Marion Scherr
The Invention of 'Outsider Art'

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The Invention of 'Outsider Art'

Experiencing Practices of Othering in Contemporary Art Worlds in the UK

[transcript]

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1. Introduction

In Western Europe and the US, media coverage and curatorial interest in the phenomenon of 'Outsider Art' has rapidly increased over the last three decades. The British art world in particular has played an important role in shaping the history of 'Outsider Art' in the second half of the twentieth century. The term itself made its first appearance in the UK, and vast quantities of academic literature about the genre have also been published there, along with the world's only specialist magazine, *Raw Vision*. Several major exhibitions in established art world institutions have further raised the profile and market value of 'Outsider Art', with the number of collectors, dealers and gallerists making the genre their sole focus consequently increasing.

The UK also exemplifies a unique setting in practical terms, considering its pioneering history in anti-psychiatric and art therapy approaches; the high number of studio art programmes, open ateliers and charities; and the willingness of a large proportion of the population (2017/18, NCVO) to volunteer in such organisations. Providing arts facilities and mentorship for individuals experiencing social marginalisation and subscribing to predominating Western democratic ideals of equality, diversity and inclusivity, these organisations aim to bridge the gap between the arts and the social sector. They may also have laid the way for art which does not conform to rigid art world standards to flourish and gain visibility.

However, the frequent framing of artworks created in such contexts as 'Outsider Art' may reproduce rather than alleviate aesthetic hierarchies, inequality and social exclusion, potentially yielding profound social, psychological and economic consequences for the individuals subsumed under the label. Acting as a constant reminder that these creations are considered separate from 'proper' and more 'serious' art, the label 'Outsider Art' not only prevents a complex reading of these artworks—it promotes a ranking within the arts and society at large, devaluing the experiences of a large number of its members.

Even though the academic field of Cultural Studies originated and flourished in the UK already in the 1960s, inspiring a great many scholars to counteract processes of social division by deconstructing ideological oppositions such as male/female, black/white, outside/inside and primitive/civilised, critical reflections on 'Outsider Art' are still scarce. With most literature about the genre thus far being produced in the field

of art history, socio-political issues often go unnoticed, with the artist's 'Otherness' many times taken as a given and for granted, or even being reproduced. A thorough investigation of the political implications and potential discriminatory impact of the classification of 'Outsider Art' is therefore urgently called for and shall be provided by the present study, attempting a re-evaluation of the genre by laying its prime focus on the ideas and experiences of artists, rather than the professional 'experts' affiliated with the field.

1.1 Definitions, Research Context and Issues of Concern

The term 'Outsider Art' was initially conceptualised as a translation of the French 'Art Brut', coined by artist and collector Jean Dubuffet in 1948, to classify work produced by "clinically insane" artists, who he understood as being "untouched" by culture and thus supposedly engaging in a "chemically pure artistic operation" (Dubuffet as cited in Thévoz, 1995, p. 11). When art historian Roger Cardinal introduced the term 'Outsider Art' to the British art world in 1972, he let go of the strict qualification criteria of its French predecessor and embraced all art of "authentically untutored, original, and extra-cultural nature" (1972, p. 24) while still emphasising the proposed Otherness of this art form. The label 'Outsider Art' and its many synonyms[1] have been used ever since to designate a vastly heterogeneous group of artists who often have nothing more in common than their experience of marginalisation. At the most basic level, 'Outsider Art' is defined as art produced by artists "typically unconnected to the conventional art world" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). In Western Europe this group may include hospice patients, people with disabilities or mental illnesses, ethnic minorities, refugees, prison inmates, the homeless, children, psychic mediums, 'reclusive misfits', or anyone else self-taught displaying 'eccentricities' and/or diverging from societal norms.

Neither signifying an arts movement nor referring to a particular aesthetic style, the constitution of 'Outsider Art' thereby largely rests on the marginal *social* status and identity of said artists, their supposed antagonism towards cultural norms and their presumed disinterest in the art world, thus necessarily rendering attempts to define the genre unsatisfactory and blurry. Instead, what unites this incohesive group of artists is

1 Apart from 'Art Brut', the genres 'Primitive Art', 'Naïve Art' and 'Psychotic Art' can be seen as historical precursors of and sharing a discourse with 'Outsider Art'. At present, the terms 'Visionary Art', 'Grassroots Art', 'Raw Art', 'Isolate Art', 'Mediumistic Art', 'Vernacular Art', 'Intuitive Art', 'Art Extraordinary', 'Fringe Art', 'Marginal Art', and 'Singular Art' are at times used interchangeably with 'Outsider Art'. Particularly in the US, the labels 'Self-Taught Art' and 'Folk Art' are more frequently applied to creative productions which in Europe may fall under the category of 'Outsider Art'. It is worth noting that, even though both US-American and European 'Outsider Art' by now largely share the same discourse, they have developed in different socio-cultural contexts and under disparate political circumstances. The European 'Outsider Art' narrative has primarily evolved with reference to artworks produced in psychiatric settings while the US-American roots of the genre are entangled with the art of 'black' people and former slaves of the southern states. Since my research is mainly based on the experiences of artists in the UK, the European historical narrative of 'Outsider Art' will build the foundation of this study and feature more strongly throughout the text.

the declared supposition of their being fundamentally different in social and psychological terms. To facilitate the argument a particular set of marketable myths have been employed and characteristics ascribed *to* the artists, with roots in Western European socio-evolutionistic, modernist-primitive and romantic ideas of the 19th century.

As a counter-reaction to the enlightened celebration of rationality, progress, industrialisation, and the tempering of nature for the sake of scientific advancement, early 19th-century affiliates of the Romantic movement shifted their focus to the artistic productions of the 'mad', folk painters, children and 'primitives'. Turning their supposed natural purity into a feature of desirability, individuals belonging to these groups were considered countercultural rebels, with their artworks being celebrated as raw expressions of absolute freedom from the restraining norms of society, as historian Allan Beveridge (2001) demonstrates. With the idea of the 'noble savage' firmly embedded in the arts and literature of the time, those to which such terms were applied, however, were still regarded as at the lowest end of "social evolution", to follow sociologist Stephen Sanderson (1992). According to their social status, the artworks they produced can be understood as being similarly situated at the bottom of a monochromatic aesthetic hierarchy—clearly opposed to 'high' art. Hence, the inclusion of these 'inferior' art forms into the general art discourse has further strengthened the superior position of a Eurocentric art history, representing itself as "a unique source of meaning" and "the world's centre of gravity", as Cultural Studies theorists Ella Shohat and Robert Stam point out (1998, p. 27). Today, 'Outsider Art' still acts as the polar opposite of 'sophisticated' and conceptually oriented contemporary art, reproducing, if more fragmented, a modern dual world order.

With the idea of an unencumbered creativity distinctly inspiring fin-de-siècle and avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, 100 years later, the myth of the solitary, raw, impulsive and mysterious artist genius seems to experience a revival or rather an intensification in the figure of the 'Outsider Artist'. Even though artists, critics and institutions challenged racist, sexist and classist assumptions within the Western arts from the 1980s onwards, the constitution of 'Outsider Art' exemplifies that, up until now, the art historical canon is influenced by and following a colonial motive in its judgements and forms of representation, and that the idea of the 'noble savage' has lost none of its rigour and fascination, as a number of art historians have observed (e.g. Bedell, 2003; Karentzos, 2012). As much as 'Primitive Art' and 'Naïve Art', 'Outsider Art' can be understood as a conceptual product begotten by a selected group of art world professionals in Western Europe who, with disdain for the conventional and commercialised, are on the lookout for the rare and exotic. The hype around 'Outsider Art' may thus be interpreted as an expression of cultural pessimism, following what Shohat and Stam call the "colonial trope" of an ethnocentric art historical viewpoint, implying that there must be something like 'Insider Art' as "the normative culture of reference"—which there is not (1998, p. 27). The discursive non-existence of the term 'Insider Art', on the other hand, indicates an underlying inequality of power between two or more social groups by which the unmarked, normative and invisible centre invents, marks and silences particular individuals as Other and positions them on the outside.

