolisme de la croix*] (1931). (Henri Béhar, "Point sublime/suprême", in Henri Béhar, op. cit., p.812-3). However, in Dalí's picture, the cross seems distinctly (ironically?) Catholic, as it is also accompanied by explicit references to the Eucharist (object number 7).

[305] In French, the *roman à clé* (literally *key novel*) refers to a work in which fictional characters and events are actually echoes of real ones, that can be identified with readers in possession of the "key".

[306] Such notion of code deceptively pointing at an "empty" central signifier could call to mind Julia Kristeva's Lacanian analysis of a similar process at work in Gérard de Nerval's oeuvre. See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

32 seems to promise not only an irruption of the surreal into daily life (like the anthill sprouting from human body parts in both The Great Masturbator and *Un chien andalou*), but also the possibility to "open up one's head", i.e. both harnessing the raw energy of the unconscious and applying its potential to shape the future of human societies.

If the key does fall into the register of widely used surrealist motives, it is also insistently associated with madness in general, and the "art of the insane" in particular. In that sense, the original title of André Breton's 1948 essay "The Art of the Insane: Freedom to Roam Abroad" [*L'art des fous, la Clé des champs*], based on the French idiom "the key to the fields" (meaning "to escape")[307] is only a rather late occurrence of a long string of associations. One of the most visually striking instances is offered by the illustrations accompanying Hans Prinzhorn's short French-language summary of his *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922), published under the title *About the Art of the Insane* [*À propos de l'art des aliénés*] in the Belgian avant-garde magazine *Variétés* in 1929.[308] Contrary to expectation, the short dossier of illustrations is not drawn from Prinzhorn's book, but from the personal documentation of the Belgian psychiatrist Pierre Borremans.[309] On the second page, bottom left, the dossier offers the intriguing photograph of Ernest Scohy [Fig. 3.6], an otherwise unknown Belgian bricklayer by trade who also appears to have been active as a self-

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[307] Most frequently in the fixed idiomatic expression "prendre la clé des champs" meaning "to escape" (literally "take the key to the fields").

[308] Hans Prinzhorn, *About the Art of the Insane* [*À propos de l'art des aliénés*], in P.-G. van Hecke (dir.), *Varieties: A Monthly Illustrated Journal of the Contemporary Spirit* [*Variétés : revue mensuelle illustrée de l'esprit contemporain*], March 15th, 1929, pp.577-580. Prinzhorn's article doesn't mention a translator and might have been written directly in French, even though, given the stylistic quality of the article, it is fair to assume that Prinzhorn might have received substatial help.

[309] The illustrations accompanying Prinzhorn's article in *Variétés* (op. cit., unpaginated insert between p. 580 and 581) are described as "documents communicated by Dr. Borremans, Mortsel-Anvers". He can be confidently identified as Pierre Borremans, a Belgian psychiatrist active in Belgium in the 1920s and 1930s. Biographical information about Pierre Borremans is scarce, apart from medical publications such as Pierre Borremans and Ludo Van Bogaert, *Syndromes végétatifs paroxystiques d'origine centrale dans les séquelles post-encéphalitiques*, Anvers: Institute Bunge, Paris: La presse médicale, 1936.

taught artist with a certain penchant for keys, as he is depicted holding the picture of a key in his left hand, and an actual one in his right hand. It is fair to assume that Borremans might have encountered him as a patient, based on the short accompanying text that seems to have been authored by Borremans, on the face of its delirious nature and the liberties it takes with the rules of spelling:

> The gratest [sic] universal surprise where from the entire world the key that the popes posesed [sic] on earth god the faver [sic] puttit [sic] in the hands of a humble worker to Ernest Scohy at Pont-a-celles [sic] Hainaut Belgium europe [sic].[310]

In Ernest Scohy's delusion, the "unlocking" of mystical secrets is directly linked to the keys of Saint Peter featured on the Vatican's coat of arms, representing the power invested into the apostle Peter by Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew.[311] One can surmise that the illustration and accompanying text were selected by the Paul-Gustave van Hecke, the chief editor of Variétés, among the photographic documentation provided by Pierre Borremans, on the basis of their resonance with contemporary surrealist esthetics. *Variétés* played only a marginal, and sometimes even antagonistic role vis-à-vis surrealism, with the notable exception of the special issue "Surrealism in 1929", already mentioned. But other examples can be found in publications central to the surrealist movement. For instance, the December 1926 issue of *The Surrealist Revolution* [*La révolution surréaliste*] opens on a disquieting "Press Review" compiled by Paul Eluard and Benjamin Péret. This Press Review is an ambiguous parody of the *faits divers* rubric habitually found in French tabloid newspaper, often featuring particularly sordid blood crimes or sexual scandals. In this case, it opens on two news stories that seem to resonate with current surrealist

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310 "La plus grande surprise univercelle [sic] où du monde entier la clé que les papes pocédait [sic] sur la terre dieu le pêre [sic] la mis [sic] entre les mains d'un simple ouvrier a Ernest Scohy maçon a Pont-a-celles [sic] Hainaut la Belgique l'europe" Ernest Scohy,

311 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on Earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on Earth shall be loosed in heaven."
Matthew 16:19.

preoccupations. The first one, "An Unexpected Suicide", is an account of the suicide of a prostitute; the second one, "A Tragedy in a Madhouse", describes a gory fight between two inmates of a psychiatric hospital in Brno (former Czechoslovakia), leading to the death of one of the inmates. Both news stories are accompanied by a striking illustration featuring various kinds of keyholes, probably borrowed from a technical publication; each keyhole is attached to a number. Like in Dalí's *Board of Delirious Associations*, no explanatory list is provided: the only caption provided is an intentionally puzzling one, a form of double bind doubling down as a potential sexual double entendre: "Keyholes – Do not confuse them" ["Les entrées des serrures – ne pas confondre"]. The numbers thus echo the rhetoric of withheld meaning already inherent to the keyholes themselves. Additionally, no explanation is provided regarding the link between the illustration and the text of the press review, displayed on the same page. But the link might be provided by the details of the gory anecdotes: according to the news item narrated by Éluard and Breton, the suicide of the prostitute was the result of a sudden impulse, while one of her clients was in the room; the fight between the two inmates of the psychiatric hospital is narrated in similarly uncanny terms, as they are both described as being suddenly "possessed", roaring like wildcats and going at each other's throat with teeth and nails. In both cases, the *fait divers* seem to be perceived entirely esthetically, as offering a "glimpse" of the surreal, and more specifically of the supposed omnipotence of the unconscious (impromptu and irresistible expression of the death drive, or "metamorphosis" into a wildcat based on a sudden fit of delirium).

Eluard and Péret's "Press Review" doesn't quote a single source (for instance another newspaper or a news agency). Given the surrealist movement's inclination for hoaxes, the stories featured in this review might very well be the figment of the imagination of Péret and Eluard. But this possibility notwithstanding, the "Press Review" seems to be a key piece of evidence, so to speak, to describe the relationship between surrealist esthetics, the motive of the key, and madness. Like

the "art of the insane" itself, the "found"—or imagined—news items function as metaphors, as poetic illustrations of the surrealist agenda. But by turning the violence and suffering they describe into an estheticized example of the powers of the unconscious, they seem to be partly coopting the tabloid esthetics that they set out to parody. Such apparent lack of empathy, reminiscent of André Breton's disturbing declarations about "the simplest surrealist act" consisting in "going into the street and shooting at the crowd at random", points at the influence of André Gide's notion of a random murder as "gratuitous act" (*acte gratuit*) as the quintessential demonstration of human freedom.

But on a more conceptual level, it seems to be pointing at a larger issue within surrealism's relationship to mental illness. The alleged unknowable mysteries of mental illness, considered as an opaque cipher or "key" allowing one to catch a glimpse of the powers of the unconscious, could be described as a rhetorical construction: in fact, madness isn't truly a "blank slate" for the surrealists, but rather a reflective surface onto which they tend to project their own agenda and priorities. We could say that surrealists "fetishize" madness, in the particular sense of Eluard's description of the fetish in "Savage Art": like the "mirror with silvering on both sides", madness is then defined by an absolute opacity paradoxically allowing for specular transparency. "Surrealist madness" should thus be described as a discursive object in its own right, whose role is not to entice the reader or spectator to inquire about the physical reality of mental illness or the inner mechanisms of delirious speech. "Surrealist madness" and the physical reality of mental illness rarely intersect, which could explain why Eluard and Péret could describe a murder in a psychiatric asylum with such ironic nonchalance. Conversely, when mental illness struck within their ranks, surrealists seemed ill-equipped to face the situation: André Breton's *The Key to the Fields* features a short essay about Antonin Artaud's famous 1947 lecture *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, in which Artaud's struggle with mental illness is evoked only obliquely and with a

noticeable sense of embarrassment; Breton also claimed that mental illness had no impact on Artaud's artistic production.

The symbolism of the key thus arguably offers the embodiment of the surrealist fetishization of mental illness: while the "art of the insane" is identified with the proverbial "key to the fields", as a form of absolute freedom reminiscent of Wieland Herzfeld's "Ethics of Madness", it is surprisingly at odds with the loss of freedom generally associated with mental illness, both as lived experience (as a "disease of the will", in the words of Sigmund Freud) and as a result of the "great confinement" [*grand renfermenent*] within psychiatric asylums described by Michel Foucault. In other words, while often claiming their solidarity with the inmates of psychiatric hospitals,

But the point of such definition of the "fetishization" of mental illness—and particularly of the "art of the insane"—by surrealism is not to put the movement on trial for its conceptual and ethical shortcomings in that regard, which would achieve relatively little, but rather to provide a conceptual framework to attempt to describe more accurately the dynamics of surrealism's engagement with madness as part of its broader Primitivist agenda.

Chapter 4: "Art brut is art brut": Dubuffet as Anti-Modern

4.0 Introduction: Mythologies of Jean Dubuffet

"Down with explanations! They asphyxiate meaning. Meaning is like a fish that can't survive for long outside of its murky water. Art brut is art brut, everyone got that."[312] This paradoxical non-definition of *art brut*, a term coined by French painter Jean Dubuffet in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War to designate a vast range of visual works produced by patients in psychiatric institutions, practicing psychics, or self-taught artists, appeared in Dubuffet's *art brut* manifesto of October 1947, and has been quoted ad infinitum ever since as a kind of *bon mot*, often as a convenient placeholder for a more precise elucidation of the artistic category it is supposed to designate.

An expression of its author's deep-seated irrationalism and professed anti-intellectualism, Art brut rests upon a tautological structure whose underlying symbolic violence should not be underestimated: it is explicitly aimed at rejecting the validity of rational thought and argumentative coherence at large, in the name of a vague, vitalist notion of intuition.

In that regard, the most insightful picture of the argumentative structure of Jean Dubuffet's early writings on *art brut* isn't to be found in the writings of his various epigones, from Michel Thévoz and Lucienne Peiry to Roger Cardinal, but in the works of one of his contemporaries: in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, first published in 1957.[313]

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[312] « Assez d'explications ! Ça asphyxie le sens. Le sens est un poisson qu'on ne peut tenir longtemps hors de son eau trouble. L'art brut c'est l'art brut et tout le monde a très bien compris. » Jean Dubuffet, "L'Art brut", in *L'homme du commun à l'ouvrage*, 1973 [October 1947], p.84.

[313] Roland Barthes, Mythologies. Paris : Seuil, 1957.

Providing us with a detailed analysis of postwar French right-wing populism and anti-intellectualism (then embodied by the French politician Pierre Poujade), Barthes paid particular attention to the semiotics of tautology: "tautology is always aggressive: it signifies an angry rupture between intelligence and its object, the arrogant threat of an order from which thought would be banished."[314] According to Barthes, claims based on "A=A" argumentative structures are both superficially seductive and highly problematic:[315] revelatory of an attempt at unravelling linguistic expression, they are indicative of what he describes as a fascistic mystification aiming at "transforming petit-bourgeois culture into universal nature".[316]

Such confusion between nature and culture is at the heart of Jean Dubuffet's project. Dubuffet vehemently insisted that *art brut* "existed" in and of itself, as a category more akin to a botanical genus than to an esthetic label of his own invention. To a letter by Jean Paulhan (since destroyed by Dubuffet) in which the founder of the NRF and early supporter of Artaud doubted the reality of the existence of art brut, Jean Dubuffet replied on November 7th, 1945:

> That's a good one! [When you claim] That Art Brut doesn't exist. What about those 20 notebooks that I just filled out with all that stuff, where do you put them? If something cannot be defined, named, or grasped, that doesn't necessarily mean that it doesn't exist.[317]

According to Dubuffet's problematic appeal to "common sense", the mere accumulation of materials would offer sufficient proof of the reality of the existence of art brut. In spite of its shaky premises, Dubuffet's gamble has proven surprisingly successful: to this day, art brut often passes

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[314] « Il est bien vrai que la tautologie est toujours agressive : elle signifie une rupture rageuse entre l'intelligence et son objet, la menace arrogante d'un ordre où l'on ne penserait pas. » Roland Barthes, « Racine is Racine » [« Racine est Racine »], in *Mythologies*, p. 90

[315] Roland Barthes, « Poujade et les intellectuels », in *Mythologies*, 176.

[316] Roland Barthes, ibid., 7

[317] "Ah tu en as de bonnes! Que l'art brut il n'y en a pas. Et mes 20 cahiers que j'en ai tout plen alors, où tu les mets? " Jean Dubuffet, Letter to Jean Paulhan, November 7th, 1945, in: Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi (eds.), *Jean Dubuffet – Jean Paulhan, Correspondance* (1944-1968), Paris: Gallimard, 2003, p. 249

for nature rather culture, as a real existing category into which specific works would necessary fall into on the face of a set of fluctuating formal and biographical criteria, rather than a culturally specific discourse revelatory of the political, esthetic, and economic upheavals that beset French society and the French art world during and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

In that same text, Dubuffet led a preventive strike against what he called all possible "deniers" of art brut, warning that they might attempt to diminish the merit or originality of his alleged discovery by retracing Dubuffet's steps and describing some of his influences. Dubuffet's acute "anxiety of influence" led him to take a range of practical measures against this perceived threat. The numerous texts he produced about *art brut*, and about his own artistic practice, contain a number of quotations and oblique references that, in their overwhelming majority, are never attributed. Even more radically, Jean Dubuffet curated his own archive, catalogue raisonné, and multi-volume selected literary works, and created two foundations to perpetuate his legacy: while doing so, he also systematically destroyed parts of his own works and archives: most of his paintings from the years 1921-1943, and large parts of his correspondence. Crucially, most of the letters he received from NRF founder Jean Paulhan, and the entirety of his presumably extensive correspondence with Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

Any rigorous confrontation with the early history of Jean Dubuffet's *art brut* is thus unavoidably faced with a major methodological obstacle. How is it possible to produce scholarly work on an artistic phenomenon that not only characterizes itself as "ineffable" or "indefinable", but whose author consistently and purposefully intended to block any attempt at engaging with his legacy that wouldn't agree with his stated intentions? In fact, any rigorous scholarly analysis of the early history of *art brut* necessarily falls outside of the parameters defined by its author, and certainly would not have met with his approval.

In that regard, I would subscribe to Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi's diagnosis in the preface of their authoritative biography of Jean Dubuffet:

A dense and complex veil obstructs the view of the scholar who attempts to analyze [Dubuffet's] personal trajectory and his work. Between the mystifications of his autobiography and a proliferating self-exegesis, biographers […] might be tempted to simply echo them. […] But they have to attempt to deconstruct [Dubuffet's] myth through rigorous critical work, by confronting it with primary sources and documents.[318]

But Marianne Jakobi's clear-sightedness seems to be relatively exceptional. Like Dubuffet's metaphorical fish, the invention of *art brut* remains surrounded by layers of murky water that have consistently obscured it from the sight of critics and art historians, in spite of the already imposing bibliography of scholarly works dealing with various aspects of Dubuffet's personal and artistic trajectory.

The numerous gaps in Dubuffet scholarship, sometimes leading to outright misinterpretations,[319] constitute an unmistakable indication of this state of affairs: the context of the "invention" of art brut in the early years of the formulation of the notion by Dubuffet between 1945 and 1951 has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. The flurry of activity then displayed by Dubuffet to collect, promote, and advertise for *art brut* in Paris is rarely discussed in the context of the other

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[318] "Si bien qu'un voile complexe et dense gêne qui veut avoir de sa personne, de son parcours et de son œuvre une exacte appréhension. Pris en tenaille entre les mystifications du récit autobiographique et la masse des développements de l'autoexégèse, le biographe […] est d'emblée confronté à la tentation de la répétition. […] Il doit s'efforcer à son tour de déconstruire le mythe par un travail le plus rigoureux possible, qui vienne le confronter aux faits et aux documents. " Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi, *Dubuffet*, Perrin, 2007, p.11.

[319] Dubuffet's "anxiety of influence" has historically led to some spectacular misinterpretations of his works. In the following chapter, I will evoke and attempt to rectify several of the most egregious ones: a widespread misreading of Dubuffet's painting *Will to Power* as satirical, of Dubuffet's work as the expression of shell-shocked esthetics and historical trauma, of his first exhibitions at the René Drouin gallery as a quintessential expression of an esthetic liberation that would echo and prolong the political liberation of the French territory, and a reading of art brut as being antithetical to notions of "Degenerate art", corresponding to a historical revenge of the "art of the insane" after the fall of the Nazi regime.

two *causes célèbres* actively defended by Dubuffet in those years: raising funds to support an ailing Antonin Artaud, and, much more controversially, advocating for the "rehabilitation" of the collaborationist novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline, whom Dubuffet described as the victim of a witch hunt.[320] Dubuffet's simultaneous involvement with Artaud and Céline is part and parcel of the historical, esthetic, and political underpinnings of art brut, thus arguably allowing us to catch a glimpse of some of the issues still lurking in the murky, unexplored waters of Dubuffet's personal and artistic trajectory: for instance, his conflicted relationship to surrealism and psychiatric institutions (Artaud), or his penchant for reactionary politics in some of their most extreme incarnations (Céline).

Not unlike Julia Kristeva's transhistorical reading of the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline in *Power of Horror: Essay on Abjection* (1980), comprehensively criticized by Alice Yaeger Kaplan,[321] a number of contemporary interpretations of Dubuffet's work and of his notion of art brut tend to largely disregard their immediate historical context to propose a broadly psychoanalytical interpretation, for instance by focusing on the symbolic meaning of Dubuffet's "excremental" esthetics (Rachel Perry, Hal Foster); such interpretations sometimes also tend to reconstruct Dubuffet's own political positions and ethical choices based on the assumed psychoanalytic import of these works, a method that has led to a number of misunderstandings on key aspects of Dubuffet's trajectory.

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[320] In the second half of the 1940s, Antonin Artaud was then impoverished and in the midst of an intense psychotic episode after being released from the Rodez hospital. Louis-Ferdinand Céline was under a penal condemnation for his rabidly anti-Semitic writings and active support of the Vichy regime and the Nazi occupation of France.

[321] Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.109

In the following chapter, I will attempt to show that *art brut* as a Primitivist form of cultural and institutional critique is the result of an unlikely combination of reactionary politics and formal innovation that, in spite of its apparent non-conformism, ultimately constitutes a form of regressive "return to order". I will argue that an analysis of the various contexts that shaped the theory and practice of *art brut* would lead us to define Dubuffet as *anti-modern* in the sense defined by Antoine Compagnon:[322] occupying an uneasy, ambiguous position between tradition and innovation, Dubuffet's *art brut* constituted a form of backlash against the progressive avant-garde, while also partly using the tools, methods, and ideas developed by the latter in the service of a markedly different political agenda.

In the first section of this chapter, I will analyze Dubuffet's ideology of the *tabula rasa*, in the context of the general movement towards an esthetics of "bare life" in European literature and visuals arts in the aftermath of the Second World War.

In the second section, I show that Dubuffet's use of automatism draws from previous surrealist practices, but also departs from them by abandoning the surrealist quest for the surreal, replaced by an immanent praise of bodily materiality.

In the third section, I describe *brut* primitivism in terms of a "totemist", immanent, and ethnocentric form of primitivism constituting a major departure from surrealism's praise of the cosmological dimension of the fetish object.

In the fourth and last section, "Dubuffet, Céline, and 'Degenerate' Art I attempt to demonstrate that art brut constitutes a partial continuation rather than a contestation of the ideology of artistic

[322] Antoine Compagnon, *Les antimodernes. De Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes.* Paris: Gallimard, 2005. pp. 28-32.

"degeneration", emphasizing Dubuffet's affinities with ultra-reactionary thinkers such as Maurice Barrès and Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

4.1 Starting from Scratch?

In René Barjavel's science-fiction novel *Ravage*, published in 1942, an unexplained event leads to a major shift in the laws of physics: electricity disappears, and iron becomes easily breakable, leading to the cataclysmic collapse of modern urban civilization. The lead character, symptomatically called François Deschamps (best translated as "Frenchman Of-the-Fields") then sets up a new, traditionalist and patriarchal social structure based on agriculture, handicrafts, small-scale exploitations, and barter. When a young, foolish blacksmith miraculously reinvents a steam machine out of bronze and timber, François violently opposes what he perceives as the return of a perverted technological order: the new steam engine and its inventor are eventually destroyed without a trace, and all is well that ends well in Barjavel's ultra-reactionary idyll.

The undoubtedly regressive conclusion of Barjavel's novel stands in sharp contrast with the formal characteristics of the narrative.[323] Its political underpinnings appear particularly grim when read in the light of its immediate publishing context: *Ravage* was first published as a feuilleton in the notorious French collaborationist newspaper *Je suis partout*. François, a benevolent patriarch allowing a "regenerated" French society to reconnect with traditional

[323] *Ravage* was recently described by French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux as constituting a rare example of "world outside of science" [*monde hors-science*], that would directly question the necessity of the invariability of the laws of physics instead of elaborating on possible future developments based on these laws Quentin Meillassoux, *Métaphysique et fiction des mondes hors-science*, Paris : Aux forges de Vulcain, 2013

values, is thus but a thinly veiled transposition of Vichy regime's leader Philippe Pétain's traditionalist agenda, and a defense and illustration of one of its main slogans: "Soil never lies" [*la terre ne ment pas*].

Barjavel's narrative also constitutes one of the most extreme examples of a mistrust for modern technology that remained widespread among French artists and intellectuals throughout the 1940s – and, paradoxically, across the political spectrum, even though its deep affinities with Vichy's praise of rural traditionalism casts a long shadow over the entire phenomenon.[324] Unlike the specific blend of "Reactionary modernism" described by Devin Fore in his seminal *Realism after Modernism* (2012), for instance in his analysis of technological optimism of the works of 1930s German artists and writers like Ernst Jünger, modern technology is not called upon to offer prosthetic supplements that would remedy the inadequacies of the human body. Rather, the Second World War and its immediate aftermath were generally perceived as calling for a new form of artistic expression that would focus on "bare life", i.e. the fragility and physical reality of the human body in its material environment. Such posture relied on a rhetoric of direct phenomenological presence eschewing any form of technological mediation.[325]

Dubuffet's *art brut* has to be situated within this set of coordinates: mistrust of technology, rhetoric of authenticity and immediacy, and emphasis on materiality. Like Hans Prinzhorn's "artistry of the mentally ill", which was meant to bring about a replacement of traditional

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[324] On French fascism's distinct penchant for peasantry and "rural values", see Robert O. Paxton's definitive study *French Peasant Fascism: Henry Dorgères's Greenshirts and the Crises of French Agriculture, 1929-1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997

[325] On this topic, see Jean Laude's insightful and well-documented description of the main tendencies of postwar intellectual and artistic trends: "Problèmes de la peinture en Europe et aux États-Unis (1944-1951)", in: *Art et Idéologies: L'Art en occident 1945-1949*, [Colloque d'histoire de l'art contemporain, Saint-Étienne, 18-20 novembre 1976], Saint-Étienne: Centre interdisciplinaire d'étude et de recherche sur l'expression contemporaine, 1978, pp. 9-88.

symbolic and esthetic structures discredited by the horrors of the First World War, Jean Dubuffet's *art brut* allowed him to make use of works situated outside of the artistic canon as part of a broader Primitivist agenda aiming at renovating artistic values in the aftermath of the Second World War. The resemblances between both projects are accentuated by the fact that Dubuffet made extensive use of Prinzhorn's research, and included works taken from the remains of his collection into the emerging canon of *art brut*.[326] But according to Éric de Chassey, the Second World War introduced a chasm in the production of the avant-garde that was dictated by a different understanding of the temporality of artistic production:

> The modernist project was characterized by a constant renewal, a rejection of the past, and the invocation of something radically new […]. But this was part of a dialectics whose avant-garde logic […] was premised upon a notion of historical progress, a teleological perspective whose credibility was seriously dented by the Second World War. The First World War as a recent major traumatic event had made it clear that simply renewing positive utopian strategies, after a period of mourning and negation embodied by […] Dada, had failed to offer a satisfactory solution.[327]

The notion of historical teleology is particularly clear in the case of surrealist appropriations of the "art of the insane", discussed in the previous chapter: as we have seen, it was theorized by Breton as part of a process of historical *Aufhebung* inspired by Hegel, surrealist productions offering a glimpse of the dialectical resolution of the conflict between reason and technique, on

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[326] Ingrid von Beyme and Thomas Röske (eds.), *Dubuffets Liste: ein Kommentar zur Sammlung Prinzhorn von 1950*, Heidelberg: Verlag Wunderhorn, 2015.

[327] "Le projet moderniste avait bien été celui d'un renouvellement à chaque fois, d'un rejet de ce qui avait précédé et de l'invocation d'une radicale nouveauté […]. Mais il s'agissait là d'une dialectique dont les ressorts avant-gardistes […] étaient liés à un sens de l'histoire, une visée téléologique que la Seconde Guerre mondiale mettait fortement à mal. […] Le grand événement traumatique qu'avait été la Première Guerre mondiale avait déjà permis vérifier que le simple renouvellement des stratégies utopiques positives, une fois passée une période de deuil et de négations incarnée par […] Dada, n'avait pu en aucun cas constituer une solution satisfaisante. " In: "Après la table rase", in: Éric de Chassey and Sylvie Ramond (eds.): *1945-1949: Repartir à zéro: Comme si la peinture n'avait jamais existé*, Paris: Hazan – Musée de beaux-arts de Lyon, 2008, p.21

the one hand, and dream and immediate contact with nature, on the other. If non-dialectical, Prinzhorn's project was equally based on the idea that avant-garde visual productions might make use of the "artistry of the mentally ill" to bring about a renewed definition of art, as part "aesthetics of the future" inspired by the "philology of the future" of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*.

Unlike these two previous appropriations of the "art of the insane", Dubuffet's *art brut* could be defined as a case of absolute presentism. Dubuffet's renewed attention to self-taught, non-conventional artistic productions is meant to bring about a form of tabula rasa, unknowingly heeding the call of Barnett Newman "to start from scratch, to paint as if painting has never existed before".

Whereas *art brut* was supposed to bring about a radical redefinition of the tenets of artistic production and of the art world in general, Dubuffet's writings on the topic provide little in the way of a positive utopia, an alternative model or dialectical resolution of conflicts towards which artists would be meant to strive. Rather, thus conforming to the major trend of his time, *art brut* seems to be the result of an attitude of absolute presentism: instead of moving forward, one of the main artistic trends of the immediate postwar period seems to be to dig in, to burrow deeper into the ground in search of the foundations of "bare life". Dubuffet's fascination for the soil in his own work, from his *Vinous Landscape* [*Paysage vineux*] (1944) to his *Texturologies* of the late 1950s and beyond, should thus be seen in the context of a dual quest for unmediated materiality and the origins of human expression. The discovery of the prehistoric paintings of Lascaux in the 1940s, celebrated by Georges Bataille in his essay *Lascaux: Or The Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting* (1955), Brassaï's continuation of his work on graffiti (started in the early 1930s) that led to the publication of *Graffiti, or: The Language of the Wall* (1961), the publication of the five books by Gaston Bachelard on elemental symbolism between 1938 and 1948, or the renewed interest for early Romanesque

art on the part of painters associated with the short-lived Jeune France group in 1943-1944 (Bazaine, Bissière, Étienne-Martin) are thus all part of the same cultural and esthetic paradigm.[328] In that regard, Bazaine's call to arms from 1943 in his manifesto "Researches of the Young Painters" ["Recherches des jeunes peintres"] seems to encapsulate the link between the rhetoric of the tabula rasa, the primitive, and elemental materialism that provides the background of Dubuffet's *art brut*:

> Such is the current state of French art, after completing its long cycle of ten centuries: virgin again, naked like a Primitive, and infinitely more available because its goal isn't to create by sticking to the rules of an established writing form [*écriture*]: rather, it has to invent its own writing anew. The difficult task of "young painting" is thus more or less equivalent to the accomplishments of Byzantine mosaicists when they discovered the profound laws of their art, while the last complacencies of Alexandrine art were crumbling around them, much like the art of our Salons.[329]

This specific blend of what one could call elemental primitivism is usually described as a reaction to the trauma of the Second World War and the Holocaust: as mentioned by Jean Laude, reports of the discovery of the Lascaux paintings and of the destruction of Hiroshima by an atomic bomb were received simultaneously in 1945, producing a specific kind of mythology linking the discovery of the origins of art with the possibility of the extinction of the human race.[330]

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[328] On postwar primitivism in its French and European context, see Sylvie Ramond, "Se croire aux premiers âges du monde", in: Éric de Chassey and Sylvie Ramond (eds): *1945-1949: Repartir à zero: Comme si la peinture n'avait jamais existé*, Paris: Hazan – Musée de beaux-arts de Lyon, 2008, pp. 32-45

[329] "Voilà donc où en est cet art français après avoir, en dix siècles, accompli tout son cycle : vierge à nouveau, nu comme un primitif, et infiniment plus disponible puisqu'il lui faut, non pas créer au moyen d'une écriture apprise, mais inventer de toutes pièces cette écriture elle-même. La tâche difficile de la « jeune peinture », c'est à peu près l'équivalent de celle qu'entreprirent les mozaïstes byzantins lorsqu'ils découvrirent à nouveau les lois profondes de l'art, tandis que s'émiettaient autour d'eux les dernières complaisances de l'art alexandrin, assez semblable à celui de nos Salons actuels." Jean Bazaine, "Recherches des jeunes peintres" [1943], in Jean Bazaine, *Le temps de la peinture (1938-1998)*, Paris : Flammarion, 2002.

[330] Jean Laude, ibid. The conflagration of both events in popular imagination was also noted by Georges Bataille in his 1955 lecture on Lascaux: "It has become commonplace today to talk about the eventual extinction of human life. The latest atomic experiments made tangible the

Dubuffet's *art brut* is often talked about in terms of historical trauma, most recently by Hal Foster in his 2018 Mellon Lecture at the National Gallery of Art, who featured Dubuffet's art brut prominently as an illustration of a specific kind of postwar shell-shocked esthetics that he called "positive barbarism", a concept he borrowed from the writings of Walter Benjamin. However, such readings seem largely unsupported by the theory and practice of *art brut*. In fact, Dubuffet's own take on the necessity of an artistic *tabula rasa* is surprisingly devoid of references to current events: one could go as far as saying that Dubuffet's attitude throughout the Second World War, on both a personal and artistic level, is characterized by a callous indifference to the suffering of others around him. Whereas Jean Fautrier, with whom Dubuffet shared a numbered of stylistic traits and who was also exhibited by the gallerist René Drouin from 1944 onwards, explicitly presented his *Hostages* [*Otages*] series as an early attempt to pay homage to the victims of Nazi atrocities, Dubuffet vehemently refused to associate himself to this gesture. When asked by a journalist about a possible link between his own works and the memorialization of recent massacres such as the destruction of the French village of Oradour, whose inhabitants were butchered en masse by the SS as a retaliation for resistance activities in the area, Dubuffet infamously declared "I don't give a damn about Oradour" ["Oradour, je m'en fous"].[331] In fact, according to Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné, Dubuffet thrived during the Nazi

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notion of radiation invading the atmosphere and creating conditions in which life in general could no longer thrive. […] I do not intend to talk to you about our demise today. I would like, on the contrary, to talk to you about our birth. I am simply struck by the fact that light is being shed on our birth at the very moment when the notion of our death appears to us."
Georges Bataille, "Lecture, January 18th, 1955", in: Georges Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity: prehistoric Art and Culture*, translated by Michelle and Stuart Kendall, New York: Zone Books, 2005, p.87.

[331] The incident is discussed in Michael Krajewski, *Jean Dubuffet: Studien zu seinem Frühwerk und zur Vorgeschichte des Art brut*, Osnabrück: Der andere Verlag, 2004, p.52.

occupation, a period he remembered fondly as characterized by freedom and new opportunities.[332]

On a political level, Dubuffet hardly felt oppressed by the Nazi occupation of France: in fact, on his own admission, Dubuffet felt a sudden bout of enthusiasm for what he coyly called "German ideologies" after the invasion of French territory by the Wehrmacht: he set about learning German, and perusing the works of Nietzsche.[333]

In concrete terms, Dubuffet amassed a small fortune by setting up a scheme that allowed him to smuggle wine from the so-called "free zone" to Paris, which was then cut off from wine-producing regions because of the German occupation: his wine business, which was near bankruptcy before the war, flourished and offered him a steady source of income.[334] Because of these legally dubious activities, which put Dubuffet squarely in the category of war profiteers, Dubuffet was briefly arrested in March 1945, and only managed to escape a penal condemnation thanks to the timely intervention of his friend Jean Paulhan, whose impeccable resistance credentials as a founding member of the National Council of the Resistance carried a lot of weight in postwar Paris.[335] The occupation also allowed him to launch his artistic career, greatly helped by the enthusiastic support of Paulhan, whom he met in 1943, but also partly owing to the power vacuum resulting from the absence of a number of prominent figures from the art world, who were either in exile (André Breton, Benjamin Péret), engaged in resistance activities (Louis

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[332] "War was a great opportunity [for Dubuffet], and he set about to fully profit from it. France entered one of the darkest moments of its history, but those years constituted, for Dubuffet, a brilliant time of artistic rebirth, when his vocation finally found the means to express itself." ["La guerre est une aubaine que [Dubuffet] entend bien faire fructifier. La France entre dans une des périodes les plus noires de son histoire, mais les années sombres sont, pour Dubuffet, la période lumineuse d'une naissance à lui-même, où une vocation taraudante découvre enfin le moyen de s'assouvir."] Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné, op. cit., p.101s

[333] Jean Dubuffet, *Biographie au pas de course*, p. 42

[334] Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné, op. cit., p.113-4

[335] Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné, op. cit., p.115

Aragon, Paul Éluard, Georges Sadoul), in hiding to escape deportation (Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler), or deported and murdered in concentration camps (Max Jacob, Robert Desnos). The special circumstances of the occupation also allowed Dubuffet to set up his studio in a luxurious building in May 1944, shortly before the liberation of Paris: it belonged to the Polish Jewish painter Mela Muter, a prominent member of the School of Paris and a close friend of Rilke, Bonnard, and Braque, who was then in hiding in the South of France to escape deportation. The house had been purpose-built for her by the renowned architect Auguste Perret in exchange of his portrait in 1930. Dubuffet refused to let her move back to the house upon her return to Paris in 1946; a protracted legal battle ensued, won by Dubuffet thanks to the ever-convenient support of Paulhan. Mela Muter died in poverty in 1967.[336]

These details of Dubuffet's wartime activities are sordid: but they shouldn't be considered as mere biographical footnotes. Given the fact that most of the scholarship devoted to Dubuffet (including the work of Rachel Perry or Hal Foster) describes his attempt at "starting from scratch" that led to the invention of *art brut* as an expression of wartime trauma, paying closer attention to Dubuffet's experiences during the war adds weight to the idea that such an interpretation is simply unsustainable.[337]

Another piece of evidence is offered by Dubuffet's own elaborations on the necessity of an artistic *tabula rasa*. Their absolute presentism is based on two interconnected assumptions: the notion of the limited validity of the work of art, only relevant in its specific historical moment;

[336] Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné, op. cit., p.128 and note 10, p.500
[337] At most, given that Dubuffet borrowed a number of stylistic traits from Fautrier (Perry 2000, 22-23), one could make a case for Dubuffet's immediate postwar work as an indirect, and possible involuntary reflection of the trauma-driven esthetics of Fautrier.

and the affirmation that true creation (artistic or otherwise) is only made possible by ignoring the past. These notions are best expressed by Dubuffet in a letter to Jean Paulhan from 1944:

My law is as follows: nothing ever has any antecedents, every newborn man is the first newborn, every ball to which every girl runs for the first time is the very first dance that ever happened. Go tell that girl that balls like this one happen all the time, since the beginning of times, she won't listen to you, or at least she won't hear you, and what does it matter? This piece of advice is of no use to her. What's more, should she deeply convince herself of this truth - which remains alien to her, she couldn't dance any more, she couldn't even keep on living.[338]

Ironically, in spite of its apparent simplicity and ample use of bucolic imagery, Dubuffet's call for new beginnings based on a blissful ignorance of the past is itself a quotation in disguise: a fairly faithful, if lyrical, rendering of Nietzsche's definition of "The Use and Abuse of History for Life" in his *Second Untimely Meditation*.[339] According to Nietzsche, history consists in a series of failures –

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[338] "Ma loi à moi c'est qu'il n'y a de précédents à rien, tout homme qui vient au monde est le premier homme qui vient au monde, tout bal auquel toute gamine court pour la première fois est le premier bal qui ait jamais eu lieu. Allez lui dire à cette petite que des premiers bals il y en a comme cela depuis que le monde est monde, elle ne vous écoutera pas, elle ne vous entendra pas en tout cas, et puis qu'est-ce que cela peut faire ? Cette observation ne lui est pas utile. Voire même si elle se pénétrait très profondément de cette vérité qui n'est pas la sienne, elle ne pourrait plus danser, elle ne pourrait plus vivre un instant de plus. " (*Homme du commun*, 287)

[339] "Dubuffet's law" isn't quoted verbatim from the *Second Untimely Meditation*, which doesn't offer the example of a young girl going to a ball. However, Dubuffet's apologue strongly resonates with Nietzsche's line of reasoning, for instance in the following passage, which links the blindness of passion, life-affirming action, and artistic creation:

"What deeds could man ever have done if he had not been enveloped in the dust-cloud of the unhistorical? Or, to leave metaphors and take a concrete example, imagine a man swayed and driven by a strong passion, whether for a woman or a theory. […] His whole case is most indefensible; it is narrow, ungrateful to the past, blind to danger, deaf to warnings, a small living eddy in a dead sea of night and forgetfulness. And yet this condition, unhistorical and anti-historical throughout, is the cradle not only of unjust action, but of every just and justifiable action in the world. No artist will paint his picture, no general win his victory, no nation gain its freedom, without having striven and yearned for it under those very 'unhistorical' conditions. If the man of action, in Goethe's phrase, is without conscience, he is also without knowledge: he forgets most things in order to do one, he is unjust to what is behind him, and only recognizes one law, the law of that which is to be." (as translated by Adrian Collins, 1909).
["Wo finden sich Taten, die der Mensch zu tun vermöchte, ohne vorher in jene Dunstschicht des Unhistorischen eingegangen zu sein? Oder um die Bilder beiseite zu lassen und zur Illustration durch das Beispiel zu greifen: man vergegenwärtige sich doch einen Mann, den eine heftige

in that sense, knowledge of history can be detrimental to action: becoming aware that all human endeavors are ultimately doomed to fail necessarily has paralyzing effects. Thus, Dubuffet's "prom" metaphor relies heavily on Nietzsche's conscious rejection of historical knowledge: according to his autobiography, the artist was an avid reader of Nietzsche in the early 1940s.[340]

Dubuffet's take on the *tabula rasa*, implying that true art would have to be constantly reinvented, its techniques renewed from scratch at every iteration, provides the conceptual framework for both his own artistic creations (characterized by the use of a range of different techniques that don't traditionally fall into the general category of fine arts) and his sustained interest in the works of self-taught artists of various stripes (including mediumnistic art and the "art of the insane"): the unbridled originality of the works of artists such as Auguste Forestier or Adolf Wölfli owing largely to the fact that they developed their own methods and technique in relative isolation, without relying on traditional artistic training.

In Dubuffet's view, the imperative of a clean break with artistic tradition isn't the result of traumatic experiences of such magnitude that they would invalidate any attempt at producing

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Leidenschaft, für ein Weib oder für einen großen Gedanken, herumwirft und fortzieht: [...] Es ist der ungerechteste Zustand von der Welt, eng, undankbar gegen das Vergangene, blind gegen Gefahren, taub gegen Warnungen, ein kleiner lebendiger Wirbel in einem toten Meere von Nacht und Vergessen: und doch ist dieser Zustand – unhistorisch, widerhistorisch durch und durch – der Geburtsschoß nicht nur einer ungerechten, sondern vielmehr jeder rechten Tat; und kein Künstler wird sein Bild, kein Feldherr seinen Sieg, kein Volk seine Freiheit erreichen, ohne sie in einem derartig unhistorischen Zustande vorher begehrt und erstrebt zu haben. Wie der Handelnde, nach Goethes Ausdruck, immer gewissenlos ist, so ist er auch immer wissenlos; er vergißt das meiste, um eins zu tun, er ist ungerecht gegen das, was hinter ihm liegt, und kennt nur ein Recht, das Recht dessen, was jetzt werden soll. "] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Zweites Stück: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben", in: *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, E. W. Fritzsch, Leipzig, 1874, 214-5

[340] See Dubuffet, *Biographie au pas de course*, Paris: Gallimard, 2001, p.42.