Due to their general filling of powerful positions in art world establishments and society, art historians, critics, dealers, curators, gallerists and collectors—as well as

funding agencies, unions and educational institutions—hold the authority to designate who is or is not an 'Outsider Artist' and control the dissemination of knowledge via the means of the discourse. As of now, they tend to represent 'Outsider Artists' as raw, pure, uninfluenced, innocent, uncorrupted, honest, real, spontaneous, unintentional and unaware. Reinforcing the idea that these attributes designate the natural essence and true being of the artist, the social constructedness and ideological implications of these ascriptions often remain disguised. Instead, the individuals labelled 'Outsiders' tend to be imagined as *authentic*; unphased by conventions and resistant to cultural conditioning. Consequently, they are frequently framed as the ultimate Other on the outskirts of, if not entirely opposed to, society. Michel Thévoz, ex-curator of the 'Art Brut' collection in Lausanne, for example, proclaims that these artists "wish to take nothing from culture and they wish to contribute nothing to it. They do not aspire to communicate […] these are in every respect refusers and autistics" (1990, p. 34).

The myth of the isolated, unaffected and uncultured artist thereby ignores the fact that every individual is socially and historically constituted, and any artistic production is necessarily located within a complex cultural system, operating, in the words of anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, as one of its "externalizations" (1992, p. 6). Neglecting social commonalities for the sake of upholding the romantic illusion of purity, radical ascriptions such as the ones undertaken by Thévoz instead insist on the artist's positioning *beyond* culture—in not only social, but also psychological, terms. Artificially separated from the 'sophisticated' realms of modern and contemporary art, some scholars further represent 'Outsider Artists' as producing for private, rather than public, consideration, unintentionally—with no audience in mind, and unaffected by the recognition or reactions of the latter (e.g. Moran, 2005; Kennedy, 2010; DiMaggio, 2013). According to curator and art critic Lyle Rexer, their decision to create comes "suddenly and arbitrarily", with the artists solely following their expressive impulse and remaining entirely unaware of their productions as being art (2005, p. 77). Psychoanalyst Michael Sinason even proclaims that 'Outsider Artists' are "driven to produce their art by an agency they do not know or understand" (2007, p. 7), presupposing a lack of consciousness in said artists and with it an assumed inability to reflect.

Due to the mythical framing of 'Outsider Artists' as infantile, raw, unsophisticated, irrational and unaware individuals, who "know not what they do" (1922/1972, p. 269) as psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn once stated, the artists subsumed under the label are effectively dehumanised and relegated to a position of inferiority. Not only are they forcefully grouped, homogenised and generalised as 'Outsiders', they often tend to be further stigmatised as one-dimensional, fixed subjects, devoid of the ability to develop or change. Under the silencing blanket of these myths, the fluid, multifaceted, hybrid and intersectional identities of individual artists are thereby prone to vanish with their ascribed features overshadowing, simplifying and distorting the reception of their artworks and personalities. Facilitating an understanding of the artists as less than human and unable to speak for themselves, the 'Outsider Art' discourse consolidates and legitimises colonial practices, such as the presumed need for their being discovered and put under patronage. Following the tenor of the field, their art may thus only be introduced to the art world by well-established professionals who usually maintain a position of superiority by talking *about* the artist, rather than *to* or *with* them.

The effects and implications of these mythical ascriptions and practices of Othering are manifold. Being measured against the normative yardstick of a prevailing mainstream which sets the tone, value and standards of commonality, individuals classed as 'Outsider Artists' tend to face an odd intersection of vigorous attention and plain ignorance. Depending on how well they fit predominating aesthetic conceptualisations of 'rawness' and how drastically they diverge from an ever-changing norm, 'Outsider Artists' oscillate between being included in and excluded from various art and social worlds, with their respective levels of autonomy and control over self-representation varying. In the realms of the 'Outsider Art' world, especially, their agency tends to remain limited. As many critics have observed, and as indicated above, artists classed as 'Outsiders' are rarely invited to participate in a dialogue on eye-level, but rather more often have their voices silenced by narratives disseminated by more powerful actors in the field (McClanan, 1997; Beardsley, 2003; Metcalf, 1994). Some of the latter may benefit greatly from simplifying and sensationalist representations, emphasising the supposed psychopathological Otherness and deviance of said artists to raise attention and sales. By this deliberate practice of "Enfreakment" (Hevey, 1992), artists are not only Othered; their artworks are downgraded to the status of fetish products or exotic artefacts, and are consequently not considered for critical evaluation as serious art. Predominately not included in the general collections of museums and often only exhibited temporarily or in a separate area, divisions are further promoted, impeding a reading of these artistic expressions as meaningful contributions.

With well-versed art world professionals often remaining the main beneficiaries, very few 'Outsider Artists' have managed to turn the emphasis on their 'Otherness' into gain for themselves. They face an array of barriers when attempting to do so, or often do not possess the necessary means to prevent themselves from being exploited and/or misrepresented. Even those who do eventually become successful and consequently benefit from their association to the 'Outsider Art' field are often disregarded and scorned by the latter again—this time for having become 'impure', 'inauthentic' and 'corrupted', no longer meeting the criteria essential to the status of 'Outsider Artist' (Fine, 2003; Kallir, 2012).

Considering the rising public awareness of and ongoing demands for social justice, greater equality and diversity and the increase of anti-discrimination laws and policies aiming for inclusion in recent times, crude Othering practices resulting in socio-political and economic marginalisation of individuals have received much criticism. In line with postmodern quests rejecting hierarchies of binary oppositions, some writers, like Diana Crane (2009) and Christina Smallwood (2015) therefore claim to observe a breakdown of barriers and a breaching of distinctions in the art world, predicting the near end of 'Outsider Art' as a separate category. Others, like Moriah Hart (2009), conversely point to the increase of interest and popularity of 'Outsider Art', indicating its trending potential.

As the rising number of collections, museums, galleries and fairs specialising in 'Outsider Art' testifies, the longing for a pure and mysterious Other undoubtedly outweighs efforts to nullify distinctions within Western contemporary art worlds, further exposing their structural inequalities. The underlying impetus for this "quest for authenticity" as Gerard Wertkin, director of the American Folk Art Museum, once called

it (2005, p. 15), may be understood as a counter-reaction to the perhaps more commercially oriented, conceptually 'refined' work that currently predominates most museum walls. Collector and gallerist James Brett, for example, denounces contemporary artists, since they would presumably "paint ideas rather than art", "create surface, not depth" and "need words to disguise the absence of meaning" (NRC, 2016, February 20). 'Outsider Art' on the other hand, "deals in something purely emotional", and is, according to Brett, "unpretentious", "very immediate" and "quite truthful" (*The Independent*, 2011, October 8).

Considering this mythic consolidation, similar to other 'non-professional' art forms of the past, 'Outsider Art' occupies a contradictory position within Western contemporary art worlds. While its inclusion in the general art discourse may challenge and progress established definitions of art, the connotation of the term likewise reinforces the 'Otherness' of said artists, reproducing dehumanising social hierarchies and conservative conceptualisations of art at the same time. Following Disability Studies theorists Mitzi Waltz and Martin James, it is in response to this that the term 'Outsider Art' unfolds its problematic potential as a marker of difference, delineating "the boundaries of normalcy rather than to expand them" (2009, p. 378). As a result, artists affiliated with the field are often faced with a twofold discrimination of being socially as well as artistically pushed to the margins before they are discursively reintroduced to the 'centre' as the polar opposite, the abnormal, the 'Other'.

With most individuals having already been socially Othered prior to their labelling as 'Outsider Artists', the implications of this designation may be understood as surpassing the limited realms of the arts, representing an issue of socio-political relevance on a larger scale. Effectively withholding opportunities from certain individuals to "participate freely in the cultural life of the community", as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 27, UN General Assembly, 1948) and "develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential" (Article 30, UN General Assembly, 2008)—as called for by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—the 'Outsider Art' discourse demonstrates as much as it reproduces social inequalities and injustice, access restrictions and artistic exclusion. Aggravating already persisting inequalities concerning the significantly lower rates of arts participation and attendance among individuals with an illness or disability (Green & Newsinger, 2014), overall, the genre may be understood as reinforcing unequal power relationships and contributing to separation, gaps and divisions not only within the art world, but in society at large. 'Outsider Art' thereby effectively counteracts the policies of equality, diversity and inclusion, which most educational and cultural institutions in the UK currently subscribe to, rendering a thorough investigation of the genre, from a socio-scientific viewpoint, indispensable.