"fine arts" after the horrors of the war. In that sense the "bare life" of his schematically sketched figures has little to do with the emaciated silhouettes produced by Giacometti or Michaux around the same time. Far from being the expression of a loss of hope in the future of mankind, of a terror-filled asceticism that would reduce the human form to its most minimal expression, Dubuffet's *tabula rasa* is theorized as a form of vital exuberance free from paralyzing conventions, its improvisational, ever-evolving techniques often borrowing from popular entertainment forms such as the circus, the street fair, or puppet theater. Somewhat counter-intuitively, largely ignoring the catastrophes and suffering that surrounded him, Dubuffet's attempt to "start from scratch" is the result of a vitalist affirmation of the self. It is therefore somewhat understandable that Dubuffet's uncritical embrace of a Nietzschean "will to power" might have confused critics and art historians alike: it is largely jarring with the spirit of the times, and with our understanding of what should have been on the mind of artists and intellectuals in the immediate aftermath of one of the most catastrophic events in world history.

Dubuffet's ode to Nietzsche, *Will to Power* [*Volonté de Puissance*], has been consistently misread as a bitterly ironic take on the notion [fig. 4.1]. As noted by Mechthild Haas,[341] such misreading originates from Vivian Barnett's interpretation of the painting in 1984 for the Guggenheim museum;[342] it has been consistently echoed in numerous publications such as the catalogue of the Dubuffet retrospective at the Schirn Museum in Frankfurt (1990),[343] or, more recently, the comprehensive entry on the painting on the website of the Guggenheim museum

[341] Mechthild Haas, *Jean Dubuffet: Materialen für eine "andere Kunst" nach 1945*, Berlin: Reimer, 1997, pp.142-4
[342] Vivian Endicott Barnett, The Guggenheim Museum Collection, 1900-1980, New York, 1984, p.344.
[343] Thomas M. Messer (ed.), *Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985)* [exhibition catalogue], Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 1990, p.43

(undated) by Jan Avgikos:

> The figure's aggressive machismo is itself threatened by the very stance he assumes: hands held behind the back, his gesture is either one of unexpected receptivity or of helpless captivity. The title refers to a central tenet of Nazi ideology, taken from the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. But in a single deft stroke, Dubuffet's caricature mocks Fascism's claims to authority as it emasculates romanticized male aggression.[344]

To a certain extent, Avgikos' complete misinterpretation of the painting does touch upon the crux of the problem: the notion of a "will to power" was indeed "a central tenet of Nazi ideology". But unfortunately, assimilating Dubuffet's *Will to Power* to an outright mockery of fascism is more the result of wishful thinking on the part of the author than of a rigorous interpretation of the work. In his 2018 Mellon lectures, Hal Foster seemed to echo this line of thinking by describing the painting as "more farcical than forceful". It would be more correct to say that it is meant to be both farcical and forceful: as we just mentioned, in Dubuffet's work, the exuberant affirmation of the self is associated with popular, sometimes even outright carnavalesque visual forms.

Of course, Dubuffet's idiosyncratic visual language does not agree with standard Nazi esthetics, for instance with Leni Riefenstahl's own praise of the Nietzschean "will to power" in *Triumph of the Will* (1935): however, as disturbing as it may sound, his work did partly share a common ideological basis. Significantly, in the fragments published posthumously under the title *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche claimed both that human beings were not essentially different from their natural environment, nor the pinnacle of evolution, and that "culture" was to be understood as a superficial attempt at "domesticating" humans, which should be reverted in

[344] Jan Avgikos, "Jean Dubuffet : Will to Power" [undated], https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/1102, accessed on 08/03/2018

order to "cure humans from culture".[345] It is thoroughly possible that Dubuffet's insistent rejection of "culture", might have partly take its cues from Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, which it is fair to assume that he had read in detail.[346] Thus, I would fully subscribe to Mechthild Haas' interpretation of the painting as both a form of provocation and a Nietzschean declaration of war against the perceived oppression of culture:

> Dubuffet doesn't ironize Nietzsche's concept [of a will to power], but instead makes use of it in order to formulate his own critique of cultural conventions. […] His stocky male nude is meant to provoke the cultivated bourgeois art connoisseur […]: the direct, threatening exhibition of the penis, the aggressiveness and brutality of its showy display of strength deny its viewers the pleasure of the contemplative enjoyment of art.[347]

The influence of Nietzsche's work on Dubuffet has thus been largely underestimated. But unlike Prinzhorn's Expressionist, forward-looking Nietzsche of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Dubuffet's take on Nietzsche seems to focus on a form cultural critique mostly informed by the *Second Untimely Meditation: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Paradoxically, and unlike its interwar

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[345] "The domestication (the 'culture') of man does not go very deep… When it does, it immediately leads to degeneration (type: the Christian). The 'wild' man (or, in moral terms, the bad man) is a return to nature – and, in a way, its restauration: *curing* man from 'culture'…" [Die Domestikation (die »Cultur«) des Menschen geht nicht tief ... Wo sie tief geht, ist sie sofort die Degenerescenz (Typus: der Christ). Der »wilde« Mensch (oder, moralisch ausgedrückt: der böse Mensch) ist eine Rückkehr zur Natur – und, in gewissem Sinne, seine Wiederherstellung, seine *Heilung* von der »Cultur« ...] Friedrich Nietzsche [and Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche], *Der Wille zur Macht: Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte*, Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1922 [1906], 684 Because of the important manipulations of the original text by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche and her associates for political purposes, it is impossible to ensure with any degree of certainty that the previous passage was indeed written by Nietzsche.

[346] Dubuffet had access to renowned French Germanist Geneviève Bianquis' translation of *The Will to Power*, published by Gallimard in two volumes between 1935 and 1937.

[347] "Dubuffet ironisiert nicht Nietzches Idee, sondern er benutzt sie, um seine Kritik am bestehenden Kulturideal zu formulieren. [...] Der bullige Männerakt dient zur Provokation des bürgerlich gebildeten Kunstbetrachters [...]: die direkte bedrohliche Zurschaustellung des Geschlechts, die Aggressivität und Brutalität des Kraftprotzes verschließen sich einer kontemplativen Kunstbetrachtung. Jeglicher idealistische Kunstgenuss wird verweigert. " Haas, op. cit., p.144.

predecessors, Dubuffet's vitalism is thus combined with a sense of historical pessimism.

Such pessimism directly informs Dubuffet's view on the limited validity of the work of art: according to Nietzsche, an action is only "justified" – or even made possible – inasmuch as it is carried out in a bout of anti-historical passion. Dubuffet seems to be taking this logic one step further, by assuming that the unavoidable "failure" of any historical action also implies that works of art come with an expiration date: when action-oriented enthusiasm starts ebbing away (for instance at the end of a historical period, an artistic movement, etc.), the work of art itself isn't kept afloat by a constant stream of vital energy, and, having served its momentary purpose, might as well be discarded. This notion is expressed in no ambiguous terms in one of Dubuffet's earliest manifestoes, the ironically titled *Notes for the Well-Read* [*Notes pour les fins lettrés*] from 1946:

> *Man writes on sand*: […] The meaning [of a painting] entirely relies on the collective state of mind of the moment during which it was made. When this moment recedes in the distance, when new suns rise on the world, while other set and are extinguished, and when Man changes his habits, the meaning of these signs becomes increasingly opaque. […]
>
> *Fossil fish*: When the timeliness of any human work starts receding in the distance, it becomes what a fossil fish is to a fish. Sorry, but I would rather have caught the simplest, the most banal of bleaks – alive, and therefore immensely fascinating – rather than the most illustrious *fossil* fish.[348]

The metaphor of the "fossil fish" provides the conceptual basis for a wholesale rejection of artistic

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[348] "*L'homme écrit sur le sable*: [Un tableau] n'a de sens qu'en fonction de l'humeur collective du moment où il a été produit. A mesure que ce moment s'éloigne, que de nouveaux soleils se lèvent sur le monde, cependant que d'autres baissent et s'éteignent, tandis que l'homme change de façons, le sens des signes devient peu à peu impénétrable. […]

Poisson fossile : A mesure que s'éloigne l'actualité d'un ouvrage humain, il devient ce que le fossile du poisson devient au poisson. Que l'on m'excuse, je préfère dans mon bocal la plus humble, la plus commune des ablettes—Mais vivante (et, de l'être, si passionnante ! au plus illustre poisson *fossile*. " Jean Dubuffet, "Notes pour les fins-lettrés" [1946], in : *L'homme du commun à l'ouvrage*, 57-8.

tradition, including the interwar avant-garde (first and foremost surrealism), technical training provided in fines arts academies, and more generally any artwork from the past. This attitude, which culminated in Dubuffet's wholesale rejection of museums in his manifesto *Asphyxiating Culture* [*Asphyxiante culture*] (1968), echoes certain aspects of Nietzsche's denunciation of nineteenth-century historicism, especially of the trend he called "antiquarian". Dubuffet's esthetics also offer strong parallels with the symbolic vandalism of Italian futurism, for instance with their manifesto "Against Passéist Venice!" (1910), which proposed to raze the ancient city to the ground in order to replace it with an petrochemical complex.[349] Among Dubuffet's contemporaries, such strong condemnation of museums as repositories of inauthentic, "dead" art can also be found in the writings of the painter Roger Bissière:[350] for both Dubuffet and Bissière, iconoclasm can be seen as a reaction against attempts to reinvigorate and democratize the bourgeois humanist cult of traditional art and literature as an antidote to the barbarity of the war, such as André Malraux' *Imaginary Museum* [*Le Musée imaginaire*] (1947), or Jean Vilar's staging of literary classics at the People's National Theater [*Théâtre National Populaire*] from 1951 onwards. However, unlike Bissière or the futurists, Dubuffet seems to turn such iconoclastic aggression against his own work: his experiments with non-conventional techniques often led the thick crust of paint on his own canvases to crack or start oozing if placed near a source of heat, an

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[349] F.T. Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Luigi Russolo, "Against Passéist Venice!" [1910], in: Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 67-9

[350] "Ah! Modern painting, the old masters, murals, oil painting, frescoes, and all those Spaniards, Dutchmen, Italians, and Frenchmen, all those little swings for Museum curators and for the students of the École du Louvre… I really don't give a damn about any of those." ["Ah! La peinture moderne, la peinture ancienne, la peinture murale, la peinture à l'huile, la fresque, les Espagnols, les Hollandais, les Italiens, les Français, et toutes les balançoires pour conservateurs de Musées, ou pour les élèves de l'École du Louvre, ce que je peux m'en foutre. "] Roger Bissière, "Défense d'afficher", in : "Problèmes de la peinture", *Confluences*, 1945, p.365.

eventuality welcomed by Dubuffet himself (Perry 2000, 208-43).[351]

The radicalism of Dubuffet's praise of the *tabula rasa* should not entirely be taken at face value. In fact, Dubuffet's rhetoric of uncompromising vandalism constitutes less an attempt to entirely do away with artistic tradition than to expand its technical repertoire (Laude 1976, 44). Dadaist works created with found materials, for instance the collage of elements of street refuse in Kurt Schwitter's *Merz Pictures* in the early 1920s, were defined as "anti-art", questioning the very notion of artistic production. Conversely, neither the use or allusion to "abject" materials in Dubuffet's own works (his "retour à l'ordure", to use Rachel Perry's term) nor his collecting and exhibiting of *brut* works is meant to constitute a wholesale attack against the notion of art. Rather, it is meant to "regenerate" it (as part of a politically dubious discourse of "degeneration", which we will analyze in a later part of this chapter), while maintaining a series of relatively traditional artistic practices and symbols: the lone artist as inspired creator, the ontologically exalted status of the work of art, the centrality of the artist's hand, etc.

The relative conservatism of Dubuffet's project relatively to the magnitude of Dada's institutional critique is easily perceptible in one of the early slogans chosen by Dubuffet to characterize the alleged iconoclasm of his artistic practice: *Peinturer hardi*, best translated as "Paintering [sic] boldly". "Peinturer" is a barbarism, technically a hypercorrection of the

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[351] Dubuffet explicitly linked the limited validity of the work of art and the use of non-durable materials in his *Notes for the Well-Read*, couple of paragraphs after the metaphor of the "fossil fish": "The importance given to the durability of artworks strikes me as odd […]. It has become so prevalent that contemporary artists purposefully abstain from using bright or shiny colors, alleging that such colors might later lose their luster. […] But art is an expression of a frenzy of enthusiasm [*ivresse*]: how could it be compatible with such inhibitions?"
["Il est drôle de constater quelle place tient la question de durabilité des ouvrages […] C'est au point que [les artistes d'aujourd'hui] se privent de toutes couleurs vives et éclatantes à raison que ces couleurs puissent risquer par la suite de se ternir. […] Ce que l'art implique d'ivresse s'accorde-t-il avec de telles inhibitions ?"]. Jean Dubuffet, ibid., 59.

irregular verb "peindre" based on an analogy with regular infinitives of the first group (such mechanisms of hypercorrection being the hallmark of the language of children, or, as seems to be the case here given Dubuffet's ideology of the *tabula rasa*, of illiterates). However, given the numerous attempts from the 1910s onwards to do away with "painting" altogether by promoting different media and techniques (collage, moving images, photograms, etc.), the expression seems more than slightly oxymoronic: there is relatively little boldness in sticking to the traditional medium of painting in the late 1940s, even under such intentionally provocative, *brut* label as "paintering".

Moreover, by vehemently rejecting abstraction and sticking to figuration throughout his career (a choice that also largely informed the choice of works that progressively constituted the emerging canon of *art brut*),[352] and in spite of indisputable technical innovations, Dubuffet largely privileged themes that fall well into the tradition of the fine arts, and could be already found in Dubuffet's school exercises at the Académie Julian: portraits, nudes, and landscapes.

In other words, neither Dubuffet's own productions nor his notion of *art brut* would qualify as anti-art. They are, however, anti-modern in the sense defined by Antoine Compagnon: occupying an uneasy, ambiguous position between tradition and innovation, they constitute a form of backlash against the progressive avant-garde, while also largely drawing lessons from it.[353]

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[352] On Dubuffet's rejection of abstraction, I will very immodestly quote my own work: Raphael Koenig, "Towards Abstract Art Brut?", in: *In abstracto* [exhibition catalogue] Paris: Galerie Christian Berst, 2017.

[353] Dubuffet's work seems increasingly at odds with artistic modernism, by rejecting abstraction or steadfastly privileging drawing over color. But it is also far from relying on the artistic guidelines defined by the Vichy regime: Dubuffet's distortion of the human figure or his privileging of "clumsy" execution are incompatible with the regime's praise of the "sane" human

A particular case in point is the question of Dubuffet's complex, conflicted relationship with French surrealism. Surrealism was one of the earliest targets of Dubuffet's denunciation of "dead" artistic tradition. In Georges Limbour's article in the art newspaper *Comœdia* from July 8th, 1944, titled "Revelation of a Painter: Jean Dubuffet" ["Révélation d'un peintre: Jean Dubuffet"]:

> For a number of years, nothing new happened in the realm of painting. […] Stagnant surrealism was stubbornly balancing, before the war, heterogeneous objects—akin to crutches—in the middle of its deserted landscapes. We got tired of this intellectualized, philosophical, and often sickly surreal. And we hoped to get closer to a simpler, more moving reality, from which one would have extracted the raw sap [*sève brute*] of life—itself an ineffable mystery![354]

Georges Limbour was a childhood friend of Dubuffet, whom he had met in their hometown of Le Havre; he remained one of his closest collaborators, and it is well-established that Dubuffet directly participated in the redaction of Limbour's article (Dieudonné and Jakobi 2007, 132). Dubuffet's fingerprints can be found all over this text: in its overall vitalist rhetoric, but also in the use of terms that later became leitmotivs of Dubuffet's writings and public declarations: the metaphor of the "sap", but also, crucially, the use of the adjective "brut" to define his overall esthetics.

Even though this text has received relatively little critical attention so far, it could thus be

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body, or its attempt to enforce a systematic control of artistic production that would favor a balanced, polished finish. In that sense, they remain closer to modernist esthetics (Dieudonné and Jakobi 2007, 116-7).

354 "Depuis quelques années la peinture ne nous a rien offert de nouveau. […] Le surréalisme stagnant s'obstinait, avant la guerre, à faire tenir en équilibre dans ses paysages désertiques, des objets hétéroclites, de la famille des béquilles. Lassés du surréel savant, philosophique et souvent maladif, nous pouvions désirer nous rapprocher d'une réalité simple et plus émouvante où l'on aurait puisé la sève brute – elle aussi mystérieuse – de la vie. "

described as Dubuffet's earliest published manifesto, predating his *Notes to the Well-Read* by nearly two years. It is all the more significant that this early formulation of *brut* esthetics is explicitly defined as a reaction against the alleged inauthenticity and lack of vital *élan* of surrealism, the perceived "stagnation" of which is opposed to the irrepressible flow of "raw [*brut*] sap". The general message is abundantly clear: *brut* esthetics are meant to replace a moribund surrealism as part of an artistic changing of the guards.

But in that same article, Limbour-Dubuffet also evoke automatism as a productive artistic method. Automatism is, of course, far from being the exclusive preserve of the surrealist movement: in fact, André Breton himself had borrowed the term from leading French psychiatrist Pierre Janet's *Psychological Automatism* [*L'automatisme psychologique*] (1889). In this article, Dubuffet-Limbour mention yet another version of automatism, one that would betray the stereotypical nature of spontaneous gestures and ultimately prove the existence of Jungian "archetypes":

> Dubuffet likes to evoke a certain automatism that compels human beings, when they instinctively want to reproduce an object, to follow precise and fateful transcription rules that are very different from classical perspective. The primitive, the child that hasn't been perverted [*dénaturé*] by education obey them when, in order to represent a field, they draw a square or a rectangle that they then fill with colors. Thusly, in Dubuffet's panoramic landscapes, fields and roads will appear to be seen from above, in a bird's eye view, whereas cyclists, houses, and roads are seen from the horizontal perspective of a humble biped: they appear to be lying down against the landscape. [355]

[355] "Dubuffet parle volontiers d'un certain automatisme qui pousse l'être humain, dès qu'instinctivement il veut reproduire un objet, à obéir à des règles précises et fatales de transcription qui ne sont pas du tout celles de la perspective. Le primitif, l'enfant non dénaturé par l'éducation y obéit lorsqu'il couche tout naturellement sur le papier un champ en un carré ou un rectangle qu'il remplit ensuite de couleurs. Ainsi, les paysages panoramiques de Dubuffet, les champs et les routes nous paraîtraient-ils d'une certaine hauteur, comme dans l'œil de l'alouette, tandis que les cyclistes, les maisons et les routes seraient vus du regard horizontal d'un simple bipède et paraîtront au premier abord comme couchés dans le paysage."

This passage deserves particular scrutiny, inasmuch as it encapsulates the tensions and contradictions of Dubuffet's anti-modernism on a least three levels: by paradoxically linking "spontaneous" productions and deliberate artistic creation, by seemingly rejecting surrealism while partly continuing it, and by introducing a confusion between nature and culture in the name of a conservative restauration of the instinctual.

While Dubuffet has written extensively both about the works of the artists included in his *art brut* collection, and about his own process of artistic production, he has tended to keep these two topics separate. He has written surprisingly little about the way his two fields of activity relate to one another, and more specifically about whether seeking out, collecting, and exhibiting *brut* works might have an impact on his own artistic production. In this passage, this link is evoked somewhat more specifically: works by artists who haven't been *dénaturés* (literally "de-naturated") remain closer to the stereotypical invariants of human expression that Dubuffet is seeking to uncover: therefore, their works provide both a guiding principle or regulatory ideal, but also, much more concretely, a reservoir of formal solutions that can be appropriated by the artist. As a rule, Dubuffet never explicitly mentions the source and nature of his numerous stylistic borrowings: they have to be meticulously reconstructed based on circumstantial evidence, or the declarations of other artists.[356] But here, such borrowing is discussed in detail: the technique consisting in representing the foreground and the background of the painting from different perspectival positions (respectively frontally at eye level, and in a bird's eye view). Whereas such a

[356] This is the case for Sarah K. Rich's exemplary demonstration that the technique of butterfly wings collage used by Dubuffet in the early 1950s was directly borrowed from his friend Pierre Bettancourt: Sarah K. Rich, "Jean Dubuffet: The Butterfly Man", in: *October*, Vol. 119, (Winter, 2007), pp.46-74. One can only hope for more studies of this caliber in the future: there are reasons to believe that similar "borrowings" could be traced back to the work of Roger Bissière, Gaston Chaissac, Jean Fautrier, Slavko Kopač, or André Masson, to name only a few.

description could apply to a number of works from the period 1943-1944, there is reason to believe that it might be more specifically related to one specific painting: *Cyclist with Five Cows* [*Cycliste avec cinq vaches*] from July 1943 [Fig. 2]. It displays both the cyclist and the square and rectangular fields mentioned in the article, seen from different perspectives. In this painting, the research on representational invariants is taken to an extreme, as the cows, the hill, and the trees appear particularly stereotypical. The vibrancy of the square yellow field in the center of the composition, balanced by the dark green of the grass, and the dynamism of the cyclist appearing to cross the composition at high speed, confer to *Cyclist with Five Cows* an air of unmitigated optimism, of mid-summer sensual plenitude coherent with the biographical record of Dubuffet's activities at the time.[357] It is, however, particularly telling that this picture of bucolic happiness is dated from 1943, also the year of Felix Nussbaum's *Self-Portrait with a Jewish Identity Card*, a claustrophobic picture of terror and sequestration dominated by grey and ochre tones and a large, looming wall: the presence of a patch of bright yellow at the center of each composition cruelly underlines the disparities in tone and content between the two paintings, providing a poignant illustration of Dubuffet's complete indifference for the tragedies happening on his doorstep, and hopefully putting the last nail in the coffin of interpretations that claim to perceive in Dubuffet's works the effects of wartime trauma turning into "positive barbarism".