1.2 Current State of Research in the Field

Thus far, most of the research and literature produced about 'Outsider Art' can be attributed to the field of art history and remains relatively unconcerned with the socio-political issues outlined above. In these texts, the artists' 'Otherness' is many times taken

as a given and for granted, with the main focus being on biographical background, pathological details, 'unusual' approaches and circumstances of their creative practice, the discovery narrative and/or formal aesthetic descriptions.

Apart from Cardinal's *Outsider Art* (1972) and his many essays published thereafter, art historian John MacGregor's *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (1989), art educator John Maizels' *Raw Vision* magazine (since 1989) and *Outsider Art Sourcebooks* (2002; 2009; 2016), count as classics in the field. In most of these publications the practice of Othering is left uncontested or may even be facilitated in its reproduction, as these writers have built the referential groundwork upon which the labelling process undertaken by institutions, exhibitors, the media and educational environments is largely based.

In recent years, however, the problematic implications of the terminology and ethical issues informing the field have also been discussed by an increasing number of scholars, if only in passing. In his book *Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000), artist and curator Colin Rhodes provides an art historical survey of the constitution and reception of 'Outsider Art', delineating it as a genre socially, rather than artistically, constructed via "labelling" a heterogeneous group as "significantly different" and "dysfunctional in respect of the parameters for normality set by the dominant culture" (2000, p. 7). Art therapist David Maclagan further investigates the background of the commercial hype around the ideal of creative originality, exploring the popularisation of 'Outsider Art' in his book *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace* (2009). Both authors have countered the myth of the pure, uninfluenced and isolated 'Outsider Artist' by aesthetically contextualising their artworks in their respective time, space and context of production, as well as outlining the influence of the artists' social environment and visual culture on their art. Yet, even in these rather critically inclined texts, the 'Outsider' category is effectively left uncontested by overemphasising aesthetic perspective, styles and techniques, and largely neglecting the socio-political implications of the genre's existence as a whole.

Since 'Outsider Art' is predominately defined via social rather than artistic parameters, art historical and aesthetic investigations consequently reach their limits very soon, calling for a re-evaluation of the genre from a social-scientific perspective. Subscribing to this demand, cultural historian Eugene Metcalf suggests that, in order to make sense of 'Outsider Art', "we must view it not as the solely aesthetic creation of individual eccentrics disconnected from culture, but as the symbolic product of a complex and ambiguous relationship between more-and-less powerful social groups" (1994, p. 215). This is all the more important considering that one cannot tell whether an artwork is 'Outsider Art' or not by viewing it without contextual information about its production or the social background of the artist, as many scholars have remarked (Moran, 2005; Beveridge, 2001; Kallir, 2012). As indicated above, the definition of 'Outsider Art' is imprecise; the term is quite randomly applied to a variety of trained and untrained artists whose approaches and creations are so diverse in character and style that it takes strenuous effort to squeeze all of them into a single category. The discourses that manage to do exactly that and facilitate the framing process of 'Outsider Art' via the practice of Othering may thus be understood as powerful mediums and systems of thought, which after Foucault (1969) constitute the subjects and worlds of which they speak. Considering the precarious social circumstances of the artist being the crucial

factor in their classification as 'Outsider Artist', in this light, an in-depth, critical investigation of the genre may yet again be of larger socio-political concern, however having so far only attracted scarce interest within the social sciences.

Sociologist Howard Becker (1982) has provided perhaps the most comprehensive overview on the sociological constitution of art worlds thus far, distinguishing between 'integrated', 'maverick', 'folk' and 'naïve' artists. While both 'integrated' and 'maverick' artists are professionally trained according to the conventions of their respective art form, Becker proclaims that 'folk' artists are influenced by their traditional community setting, while 'naïve' artists are represented as idiosyncratically expressing and following internal urges and impulses. By overexposing artificial dualities between professional/unprofessional, trained/untrained, culturally influenced/idiosyncratic, Becker not only indicates but reinforces the problematic inequalities underlying contemporary art worlds. To a certain extent justifying colonial practices, he suggests that 'naïve' artists (i.e. 'Outsider Artists'), must necessarily be 'discovered' or otherwise remain unknown, furthermore engaging in the practice of Othering when describing the works of "autistic" artists as "totally individualistic and therefore unintelligible" (Becker, 1982, p. 14). By contrast, sociologist Vera Zolberg has written several essays critically reflecting on such separations and marginalisation within the arts. Outlining the hegemonical implications of labelling artists 'Outsiders' and theoretically investigating gatekeeping practices which delineate the boundaries of particular art worlds, she has addressed some of the most pressing ethical issues concerning the field. However, speaking of an "asymmetrical conflict" between a "strong" art establishment and "comparatively weak or altogether powerless" 'Outsiders' (2010, p. 100), Zolberg likewise re-inscribes hierarchical constitutions in a rather paradoxical manner. In accordance with other critically inclined authors, like Prinz (2017), Schüssler (2006) and Maclagan (2009), she condemns the—often exploitive—practices of collectors, gallerists, and dealers yet, at the same time, their powerful position in the field is reconfirmed by representing the artists as helpless victims of this process. In many of these accounts those who are criticised have a name—they are individual personas with distinct voices—while the artists remain grouped, anonymous and deprived of agency or room for manoeuvre. This may be an unfortunate side-effect of the exclusively theoretical stance assumed by most of the authors listed above, highlighting the importance and potential value of empirical field studies. Yet, in these realms, research material concerning 'Outsider Art' is even rarer.

The sociologist Rasmus van Heddeghem (2016) and the cultural anthropologist Alexandra Schüssler (2006) are among the few who have conducted field studies in the Netherlands and Austria, providing rich insight into the 'Outsider Art' field based on data from interviews and participant observations. Both, however, focus on issues of framing, institutional set-ups and the experiences of audience members, collectors and gallerists, with their respective papers remaining unpublished as of now. The only extensive ethnography published so far has been produced by sociologist Gary Alan Fine in 2004, under the title *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity.* Placing its distinct focus on the marketing and construction of authenticity in 'Self-Taught Art' and 'Folk Art' in the US, Fine's elaborations are largely based on his many

encounters with collectors, art dealers and gallerists, their networking practices and narratives constituting the field and respective position therein.

These empirical studies are sensitive to and critical about the constitution of 'Outsider Art', its inherent relationships of power and the ethical problematics of the field; however, the individuals labelled 'Outsider Artists' remain shut out of the dialectic. If they are consulted at all, it is only selectively or as an illustrative side note, appearing as objectified fixtures in their historically predefined place. By continuing the established practice of solely speaking *about* the artists, even the most critical accounts of the genre thus re-inscribe pre-existing inequalities in the field, effectively leaving the idea of the 'Outsider Artist' untouched and shying away from deconstructing their ascribed Otherness. This focus also persists in most recent debates concerning the (in)adequacy of the term. In line with this, speculations about the future of 'Outsider Art' are being made, with some academics vouching for expansion and others for eradication of the terminology, yet mostly refraining from consulting the artists in this process to see how the meaning of 'Outsider Art' may be constructed from their perspective (e.g. Kallir, 2012; Maclagan, 2009; Rexer, 2005). Rather, the term 'Outsider Art' is used to make a point in a debate which, so far, largely reproduces the old historical discourse.

Hence, both in art historical as well as in the social-scientific literature to date, 'Outsider Artists' tend to remain projection surfaces or 'cardboard figures', and are often not considered as equivalent conversation partners, with their voices, opinions and experiences rendered insignificant to the debate.[2]

Against this concurrent backdrop of research and literature produced in the field, the present study shall be understood as a counteracting measure, putting the artist at the centre and issuing an invitation to share their version of the story. Along with a critical analysis of the discursive constitution of 'Outsider Art', the main contribution of this ethnography will thus lie in shifting the focus to the largely unheard-of perspectives and experiences of those labelled 'Outsider Artists' in particular reference to their rising popularity in the UK.