However, the link between "instinctual" primitive artworks and Dubuffet's own work is not made entirely explicit, and arguably remained obscure in Dubuffet's later writing on *art brut*. With a certain amount of provocation, Dubuffet often alluded to them as the result of the hobby of a professional wine merchant and rarely addressed his years of artistic training at the Académie Julian, earlier, more conventional artistic production, and sustained contacts with

[357] Dieudonné and Jakobi, op. cit., p.203s

members of the historical avant-gardes (including Raoul Dufy, Max Jacob, or André Masson) throughout the 1920s and 1930s. However, Dubuffet also never claimed an outright *brut* status for his own works, reserving the label for the various "primitive" works he gathered under this appellation from 1945 onwards. If the recourse to archetypal representation is primarily found in its unadulterated state in self-taught productions untouched by so-called "denaturation", how can a professional artist like Dubuffet attain such "automatism" of visual expression?

By actively studying the mechanisms of this "archetypal" automatism, Dubuffet seems to claim for his own work a kind of secondary automatism: paradoxically, a careful study of brut visual expressions would allow him to tap into the vitality and strength of expression of "raw sap". But such narrative has to be taken with a grain of salt: as demonstrated by Hal Foster, the attack on perspective in works like Max Ernst's *The Master's Bedroom* (1920) Paul Klee's Room *Perspective with Inhabitants* (1921) is a hallmark of avant-garde appropriations of stylistic features of the "art of the insane": it functioned as a powerful tool to contest a traditional symbolic order embodied by "rational" perspective (Foster 2004, 193-225). Dubuffet's own attack on perspective cannot be interpreted simply as a result of the impact of *brut* works on his own artistic production: it is also part and parcel of the deeply "cultural" trajectory of the historical avant-garde, and is necessarily in dialogue with them. Tellingly, *Cyclist with Five Cows* is far from being the first occurrence of such use of "dual" perspective associating a frontal view of the foregrounded figure and a bird's eye view of the background. In fact, Dubuffet had experimented with a similar technique nearly twenty years prior, as evidenced in his *Fright* [*Frayeur*] from 1924 [Fig. 4.3], a surrealist-inspired work created during a period when Dubuffet's visual productions were strongly under the influence of the French surrealist painter André Masson, who pioneered similar figure-ground relationships in his own compositions (Jakobi and Dieudonné 2007, 55-6).

Therefore, it would be more accurate to place a work such as *Cyclist with Five Cows* at the confluence of Dubuffet's newly found "faux naïve" esthetics inspired by "brut" works, and of his previous confrontation with André Masson's innovative use of the pictorial plane (combining both his own surrealist allegiance and the use of multiple perspectives characteristic of Cubism), and more generally of his knowledge of the avant-garde's various attempts at questioning traditional perspective. This is not to say that Dubuffet's *Cyclist with Five Cows* should be put squarely in the realm of the avant-garde. In Hal Foster's description, attacks on traditional perspective by the likes of Paul Klee and Max Ernst were part of a broader socio-political agenda aiming at contesting the validity of the ruling symbolic order in the name of historical progress, paving the way for the advent of a different kind of society. Works like *Cyclist with Five Cows* seem to serve a different agenda altogether: while drawing lessons from the formal innovations of the avant-garde, they are explicitly presented as attempts to bring about a form of restauration, a "return" to a more authentic bound with nature that has little do to with progressive utopias, and is more in line with a regressive take on the regenerative powers of rurality praised by a host of reactionary thinkers, including ideologues of the Vichy regime.[358] Limbour and Dubuffet's paean to "a simpler, more moving reality […] the raw sap [*sève brute*] of life" could thus be described as providing an exemplary illustration of Roland Barthes' thesis: of petit-bourgeois culture masquerading as nature in order to impose itself as a form of universalism.

[358] The educational policy of the Vichy regime was premised on the notion of the regenerative role of French peasantry for society as a whole, in order to "substitute to the encyclopedic ideal of the abstract Man developed by city dwellers […] a larger, more humane ideal of a Man rooted in a soil", in Pétain's own words (Philippe Pétain "The Reform of Primary School", in: *Revue des Deux Mondes*, August 15th, 1940).

Speaking Hands: Dubuffet and Automatism

But the relationship between Dubuffet's *art brut* and surrealism, in spite of his explicit animosity for the latter, involves far more than the question of his departure from one-point perspective in pictorial representation. In fact, such mechanism of appropriation of specific aspects of surrealist practices at the service of a markedly different ideological agenda seems to lie at the heart of *art brut* on a least two levels: a broader redefinition of automatic writing disconnected from the notion of the surreal, and a major repurposing of surrealist primitivism, shifting its focus from the cosmological transcendentalism of the fetish object to the fixed ontology and symbolic rootedness of the totem.

Dubuffet's "secondary automatism", outlined above, consisted in carefully studying and attempting to recapture the supposedly "instinctual", stereotypical automatism of *brut* productions. His own paintings and his definition of art brut, however, relies on another, more direct type of what one could call his "primary automatism". Broadly speaking, it consists in the gestural spontaneity of the hand, emphasizing the improvisational character of gestures in their confrontation with the resistance of materials.

> *The Hand Speaks*: Respecting the impulsions, the ancestral spontaneities of the human hand when it traces its signs. […] Man, his weaknesses and clumsiness, have to be felt in every detail of the painting. In a line that was meant to be straight, but becomes suddenly shaky (because the artist's hand itself started to shake), or interrupted in places (because tiny irregularities in the material lifted up the painting brush) […] Like the amount of chance occasioned by the materials (it's not exactly chance, […] but rather the impulsions and aspirations of the material itself), the one created by the hand also have to take the stage for a last bow […].[359]

[359] "*La main parle* : Respecter les impulsions, les spontanéités ancestrales de la main humaine quand elle trace ses signes. […] On doit sentir l'homme et les faiblesses et maladresses de l'homme dans tous les détails du tableau. Dans une ligne qui, supposée droite, se met à trembler (parce que la main tremble), interrompue (parce que des petites irrégularités […] ont fait sauter le pinceau) […] De même que les hasards propres des matériaux (ce n'est pas [sic] […] des

The rhetoric deployed by Dubuffet is entirely premised on a form of phenomenological immediacy, according to which the nature of the material and the bodily presence of the painter would be highlighted by privileging rough textures and imperfect drawing at the expense of an impeccable finish and polished appearance. But once again, his denunciation of the inauthenticity of traditional artistic skills has to be taken with a grain of salt. Dubuffet's "return" to physicality and materiality is presented as a revenge of the self-taught, the amateur, and the artisanal against the perceived diminished vitality of "professional" artists. But his folksy, sometimes even outright populist vision of the liberated "speaking hand" owes a lot more to modern art than Dubuffet himself was willing to admit. Under the denunciation of the inauthenticity of finish lies the modernist trope of a reduction of artistic expression and technique to its mere essentials: like Adolf Loos banning "ornament" from the architectural repertoire, or Clement Greenberg trimming off narration and figuration in order to make place for the pure life of form, Dubuffet wants to bring painting back to what he perceives to be its fundamentals: matter and gesture.

Dubuffet's ambiguous reference to chance betrays the avant-garde genealogy of his "speaking hand": not unlike André Breton's *hasard objectif*, chance is supposed to express a higher form of necessity. But this hidden necessity is entirely redefined. In Dubuffet's case, references to a transcendent surreal are replaced by a form of vitalist materialism: painting is the result of the confrontation between two lumps of matter each imbued with their own individual volition, as the "will" of the painter clashes with and only partially "tames" (a word used by Dubuffet

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hasards, mais des velléités et aspirations propres des matériaux), les hasards de la main doivent aussi paraître en scène à la fin de la pièce […]." Jean Dubuffet, "Notes pour les fins-lettrés" [1946], in: *L'homme du commun à l'ouvrage*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973.

throughout the text) the "will" of brute matter, i.e. both of the painter's own body and of the materials he is using (paint, canvas, etc.).

In fact, under the disguise of Dubuffet's "speaking hand", it is relatively easy to distinguish an old surrealist favorite: automatic writing. It is reasonable to assume that on this point, Dubuffet also drew inspiration from his friend André Masson.[360] Adopting a relatively unorthodox position within the surrealist movement, Masson pioneered a new definition of automatic writing as a "movement enamored with itself" [*un mouvement qui s'éprend de lui-même*], [361] abandoning the surreal to privilege a muscular, embodied physicality.[362]

Following in the footsteps of Masson, a number of painters adopted a similar version of what one could call post-surrealist automatic writing, for instance the German painter Karl-Otto Götz, whose practice of automatism aimed at facilitating formal experimentation and innovation, instead of attempting to catch a glimpse of the higher truth of an ever-elusive surreal.[363] Significantly, Dubuffet included in the core canon of *art brut* works that had already attracted the attention of Breton when he was formulating his own definition of automatism: drawings and

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[360] Jean Dubuffet had been a close friend of André Masson since 1922 onwards. On the personal relationship between Masson, Dubuffet, and Limbour, see Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec André Masson*, Marseille: Ryoân-ji, 1985, p.72, and Jakobi and Dieudonné, op. cit., pp. 52-6.
[361] André Masson, "Propos sur le surréalisme" [1961], in: François Levaillant (ed.): *André Masson, le rebelle du surréalisme*, Paris: Herman, 1994, p. 35
[362] In the 1920s, Masson also created a series of "sand pictures", mixing in sand and glue on the canvas, then reworking the thick paste with a brush: such innovative use of new materials, turning the canvas into a one-dimensional surface directly echoing the texture of the ground, for instance in his sand painting *The Dead Horses* [*Les chevaux morts*] (1927) could arguably be described as a precursor to Dubuffet's own work on materiality from the late 1940s onwards.

[363] On K.O. Götz and automatism, see Raphael Koenig, "Karl-Otto Götz", in: *Inventur—Art in Germany, 1943-55* [exhibition catalogue], Cambridge, Ma: Harvard Art Museums and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018

paintings produced by practicing psychics who claimed to be communicating with spirits when put in a trance state.[364] The "speaking hand" evoked by Dubuffet in 1946 is meant to evoke the "clumsiness' and gestural spontaneity cultivated by Dubuffet, that are supposed to be the hallmark of all *brut* productions. But it ultimately remains closely linked with the postwar history of surrealist automatism, and more specifically with the movement's reception of practicing psychics. Dubuffet's theory of artistic reception also seems to be derived from such surrealist practices. Implicitly moving away from traditional notions of esthetic contemplation of a Kantian "balance of faculties", Dubuffet defines reception as an attenuated echo of the gestural spontaneity that presided to the painting's creation:

> The painting will not be looked at passively […], but relived in its elaboration, re-done in the mind, and, as it were, re-acted. […] Internal mechanisms have to be set in motion within the viewer, who will scratch where the painter scratched, rub, dig, chew, push, where the painter did. He feels that all gestures previously done by the painter are being reproduced within him.[365]

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[364] Breton himself reminded his readers of the continuity between art brut and "The Automatic Message" in one of his contributions to the unpublished *Almanac of Art brut* edited by Dubuffet: "In the basement of the Gallery René Drouin, in one of the first group exhibitions of art brut, I immediately felt fascinated by the canvases of Joseph Crépin. Their profoundly 'medianimic' [sic] nature made them unambiguously stand apart from the other exhibits. My encounter with them felt particularly exhilarating, inasmuch it felt like the last stage of a long quest, that previously led to such texts as 'The Automatic Message' and 'Origins and Perspectives of Surrealism'." ["C'est dans le sous-sol de la galerie René Drouin, lors des toutes premières manifestations d'ensemble de l'art brut, que d'emblée les toiles de Joseph Crépin exercèrent sur moi leur fascination. Leur caractère foncièrement 'médianimique' [sic] les distinguait sans hésitation possible des autres œuvres exposées et ma rencontre avec elles eut ceci d'exaltant qu'elle était l'aboutissant d'une longue quête dont portent témoignage un texte comme 'Le Message automatique' et tels passages de 'Genèse et perspective du surréalisme'"] André Breton, "Joseph Crépin", in: Sarah Lombardi and Baptiste Brun (eds.), *Jean Dubuffet et al.: Almanach de l'Art Brut* [facsimile], Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2016 [1948],p.131

[365] "Le tableau ne sera pas regardé passivement […] mais bien revécu dans son élaboration, refait par la pensée et si j'ose dire re-agi. […| Toute une mécanique interne doit se mettre en marche chez le regardeur, il gratte où le peintre a gratté, frotte, creuse, mastique, appuie, où le peintre l'a fait. Tous les gestes faits par le peintre il les sent se reproduire en lui. " Jean Dubuffet, op. cit., p. 45.

Such theory seems fully in line with Dubuffet's Nietzschean notion of new beginnings: as he seems to reject the possibility of appreciating any work from the past (assimilated to a "fossil fish"), the only way to justify any kind of reception is to directly tap into the vitalist outburst of creation. "Re-action": the hyphen emphasizes the fact that Dubuffet intends to distinguish such notion from Nietzsche's concept of reaction as pure negativity attempting to block out the creative potential of action; here, the prefix "re" does not denote "counter", but rather "again", as a slightly attenuated repetition. According to Dubuffet, reception is only valid inasmuch as it echoes the pure positivity of artistic creation as primary action, much like the surface of the Moon reflects the rays of the Sun.

Such notion of "re-action" seems key to understand the underlying criteria of Dubuffet's own appreciation of works of art, first and foremost his selection of works to be included in the emerging canon of *art brut*: inquiries meant to ascertain the *brut* character of a work, later foregrounded in the series of monographs of individual artists published in the *Cahiers de l'art brut* from 1961 onwards, focused on the artists' biographies, and their disconnectedness from traditional mechanisms of artistic validation and training (art schools, mainstream art market, etc.). But such criteria are by no means sufficient: ultimately, Dubuffet's selection is based on a notion of esthetic quality guided by the magnitude and intensity of such "re-action" on the part of the viewer. In other words, Dubuffet's selection of *brut* works ultimately rests upon subjective criteria of esthetic appreciation.

Moreover, Dubuffet's rhetoric of phenomenological immediacy should not detract from the culturally constructed nature of such theory, which Dubuffet mostly inherits from avant-garde

predecessors. The notion that a painting would be the residual trace of the creative experience was already championed by André Masson from the 1920s onwards, and became widespread among the *informel* painters of the late 1940s and early 1950s such as Nicolas de Staël, Hans Hartung, or Henri Michaux (Laude 1976, 65). But from the perspective of artistic reception, such set of criteria also seems to derive from the surrealist theories of the found object analyzed in the previous chapter: Dubuffet's theory of reception as "re-action" could be described as a reformulation of the surrealist "encounter" with the found object, in which the mysteries of the surreal would be replaced by vitalist notions of creative spontaneity.

The range of Dubuffet's *art brut* is arguably more limited than the one of surrealist found objects, as it does not include natural objects, utilitarian, or industrial objects invested with a secondary *causa finalis*. However, as was the case for found objects, the nature of *brut* work (as the result of pseudo-religious mediumnistic practices, the expression of mental illness or disability, or of isolated self-taught practices) is ultimately irrelevant. Their selection is the result of a projection, of an ideologically and historically determined set of parameters presented as an unmediated subjective impression: in other words, of an eminently cultural phenomenon disguised as trans-historical "nature".

4.2 Totem and Terroir: *Brut* Primitivism

Upon reaching the shores of Martinique on the boat that carried them away from war-torn Europe in 1941 alongside with Claude Lévi-Strauss and a number of other French, German, Austrian, Czech, and Spanish refugees, fellow surrealists André Breton and André Masson carried their gaze upwards. A faint glimmer in the canopy seemed to carry the reassurance that, in spite of everything, a new dawn would rise:

> [André Breton]: _Look at this white spot up there, like a gigantic flower… Or it might only be the reverse of a leaf: there's so little wind! Night here must be full of pitfalls, of unknown noises. But the most beautiful sight, the least imaginable, is still the rise of dawn.[366]

Lost in the contemplation of the landscape, Breton and Masson thought of the painted jungles that had sprung forth from the imagination of self-taught artist extraordinaire and longtime modernist and surrealist favorite Henri Rousseau. They came to the somewhat surprising conclusion that the *Douanier*, thanks to his "primitive psychology", had been endowed with mediumistic skills allowing him to intuit the reality of the tropical rainforest without ever experiencing it first-hand, by tapping into "a mysterious communication, a secondary one, that is still possible between all human beings […] beyond the obstacles of civilization". Adding to Breton's already wild speculations, Masson then surmised that Henri Rousseau's gift of clairvoyance might have allowed him to catch a glimpse of humanity's utopian longings:

> One could surmise that Henri Rousseau was the depositary of primeval dreams and desires; the nostalgia of Edenic life in his paintings is particularly striking: the one that permeates Fra

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366 "[André Breton] : _Regarde cette tache blanche là-haut, on dirait une immense fleur mais ce n'est peut-être que l'envers d'une feuille : il y a si peu de vent. La nuit ici doit être pleine de trappes, de bruits inconnus. Mais le plus beau parce que le moins supposable, c'est encore le lever du jour. " André Breton, *Martinique charmeuse de serpents* [1948], in: Marguerite Bonnet (ed.), *André Breton, Œuvres complètes*, Vol. III, Paris: Gallimard, 1999, p.373

Angelico's *Paradise* is much less profound, for instance.[367]

Moving seamlessly from the tip of the canopy to visions of Paradise, these opening paragraphs of André Breton's *Martinique: Snake Charmer*—whose very title is a direct homage to Henri Rousseau—seem to encapsulate the direction and underlying assumptions of surrealist primitivism. Premised upon the notion of a prelapsarian "common ground" of humanity based on the language of the unconscious, it seems carried by an ascending movement that opens it up to a form of transcendence, or at least to a range of utopian aspirations. Conversely, the dynamics of Dubuffet's own blend of primitivism seem to consist in a strong downward pull, compelling him to fix his gaze on the ground. Such tendency could be represented by his 1950 painting *The Geologist* [*Le géologue*] [Fig. 4.4]. A patchwork of overlapping earth-colored surfaces, representing a cross-section of the ground, occupies more than three quarters of the canvas: at the upper left corner, against a thin sliver of sky, a sketch figure of the eponymous geologists holds up a magnifying glass, inviting the viewer to join him in the close contemplation of the texture of the ground and the layers of geological strata below. Dubuffet's geologist simply amounts to a jocular *mise en abyme* of the painter's—and presumably the viewer's—earth-bound gaze, as it seems to revel in an accumulation of pure materiality. It has little in common with Claude Lévi-Strauss' self-portrait as a geologist in *Sad Tropics*:[368] instead of calling for rational understanding of a seemingly chaotic reality, Dubuffet's geologist seems to encourage us to partake in an uncritical mystique of the soil.[369]

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[367] "On pourrait avancer qu'Henri Rousseau était le dépositaire de songes, de désirs séculaires ; la nostalgie d'une vie édénique est chez lui saisissante : je tiens pour bien moins profonde celle que révèlent les *Paradis* de Fra Angelico, par exemple. " André Breton, ibid.