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2 Critiques on such monophonic writing practices have already been put forward by poststructuralists, feminist theorists and members of the Writing Culture group in the 1970s. Stimulating a reflexive turn in the social sciences, they do however frequently still not feature in texts about 'Outsider Art'. The lack of anthropological studies concerning 'Outsider Art' is surprising considering the myriad of academic papers and research projects focusing on dissecting and dismantling Othering practices elsewhere. This may be due to the fact that even establishing the legitimacy of 'Outsider Art' as 'real art' within established art worlds in Western Europe—let alone recognition of those labelled 'Outsider Artists' as valuable members of society, despite their possible mental illnesses or disabilities—is still an ongoing battle, depleting most resources. I have been continually confronted with the dire state and prevalence of discriminatory practices within cultural and educational institutions while working on this project. For example, when presenting my research proposal at the University of the Arts London—a prestigious institution ranked 2nd in the world for Art and Design (QS World University Rankings, 2019) and officially subscribing to policies of inclusion, diversity and equality—the chair of Aesthetics and Management was rather underwhelmed by my suggested approach: "Why speak to these outsider artists? They have nothing to say anyway" (Field Notes Main Edu, 2016). Likewise, at the Academy of the Arts in Berlin, one of the archival managers remarked to me recently that 'Outsider Art' is "interesting, but not *really* art, is it?" (Field Notes Non-UK, 2018).

1.3 Contributions, Aims and Significance of Study

The envisioned contribution and directive focus of the present ethnography may be understood as following two key objectives, requiring the employment of a mixed set of methodological approaches.

In the first part, I aim to retrace the historical development of the phenomenon of 'Outsider Art' and discuss its ambivalent role and contemporary significance in the British art world. This will take the form of an art historical recap, identifying influential key players in the field and further examining the variously shifting connotations of the term as well as the myths constituting the representation of 'Outsider Artists' from multiple perspectives. Making methodological use of discourse analysis as proposed by sociologist Reiner Keller (2011), I will consult media reports (i.e. newspapers, broadcasts, websites and blogs), academic literature as well as exhibition reviews and catalogues, specifically focusing on those institutions and key players whose contributions have made a significant impact on the historical and contemporary understanding of 'Outsider Art' in the UK. Following Becker's sociological definition of art as a collective, social activity rather than an individual stroke of genius, this art historical contextualisation shall facilitate an understanding of the 'Outsider Art' world and its terms of reference as being constituted by a network of professional actors and institutions. Reaching consensus of what is and is not considered art, 'inside' or 'outside' a particular time and context, 'Outsider Art' may thus be understood as a social arena in which the meaning of the field as well as differential relationships of power are under constant negotiation. Following Foucault's understanding of "discursive practices" (1969, p. 144), the conceptual production of the 'Outsider Artist' does however also have a significant historical dimension. Sharing a discursive background with other problematic and now largely discarded genres such as 'Primitive Art' and 'Naïve Art', 'Outsider Art' is likewise represented as an exotic, raw, pure, uninfluenced and uncultured art form, hence reproducing colonial frameworks rather than being an "art without precedent or tradition" as prominently proclaimed by curators Cardinal and Victor Musgrave in 1979. 'Outsider Art' must therefore be understood in the context of wider reaching Othering processes informing the socio-political history of Western Europe, further indicating inequalities on a broader societal scale.

It is the aim of the first part of this study to delineate the interlinkage of the historical predecessors of 'Outsider Art' with its currently predominate understandings, to conceive it as an art historical Othering practice and reveal its inherent political agenda and underlying network of shifting yet unequally distributed positions of power. The figure of the 'Outsider Artist' shall be further demystified by grasping the latter as an ideological construct and instrument which obscures and maintains the superiority of certain groups of 'experts' who hold the power to draw borders between a metaphysical inside and outside, thereby defining an imaginary Other into existence.

Keeping this premise in mind, the present study may be academically contextualised within the realms of Cultural Studies, taking its incentives from post-structuralist and postcolonial theory. With reference to the writings of philosophers Michel Foucault (1969) and Jacques Derrida (1967), I aim to counteract positivist proclamations of objective, universal truths and essences as proposed by the 'Outsider Art' discourse.

Understanding knowledge, truth and meaning not as neutral or fixed entities, but as polysemic and shifting creations by those holding positions of relative power, I grasp the 'Outsider Artist' instead as a socially constructed modern meta-narrative.

As the title of this study indicates, in this manner I attempt to demonstrate how, via the discursive practice of Othering, the 'Outsider Artist' was actively *invented* in its supposed essence, rather than—as often proclaimed—*discovered* as a passive, natural entity. This shift in perspective and terminology is crucial as it makes apparent the ideological make-up of the discovery narrative representing the 'Outsider Artist' as naturally pure, raw and authentic, and with it, calling for their being uncovered. It is these myths and narratives after all which have thus far pervaded the field, facilitating colonial practices in apolitical disguise, reproducing social inequalities, binary world-models, and hierarchical oppositions whose deconstruction is long overdue. Hence, use of the term 'invention' shall be understood as an instrument, advocating for an understanding of 'Outsider Art' as a wilful and politically engaged act of construction. Representing a subject created according to the needs of an assorted group of Western European art world professionals, I consequently argue with art historian and art critic James Elkins (2006), that the 'Outsider Artist' does not exist as such, but rather acts as a mirror fulfilling the desires of its producers. However, even though the figure of the 'Outsider Artist' may be an idealistic invention and social construct, it can still yield profound material and socio-psychological consequences on those labelled as such. Representing the starting point of the second part of this study, I consider the analysis of these individual experiences, opinions, and the impacts of being labelled and stigmatised, as the main contribution of the present survey.

Counteracting the risks of once more solely speaking *about* the artists or reducing the latter to passive victims of Othering processes, I aim to disrupt, contest, enrich and diversify the currently rather one-sided discourse about 'Outsider Artists' with the much-needed, yet often absent perspective of the artists themselves. Considering the individuals labelled 'Outsider Artists' as active, multifaceted and ever-changing actors in their respective socio-cultural contexts, the focus of the second part of this study will lie on their oscillating and intersecting experiences of being included/excluded, delineating the hybridity of their identities and differences as being under constant negotiation, rather than pre-set or immanent features.

The deconstruction of the myths constituting the idea of 'Outsider Art' will thus not stop at the critical art historical reading and revelation of its social constructedness as aimed for in the first part. It will be first and foremost facilitated by the critical analysis of empirical material collected in the field, mostly consisting of field notes from participant observations in art educational settings, art fairs, galleries, conferences, open studios, charities and other organisations affiliated with the British 'Outsider Art' field, as well as problem-centred interviews conducted with individuals who have been labelled or who label themselves 'Outsider Artists'.

Following the method of grounded theory as introduced by sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser (1967), the focus is hereby set on the heterogeneous viewpoints of artists, aiming to provide a range of perspectives, reflecting individual narratives. Central to the second part will thereby be the contrasting of findings from Part I with artist self-representations, followed by an investigation on artist experiences in

art education and barriers faced therein and afterwards. A further analytical focus will lie on their identification with the genre, re-evaluating the adequacy of the term and demonstrating the various impacts of the labelling practice onto artists. Of crucial concern will be the question of how the 'Outsider Art' discourse is internalised, shaping the self-understanding of said artists and how it is reproduced but also challenged and subverted by their individual practices and appropriations. This will be spun further in reference to the evaluated importance of sharing work with an audience and gaining artistic recognition, including an overview of exemplary strategies developed to manage and overcome obstacles faced in the field and possibilities to participate in the latter.

By addressing and investigating the issues outlined above, the present study follows three principal aims: first to document, then to counteract and finally to surpass Othering practices in the field of 'Outsider Art', overall advocating not only for a fairer, more inclusive art world, but much more so, for a definitory expansion of the concept of 'art'.