[368] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, Paris : Plon, 1955, p.58-61

[369] For Lévi-Strauss, the geologist offers an apt metaphor fort the task of the structural anthropologist: in the apparent chaos of the landscape, a geologist is able to recognize the forces of erosion, tectonics, etc. that progressively shaped it over time, just like the anthropologist

In spite of their incompatible spatial orientation, *brut* and surrealist primitivism share a common point of departure. They seem to take traditional African and Polynesian sculpture as a model for the exalted role of the work of art and the way it relates to its environment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the so-called primitive "god objects" deeply shaped Breton's theory and practice of surrealist objects by granting them an ontological state of exception opening up to a form of transcendence. Dubuffet's own understanding of the *brut* work is more ambiguous, as it attempts to combine two logically irreconcilable positions: the exalted ontological status of the surrealist "wonder" [*merveille*] and a simultaneous paean to the banal, the overlooked, and the abject. Dubuffet's notion of what he called the "star on every forehead" [*étoile à tous fronts*] testifies to the presence these two conflicting impulses:

> *A Star on Every Forehead*: Expressing one's thought by the means of signs, drawings, and images is as natural to humans as spoken language (as is abundantly clear in children), and does not necessitate any special gifts, contrary to what professional painters say. […] Such an obsession can take hold of anyone, and talks of special gifts and vocations are mere superstitions (sometimes with a hint of imposture).[370]

This passage is often quoted as an unambiguous expression of the strong impulse towards a

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making sense of the confusion of human experiences to discern the laws that govern the underlying mechanisms of social life. Attempting to create order from chaos, Lévi-Strauss remains in the tradition of the Enlightenment; Dubuffet's fascination with the ground, on the other hand, is the expression of deep-seated irrationalist tendencies and problematic celebration of "terroir" that falls squarely in the Anti-Enlightenment camp as defined by Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell. Such fundamental difference in worldviews and political orientations might have been more explicitly addressed in Kent Minturn's recent article on Dubuffet and Lévi-Strauss: Kent Minturn, "Dubuffet, Lévi-Strauss, and the Idea of Art brut", in: *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 46, Polemical Objects (Autumn, 2004), pp. 247-258

[370] "*L'étoile à tous fronts* : Exprimer sa pensée par le moyen des signes, de dessins et d'images est aussi naturel à l'homme que le langage verbal (on le voit bien chez les enfants), et ne nécessite pas les dons spéciaux que les peintres professionnels disent. […] Cette manie peut venir à chacun et dons et vocations ne sont que racontars (teintés d'imposture). " Jean Dubuffet, op. cit., 61.

radical democratization of art underlying Dubuffet's art brut. The reality, however, seems markedly more complex. A number of Dubuffet scholars assumed that the phrase "star on every forehead" had been coined by Dubuffet in this passage of the *Notes for the Well-Read* from 1946. It is, however, merely an adaptation of the image of the "star on the forehead" that became a leitmotif of the surrealist movement to designate a gift of clairvoyance and poetic vision,[371] itself borrowed from the title of a theater play by surrealist favorite Raymond Roussel, *The Star on the Forehead* [*L'étoile au front*] (1924). In Roussel's play, the star on the forehead is linked to the idea of predestination, also prevalent in *Nadja*. In *Notes to the Well Read*, the use of the term signals Dubuffet's polemical intent: his all-out attack on the notion of artistic gift or vocation is not merely targeted at "professional painters" in general, but, more specifically, at the idea of artistic exceptionalism (visionary nature of the artist, exalted ontological status of artistic creation) associated with the surrealist notions of "wonder" and "encounter". But Dubuffet's "star on every forehead" also paradoxically seems to constitute a partial continuation of such notions: if potentially available to every human, the gift of unhindered artistic creation remains the preserve of a handful of creators who, for a variety of reasons, are able to bypass what Dubuffet sees as the otherwise prevalent obstacle of cultural conditioning to directly tap into a form of primitive human expressivity. Such unresolved tension between the banal and the extraordinary seems to underlie the series of monographs dedicated to specific artists published under the title *Cahiers de l'art brut* from 1961 onwards.[372] Dubuffet's glorification of unknown or obscure visual artists is not

[371] It was notably used by Breton in the title of his short text on the Cuban surrealist painter Wifredo Lam from 1942, and in his description of the title character in *Nadja*. One of Nadja's drawings reproduced in the illustrations features an enigmatic self-portrait titled *What Is She?* [*Qu'est-elle ?*], in which Nadja's forehead is adorned with a shining star.

[372] Significantly, the series seems to derive from an aborted writing project pursed by Dubuffet in the 1930s, consisting in a series of biographies of unknown characters written in the style of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, commonly referred to as *Parallel Lives*.

a straightforward praise of the banal. Rather , it seems to derive from the assumption that their work deserve a special, exalted status corresponding to one of the explicit etymological sources of the term *brut*: a "rough diamond" [*diamant brut*], if riddled with imperfections that might make it less valuable as a commodity, is still, for all intents and purposes, made of a precious, rarefied stone.

In that regard, the creators singled out by Dubuffet for their unadulterated artistic creativity belong to a range of categories—such as non-European "primitives", children, the mentally ill, and a range of obsessive self-taught creators—that hardly come as a surprise in the 1940s: they already constituted, the usual suspects of Western primitivism for nearly half a century. The first group on the list, however, the art of so-called non-European "primitives", constitutes the odd one out, and arguably one of the main points of divergence between *brut* and surrealist primitivism. If they are regularly mentioned in Dubuffet's writings, their works are conspicuously absent from the canon of *art brut* established by Dubuffet: the reasons behind such absence doesn't seem to have been thoroughly investigated in the critical literature on Dubuffet so far.

Dubuffet's encounter with African and Polynesian "primitive" art largely shaped his theory and practice of art brut on at least two levels: their formal qualities directly informed his views on the esthetic criteria of the *brut* work; the Western discursive structures that surrounded the reception of such works, first and foremost the largely artificial anthropological distinction between totemism and fetishism, and Western anthropological practices in general, also provided a conceptual and practical framework for Dubuffet's investigating, collecting, publishing, and

displaying strategies of *brut* works.[373] One of the pivotal figures of this transition between what one could call "tribal" and "brut" primitivism is the gallery owner Charles Ratton. Ratton had been a major dealer of non-European traditional arts in Paris from the early 1920s onwards. He was also an early supporter of the surrealist movement, helping the likes of Breton and Éluard organize their occasional sales of African or Polynesian art; the 1936 Surrealist Exhibition of Objects had been held in his gallery.[374] Ratton was then a founding member of Dubuffet's Company of Art brut [*Compagnie de l'art brut*], active between 1948 and 1951, alongside André Breton, Jean Paulhan, Michel Tapié, and Benjamin Péret.

Dubuffet met Ratton in June 1944, when the latter visited his workshop—probably on the recommendation of Paul Éluard—and offered to buy one of his paintings, which was eventually gifted to him by Dubuffet.[375] Shortly thereafter, invited to Ratton's holiday home in Cinqueux, Dubuffet stayed in a room where non-European "primitive" artworks and classics of the "art of the insane" (with which Dubuffet was yet unfamiliar) were displayed side by side. This encounter made a deep impression on Dubuffet, and led him to wonder about a deep affinity between what he perceived as two interrelated forms of "primitive" human expressivity in a letter to Ratton from December 10th, 1944, whose historical importance has been justly emphasized by

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[373] On Dubuffet's use of a methodology (prospection, photographic documentation, cataloguing) largely borrowed from contemporary anthropological practices, see Baptiste Brun, "Réunir une documentation pour l'Art Brut : les prospections de Jean Dubuffet dans l'immédiat après-guerre au regard du modèle ethnographique", Les Cahiers de l'École du Louvre [Online publication] issue 4, 2014, accessed on March 9th, 2017. URL : http://cel.revues.org/487 ; DOI : 10.4000/cel.487

[374] The deep affinities between the invention of the surrealist object and the Western reception of non-European artworks were not merely of a discursive order (the rhetoric of the "god-object"), but were inscribed in the very spatial coordinates of the exhibition.

[375] Philippe Dagen, "Ratton, objets sauvages", in: *Charles Ratton: L'invention des arts "Primitifs"*, Paris: Musée du Quai Branly – Skira Flammarion, 2013, pp.134-146

Philippe Dagen:

With American statues spread out all around the room, […] the Negro sorcerer of the color of liquorish, red chalk, and catechu, that you gave me and that I love so much – it has so much grandeur. The embroideries of that one madman, and the bombastic compositions of that other one,[376] were also really fascinating and I will mention them to Daniel Wallard, who is preparing a book on the works of the insane, to which I am supposed to contribute a little; but as am about to break ground on this new project, I was assailed by a doubt: should we also include the [drawing of the] catechu-colored sorcerer? Couldn't we say that the whole of Africa is mad? And that the flame that animates and illuminates human beings is nothing but the flame of madness?[377]

Dubuffet's letter constitutes a crucial piece of evidence to reconstitute the genealogy of his concept of *art brut*. The grotesque and offensive description of a "mad Africa" deserves relatively little attention, even though such claims equating non-European traditional artworks and rituals to madness were repeated in Dubuffet's later writings on *art brut*.[378] Rather, this letter testifies to the fact that Dubuffet was deeply influenced by an earlier form of "undifferentiated" primitivism, closely related to the one practiced and theorized by the surrealist movement, that put in the

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[376] These two works had been featured in specialized publications on the "art of the insane" since 1907, which were apparently not yet known to Dubuffet: the first one, an anonymous drawing using white thread on a black cloth featuring human-animal hybrid characters, probably came from the same source as the one featured in Marcel Réja's L'art chez les fous (1907); the second one can be readily identified as a pencil drawing by Émile Hodinos, whose works also appear in the illustrations of Réja's work, and are featured prominently in Jean Vinchon's *L'Art et la Folie* (1924), a work that was well-known by the surrealists. (Dagen 2013, 138).

[377] "Avec les statues américaines déployées en éventail autour de la chambre, […] ce sorcier nègre couleur de réglisse et de sanguine et de cachou que vous m'avez offert et que j'aime beaucoup, qui a tant de grandeur. Les broderies du fou, et les grandiloquentes compositions de l'autre fou, étaient bien attachantes étaient bien attachantes et je vais en parler à Daniel Wallard puisqu'il va se mettre à cet ouvrage sur les travaux des fous, auquel il est entendu que je dois un peu collaborer, mais au seuil de cette entreprise me voici déjà perplexe : faut-il y mettre aussi le sorcier cachou ? Toute l'Afrique n'est-elle pas folle ? La flamme qui anime et illumine l'être humain n'est-elle pas la propre flamme de la folie ?" Jean Dubuffet, Letter to Charles Ratton (December 10th, 1944), as quoted in Philippe Dagen, op. cit., p.136

[378] In his "Homage to Savage Values" ["Hommage aux valeurs sauvages"] from 1951, for instance, Dubuffet successively mentioned Papuan masks, Korean shamanic dances, and native American art as productions of mental illness. Jean Dubuffet, op. cit., pp.113-4.

same category the "art of the insane", non-European traditional arts, and various kinds of self-taught and mediumistic productions, in which they perceived the bottom line or "degree zero" of human expressivity. Dubuffet's doubts ("should we also include the [drawing of the] catechu-colored sorcerer?") is an expression of "boundary trouble" whose eventual resolution determined the entire evolution of *art brut*.

Even though non-European artworks like the "catechu-colored sorcerer" were eventually excluded from the canon of *art brut*, they were still featured in Dubuffet's early publications and exhibitions of *brut* works from 1947-1948, even though they already constituted a statistical minority vis-à-vis European artworks. Significantly, the only articles (two out of nineteen) dedicated to non-European artworks in the *Almanac of Art brut* project from 1948 came from surrealist contributors André Breton and Benjamin Péret.[379] The proportion of European versus non-European artworks is comparable in the first major exhibition organized by the Company of Art brut at the René Drouin gallery in 1949 under the title *L'Art brut*: out of approximately 63 exhibited artists, only two, Qadour Douida (Algeria) and Somuk (Papua-New Guinea) hailed from outside of the European continent.[380] Non-European artworks, already a tiny fraction of the emerging art brut canon, were entirely excluded from later art brut exhibitions, for instance the

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[379] André Breton contributed "[Hector] Hippolyte", an article on the voodoo-inspired Haitian painter Hector Hippolyte, whose work he had discovered during his stay in Haiti in late 1945-early 1946. Benjamin Péret also contributed an article whose material was provided by his years spent as a refugee on the American continent, more specifically his long stay in Mexico (1942-1948): an article on the sign paintings of taverns serving fermented pulque [*pulquerias*], which would fall into the general category of folk art. The last stage of the manuscript of the *Almanac of Art brut* makes it clear that Dubuffet was planning on excluding Péret's contribution from the final version, bringing the number of texts dealing with non-European artworks to a single one out of nineteen, or a little over 5%.

[380] For biographies and a selection of representative works of the artists included in the 1949 L'Art brut exhibition, see *Jean Dubuffet's Art brut: The Origins of the Collection* [exhibition catalogue], Lausanne – Paris: Collection de L'Art brut/ Éditions Flammarion, 2016.

monumental exhibition of Jean Dubuffet's art brut collection at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1967, which marked the return of *brut* esthetics as a major component of the French art world after a long interlude during which Dubuffet's collection was displayed at the house of the painter Alfonso Ossorio in Long Island (1951-1963).

Thus, non-European artworks were never a major part of Dubuffet's *art brut*; rather, they seemed to constitute a model of unhindered artistic expression, often mentioned as such by Dubuffet in his writing, paradoxically orienting the formal and theoretical characteristics of *art brut* while being largely kept outside of the body of works that constituted its primary canon. The reasons for such exclusion are not immediately apparent, especially given the fact that Dubuffet's primitivism largely developed on the basis of the undifferentiated primitivism of the likes of Charles Ratton, André Breton, or Paul Éluard.

In a recent article, Dubuffet specialist Baptiste Brun offers the following explanation: uncomfortable with the mechanisms of colonial appropriation underlying the primitivist reception of non-European art, Dubuffet would have decided to make use of an "ethnographic model" to turn such mechanisms of appropriation inwards, dedicating himself to a more politically acceptable ethnography of the self. The idea that the exclusion of non-European artworks from the canon of *art brut* would derive from Dubuffet's deep anti-colonial conviction is of course highly seductive: it is also, unfortunately, entirely unsubstantiated by fact.[381] Rather, the

[381] Baptiste Brun, "Le Fou, le Nègre, le Montagnard. Chercher l'Art Brut aujourd'hui: l'écueil postcolonial de l'essentialisme ?", in: V. Capt, S. Lombardi, V. Meizoz (éd.), *Art Brut : actualités et enjeux critiques*, Lausanne: Antipodes, 2017. Brun fails to offer substantial proof to back up his claims. The essay "Honor to Savage Values" is only mentioned in passing at the end of the article, and simply deemed irrelevant (even though a closer examination of the essay would arguably invalidate Brun's opening thesis), again without further elaboration on Brun's part.

opposite seems to be the case. As explicitly mentioned by Dubuffet in his essay "Honor to Savage Values" (1951), Dubuffet decided to dedicate himself to uncovering the "savage" core of Europeans because the latter were deemed racially superior to the "savagery" of non-European peoples. Affirming his clear preference for the manifestations of what he enigmatically calls the "central vital fire" [*feu central vital*] at the expense of the rational productions of "intelligence", Dubuffet comes to the crux of the essay, in which he connects his esthetic priorities to a notion of racialized difference:

> I am far from sharing the belief that this primordial internal fire would be less intense in Western Man than in any other races. On the contrary! I believe that this strength of blood, this intensity of the vital fluid are, on the contrary, more impetuous in Western Man than in any other races, and, in other words, these 'savage values' that I hold dear above all else, seem to manifest themselves, in our worlds of Europe and America, with a more tempestuous strength than in any other world.[382]

In other words, the major difference between the undifferentiated primitivism of the surrealists and Eurocentric *brut* primitivism cannot be attributed to anti-colonialism, but rather to the influence of the pseudoscientific racism of Gobineau. Dubuffet's interest for non-European artworks can thus be explained in light of his white suprematism: non-European "primitive" works are supposed to lead the way, opening up a path for the restauration of "savage values" in Europe.[383] They are, however, still deemed inferior to their supposed European counterparts, on

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[382] "Je ne crois d'ailleurs nullement que ce feu interne primordial soit moins intense chez l'homme d'Occident que dans les autres races. Bien au contraire ! Je crois que cette force de sang, que cette intensité de fluide vital sont au contraire plus impétueuses chez l'homme d'Occident que dans aucune autre race, et, en d'autres termes, ces 'valeurs sauvages' auxquelles j'attribue plus de prix qu'à toutes autres, me paraissent se manifester, dans nos mondes de l'Europe et de l'Amérique, avec plus de force tempétueuse que dans aucun des autres mondes. " Jean Dubuffet, "Honneur aux valeurs sauvages" [1951], in: *L'homme du commun*, 105.

[383] A case in point would be Dubuffet's sustained interest in the masks of the Swiss valley of Lötschental, leading him to request a contribution on this topic from the Swiss anthropologist Eugène Pittard (reproduced in full in the *Almanac of Art brut*). In his correspondence with Father

the basis of a supplement of "internal fire" attributed to white Europeans, the precise location and possible measurement of which remain conveniently unexplained. At this point, it might be useful to call to mind Éluard's paean to the fetish in his essay "Savage Art" ["L'art sauvage"] (1937), already mentioned: the creation and worship of fetishes was equated to poetic creation as revealing "the magical laws of moral life" [*les lois magiques de la vie morale*] (36) and equated with creations such as Ferdinand Cheval's "Palais Idéal", without any mention of national or ethnic boundaries, fixed identities, or racialized notions of difference. The introduction of pseudoscientific biological racism in Dubuffet's own praise of "savagery" should thus be connected to a much larger shift between surrealist and *brut* primitivism.

As previously mentioned, both blends of primitivism arguably share a common vision of the exceptional ontological status of the work of art as respectively "god-object" and "rough diamond": such notion seems derived from what French philosopher Simondon called the "reticular structure" of reality for magical practices, i.e. the fact that contrary to the use of technical tools that can be applied to any section of reality indifferently, magical objects are associated to the notion of particularly powerful "nods" of reality (for instance mountain tops, caves, certain materials, etc.) offering a privileged vantage point from which to act on the real.[384] In Éluard's description and in surrealist practices in general, such role as "nod" seems to be devoted to fetishes, directly connected to broader cosmological forces as part of what we

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O'Reilly, a Catholic missionary who introduced Dubuffet to the drawings of Somuk, O'Reilly explicitly compared the Lötschental masks to Papuan masks, emphasizing the fact that the anthropological study of non-European cultures is used by Dubuffet as an esthetic model constantly guiding his quest of the *brut* works of "European savages".

[384] Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* [1958], Paris: Aubier, 2012, pp. 162-178.

characterized as the "upwards" tendency of surrealist primitivism.[385]

Dubuffet doesn't seem to have been particularly fond of fetishes.[386] Rather, he seems to have privileged another category of contemporary anthropological literature that had been rather neglected by his surrealist predecessors: the totem.[387] Unlike the cosmological ambitions of the fetish, the totem was described in contemporary anthropological literature as a marker of the identity of a clan, tribe, or individual, for instance by illustrating the etiological myths that constitute the symbolic foundation of its identity. Instead of opening up to the skies above, the totem's firm rootedness in the ground exemplifies the link between the downward dynamics of Dubuffet's primitivism and his predilection for fixed identities and essentialized takes on ethnical belonging. In that regard, Dubuffet's suggestion to the psychiatrist Jean Oury (who was then working at the Saint Alban hospital under the direction of François Tosquelles) is particularly significant. One of the hospital's most famous patients, the self-taught artist Auguste Forestier whose wooden sculptures Dubuffet had recently included in his fledgling collection of art brut,

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[385] Such ascending movement is illustrated in an exemplary way in the final sequence of the French surrealist director Jacques B. Brunius' experimental documentary *Violons d'Ingres* (1939), with a voiceover commentary written and read by Robert Desnos: after exploring the nooks and crannies of the exuberant architecture of self-taught artist Ferdinand Cheval's *Palais Idéal*, the screen fades in onto a vision of an interstellar flight.

[386] Fetishes are only rarely mentioned in Dubuffet's writings, and if so, only pejoratively as a metaphor for false and inauthentic values. For instance, the defense of traditional "cultural" values by what Dubuffet calls a high culture "cast" in his homage to Louis-Ferdinand Céline is compared to the use of fetishes by "Negro sorcerers" [*sorciers nègres*]. Jean Dubuffet, *L'homme du commun*, 217.

[387] The image of the totem appears early on in Dubuffet's writing as a functional metaphor for the work of art, described as a "totem at the crossroads" [*un totem à la croisée des chemins*] in his *Notes to the Well-Read* from 1946 (Dubuffet, ibid., 54).

usually worked in smaller formats, rarely above a meter in length or height. However, Dubuffet had other, rather ambitious plans for further developments of Forestier's work, as he mentioned in a letter to Oury in 1948: "Do you think that he could make a tall sculpture for us, I mean very tall (two meters in height), and we would put it outdoors, in front of our pavilion of Art brut. That would look really swell."[388]

The "tall sculpture" requested by Dubuffet, which would have been put in front of the building that housed his Art brut collection as a form of figurehead, is easily recognizable as a totem, rooting *brut* esthetics into the French ground and giving free rein to the inner "savagery" of the French, as channeled and expressed by Forestier, a self-taught, mentally ill wood carver from the rural, sparsely populated French department of Lozère.

Much to Dubuffet's chagrin, Forestier, who remained more comfortable using smaller formats, failed to deliver the *brut* totem that Dubuffet had hoped for. However, he didn't have to wait for long: in 1949, Dubuffet acquired a number of works for his Foyer de l'Art brut by the self-taught artist Gaston Chaissac. Their totemic intent is obvious: their celebration of rural spontaneity, vertical organization of the figures, and very concrete gestures towards the materiality of the ground, alongside the personality of their creator—who combined a truculent exterior, an utter disdain for the rules of spelling, and a carefully cultivated image as a naïve peasant craftsman—explain Dubuffet's fascination for these works and their creator.[389] Chaissac,

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[388] "Est-ce que vous croyez qu'il serait possible qu'il fasse pour nous une grande statue je veux dire très grande (deux mètres de haut) et nous la mettrions en plein air sur la terrasse devant notre pavillon de L'Art Brut. Ça ferait un effet épatant." Letter from Jean Dubuffet to Jean Oury from November 11th, 1948, "Auguste Forestier" file, Archives of the Collection of Art brut, Lausanne.

[389] Chaissac's folksy self-presentation should be taken with a grain of salt. As he readily admitted himself, his rural persona was partly a mystification: "some of my viewers think that I am a

from whom he borrowed a number of techniques and stylistic traits, could even be described as a role model for Dubuffet, inasmuch as he saw him as incarnating a form of "authentic" peasantry that Dubuffet himself, because of his urban sophistication and comprehensive cultural "conditioning", would never quite be able to reach: "You are an accordion-wielding village artist. I will try to become an accordion-wielding village artist. To be honest, I have been trying to become just that for quite some time", Dubuffet wrote in a letter to Chaissac on November 23rd, 1948.[390] As was to be expected, Dubuffet was particularly fond of Chaissac charcoal sculptures, which, alongside his carved stumps, are the works that engage with the materiality of the ground in the most literal manner.[391] Significantly, Chaissac created a series of similarly elongated sculptures titled "totems" in the late 1950s and early 1960s, making explicit his quest for a form

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saddler, some others are convinced that I am a cobbler, or a priest, others still that I am a tinker, or something else or rather. I have to admit that I have said so many different things that I am not quite sure what to believe myself anymore." ["certains d'entre eux me croient bourrelier, d'autres savetier, d'autres pope, d'autres ferblantier-chaudronnier et je ne sais plus du tout quoi encore. Il est vrai que j'en ai tellement raconté qu'il est difficile de s'y reconnaître"] Gaston Chaissac, Letter to Jean Dubuffet from October 22nd, 1946, op. cit., p.31.
In particular, and even though it is true that he lived in relative poverty in the rural Western French region of Vendée, Chaissac was already a well-established artist when he started a correspondence with Dubuffet. His work, which had already been exhibited in Paris on two occasions, had been championed by the key art and literature critic Jean Paulhan since the late 1930s: thus, Chaissac would hardly qualify as a naïve, uneducated artist, a fact that eventually seemed to dawn on Dubuffet when he abandoned his project of publishing the second issue of his *Cahiers de l'art brut* on the work of Chaissac. Chaissac's works were eventually moved from the Art brut section to the more inclusive "Neuve Invention" section of Dubuffet's collection in the late 1960s.

[390] "Tu es un artiste villageois accordéonneux. Je vais essayer de devenir un artiste villageois accordéoneux. À vrai dire c'est justement ce que j'essaie depuis longtemps." Jean Dubuffet, Letter to Gaston Chaissac, November 23rd, 1948, in : Dominique Brunet and Josette-Yolande Rasle, *Gaston Chaissac – Jean Dubuffet : Correspondance 1946-1964*, Paris: Gallimard, 2013, p.319

[391] "I really like all these things [paintings, drawings, painted stones, tree stumps, etc.], but there is one that I love above all else: your charcoal statue." ["J'aime beaucoup toutes ces choses de toi [peintures, dessins, pierres peintes, souches, etc.], mais il y en a une que j'aime par-dessus toutes les autres et c'est la statue de charbon de bois."] Jean Dubuffet, Letter to Gaston Chaissac of November 15th, 1949, ibid., p.350

of rural primitivism while also paradoxically betraying the modernist origins of his project, logically incompatible with a rhetoric of uneducated spontaneity: *Double-Faced Totem* [*Totem Double Face*] (1961) [Fig.4.5], *Small Totem* [*Petit Totem*] (1963-1964). A number of other sculptures belong to the same series, and are readily identifiable as totems, such as *The Fairy in the Old Clock* [*La Fée de la Vieille Horloge*] (1959-1960), and an untitled wooden sculpture from 1959 [Fig. 4.6]. The latter is 176cm tall, and was acquired by Dubuffet for his art brut collection (now part of the Collection de l'art brut in Lausanne): even though it was not exhibited outdoors, it stands to reason that this sculpture would have come close to what Dubuffet had in mind when he attempted to ask Auguste Forestier for a two-meter tall sculpture. One should also add that Dubuffet asked Chaissac to realize a form of emblem or mascot tentatively called "Monsieur Compagnie de l'art brut", even though this project did not come to fruition (ibid., 327).

The formal and symbolic characteristics of the totem pole remained a major inspiration for Dubuffet, and totem-like shapes appeared in his own work throughout his career. Among many such examples, one could mention *The Reseda* [*Le Réséda*] [Fig. 4.7], a 21 feet (6.5m) tall totem-pole like sculpture somewhat surprisingly installed in the monumental courtyard of a French state-run investment bank, or an even more imposing state-ordered sculpture, the 78 feet (24m) tall *Tower with Figures* [*Tour aux Figures*], first designed in 1967 and completed after Dubuffet's death in 1988 [Fig. 4.8].

4.3 Dubuffet, Céline, and "Degenerate" Art

The bright colors and general playfulness of Dubuffet's *Tower with Figures* seem relatively benign: on closer examination, however, the main constituents of Dubuffet's theory and practice of *art brut* – mystique of the ground, praise of "savagery", insistence on the separateness of ethnic groups with a clear penchant for biological racism – paint a much darker picture. In fact, *art brut* is an inherently oppositional notion. As such, it is part of a broader ideological construct that rests upon a series of binary oppositions ("brut" vs "culture") belonging to a Manichean vision of art and of the world at large as a form of battlefield between the authentic and the inauthentic, the vital and the morbid, that takes its roots in the writings of a number of Anti-Enlightenment writers and thinkers: Friedrich Nietzsche, as previously mentioned, but also Maurice Barrès and Louis-Ferdinand Céline. The deep affinities between Dubuffet's *art brut* and the esthetic theories of such thinkers have been thoroughly neglected in scholarly analyses of Dubuffet's oeuvre to date. However, they seem crucial to understanding the intent and direction of Dubuffet's project: as unsavory as such rapprochement might be, Dubuffet's theory and practice of *art brut* seems much closer to the pamphlets of Louis-Ferdinand Céline than to the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss (Kent Minturn) or the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan (Rachel Perry, Hal Foster), with whom Dubuffet has previously been compared.

Dubuffet's art brut, for instance his "rediscovery" of the Prinzhorn collection in the early 1950s, has often been described as a historical revenge against the Nazi crackdown on what they labeled as "degenerate art": once again, the "art of the insane" was at the center of the preoccupations of the avant-garde, and appreciated for its esthetic value. Rachel Perry, for instance, describes Dubuffet as a champion of the struggle against Nazi discourses on

"degenerate art".[392] However, and as counter-intuitive as it may sound, the opposite seems to be the case: far from contesting them, Dubuffet's *art brut* was in many ways designed as a continuation of such discourses. This is most apparent in Jean Dubuffet's letter to Jean Paulhan, already mentioned at the beginning of the present article, and that should now be quoted in full:

> That's a good one! [When you claim] That Art Brut doesn't exist. What about those 20 notebooks that I just filled out with all that stuff, where do you put them? If something cannot be defined, named, or grasped, that doesn't necessarily mean that it doesn't exist. Naturally, it's very difficult to define it without getting mixed up (I am well aware of that, since I've been on it for 15 days). But a thing might be undefinable, unnamable, ungraspable: it doesn't necessarily mean that it doesn't exist. If there is such a thing as degenerate art, as you agree that there is (go ahead, why don't you write a foreword on degenerate art) (but by the way, which one do you call degenerate?) then it necessarily follows that there must be an original art [*art originel*]! But as you just quoted Mr H[itler], very much on point. I read the whole of *Mein Kampf* without finding a single clear definition of his Nazi stuff, but the darned thing existed, no questions about that! Everyone got it.[393]

Dubuffet's elliptical, allusive writing style in this letter deserves closer scrutiny. The task seems slightly complicated by the disappearance of Paulhan's original letter, destroyed by Dubuffet in the early 1950s: however, it seems possible to extrapolate its contents from Dubuffet's reply. The first crucial point seems to be Dubuffet's cavalier attitude towards the notion of truth, influenced by his reading of Nietzsche: he seems to claim that the question of the existence or non-existence

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[392] Rachel Perry, op. cit., 127-158. Rachel Perry mostly bases this assumption on a reading of the guest books of Dubuffet's exhibitions.

[393] "Naturellement c'est très difficile à définir sans s'embrouiller (j'en sais quelque chose depuis 15 jours que je m'y évertue). Mais de ce qu'une chose est indéfinissable, innommable, insaisissable, ce n'est pas une raison pour qu'elle n'existe pas. S'il y a de l'art dégénéré, puisque de cela tu trouves qu'il y en a (je t'attends à la préface sur l'art dégénéré) (mais au fait lequel des deux appelles-tu dégénéré ?) il faut bien alors qu'il y ait un art originel ! Mais puisque tu cites fort à propos Mr H[itler]. J'ai lu tout son *Mein Kampf* sans y trouver de quoi définir son truc nazi et pourtant il existait son fichtre truc oui ! Tout le monde comprenait. " Jean Dubuffet, Letter to Jean Paulhan, November 7th, 1945, in: Julien Dieudonné and Marianne Jakobi (eds.), *Jean Dubuffet – Jean Paulhan, Correspondance* (1944-1968), Paris: Gallimard, 2003, p. 24

of art brut raised by Paulhan needs to be reframed in terms of the truth-creating abilities of an act of the will: *art brut* is less the description of an existing phenomenon that a sort of program, an esthetic "will to power" able to create its own truth. The fact that Dubuffet felt the need to claim that conceptual haziness would not detract from the possible real-world impact of such program based on his reminiscences of *Mein Kampf* is undoubtedly disturbing, as Dubuffet seems to conceive of his own project as structurally analogous to the rise of Nazism.[394]

Paulhan played a crucial role in the organizing of resistance activities among French intellectuals, for which he was briefly interrogated and imprisoned. He was also a founding member of the National Council of the Resistance: one could hardly suspect him of harboring Nazi sympathies, and Dubuffet's *Mein Kampf* allusion could be seen as a mere provocation or off-color joke. But it should also be emphasized that Dubuffet's sympathies for Nazi ideology might have been much deeper than what he would have expressed in his letter to Paulhan.[395]

On a conceptual level, Dubuffet's reference to "degenerate art" might be even more disturbing. It also happens to be logically incompatible with the notion of a programmatic act of the will, as it gestures more towards a positive truth content. The existence of "degenerate" art as

[394] Interestingly, such analogy is premised upon the use of language and unprecise, supposedly "intuitive" thought: such description seems to correspond to the main characteristics of Nazi rhetoric as analyzed by Viktor Klemperer in *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (1947).

[395] As a matter of fact, his abrupt affirmation that the lack of clarity of *Mein Kampf* did not hinder its success is echoed in its very formulation in his own art brut manifesto: "Art brut is art brut, everyone got that" sounds eerily similar to "the darned [Nazi]thing existed, no questions about that! Everyone got that." (in the original French, only the tense of the verb differs: "tout le monde a très bien compris" for the former vs. "tout le monde comprenait") for the latter.

a real existing category seems to be a point of agreement between Paulhan and Dubuffet: the latter, however, appears to suggest a definitional shift that could be described as the notional foundation of *art brut*. "Which one do you call degenerate?", Dubuffet pointedly asks: he seems to intimate that the "real" degenerate art might not necessarily be the one described in standard Nazi propaganda. Based on the corpus of Dubuffet's writings on *art brut*, one can reasonably formulate the assumption that he intended to switch both categories: traditional academic or so-called "cultural" art being now deemed inauthentic, de-vitalized, and potentially morbid, and "primitive" artistic expressions such as the "art of the insane" being held up as a paramount of vitality, authenticity, and fullness of expression. In other words, the "art of the insane" would move over across the street and occupy the position previously held by the Nazi-approved "bio-positive" art of the likes of Arno Breker of the *Great German Art Exhibition*.

The importance of Dubuffet's recuperation of the ideological discourse of "degenerate art" should not be underestimated. The preface that Dubuffet alluded to in his letter, and that he was somewhat laboriously putting together in November 1945, was eventually published in abridged form in 1947 under the title *L'Art brut*: it provided the ideological basis for all subsequent iterations and reformulations of the concept. In fact, with relatively few exceptions, Dubuffet's theorization of art brut remained remarkably consistent throughout his career: the month of November 1945 could thus be described as the moment of the actual "birth" of art brut, corresponding to a more sedentary period of reading and writing following in the heels of Dubuffet's nomadic quest for art brut during his travel to Switzerland of July 1945, in the company of Jean Paulhan and Corbusier. Dubuffet's letter to Paulhan offers a privileged window into the period of formation of the notion; the conceptual tensions and disturbing political undertones apparent in this letter could be said to have determined the whole evolution of

Dubuffet's *art brut*.

First of all, what Dubuffet seems to present as mere switch between the respective positions of the "degenerate" and the "authentic" is actually a more complex operation. In fact, Dubuffet conveniently appears to forget that the "art of the insane" was deemed "degenerate" alongside the works of the avant-garde, which was the primary target of the Nazi regime. But Dubuffet's broad concept of "culture" encompasses both traditional academic art and the avant-garde, rejected wholesale as the productions of a "cast" peddling false, inauthentic values. In that regard, the denunciation of surrealism as "morbid" and "stagnant" by Limbour and Dubuffet in *Comœdia* on July 8th, 1944 was in line with the notion of the "degeneration" of the avant-garde peddled by Nazi Germany and echoed by the Vichy regime. Taking a closer look at the editorial line and political leanings of *Comœdia* would arguably reinforce the hypothesis of a continuity between fascist and *brut* denunciations of the avant-garde. As noted by leading historians of the Vichy regime Julian Jackson, *Comœdia* occupied an ambiguous position with the French literary world under Nazi occupation, as a "discreet" collaborationist newspaper that carefully avoided explicitly political topics, but whose claims of "neutrality" were deeply compromised by its involvement with Vichy and Nazi authorities, both ideologically and economically.[396] Cocteau,

[396] "The risk of guilt by association was particularly insidious in the case of the cultural magazine *Comœdia*, launched in 1941. *Comœdia* was soon attracting the cream of literary Paris much more successfully than the NRF. Contributors included Cocteau, Colette, Paul Valéry, Claudel, and Jean-Louis Barrault. It was here that Cocteau published his homage to Breker. *Comœdia* contained nothing directly political, but every issue carried a page on 'European' culture. This was not an innocent Europe: it meant primarily Germany (Bayreuth, Mozart, 'contemporary German poetry') but also Italy, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia. The European page was under the control of the German Institute. […] Was the European cultural orientation of the magazine not a form of 'soft' collaboration? Whether it was acceptable to contribute to *Comœdia* continued to exercise many writers who had no doubts that it would not be acceptable to write for the NRF." Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.315.
Christine Lombez's in-depth analysis of the European page of *Comœdia*, especially of its section

for instance, published his infamous homage to official Nazi sculptor Arno Breker in *Comœdia*: it is thus quite telling that Dubuffet and Limbour saw it fit to publish the first *art brut* manifesto in the same journal. If the bulging granite muscles of Breker's "Aryan" athletes show relatively little commonalities with the *brut* esthetics of Dubuffet, at least on a purely formal level, another article published in *Comœdia* seems to echo their preoccupations in significant and largely disturbing ways.

The article "Towards a Return to an Art of Popular Tradition" ["Vers un retour à un art de tradition populaire"] was published in *Comœdia* on January 31st, 1942. It was written "on the occasion of the exhibition of children's drawings created as an homage to Marshall [Pétain]", held at the Musée Galliera in Paris in January 1942, by the exhibition's curator, the minor painter and man of letters Henri d'Amfreville.[397] In *Comœdia*, d'Amfreville waxes lyrical on the contribution by these drawing by young children (between the ages of eight and fourteen) to the

titled "European Library" [*Bibliothèque européenne*] leads her to partially contest the term "soft collaboration" used by Jackson: for Lombez, the editorial policy of the journal was conditioned by "filters and more or less subtly expressed prejudices that confirm the hold of a German ideological line" ["présence de filtres et de parti-pris plus ou moins subtilement exprimés qui vont dans le sens d'une mainmise idéologique allemande sur la ligne éditoriale du magazine"]. Lombez further notes that the publication of *Comœdia* coincided exactly with the temporal extension of German military occupation (june 1940 to August 1944). In spite of the magazine's general policy of avoiding explicitly political topics, Lombez would thus be more inclined to subscribe to French historian Jean-François Sirinelli's characterization of *Comœdia* as "one of the crown jewels of the collaborationist press." See Christine Lombez, "Critique, traduction et propagande dans la presse française de l'Occupation : l'exemple de *Comoedia* (1941-44) ", in: M. Finck, T. Victoroff, E. Zanin (et al.), *Littérature et expériences croisées de la guerre, apports comparatistes. Actes du XXXIXe Congrès de la SFLGC*, URL : http://sflgc.org/acte/christine-lombez-critique-traduction-et-propagande-dans-la-presse-franca ise-de-loccupation-lexemple-de-comoedia-1941-44/, accessed on August 15th, 2018.

[397] On Henri d'Amfreville and the exhibition of children's drawings at the Galliera Museum in January 1942 in the context of the Vichy regime's cultural and artistic policy, see Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *Histoire de l'Art: Paris 1940-1944, Ordre National – Traditions et Modernités*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986, p.42-4.

regime's program of esthetic, social, and political "regeneration" of the French nation. These young children, he claims in all seriousness, would feel instinctively drawn to the reassuring, protective figure of Pétain and shower him with marks of affection on their own accord. Moreover, the unbridled artistic freedom that d'Amfreville perceives in their drawings and paintings—which, as he explicitly mentions, should be disconnected from harmful notions of political freedom—are due to the fact that these children haven't been exposed to the toxic effects of education, commerce, and "decadent" artistic movements such as Cubism:

A rare gift of invention often animates these images. Each *terroir* finds its expression in them. […] This instinctive outburst of a young generation [is] concomitant with a broader return to regional values. […] Whereas countryside children can hold on to their personal fantasy for longer, urban children have a distinct tendency to only copy what they see. […] Imitation and education have killed primitive inspiration […] But who were the ancestors of the children whose works are now exhibited at the Galliera Museum? […] They were sculpting with their own blood and the monks, their masters, only taught them to carve stone, mix pigments, draw gestures, and compose simple scenes. They were thus freer than us, because they only obeyed to their own personal song [*chanson*] without being contaminated by noxious surroundings. […| The homage of the children of France to Marshall [Pétain] thus allows us to consider art from the perspective of the National Revolution […] Popular artistic creation will not be overlooked anymore. It will regain its rightful place.[398]

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[398] "Un rare don d'invention anime souvent ces images. Chaque terroir s'y exprime. […] Ce jaillissement instinctif d'une jeune génération au moment où s'opère un retour aux valeurs régionales. […] Si les petits campagnards peuvent conserver longtemps cette fantaisie, l'écolier des villes n'a que trop tendance à vouloir copier ce qu'il voit. […] L'imitation et l'enseignement ont tué l'inspiration primitive […] Mais quels étaient donc les aïeux des enfants dont vous verrez les œuvres au Musée Galliera ? […] Ils sculptaient avec leur sang et les moines, leurs maîtres, ne leur apprenaient qu'à tailler la pierre, broyer les couleurs, dessiner les gestes ou composer les sujets. Ils étaient donc plus libres que nous parce qu'ils n'obéissaient qu'à leur propre chanson sans pouvoir être atteints par une ambiance redoutable. […] Voici comment l'hommage des enfants de France au Maréchal [Pétain] nous conduit à envisager l'art sous l'angle de la Révolution nationale […] La création artistique populaire ne sera plus méconnue. Elle retrouvera sa place. " Henri d'Amfreville, "Vers un retour à un art de tradition populaire. En marge de l'exposition de dessins d'enfants en hommage au Maréchal." *Comœdia*, January 31st, 1942, pp.1-2.

The main theses defended by d'Amfreville: praise of instinctual representation, of local inspiration and *terroir*, exaltation of the French countryside as opposed to the pernicious influence of urban life, rejection of artistic education, and empowering virtues of ignorance that would allow artists to develop entirely on their own and be true to their own *chanson* offer troubling similarities with the *brut* esthetics first presented by Limbour and Dubuffet in the same magazine two years later. Another article simultaneously published by d'Amfreville in the daily newspaper *L'Illustration* (January 3rd to 10th, 1942) offers further clues on the relationship between what one could term "Vichy primitivism" and the avant-garde. Reflecting on his experience as a member of the evaluating committee for the children's drawings competition that led to the same exhibition, d'Amfreville launches into a frontal attack against psychoanalysis and the avant-garde:

"I also concluded to the absence of any sickly feeling. The extreme purity of children's imagination invalidates […] *the deductions of Freud and of the surrealists*, who want to make childhood a part of their intellectual obsessions. In these instinctive testimonies where imagination is given free rein, I only found complete freshness. […] The works of schoolchildren from the countryside stands in sharp contrast from those of their urban counterparts. Far from shop windows and bad examples, young peasants remain true to their own dreams; their impressions are more original and *akin to the art of the Primitives*. Among nature, […] popular art is more deeply rooted." [emphasis mine][399]

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[399] ["J'ai aussi constaté l'absence de tout sentiment morbide. L'extrême pureté de l'imagination enfantine est un démenti aux imaginations de M. Cocteau, aux déductions de Freud et des surréalistes, qui veulent faire participer l'enfance à leurs obsessions intellectuelles. Devant ces témoignages instinctifs où la fantaisie se donne libre cours, je n'ai trouvé que fraîcheur. […] On sépare aisément les œuvres des écoliers des villes de ceux des campagnes. Loin des devantures et des mauvais exemples, les jeunes paysans restent imprégnés de leurs rêves ; ils ont les impressions les plus originales et rejoignent l'art des primitifs. C'est […] parmi la nature que la tradition populaire est le plus solidement enracinée."] Henri d'Amfreville, "Le Noël du Maréchal". in: *L'Illustration*, January 3rd to 10th, 1942

D'Amfreville thus opposes the alleged "purity" of children's drawings to the pathological, prurient "intellectual obsessions" of psychoanalysis and surrealism. By equating children's art to the "art of the Primitives", however, he also seems to gesture towards a blend of Modernist Primitivism also incarnated by surrealism: d'Amfreville's "Vichy primitivism" thus subscribes to the Primitivist agenda, broadly defined, but now entirely divorced from the language of the unconscious favored by the surrealists, deemed "degenerate". Dubuffet and Limbour's manifesto seems to define their own blend of primitivism very much along similar ideological lines: in their denunciation of surrealism as "morbid", one could justifiably see an echo of d'Amfreville's own polemic against surrealism, and more generally of the fascist rhetoric of "degenerate art" rejecting the whole of the avant-garde as pathological.