From an anthropological viewpoint, the predominate goal of this study is to document and make visible the systematic overwriting of the artist's voice in the field of 'Outsider Art' and the often disguised Othering practices in societies whose institutions subscribe to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As anthropologists Arthur Kleinman and Rachel Hall-Clifford have shown, ethnographic methods are exceptionally well-equipped to counteract Othering discourses by "measuring what matters most" in the lived reality of marginalised individuals, and to understand the socio-cultural processes facilitating dehumanising relations of dominance and exploitation (2009, p. 418). Rather than finding definite answers or solutions, this study thereby builds on the presumption that the destructive forces of stigmatisation may most effectively be combatted by retracing, collecting and documenting a variety of perspectives hitherto largely neglected.

The second aim of this study relates more specifically to the British art world, its representative institutions and acclaimed professionals. By shifting the focus from curators, collectors and art historians to the actual artists, the implications of their being labelled 'Outsider Artists' shall become transparent, and simplifying stereotypes overturned. Instead, an understanding of 'Outsider Artists' as a diverse group of heterogeneous human beings shall be promoted, acknowledging the artists as active participants in their socio-cultural context and their identities as fluid, hybrid and in continuous constitutional exchange with their surroundings. This shall counteract popular notions and myths about 'Outsider Artists' as being uninfluenced and unaffected by culture, non- or underdeveloped, unaware or somewhat alien. Demonstrating the validity of the artist's voice as *meaningful* to society, it is my intention to bridge rather than enforce gaps and to initiate a reflection process among influential actors in the field, thus far holding to power to frame.

Thirdly, this study may also be understood as a contribution to those academic initiatives advocating for an expansion of the limited subject field of art history and a broader understanding of art, suggesting to speak of 'visual cultures' instead. According to art historian and critic Gerardo Mosquera, the latter designation is unburdened by the authoritarian and ideological implications borne by the largely European invention of 'art', and would consequently allow for art history to become an interconnected,

"polyfocal" and decentralised human cultural narrative (1993, p. 174). Such a concept may potentially embrace any kind of established or 'Outsider' artmaking on equal terms, rendering such labelling unnecessary and relegating the still frequently referenced institutional theory of art, after which a piece of work is only then art if defined as such by a particular art world (Danto, 1964). As I will show, it is definitions like these which re-inscribe and legitimise power monopolies of certain institutions, forcing 'Outsider Art' as well as much 'non-Western Art' and similarly Othered art forms of the past into a deadlock position. Since 'Outsider Artists' often do not develop their work in context or consideration of other artists, have a different approach or a voice surpassing the normative requirements and expectations of established art world institutions, these works would remain necessarily and indefinitely excluded from the latter. However, as art historian Russell Bowman points out, even though 'Outsider Artists' may engage less with the dialectical history of art, they always participate in "the dialectics of broader culture" and must therefore be seen "on par with any meaningful artistic expression" (1993, p. 18). Vouching for an extensive understanding of the arts as diverse expressions of visual cultures "fitted to different social purposes", I consequently align myself with art historian David Summers, demanding to consider "all human making" as meaningful contributions to society (1994, p. 590). Surpassing the restrictive idea of immanent aesthetics and undermining the powerful position of the Western arts canon, the overarching aim of this study may thus be understood as contributing to a democratisation of the field, the art world and society at large, allowing for multiple perspectives to complement and reside next to each other, and accounting for a range of diverse voices that had previously gone unrecognised.

1.4 Chapter Overview and Structure of Thesis

In the following chapter, the analytical framework of the present ethnography will be introduced in further detail, containing reflections on the selection of resources as well as their limitations and a discussion on ethical issues with regards to accessing the field in my various roles as researcher, arts social worker and artist working with individuals classed as 'vulnerable'. In Chapter 3, the potential of investigating 'Outsider Art' from a social-scientific perspective will be outlined and the hereafter frequently appearing concepts of field, stigma, discourse, myth and agency discussed. A special focus will thereby lie on the concept of Othering and its usefulness in uncovering the hierarchies and structural inequalities implicit to the genre. Chapter 4 will explore the romantic roots and predecessors of 'Outsider Art' and trace its development as a Western art historical Othering practice from the mid-19th century onwards. This section is dedicated to scrutinising the ideas of the main advocates facilitating the establishment of the genre as a separate art form and their ideological contributions to constituting the mythical narrative of the 'Outsider Artist'. In Chapter 5, the focus will narrow to representations of 'Outsider Artists' in the British media, evaluating the present significance of historically grown myths and the contemporary role of the genre in the first two decades of the 21st century. Based on these grounds, the ideas and experiences of artists affiliated with the field will then be introduced and depicted in the form of a

journey of inauguration into the 'Outsider Art' world in Chapter 6. Starting with their reflections on art education and barriers faced in attempting to participate, the implications of Self/Other-labelling will be discussed and the 'Outsider Art' terminology scrutinised in light of the artists' perspectives on being called 'Outsiders'. These findings will be contextualised within the most recent debates and critical initiatives informing the 'Outsider Art' field in Chapter 7, which will conclude with a final overview of the study, estimate the relevance of its contributions and provide new incentives for future research.

2. Methodology and Research Design

Although largely intersecting, the shifting foci and analytical procedures of the present study may be split into two parts, as indicated in the previous chapter. The data corpus backing the entire project consists of empirical data collected in the field (mainly via participant observation and problem-centred interviews) and secondary data (newspaper articles, books, exhibition reviews, etc.) retrieved from online sources and in print. While the latter will predominately inform Part I (Chapters 4 and 5) and when investigating the historical and current constitution of the 'Outsider Art' discourse, the primary data set features strongly in Part II (Chapter 6), concentrating on the artists' thoughts and experiences and representing the most extensive part of this investigation. The varying nature of data also required the application of disparate analytical methods, covering the deductive approach of critical discourse analysis in the first, and the largely inductive procedure of grounded theory in the second part. In this chapter, the reasoning behind these choices and their suitability to address the research questions informing each section shall be further explained.

2.1 Part I: Selective Media Review and Critical Discourse Analysis

The first section of this book provides a critical analysis of the historically grown 'Outsider Art' discourse in Europe (~1850–2000), eventually narrowing the focus to the ambivalent role and contemporary significance of the genre in British art worlds and in the media today (2000–2020).

The analytical procedure chosen to examine the pool of secondary data— mostly consisting of media content[1]—was largely following the critical discourse analysis ap-

1 This corpus embraces journal articles, books, catalogues, reviews, broadcasts, newspapers and documentaries, as well as content provided on websites of charities, studios, councils, galleries and museums. In Chapter 4, the works produced by Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler will stand at the forefront in congruency with the agendas of early avant-garde movements. The investigation of these foundations will be accompanied by MacGregor's observations, followed by a selective examination of Dubuffet's writings. With particular reference to the UK, *Raw Vision* magazine, as well as articles, catalogues and books produced by Cardinal, Maizels, Rhodes and Maclagan—all of whom

proach, as suggested by sociologist Reiner Keller (2011). Considering texts as fragmentary, interrelated and embedded in a wider discursive frame, this methodological approach takes into account that differently positioned actors and institutions, with varying resources and degrees of influence, ideologically constitute the subject of 'Outsider Art' by what they say and do. Thus, critical discourse analysis bears the potential to trace the making of these constructed realities as well as to analyse the network of unequally distributed positions of power which enable certain actors to establish 'truths' while other voices remain largely invisible. Both the historical investigation in Chapter 4 and media analysis in Chapter 5 have thereby been guided by a similar set of questions. These cover:

- usage of terminology (who is labelling whom?);
- representational mode (which ascriptions are made to the artists?); and
- artist participation (when, how and in which context does the artist's 'voice' appear?).

Considering the vast quantity of reference material, the use of predefined categories and a highly selective approach were indispensable in this case; moreover, making sure not only to include 'typical' but also disconfirming and exceptional examples retrieved from the data.

Critical discourse analysis has proven particularly helpful in identifying common myths, the key players in the field involved in their reproduction and the extent of the absence of the artist's voice characteristic for the genre, further delineating the one-sided, hegemonical character of its constitution. The grounded theory approach, on the other hand, enabled a partial filling of the just-identified gaps, adding new material to the prevailing discursive frame for further analysis and facilitating a change of mode from speaking *about* the artist to speaking *with* the artist.

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are considered experts in the field—will likewise feature strongly throughout the text. Furthermore, a range of major exhibitions and critically acclaimed shows in the UK will be investigated, such as *Outsiders: An Art Without Precedent or Tradition* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1979), *Inner Worlds Outside* (Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2006), *Alternative Guide to the Universe: Mavericks, Outsiders, Visionaries* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2013), as well as touring exhibitions organised by the Museum of Everything. Curators' statements, exhibition reviews and catalogues accompanying these will represent the main focus in Chapter 5 and will be contrasted with mission statements, reviews and curatorial approaches of smaller shows and exhibitions arranged by charitable organisations, such as Chichester-based Outside In, who share the field of 'Outsider Art' with 'established' key players, yet often remain underrepresented. Apart from online and print-based media, radio shows and audio-visual content have also been included in the pool, most notably ex-Pulp singer Jarvis Cocker's Channel 4 documentary series *Journeys into the Outside* (1999) and the BBC film *Imagine: Turning the Art World Inside Out* (2013).

2.2 Part II: Participant Observations, Problem-Centred Interviews, Grounded Theory

The data informing the investigations depicted in Chapter 6 consists of field notes resulting from several cycles of participant observations between 2013 and 2020, transcripts of informal conversations, and problem-centred interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017 with 15 individuals who have been labelled or who label themselves as 'Outsider Artists'. When gathering and analysing this set of data, I have largely followed an inductive strategy to avoid forcing its contents into predefined conceptions.

Participant Observations

Shortly after resuming my duties as a creative enabler (i.e. arts social worker)[2] with several arts charities for individuals with disabilities starting in mid-2012, I became aware of the many discrepancies in the ideals generally guiding charity mission statements and their everyday practice, often neglecting otherwise highly praised values and opting for more 'practical' approaches. The ethical concerns arising from these circumstances, the fact that many participants could not express themselves verbally and that certain decisions were made *for* them, prompted me to start taking field notes during sessions, and clarified for me the value of devoting an entire research project to 'Outsider Art'. I continued the practice of selective observation and note-taking in subsequent work placements and differently structured educational environments, with a particular sensitivity and focus on the interaction between staff and students/artists and decision-making processes.[3] The core questions guiding these more structured observations were distilled from earlier, informal investigations and covered the following:

- access (on which grounds are individuals allowed to participate in a studio/class/programme?);

2 In this capacity have I assisted and led art workshops and classes in charitable organisations and other educational environments (private and public, mainstream and specialist) as well as in various fields closely adjacent to 'Outsider Art' in the UK. The main duties of a creative enabler usually include creative support, technical assistance and mentoring for individuals who have mental and/or physical disabilities and/or psychiatric illnesses and who engage in practicing art for therapeutic, educational, recreational or commercial reasons. I consider the job title 'creative enabler' as highly problematic due to its presupposition that certain individuals need to be 'enabled' by someone else to be creative, which is why I will opt for the more neutral term 'arts social worker' throughout the text.

3 The charities in which I have carried out my observations offer working facilities (studio spaces and supplies), support and mentoring for participants with a range of different disabilities and mental illnesses, and host individuals aged 17 to 70. A similar support network for students with 'special educational needs' (SEN) also exists—yet to a lesser extent—in the art departments of public schools, subscribing to policies of inclusivity and equality, however following rather different trajectories and philosophies of art and artmaking. I have undertaken research in three of these educational environments, with School A covering age groups 10 to 15, School B age groups 15 to 19 and School C age groups 19 to 30.

- artmaking (how and by whom is the process of making, the materials used and topics of artworks decided/suggested; how much freedom does the student/artist have in making their own choice?);
- artworks (how and by whom are decisions made about the exhibition, sale, representation, archiving or discarding of finished artworks, judging by which criteria?); and
- participants (how do artists/students interact with staff, and how do they react to and manage situations in which decisions are made for them?).

The guidelines listed have enabled a clearer view on how harmonious interactions on eye-level are constituted in contrast to those actions leading to conflictual interactions between artists/students or expressing a one-sided assertiveness towards the latter. They have also proven indispensable in making concrete instruments of exclusion and the structure of those 'insider' art worlds visible, which in most cases enjoy a certain immunity resulting from their being the rather unmarked norm against which 'everything else' is measured and according to which 'Outsiders' are defined. Studying intersections of inclusion and exclusion on a personal, social and artistic level in both educational environments and charities for the 'marginalised' also helped to estimate the extent and make-up of barriers faced, eventually leading to the puzzling question of *what* 'Outsider Artists' are actually supposed to be outside of. Furthermore, the method of participant observation also allowed for the inclusion of artists who communicate non-verbally and could not be interviewed following standard ethnographical procedures.[4]

The localities in which participant observations were carried out were not limited to art classes and studios, but also included excursions, open days and exhibitions organised by respective institutions, as well as internal meetings in office-spaces and archives. Likewise, observations have been carried out at the conference of the European Outsider Art Association (EOA) in Chichester, UK (2017)[5] and at the Outsider Art Fair in Paris, FR (2019)[6], with the focus in these instances being on the interactions between visitors, gallerists, collectors and dealers with those labelled 'Outsider Artists' and the extent of the latter's participation in panel discussions, presentations, networking and sales negotiations. These contexts provided further insight into the positionality of current

4 Despite informal conversations, the field notes created during or shortly after observations comprise descriptions of behaviour, interaction, participation and environment with a focus on non-verbal exchanges with artists who solely communicate with their eyes, other parts of their body or assistive technology.

5 In that year, the EOA Conference was hosted by charity Outside In at the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester from 4 May 2018–6 May 2018, under the title *The Artist's Voice.*

6 The Outsider Art Fair in 2019 took place from 19 October–21 October at the Atelier Richelieu in Paris. Despite the study's focus on the UK, reports from the Outsider Art Fair feature as core data due to the events' importance in the field. Taking place annually both in Paris and New York, at the fair investors, collectors, dealers, curators, critics, artists and art lovers meet to buy, sell, and discuss the market, new discoveries and trends. Including these reports allowed for an evaluation of the role of British 'Outsider Art' in an international context and provided further insights into current practices of ethical concern in the field.

influencers in the field, the level of artist involvement and the varying externalisations of relationships of power between different actors.

In each of the settings depicted, I took or switched between different roles. At the EOA conference as well as the Outsider Art Fair, I introduced myself as a PhD candidate and openly declared my intentions to collect observational material for research purposes. This was not as easy when acting as an arts social worker in schools and charities, in which my role may perhaps have been more properly described an 'observant participator' in disguise, needing to remain undercover for reasons stated further below. By contrast, those artists with whom I conducted interviews, were extensively informed about the project as well as the basic motivations and frameworks guiding this study.

Problem-Centred Interviews

Apart from informal conversations occurring on a near daily basis, I have carried out several interviews with artists who were willing to engage in a reflection about the genre and its implications. For this purpose, a semi-structured interviewing technique was chosen, closely resembling the problem-centred interview as delineated by sociologists Andreas Witzel and Herwig Reiter (2012). Following the latter, I have made use of a set of guidelines covering a predefined range of topics, yet largely employing open-ended questions, allowing the artists to structure and reconstruct their experiences while easing them into a narrative flow.

In total, 15 interviews with artists who align themselves with the label 'Outsider Art', or whose work has been categorised as such by others, were conducted. The majority of these artists are represented by the charity Outside In, with whom I initially collaborated in order to find artists willing to participate.[7] The sample further includes artists, who I individually invited to partake after becoming aware of them through the media, at exhibitions or while doing observations in the field. Most interviews were carried out face-to-face or via Skype or email between 2016 and 2017.[8]

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7 Even though Outside In does not self-define as a charity for 'Outsider Artists' it may nevertheless be understood as located at the heart of the field. The artists featured on their website are frequently referred to as 'Outsider Artists' by externals or in the media; exhibitions are often reviewed under the same banner; and the founder of the charity, Marc Steene, is vice president of the EOA. The online gallery is also targeted at a selective group which has traditionally been subsumed under the label, as the charity acknowledges on its website (outsidein.org.uk). When signing up for a profile on Outside In, every artist is asked to estimate how they meet the charity's criteria, needing to choose between disability, health issues, social circumstance and/or isolation. In a further step, artists are asked to specify the barriers they face to the art world in writing. None of this will appear online, as it is up to the artists if and how much of this information they want to share on their public profile and in their artist statement. Despite putting such a strong focus on the experience of marginalisation, the charity nevertheless refrains from labelling the artists and does not use the term 'Outsider Art'.