I would contend that only Dubuffet's adhesion to the ideology of "degenerate art" could explain one of the most bizarre aspects of his *art brut* theory: the rejection of any form of impact of mental illness or disability on artistic production. Dubuffet's *bon mot* on the subject has been quoted in nearly every publication devoted to the history of *Art brut*, but its meaning never seems to have been entirely clarified:

> Madness makes you lighter, gives you wings, and makes you a seer, as it seems: a large number (nearly half) of the objects in our [art brut] collection were made by clients [sic] of psychiatric hospitals. But we see no reason why, as some do, this should be made into a separate category. […] The art function is the same in all cases and there is no more art of the insane than there is an art of the dyspeptics or of people with a bad knee.[400]

[400] "La folie allège son homme, lui donne des ailes et aide à la voyance, à ce qu'il semble, et nombre des objets (près de la moitié) que contient notre collection sont l'ouvrage de clients d'hôpitaux psychiatriques. Nous ne voyons aucune raison d'en faire, comme le font certains, un département spécial. […] La fonction d'art est dans tous les cas la même et [il] n'y a pas plus d'art des fous que d'art des dyspeptiques ou des malades du genou. " Jean Dubuffet, *L'Art brut préféré aux arts culturels* [1949], in: L'homme du commun, p.92

The paradoxical nature of these claims is not lost on Dubuffet himself: while readily admitting that he largely borrowed from existing collections of art produced in psychiatric institutions (including the Prinzhorn collection, the collection of the Swiss psychiatrist Charles Ladame, and the productions of the art therapy workshop of Saint Alban), Dubuffet rejects the pertinence of mental illness as a taxonomical factor, only vaguely admitting to a problematic "empowerment" conferred by madness, that would allow artists to free themselves from cultural conditioning. Dubuffet's dismissal of the "art of the insane" as a category is part of a larger cultural movement: after 1945, the "art of the insane" never regained the central position it occupied in the art world during the interwar period.[401]

The reasons behind Dubuffet's dismissal are usually described as circumstantial: dismissing the well-established discourse of the "art of the insane", which predates his own *art brut* collection by several decades, allowed Dubuffet to insist on the absolute originality of *art brut*, in line with his ideology of the *tabula rasa*. However, an explanation that would take into account the relationship between art brut and the discourse of "degenerate art" seems arguably more satisfactory. In such binary system of oppositions, if traditional and avant-garde art occupy the position of the inauthentic and "sickly", it necessarily follows that the "brut" (which includes, but is not limited to, what was previously knowns as the "art of the insane") stands for a positively connoted ontological plenitude of pure authenticity and vitality. It seems simply impossible for Dubuffet to introduce any form of nuance in such Manichean system: the eminently "healthy" category of *brut* cannot be associated with "bio-negative" notions such as disease, handicap, and mental illness in any significant way, which could be said to constitute its theoretical blind spot.

[401] Notable exceptions are Karel Appel's *Psychopathological Notebooks* (1950), or André Breton's essay "The Art of the Insane, The Key to the Fields" (1948).

One of the major difficulties in understanding Dubuffet's theory of art is that it seem to combine two seemingly conflicting imperatives: on the one hand, an absolute originality of the work as an expression of the artist's inner world, free of outside influence; on the other, the importance of "rootedness", i.e. of belonging to an "imagined community" defined alongside local, ethnic, or national lines. Both requirements are indeed logically incompatible: if the former is premised upon a form of radical individualism emphasizing personal artistic freedom, the latter is necessarily based on determinism, as the "imagined community" in question partly dictates the form and content of the work of art. Dubuffet has often been described as an individualist or even an anarchist, for instance by the art critic Michel Ragon; however, Dubuffet's simultaneous insistence on local or even racialized determinism puts him squarely in the camp of French ultra-reactionary thinkers.

Such unlikely combination of individualism and ethno-nationalist determinism is far from being original to Dubuffet's thought: tellingly, Henri d'Amfreville deployed the same rhetoric in his pro-Vichy paean to children's drawings in 1942, by linking the development of the artists' individual *chanson* to their faithfulness to the *terroir*.

In fact, such combination had been a leitmotiv of the French extreme right since the 1880s. As comprehensively demonstrated by Zeev Sternhell, it comes directly from the work of the ultra-nationalist thinker and man of letters Maurice Barrès,[402] who linked what he called the "Cult of the Self" [*culte du Moi*] to a mystique of the soil as a locus of ethno-racial belonging in bestsellers such as *The Inspired Hill* [*La Colline inspirée*] (1913), while denouncing in *The Uprooted* [Les Déracinés] (1897) what he perceived as the pernicious influence of a supra-national culture and morality (primarily, but not exclusively neo-Kantian ethics) supported by the secular French

[402] Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, Paris : Armand Colin, 1972

education system, that would "uproot" the youth and make it impossible for them to reconnect with their "true nature". For Barrès, the only way to be true to one's self was to reject "intellectual" universalism in order to reconnect with the hazily defined, organic and emotional community of "national energy" [*énergie nationale*], thus allowing one to channel one's personal "vital impetus" [*élan vital*].

Barrès' terminology might be oddly reminiscent of the kind of pseudoscientific ravings usually found in self-help books and New Age gurus; it was, however, immensely influential throughout the first half of the twentieth century and became a major weapon in the ideological arsenal of the French extreme right. In *The Childhood of a Leader* [*L'enfance d'un chef*] (1939), Jean-Paul Sartre provided a bitterly ironic description of the seductive powers of Barrès' thought. Not unlike Jean Dubuffet, the main character of the story, Lucien Fleurier, was raised in a small-town conservative French bourgeois family before coming to Paris, where he felt alienated and felt successively attracted to different political ideologies and esthetic tendencies, including surrealism. But his reading of Barrès' *The Uprooted* felt like a revelation that determined his adhesion to violent proto-fascist groups:

From the first pages, Lucien was seduced […] To the disgusting and lubricious beasts of Freud, Lucien largely preferred the flower-scented, agrarian unconscious that Barrès offered him. In order to be able to grasp it, he had to study the soil and the subsoil of [his hometown of] Férolles, he had to decipher the meaning of its rolling hills […] or he just had to move back to Férolles, and live there: he would find it lying at his feet, benign and fertile, spread out through the Férollian countryside, mixed in with the forests, the springs, and the grass, like a nourishing humus from which Lucien would draw the strength to finally become a Leader.[403]

[403] "Dès les premières pages, il fut séduit […] combien il préférait aux bêtes immondes et lubriques de Freud, l'inconscient plein d'odeur agrestes dont Barrès lui faisait cadeau. Pour le saisir […] il fallait qu'il étudiât le sol et le sous-sol de [sa ville natale de] Férolles, qu'il déchiffrât le sens des collines onduleuses […] ou bien, tout simplement, il devait retourner à Férolles, y vivre : il le trouverait à ses pieds, inoffensif et fertile, étendu à travers la campagne férollienne, mêlé aux bois, aux sources, à l'herbe, comme un humus nourrissant où Lucien puiserait enfin la force de devenir un chef. " Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'enfance d'un chef* [1939], Paris: Gallimard, 2005, p.104.

The parallels between Lucien Fleurier's fascistic agrarian reverie and Jean Dubuffet's esthetic theories are obvious. Describing the laborious efforts of a Cézanne-inspired naturalist painter in his *Notes to the Well-Read* of 1946, Dubuffet deplored that painting had "forgotten its natal *terroir*", one that would include popular arts, unsophisticated craftsmanship, and "the traces of one's heel on the ground" (22). The reason for what Dubuffet described as Western culture's lack of vitality and general inauthenticity was ultimately that it failed to celebrate the "savage" values of "instinct, passion, whim, violence, and delirium" and was thus severed off from its "living roots" [*elle n'a plus de racines vivantes*], as Dubuffet wrote with unmistakably Barrèsian undertones in the opening paragraphs of his manifesto titled "Anti-Cultural Positions" [*Positions anticulturelles*] (1951).

Given the intimate connection between originality and *terroir* in Dubuffet's *brut* esthetics, it seems fairly logical that its polar opposite, the degenerate "cultural arts", would be accused of the dual sins of imitation and cosmopolitanism:

> What country doesn't have its section of cultural art, its squadron of professional intellectuals? It never fails. From one capital to the next, they all keep aping each other: they practice an artificial art, *an Esperanto art*, incessantly copied everywhere, can it still be called art? Does such activity still have anything to do with art?[404] [emphasis mine]

Any notion of international style is anathema to Dubuffet: given that the Barrèsian "Cult of the Self" can only be performed by renewing one's allegiance to one's roots and *terroir*, a form of artistic expression that would transcend national and ethno-linguistic boundaries is thus *ipso facto*

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[404] "Quel pays qui n'ait sa petite section d'art culturel, sa brigade d'intellectuels de carrière? C'est obligé. D'une capitale à l'autre, ils se singent tous merveilleusement et c'est un art artificiel qu'ils pratiquent, un art espéranto, partout infatigablement recopié, peut-on dire un art ? Cette activité a-t-elle quoi que ce soit à voir avec l'art ?" Jean Dubuffet, "L'art brut préféré aux arts culturels" [1949], in: *L'homme du commun*, p. 87

inauthentic. But the advent of a degenerate "Esperanto art" is not merely described as a result of a broader, impersonal socio-historical evolution: according to Dubuffet, such "degeneration" is actively and purposefully fostered by a number of artists and intellectuals. This Manichean vision of art and society amounting to a highly reactionary conspiracy theory is directly inherited from discourses on "degenerate art", and the pamphlets of Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

Louis-Ferdinand Céline occupies a privileged position in Dubuffet's writings: whereas Dubuffet generally steadfastly refused to acknowledge any form of influence on his work in the name of his esthetics of the *tabula rasa*, he was very open about his unbounded admiration for Céline, and the impact (both stylistic and thematic) that his writings had on his own oeuvre.[405]

Uncharacteristically, Dubuffet openly acknowledged his debt to Céline in the essay *Céline Pilot* [*Céline pilote*], published in 1964: in the title, "pilot" does not refer to airplanes, but to the more traditional meaning of "a person with expert local knowledge qualified to take charge of a ship entering or leaving a harbor" (OED): in other words, Dubuffet openly referred to Céline as an intellectual and moral guide. But taking a closer look at Céline's political positions and esthetic theories, and their disturbing proximity to Dubuffet's, would rather lead us to believe that his elected "pilot" led him to crash unto the unforgiving reefs of a sinister conspiracy theory.

Dubuffet was of course bound to appreciate Céline's innovative use of slang and familiar turns of phrases, constituting a notable departure from the conventions of French literary style, in novels such as his celebrated debut *Journey to the End of the Night* [*Voyage au bout de la nuit*] (1932): such use of popular language deeply resonated with Dubuffet's own *brut* esthetics. But Céline was also a notorious and enthusiastic collaborationist, and the author of three well-distributed, rabidly anti-Semitic pamphlets, in which he made ample use of biological racism, conspiracy theories, and

[405] For a comprehensive review of the relationship between Dubuffet and Céline, see "Une amitié particulière", in Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné, op. cit., p.300-314

racist slurs while unambiguously calling for the slaughter of the Jewish population of Europe: *Bagatelles for a Massacre* [*Bagatelles pour un massacre*] (1937), *The School of Corpses* [*L'École des cadavres*] (1938), and *The Nice Sheets* [*Les Beaux Draps*] (1941). Given their broad diffusion, the echo they received in the press, and his personal admiration for Céline, it is simply impossible that Dubuffet would not have been aware of the contents of these pamphlets: his claim that Céline would only have been presented "as a so-called racist and pro-Nazi polemicist"[406] as a result of a vicious and libelous smear campaign of what other politicians of a similar obedience would have called "fake news" thus constitutes a blatant and brazen attempt at historical manipulation. It is of course difficult to ascertain the degree of proximity between Dubuffet's *art brut* and Céline's views in the absence of their correspondence, which was purposefully destroyed by Dubuffet.[407] However, given the extreme care with which Dubuffet maintained and curated his own archives, and the high regard in which he held Céline, it is fair to assume that it contained compromising passages that would have shed new light on the extent of Dubuffet's racism and anti-Semitism.[408]

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[406] Jean Dubuffet, "Céline Pilote" [1964], in : *L'homme du commun à l'ouvrage*, p. 216

[407] On the destruction of this apparently ample correspondence by Dubuffet and its few remaining traces, see "Jean Dubuffet", in: Gaël Richard, Éric Mazet, and Jean-Paul Louis, *Dictionnaire de la correspondance de Louis-Ferdinand Céline*, Vol. 1, Tusson (Charente): Du Lérot, 2013, p.266-8.

[408] In an attitude that was shared by other followers of Céline, Dubuffet remained relatively discreet about the extent of his personal racism, in the context of what seems to be part of a deliberate strategy—which doesn't mean that such views didn't exert a covert influence on his work. Annick Duraffour and Pierre-André Taguieff's description of post-1945 "Céline fans" in their authoritative study of Céline's racism and anti-Semitism seems to be an apt description of Dubuffet's attitude: "Who would [publicly] proclaim today that they take Céline's pamphlets seriously […] and really believe […] in the existence of a global Jewish conspiracy? Anti-Semitic Céline fans tend to self-censor in their public declarations and their published writings, and generally remain discreet on the issue. A broad anti-conformism tinged with anarchism, whose figurehead used to be the writer Albert Paraz […] constitutes their default position, corresponding to the 'rebellious' image that they like to project." ["Qui oserait avancer [publiquement] qu'il prend les pamphlets de Céline au sérieux […] au point de croire […] à l'existence d'un complot juif mondial? […] Les célinistes antijuifs pratiquent l'autocensure dans leurs déclarations publiques et leurs écrits publiés et, en règle générale, s'avancent masqués. L'anticonformisme anarchisant, dont Albert Paraz […] avait été l'incarnation, reste cependant

However, his deeply racist convictions were well-known to his contemporaries[409]; so was his concomitant praise of the "Aryan" nature of white Europeans[410]. What is less known, however, is the extent to which such views shaped Dubuffet's project of *art brut*. Dubuffet's paranoid description of the "army of international clerics" busily falsifying culture and hindering the rise of authentic (and "rooted") forms of artistic expression first remains largely hazy:

I regret to say that my personal impression is that a whole army of international clerics is dealing in thin air, hollow works, without content, counterfeit currency, a parody of art devoid of any value. And all this noisy publicity […] only tends to intimidate, discourage, forbid, paralyze, and kill real art, wherever it might attempt to manifest itself.[411]

A cursory view at the parodic "calendar of Saints" that was meant to foreground Dubuffet's aborted editorial project of an *Almanac of Art Brut* (1948) gives a more precise idea of the identity of Dubuffet's the members of Dubuffet's nefarious "army of international clerics": it includes a motley crew of "Saints" alluding to traditional academic art like "St Chermaître", international finance and the powers of money such as "Holy Checkbook" ["Saint Carnetdechèque"] or the holiday of "Company Ltd." ["Société en participation"], but also, at the other end of the political spectrum, pointed attacks against the artistic influence of the French communist party such as

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leur drapeau, justifiant l'image du 'rebelle' qu'ils se plaisent à donner d'eux-mêmes."] Annick Duraffour and Pierre-André Taguieff, *Céline, la race, le Juif: Légende littéraire et vérité historique*, Paris: Fayard, 2017, p.20

409 On this point, see Kent Minturn, *Contre-Histoire: The Postwar Art and Writings of Jean Dubuffet* [unpublished dissertation], Columbia University, 2007, p.230

410 See for instance Jean Dubuffet's letter to Jacques Berne from April 29th, 1949, in: Jean Dubuffet and Jacques Berne, *Lettres à J.B.*, Paris: Hermann, 1991, p.47

411 "Je regrette de dire que mon impression est que toute une armée de clercs internationaux manipule du vent, des œuvres creuses, dénuées de contenu, de la fausse monnaie, une parodie de l'art sans valeur aucune. Et toute cette remuante réclame […] a pour seul effet d'intimider, de décourager et de frapper d'inhibition, de paralysie et de mort le vrai art, partout où il pourrait avoir des velléités de se manifester. " Jean Dubuffet, "Honor to Savage Values", in: *L'homme du commun*, p.101

"Saint PainteroftheParty" ["Saint Peintreduparti"] or "St Éluard". In 1948, such broad spectrum of detestation was shared by Dubuffet and other members of the Company of Art brut, especially the remaining "orthodox" surrealists André Breton and Benjamin Péret. The latter, who opposed the growing influence of the French communist party on art and literature (including on former members of the surrealist group like Louis Aragon and Paul Éluard), had just launched a violently polemical attack against Éluard titled *The Dishonor of Poets* [*Le Déshonneur des poètes*] (1945), a direct answer to Éluard's famous praise of *littérature engagée* and its contribution to the resistance against Nazi occupation in the opening essay of the poetry anthology he edited (alongside Pierre Seghers and Jean Lescure) and published clandestinely in 1943, *The Honor of Poets* [*L'Honneur des poètes*]. Neither Breton nor Péret can be suspected of having sympathized with the Vichy regime: they went into exile very early on (1941), and had been actively denouncing the rise of fascism since the 1920s. Their temporary alliance with Dubuffet was mostly a tactical one: not only did his project seem to continue and revive their long-standing interest for the "art of the insane" and other "primitive" forms of artistic expression, thus potentially breathing new life into surrealist esthetics, but it also offered what was presented by Dubuffet as an apolitical "art for art's sake" close to the positions defended by Paulhan, which understandably appeared to them as the perfect antidote against the kind of "return to order" and increasingly traditional esthetic doctrine promoted by the Stalin-era communist party.

If Dubuffet's *art brut* was thus primarily chosen for that purpose, it has to be emphasized that for Breton, Péret, and Paulhan, Dubuffet made for a strange bedfellow. They seemed increasingly uneasy with Dubuffet's crypto-fascist tendencies. Dubuffet repeatedly urged Paulhan to fly to the defense of an "unjustly accused" [!] Céline: but while Paulhan accepted to publish him in his well-regarded literary review *Les Cahiers de la Pléiade*, he refused to provide Céline with a platform for his violent diatribe against Jean-Paul Sartre (who had just denounced his attitude during the

occupation in his 1945 essay *Portrait of an Anti-Semite*), titled *À l'agité du bocal* (best translated as *To That Nutcase*) in 1948, and also refused to join the ad-hoc "Committee for the Appreciation of the Writings of Louis-Ferdinand Céline" [*Comité des amateurs de écrits de Céline*] put together and chaired by Dubuffet in 1953. Such dissensions between Dubuffet and the other members of the Company of Art brut were already apparent in 1950, when Maurice Lemaître, one of the founders of the Lettrist movement, called for contributions from a number of prominent French writers and intellectuals on the topic of "What do you think about Céline's trial [for treason]?" [*Que pensez-vous du procès Céline?*] in the January edition of the anarchist monthly *Le Libertaire*. While Dubuffet joined the chorus of notorious collaborationists such as Marcel Aymé and René Barjavel who praised Céline as "the greatest lyrical genius in France since Villon" (Barjavel) or "one of the most wonderful poets of our time" (Dubuffet),[412] and went so far as to claim that he did not know whether opinions such as "distrust [sic] for Jews and praise for the Germans" could be found in Céline's writings, Breton expressed his "disgust" for Céline's personality, while Péret correctly denounced the efforts of Dubuffet and his acolytes as a concerted "campaign to 'whitewash' Fascist and anti-Semitic elements" [*campagne de blanchiment d'éléments fascistes et*

[412] Such a line of defense, praising Céline's "poetry" and the brilliance of his style in a transhistorical or broadly historical way (within the "macro" history of Western thought, or the general movement of French literature) is representative of a broader trend to has tended to exculpate Céline, to separate the ideological contents of vehemently propagated by his works from their formal qualities, or to negate that taking into account his fascist and anti-Semitic sympathies might be relevant to a deeper understanding of his works.
In fact, as noted by Alice Yaeger Kaplan, such highly problematic position was defended far beyond the early 1950s, for instance by Julia Kristeva in *Power of Horror: Essay on Abjection* (1980): "Canonizing Céline with the modern primitivists, Kristeva saves him from fascism without having to deny his fascism or apologize for it. She thus makes him readable for a new generation of theoretically oriented intellectuals […]. Historical context drops out of the picture with the modernist-primitive equation, and Céline can resound with universal esthetic value." Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.109

antisémites], asking whether Maurras or Pétain would be next in benefitting from their solicitous zeal.