8 Six artists were interviewed face-to-face, mostly at the artist's studio or at their home, with interview lengths ranging from 90 to 120 minutes. One artist was interviewed via video call with a duration of 69 minutes and 8 artists were interviewed via email, with durations spanning from 8 to 170 days, depending on the responding speed of the interviewee.

Since this study focuses on very particular aspects of the artists' lives and experiences, reference to an open set of guidelines has been indispensable during interviews, with key questions being constantly updated and adapted to allow as much flexibility as possible and to account for the different backgrounds of individual participants. Overall, they circle around the following topics:

- experiences with art worlds (how do artists feel about dealers, collectors, gallerists, arts social workers, workshop facilitators, teachers, etc. they have thus far worked with; which barriers do they face and what strategies have they developed to circumvent them; how important is it to them to sell, exhibit and share their work with an audience?);
- representation (how does the artist's self-representation differ from those provided in the media and art world; how much control do they feel they have over their representation; when/how/by whom did their work get connected with the term 'Outsider Art' and what difference did it make; do they engage in self-labelling as 'Outsiders'?); and
- terminology (how do artists think and feel about the term 'Outsider Art'; in what context did they come across it for the first time; what are its pros/cons from their perspective; if applicable, how did their opinions change?).

To my surprise, the information provided in email interviews differed greatly from accounts given face-to-face. In the former, participants seem to have been under a lot less pressure to perform, taking their time to reflect about questions and formulate precise answers. Email responses were often packed with well-thought-out ideas, while at the same time remaining rather unpersonal. Face-to-face interviews, on the other hand, were much more emotional and vivid, perhaps unsurprisingly fostering a closer relationship between interviewee and researcher. Since participants were not able to meticulously prepare for every answer beforehand, they were often caught off-guard, urged to improvise and lacking the possibility to edit or correct spontaneous statements. Thus, this conversational style turned out to be a lot more personal, inspiring rich descriptive narratives and storytelling, with more complex questions regarding the terminology, however, often only stimulating very brief answers.

Although not planned for, these two interview types would eventually expand the data pool significantly in various directions, providing a range of deep reflections about the terminology (mostly in writing) as well as lively accounts of experiences in the field (mostly when shared face-to-face). They also showcased a variety of artist perspectives which could then be allocated along a spectrum of possible positionings, thus representing the core data upon which the empirical section of this study rests.

However, interviews have been restricted in quantity for reasons stated further below. To nevertheless achieve a purposeful sample with maximum variation, as described by sociologist Michael Quinn Patton (2002), they have been supplemented with materials published by 'Outsider Artists' in self-direction (i.e. blogs, websites, social media), posts of initiatives such as *Disability Arts Online* and artists' statements retrieved from online platforms such as the extensive database provided by Outside In, currently hosting 1,934 entries from artists affiliated with the field.

Grounded Theory

The main method employed to guide the sampling process and analyse the data at hand has been the grounded theory approach introduced by sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in 1967 and developed further in collaboration with Juliet Corbin (1998) and by Kathy Charmaz (2014). This strategy was chosen due to my clear focus on the phenomenon being investigated yet wanting to keep the research framework as open as possible to avoid falling back on pre-existing categories, being guided too much by my own bias or blindly reproducing the myths I set out to deconstruct. Accordingly, it was the categories extracted from the data leading the research process, inspiring new questions and directions to follow and eventually making underlying connections and more abstract links appear. Although an open set of guidelines was referred to during the research process, setting a limitation on the phenomena under investigation, I have attempted to stay grounded in the empirical data throughout, creating and generating theories as they originate from the latter.

At this point, however, I would like to dissociate myself from the positivist assumption that categories can be 'discovered' and naturally 'emerge' from the data, as Glaser and Strauss have initially suggested. In her critique on Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz (1990) indicates that all theory is constructed and created by the researcher, rather than discovered or pre-existing within the data; or, as sociologist Norman Denzin puts it, with a nod to Derrida: "There is no objective space outside the text" (2014, p. 26). Certain predispositions have necessarily influenced not only how I selected, interpreted and presented my findings, but what I have constructed as a *finding* in the first place, making grounded theory (at best) a method at the crossroads between induction and deduction. With the instrument of constant comparison, it does however still provide a valuable analytical tool, prompting the researcher to continuously confront his/her own unconscious biases and thus strengthening the validity of the approach. Helping to recognise and keeping subjective misreadings at bay by seeking dimensional variation, the active search for negative cases and contradictions in the data facilitates diverse and saturated categories while considerably reducing the risk of producing one-sided, extreme, or stereotypical representations of a phenomenon. Accordingly, it was pivotal throughout the research process to remain open towards new, unexpected or even contradicting insights and flexible in accounting for these circumstances in the base structure of the analytical procedure.

In this way, the grounded theory approach fits exceptionally well into the overall aim of this study. As indicated above, rather than providing a 'solution', finding a clear answer or (dis)proving a predefined hypothesis, I followed the objective to illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of artist identities, account for the range and diversity of experiences and enhance a non-binary understanding of the multifaceted meanings interwoven with the terminology.

One of the core issues interconnecting all categories of the analytical process has been the artists' experience of feeling 'different' in a particular art world, social or educational context. To demonstrate the contextual roots of these differences and their capacity to act both as a barrier *and* an asset in certain circumstances, a storyline as

has been formed incorporating all key categories[9] and indicating the intersectionality of inclusion and exclusion as fluid and transitionary states. This storyline, as much as the analytical results in general, has been structured in the form of a journey of inauguration for ease of comprehension in Chapter 6. Although reading like a linear performance, the latter shall, however, not be misunderstood as resembling the actual research process undertaken. On the contrary, and in alignment with the cyclical ethnographical procedure introduced by anthropologist James Spradley (1980), all stages from data gathering, analysis and theoretical contextualisation were carried out simultaneously. In continuous exchange with one another, they provided a larger framework in which each piece of information could be placed, de- and reconnected, evaluated, rearranged, and their relative importance for a particular issue estimated. Likewise, the instruments chosen to gather the data have been adapted in flexible response to the requirements of individual participants, new insights and site-specific particularities of the field.

2.3 Ethical Considerations, Access to the Field and Limitations

Due to the position of 'Outsider Art' as a niche phenomenon, obscurely defined and as a discourse largely in the controlling hands of a few well-established figures in the art world, finding artists willing to participate in this study was difficult. Many voiced their concerns, worrying that the information they provided may end up in the wrong hands or that participating might damage their reputations and already precarious careers as artists. Others were thrilled by the invitation, appreciative of being listened to and welcoming of the opportunity to share their stories. Despite their initial reactions, many artists kept a cautious distance and only warmed up near the end of the interviews, or when I shared personal information about myself, thereby breaking the intrinsic hierarchy between the interviewer, in their sole capacity to *gather*; and the interviewee, in their assumed role to *give* information. This establishment of more personal contact on eye-level was significant and indeed necessary for two reasons.

First, and in consideration of the problematic history of 'Outsider Art' in which stories, identities and artworks tend to have been instrumentalised and Othered by art world professionals for various reasons, it was crucial to make my own position in this context transparent and inform the artists on which side I am standing—namely theirs. Second, most of the participants have been classified as 'vulnerable' due to their being diagnosed as mentally ill and/or disabled. Even though I personally reject such classifications, it was important to account and accommodate for the indeed disparate social circumstances under which artists labelled as such live, and the differently structured realities they may therefore experience. For example, the idea of being interviewed may have a distinct quality to someone who struggles with social anxieties. In this case, the implicit pressure to speak, the assumed expectation to form coherent sentences and to

9 The key categories informing the empirical section cover Artistic Practice, Art Education, Recognition, Assets/Barriers, Social Sector/Art World Experiences, Agency, Terminology, Labelling and Identification with 'Outsider Art'.

perhaps please the researcher, may cause high levels of emotional distress. Likewise, I have encountered artists who remained disengaged and suspicious of my presence as a researcher throughout the process, or confused by the whole project and motivations guiding it. Since my research questions further contained the undeliberate potential to evoke the reliving of negative or even hurtful experiences, some conversations had a very fragile feel to them and required a lot of caution and sensitivity, at times making it necessary to let go of my guidelines entirely and instead just be there, listening. Even if what was said then was not relevant for my research anymore, it was important to let participants decide in which direction to take the interview in case questions became too much of a burden, as much as the ways in which initial contact was established were crucial in creating an atmosphere of trust.