This serious rift between Dubuffet on the one hand and Breton, Péret, and Paulhan on the other, which probably contributed to the dissolution of the *Company of Art brut* in 1950, was already perceptible in a not-so-minor detail of the publishing history of the *Almanac of Art brut* in 1948: among the parodic "Saints" of the art brut calendar put together by Dubuffet, one saint in particular gave his project a very specific political coloration, and was vetoed by Breton, Péret, and Paulhan: Dubuffet had originally planned on including "Holy Jewry" [*Sainte Juiverie*] in his calendar of the most detested names,[413] thus expressing in no ambiguous terms the link between the idea of a nefarious "cast" of counterfeiters promoting inauthentic and de-vitalized "cultural arts" and the classic extreme-right trope of the global Jewish conspiracy. Such symbolically charged suggestion, in a text that was meant to be a widely read manifesto of *art brut*, leaves little doubt on the extent of Dubuffet's anti-Semitism,[414] and might allow us to better understand what exactly is at stake in Dubuffet's bizarre ethno-racial, pseudo-historical fantasy according to which Art brut would be the only "authentic European art":

> But I am under the impression that Men of European race, who are savage and tempestuous, can't truly express themselves in our classical art, which was borrowed from the Greeks, themselves having borrowed its sources from Egypt. I feel that our classical art is a borrowed form of art, and is foreign to our race. An imposed art that is in no way the kind of art that Europe should have given itself: one that would correspond to its true voices. […] I believe that in such 'art brut'—in this art that has been continuously created in European in parallel to ['cultural'] arts, this savage art to which no one is paying attention, and often itself doesn't know that it might be called art—one can find the only authentic, truly living European art.[415]

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[413] Jakobi and Dieudonné, op. cit., 536.
[414] Dubuffet's pervasive use of anti-Semitic slurs in his personal correspondence is well-attested (Dieudonné and Jakobi, op. cit., 305-6).
[415] "Mais j'ai l'impression justement que l'homme de race européenne, qui est un homme sauvage et tempétueux, ne s'exprime pas du tout dans notre art classique, emprunté aux Grecs, et dont ceux-ci eux-mêmes empruntèrent les sources à l'Égypte. Je ressens que notre art classique est un art emprunté et étranger à notre race. Un art plaqué et qui n'est nullement l'art que l'Europe aurait dû se donner et qui correspondrait à ses véritables voix. […] Je crois que c'est

This historical fantasy functions as a kind of etiological myth describing the "borrowed" nature of cultural arts; but it is also revelatory of the nature of the binary opposition between authentic, vital "brut" and counterfeit, de-vitalized "culture": it is also premised upon a notion of ethno-racial difference, only the former corresponding to the "impetuous" spontaneity of a white European population that, in his private correspondence, Dubuffet didn't hesitate to describe as "Aryans", while the latter constitutes a suspiciously "cosmopolitan" departure from the "savage and tempestuous" spirit of the "race". "Brut" is thus ultimately, in Dubuffet's view, an ethno-racial category.

In barely disguised, still largely recognizable form, Dubuffet's notional foundations of *art brut* seem directly lifted from specific passages from Louis-Ferdinand Céline's violently anti-Semitic pamphlets *Bagatelles for a Massacre* [*Bagatelles pour un massacre*] (1938). As noted by André Derval, *Bagatelles* is a composite text, mixing the script of a ballet, a travelogue to the Soviet Union (denounced by Céline as playing a major role in the global Jewish conspiracy, in cahoots with Wall Street bankers and unfavorable French literary critics), rantings against the left-wing Blum administration, and open calls for a mass murder or "pogrom" of the Jewish population of Europe;[416] but as surprising as it may sound, Céline's explicitly genocidal outbursts also contain the outlines of a comprehensive esthetic theory praising popular, "Aryan" spontaneity supposedly threatened by a nefarious Jewish conspiracy promoting the values of imitation and artificiality (on

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dans cet 'art brut'—dans cet art qui n'a jamais cessé de se faire en Europe parallèlement à l'autre, cet art sauvage auquel personne ne prête attention, et qui lui-même bien souvent ne se doute pas qu'il s'appelle art – qu'on peut au contraire trouver l'art européen authentique et vivant." Jean Dubuffet, "Honneur aux valeurs sauvages" [1951], in: *L'homme du commun à l'ouvrage*, 105-6

[416] André Derval, *L'accueil critique de* Bagatelles pour un massacre *: Dossier*, Paris : Écriture, 2010, p.10

the basis of an alleged congenital weakness of the nervous system, that would make Jews incapable of direct emotion):

The Jew is wary of authenticity, just like the snake is terrified of the mongoose […] The great trick played by the Jews is to progressively take away […] people's taste for authenticity, and to take away from indigenous [*autochtone*] artists any possibility to express, to communicate their sensibility to their racial brethren, to stir up in them any authentic emotion. […] The French now prefer the fake to the authentic, grimaces to sensibility, idiotic mimicry to direct emotion. […] The world is now deprived of its melody. Folklore, the last whispers of folklore are the only things that still carry us… […] The only defense, the only recourse of the White man against robotization […] is a return to his own natural emotional rhythm. Circumcised Jews are now neutering the Aryan by severing him from his own natural emotional rhythm. […] A Jew never assimilates, he apes, smears, and detests. He can only produce vulgar mimicry, and nothing further. […] Extreme rarity of Jewish poets, always rehashing Aryan lyricism…[417]

Given the proximity between Céline's defense of Aryan spontaneity, under threat from the enforced mimicry and inauthenticity of the racially inferior members of a pernicious Jewish conspiracy [every word of this sentence should come with a generous amount of scare quotes], and Dubuffet's praise of *art brut* as the last line of defense of "authentic European art" against an imported, counterfeit "cultural art", it seems fair to assume that the correspondence between Dubuffet and Céline, should it not have been destroyed, would have offered substantial evidence

[417] "Le Juif se gare de l'authentique comme le serpent de la mangouste. […] L'immense astuce des Juifs consiste à enlever progressivement […] tout goût pour l'authentique et puis aux artistes autochtones toute possibilité d'exprimer, de communiquer leur sensibilité à leurs frères de race, de réveiller chez eux quelque authentique émotion. […] les Français préfèrent à présent le faux à l'authentique, la grimace à la sensibilité, à l'émotion directe le mimétisme imbécile. […] Le monde n'a plus de mélodie. C'est encore le folklore, les derniers murmures de nos folklores, qui nous bercent... […] La seule défense, le seul recours du blanc contre le robotisme, […] c'est le retour à son rythme émotif propre. Les Juifs circoncis sont en train de châtrer l'Aryen de son rythme émotif naturel. […] Le Juif ne s'assimile jamais il singe salope et déteste. Il ne peut se livrer qu'à un mimétisme grossier, sans prolongements possibles. […] L'extrême rareté des poètes juifs, tous d'ailleurs resuceurs de lyrisme aryen... " Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, Paris: Denoël, 1938, pp. 132-3

to support the claim that Dubuffet's *art brut* is but a slightly toned-down iteration of Céline's esthetic theories.

The disturbing, highly reactionary undertones of Dubuffet's *art brut*, including the binary opposition that he drew between "brut" and "cultural" arts, continue to inform debates surrounding the field of art brut or, as it is known in English since Roger Cardinal's eponymous 1972 book, "outsider art". In spite of the now substantial literature on Jean Dubuffet and art brut, these aspects of his esthetic theories have been left largely unaddressed so far, with some notable exceptions, such as the groundbreaking biography of Dubuffet by Marianne Jakobi and Julien Dieudonné that, based on unpublished and not easily accessible archival documents, shed new light on the artist's intellectual and esthetic trajectory.

But one question remains: how could such a crucially important aspect of Dubuffet's art brut remain largely under the radar of scholars, researchers, and art critics to this day?

This seems partly due to Dubuffet's superior tactical abilities: in spite of ample evidence pointing in the other direction, Dubuffet managed to position himself very early on as a representative of "progressive" politics. His early inclusion (since its first issue in April 1946) in Jean Paulhan's *Cahiers de la Pléiade* as a regular contributor and the journal's resident art critic, alongside avant-garde authors such as André Breton, René Daumal, or Henri Michaux, allowed him to position himself as a champion of the renaissance of "liberated" French arts and letters after the strictures imposed on artistic creation by the Vichy regime and Nazi occupation.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, French Dadaists and soon-to-be surrealists led by André Breton had staged a mock trial of Maurice Barrès: the so-called "Barrès Trial" (1921) symbolically marked the avant-garde's complete dismissal of the blend of irrationalism, hazy vitalism, and unhinged nationalism supported by Barrès, which they saw as one of the

ideological factors that had contributed to the horrors of the First World War.[418] Paradoxically, as the Liberation marked the political defeat of the alliance of the various streams of ultra-nationalist, fascist, and traditionalist thought that have created and supported the Vichy regime in what the anti-Semitic and monarchist thinker famously called "Dreyfus' revenge" ["La revanche de Dreyfus"] after his penal condemnation in 1944, Dubuffet arguably allowed specific aspects of these ideologies to take root in a section of the art world traditionally occupied by the avant-garde, and with the momentary cooperation of figures such as André Breton, Benjamin Péret, or Jean Paulhan: staging a partial "revenge", or at least a discreet reentry of Barrès' irrationalist nationalism through the back door of French art and letters.

Such convenient tactical alliances, combined with Dubuffet's abstaining from engaging in overtly political debates,[419] the allusive, often hermetic nature of his writings on *art brut*, and a disregard for Dubuffet's artistic predecessors and historical context actively encouraged by Dubuffet himself in the name of his ideology of the *tabula rasa* would all contribute to explain why Dubuffet's proximity to Barrès and Céline has remained largely unnoticed to this day. Paradoxically, in the midst of a near-universal celebration of Dubuffet's artistic contribution, the ideological underpinnings of his esthetic project tend to remain largely unaddressed.

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[418] On the "Barrès Affair", see Marguerite Bonnet (ed.), *L'Affaire Barrès*, Paris: J. Corti, 1987, and Michel Sanouillet, *Histoire générale du movement Dada (1915-1923): Dada à Paris*, Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1965.

[419] Dubuffet's "apolitical" stance suffered some major exceptions, such as his passionate defense of Céline's "innocence", already mentioned, or his inclusion of a number of noted collaborationists like Marcel Jouhandeau, the notoriously anti-Semitic author of *The Jewish Peril* [*Le péril juif*] (1937) alongside avant-garde members such as Artaud or Paulhan in his famous series of portraits *More Beautiful than They Think* [*Plus beaux qu'ils ne croient*] from 1946-1947.

Conclusion: The Road to Erewhon

The present study has followed the trajectory of a discursive object as it evolved from the early 1920s to the late 1940s. Various avant-garde movements, including late German Expressionism, French surrealism, and *art informel*, define this object as an artistic "elsewhere" that successively took the shape of the "art of the insane" and "art brut". My study, however, argues this object to have served as a reflective surface and as a projection of these movement's esthetic priorities.

From Prinzhorn to Dubuffet, this discursive object also reflected broader socio-political debates: political upheavals and symbolic disorientation in the aftermath of both world wars, the latest advances of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, the most violent forms of an authoritarian "return to order."

Throughout the period in question, avant-garde artists seem to have embarked upon a Quixotic journey, chasing their ever-elusive "shadow," to use a term coined by Kasper König. The quest for an artistic elsewhere turned out to be a kind of soliloquy, as the avant-garde was mostly contemplating itself in the deforming mirror of the visual and verbal productions of the self-taught and the mentally ill.

But one question remains: if this narcissistic soliloquy merely resulted in the reproduction of the same, was anything gained in the process? Did a new direction emerge from this complex hall of mirrors, or was the journey towards the artistic "elsewhere" merely a road to nowhere?

In the face of this Protean notion that is, moreover, ridden with crippling contradictions, a clear direction is admittedly hard to make out. The artistic "elsewhere" of the "art of the insane" and "art brut" is the Bermuda Triangle of esthetic theory, blurring notional lines, disorienting moral compasses, and abolishing logical categories. This same discursive object, in

its various iterations, is often meant to signify one thing and its opposite: destruction and reconstruction, the total abolition of individual volition or its most forceful expression, the sign of the artist's unbridled vitality or a symptom of pathology, the hope for a radical renewal of art and society or the harbinger of their imminent demise.

That same object was elevated to the status of a better, even "mystical" avant-garde, but also degraded to the status of mere artistic joke; it decorated the office of silver screen tyrants while being pilloried by real-life ones, and was intermittently embraced by underground anti-fascist resistance groups and committed collaborationists alike.

This extreme range of metamorphoses arguably doesn't reflect changes within the object of the discourse, but rather the historical evolution of its originators, i.e. mostly the esthetic and socio-political agendas to which various avant-garde movements successively subscribed between the early 1920s and the late 1940s.

Another way to illustrate this state of affairs would have been to follow the critical fortunes of a single work, as it became a surface of projection for the most divergent theories and ideologies. The Swiss artist August Wölfli, to name one prominent example, was first described as giving an artistic expression to the collapse of the symbolic order occasioned by schizophrenia (Walter Morgenthaler, 1921). The following year, his colorful work was featured prominently in Prinzhorn's *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* as the paramount example of unhindered form-creation [*Gestaltung*]. In 1964, Dubuffet published a partial translation of Morgenthaler's essay on Wölfli in his second *Fascicule de l'art brut*, thus presenting the artist as the embodiment of brut esthetics; Wölfli's work was eventually championed by Harald Szeemann as part of the fifth edition of Documenta (Kassel, 1972) as a powerful illustration of what the curator called the "personal mythologies" developed by individual artists.

The case of Auguste Forestier is possibly even more telling: his sculptures were produced within a psychiatric hospital, the result of a progressive art therapy workshop pioneered by the Freudo-Marxist Catalan psychiatrist François Tosquelles, which aimed at empowering patients both symbolically and economically. The same works were, however, included by Jean Dubuffet in the emerging canon of "art brut" as an example of spontaneous artistic productions illustrating the virtues of isolation, rurality, and "rootedness", thus largely disregarding the concrete conditions that had allowed for their production.

This phenomenon is even observable within the successive versions of a single text. In his first essay on the self-taught painter Séraphine de Senlis, for instance, published in 1920, the German art critic Wilhelm Uhde praised Séraphine's creations as powerful traces of her inner visions, in line with the general ideology of German Expressionism. In the second version of the text, published more than twenty years later, Uhde changed the conclusive paragraph to claim that Séraphine's hallucinatory still lives were characterized by a free interplay of shapes and colors, this time in a clear attempt at depicting her work as an instance of gestural abstraction.[420]

This solipsistic mechanism of ideological projection, which this dissertation has followed in its various incarnations, could be dismissed offhand as a kind of optical illusion or a narcissistic reflection of its subject devoid of any other substantial content. But I would argue that in spite of its inherent limitations and shortcomings, this "road to nowhere" paradoxically allowed the avant-garde to create a space for esthetic, social, and conceptual innovation.
Instead of a closed system of reproduction of the same, the strange discourses of the artistic elsewhere arguably allowed for some notable heuristic gains by virtue of this movement itself.

[420] Both versions of the text are reproduced side by side in a recent republication of the essays : Wilhelm Uhde, *Henri Rousseau – Séraphine de Senlis*, Paris: Éditions du Linteau, 2008.

They compelled avant-garde artists to displace and question the way in which they related to their own production, their social status, and their own legitimacy as authoritative producers of artworks and esthetic discourses.

By eroding conventional systems of values, including the criteria for evaluating artistic production, and even occasionally blurring the line between sense and nonsense, "sanity" and "madness", and "art" and "non-art", the avant-garde's confrontation with works that were perceived to be outside the strictures of social and esthetic norms often allowed it to perform its task.

It compelled artists as diverse as Kubin, Schwitters, Ernst, Klee, Éluard, and Breton to engage in social and institutional critique, to broaden the range of their formal and thematic vocabulary, and to deepen their reflection on the nature of art and language. Moreover, this critique often happened in dialogue with the latest advances of psychiatry. For instance, the pastiche of various kinds of pathological speech patterns by Breton and Éluard in *The Immaculate Conception* (1930) – as problematic as it might be -- directly influenced the work of the young Lacan and are referenced in his dissertation on paranoid psychosis (1932), which pays specific attention to the linguistic expression of madness, a direction that Lacan famously explored in his work from the 1950s onwards.

As my introduction mentions, exemplary of the reflective mechanism that presided over the discourse of the artistic "elsewhere" and its distortions is the anagram. It was used by Robert Desnos in his short essay on the "art of the insane", "The Genius without Mirror" (1924), where the institutionalized Polish poet "Anne-Ilde Salon" is in fact Anna de Noailles, "Joana Tucce" stands for Jean Cocteau, and "Mona Dreiguer" designates Raymond Radiguet.

Thus, one could also make use of yet another anagram—"Erewhon"—to describe the specific nature of the strange discursive object the tumultuous life of which this study sought to retrace. The anagram of "nowhere", i.e. also of the etymological meaning of the word "utopia", *Erewhon* is the title of a novel written by Samuel Butler, first published in 1872. It describes a non-existent country whose society seems to mirror England's, while also exhibiting peculiar characteristics of its own. The book is not merely a satire of Victorian society. Its conceit, which allows for both resemblances and significant distortions, enabled Butler to explore some outlandish but compelling ideas, such as the notion that in "Erewhon", machines, like living beings, would be submitted to a Darwinian process of natural selection and evolution.

It is precisely this description of the machine as another kind of biological entity that attracted the attention of Gilles Deleuze, who paid homage to Butler's ideas in *Anti-Œdipus* (1972). But as early as *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze had drawn from Butler's novel for inspiration, even turning its title into a common name.

An "erewhon", in Deleuze's playful description, was to be an umbrella term to designate a specific kind of notion, less stable or rigorously defined than philosophical concepts proper, but also more substantial than a mere empirical phenomenon that would originate from "a fantastic of imagination."[421] By virtue of the paradoxical displacement it entails, the "erewhon" is a figure of thought that stimulates philosophical reflection while being located in two mutually

[421] Deleuze, op. cit., p.365. According to Deleuze, the "erewhon" would involve a temporal and spatial leap that would lie outside of the Kantian a priori categories of perception and understanding.

incompatible positions, thus "simultaneously designating an original 'nowhere' and a 'here-and-now', albeit in a displaced, disguised, modified, and always recreated form".[422]

For lack of a better word, the discourses of the artistic "elsewhere" that crystallized, among other things, into the notion of an "art of the insane," are also a kind of *erewhon*: an unstable, ever-shifting notion premised upon a series of displacements that made it into a mirror image of the avant-garde while allowing for new elements to emerge, and for the questioning of fundamental assumptions pertaining to the nature of the artwork or the role of the artist. More generally, this *erewhon* seems to be part of a broader displacement and renegotiation of systems of normativity in the course of the twentieth century.

The history we attempted to retrace is far from being a rosy tale of linear progress: there were, in fact, numerous setbacks and even regressions, from the rhetoric of "degeneration" to the reactionary underpinnings of the notion of art brut, not to mention the numerous problematic aspects inherent to avant-garde primitivism itself. Nevertheless, three substantial gains can be derived from this engagement.

First, there demonstrably exists a direct link between discourses on the "art of the insane" and the reflection on norms and normativity that came to define a large number of philosophical debates of the second half of the twentieth century.

Second, I have shown that the productions of artistic "outsiders" are not always merely an object of avant-garde discourses, but can sometimes "talk back", entering in a productive dialogue that allows such works to make a noticeable impact on avant-garde artists and philosophers, as

[422] Deleuze, op. cit., p.7.

evident in the impact of French-speaking American writer Louis Wolfson's notion of "split words" [*mots fêlés*] on Deleuze.[423]

Finally, the role of the Saint Alban psychiatric hospital, in which François Tosquelles promoted a more inclusive view of mental illness and also pioneered an art therapy workshop, and the impact of this approach on the intellectual trajectory of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Jean Oury, or Félix Guattari, are part and parcel of this history and constitute the next logical step of my research.

By raising awareness of the mechanisms of projection and appropriation that are at play in the avant-garde's reception of unconventional productions such as those that were grouped under the label of the "art of the insane" or "art brut", the goal of the present study is thus not to dismiss the entire phenomenon as a mystification. Rather, I hope that a better comprehension of this historical phenomenon will foster new ways of looking at both specific avant-garde works and the works of so-called "outsider" artists, one that would finally do away with lingering primitivist projections and call attention to their critical and disruptive potential.

[423] Raphael Koenig, "L'Anti-Hegel: Deleuze lecteur de Wolfson, un tournant dans l'histoire de la réception des fous littéraires." *Dialogues schizophoniques avec Louis Wolfson*, Paris: L'Imprimante, 2016.

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