As it seems, the introduction of my project through the 'safe' and official channels of Outside In, a charity clearly positioned on the side of the artists, may have to some extent pre-approved my integrity as a researcher and therefore perhaps raised the inclinations of some artists to get involved. Relying on the charity for participants did, however, also constrain the number of possible artists to interview. A further limitation arose from the fact that the interview candidates, independently contacted and preselected by the charity, represented only a small fraction of 'Outsider Artists': namely those who could verbally articulate themselves and were confident enough doing so in an interview with a stranger. Leaving it at that level would have excluded a large number of artists by definition, as these aspects often represent exactly those barriers which keep 'Outsiders' from participating in the art world 'proper' in the first place. Hence, participant observations were indispensable in including also those whose nonverbal voice tends to be forgotten about due to the alternating forms of communication and approach required.

In contrast to finding artists for interviews, it has been comparatively easy to access locations in which participant observations could be undertaken. This ease of access, however, came at a particular cost. In order to gather valid data (or rather, to be in a position to do so at all) I had to remain undercover, officially acting in my role as an arts social worker. For limited periods ranging from six months to two years, I worked and/or volunteered in a number of schools and charities, mostly on part-time basis. While the respective managers of these places were aware that I was working on a PhD, they did not know I was collecting data in their organisations for this purpose. Since I was interested in finding out divergencies between what was said and done in the everyday environment, it was necessary to hide my intentions to a certain extent to reduce the issue of reactivity—a practice extensively discussed by sociologist David Calvey (2017). If the staff had been briefed for best practice behaviour, as was often the case prior to the advent of external visitors, and taken extra care to adhere to the official philosophy of the institution during my presence, the data obtained would have been drastically distorted and effectively of no use. Most likely, however, I would have not even been able to obtain permission to do research at all, since many charities are understandably concerned about the threat of 'negative' publicity, potentially lowering their chances in acquiring funding. Many schools likewise worry about their Ofsted ratings and are unwilling to grant access to researchers—especially if they are not officially associated with the local council or the Department of Education, or aim to investigate delicate

issues such as the practical implementation of inclusion policies and the treatment of 'vulnerable' individuals in the classroom/studio.

I struggled with this undercover approach at many points during my research, pondering the risks of people and organisations involved if I used the information acquired in my study. In the end, I indeed decided to dismiss large parts of the data collected, choosing to keep only those materials absolutely crucial to my research providing they could be encrypted to such an extent that I could ensure any backtracking of the data was impossible. Following the prevailing ethnographical standards and codes of ethics regarding the facilitation of non-identification and confidentiality of data sources (Iphofen, 2013), no particularities of charities or schools are stated, and each section quoted separately marked for reference. This was to avoid the possibility of grouping statements stemming from the same institution; providing a pool of disconnected vignettes instead. The names of artists with whom I have conducted interviews have also been anonymised, as have particular actors or any other identifying material mentioned during these conversations. However, all sections quoted from specific artists have been attributed with the same encrypted marker, allowing for coherence in their story and to interrelate different segments rather than decontextualising them. On the other hand, the names of artists whose statements I have retrieved online or who were quoted elsewhere have not been anonymised, as these sources are publicly accessible, and anonymisation may have had the undesired effect of silencing those who have deliberately chosen to openly share their opinions and 'go public' under their own names.

Despite the rather practical limitations outlined above, there are further, more general restrictions this study has been subject to. I am aware that, in the present format and language chosen, this text will only reach a narrow audience, possibly excluding many artists yet again, thereby to a certain extent reproducing the circumstances I have set out to criticise. Likewise, the monophonic authority of the researcher persona, which I have continuously attempted to contest, may entail similar implications. As historian and cultural anthropologist James Clifford stated about the inherent nature of ethnographies: "However monological, dialogical, or polyphonic their form, they are hierarchical arrangements of discourses" (2010, p. 17). Considering this, I would like to add that I do not claim to *represent* 'Outsider Artists' in this study, nor am I under the illusion I could possibly give the individuals labelled as such a 'voice'. Rather, I am trying to take a critical look at the make-up *of* representations in hindsight of the historical lack of voices, acknowledging the multiplicity of perspectives and, with this study, bringing to the forefront those which are conspicuously absent in the historical and contemporary discourse of 'Outsider Art'. Practising a form of engaged anthropology with this aspiration, I realise that neutrality, value-free judgements and objectivity may be longed for but neither in the field nor in ethnographic writing ever be achieved fully, as the advocates of the Writing Culture group already remarked in the 1970s. With regards to the fact that, as an ethnographer, I am inevitably part of the phenomenon I investigate; I therefore consider it a necessity to make transparent to the reader what fuelled my motivation to conduct this research and the position I am writing from.

2.4 Roles, Background and Position of Researcher

So far, most actors involved in producing literature about 'Outsider Art' have been elderly, well-educated and distinguished white men who tend to hold influential positions in cultural, media or educational institutions or are otherwise well-networked in the field. By contrast, at the time of my research, I was a rather young, immigrant woman with working-class roots, and as a 'creative enabler' have been involved much more closely with the social rather than the arts sector. Moreover, I had the experience of being included/excluded in and from various art worlds myself and, due to falling under the classification of 'disabled' in the UK (Equality Act 2010), occasionally also being labelled an 'Outsider Artist'. This has certainly raised my sensitivity towards the subject and made me aware of the intrinsic absurdity, multifariousness and ambivalence of the term. My background in Cultural Anthropology allowed me to theoretically contextualise my experiences and reflect on its implications, heaving them from a personal to a more abstract level when looking at the workings of marginalising Othering processes from a perspective rooted in postcolonial theory. Apart from this theoretical engagement, as an arts social worker I was in almost daily exchange with a heterogeneous group of non-academic artists from all walks of life, evoking ongoing reflections and perhaps transcending all too one-dimensional viewpoints on the subject.

Overall, my own creative practice, as well as the experiences I have personally made with being Othered or silenced, seem to have contributed to building trust between myself and other artists, with whom I often shared a certain sense of knowing—a circumstance which may be read either as a limitation or an advantage, perhaps having effective implications of both.

Although I have continuously striven to neutralise my own influence and presence in the field by giving away as little personal information and opinion as possible, as is a general standard in ethnographical research, retaining a disengaged position of semi-objective distance has been particularly difficult in this project, and may have even had a detrimental effect on the quality of data acquired. While it has been relatively easy to stay in the background during visits to museums, conversations with curators and as an arts social worker undertaking participant observations, the artists with whom I conducted interviews were often as much interested in my point of view as I was in theirs. With 'Outsider Art' being an ethical minefield, some were almost demanding to reveal my position to them as a sign of trust before they would elaborate any further on their experiences. This heightened suspicion soon turned out to be a precautionary measure, since many were not sure how open they could speak to me in case I was affiliated with certain people and institutions, in turn indicating the implications of unequally distributed positions of power in the field.

As indicated above, some artists declined to be interviewed or remained wary in the process; others were eager to share their stories having lesser concerns. Generally speaking, I noticed, that somewhat being part of the group made a vast difference. This coincides with observations made by sociologist Jost Reinecke (1991) who proclaims that the smaller the social distance between interviewer and interviewee, the less distorted are the responses to sensitive questions. Most conversations indeed got a lot livelier and deeper as soon as I had made remarks about my own background and experiences.

However, and as a rule, I would only share this information when specifically asked about it, and would not introduce it otherwise. By contrast, I hope that the briefly outlined aspects contouring my involvement and various roles in the field will help the reader to contextualise and evaluate this studies' analytical findings and interpretations and account for unconscious biases which may have affected the research process and the selections undertaken.

3. Theoretical Contextualisation of 'Outsider Art' in Cultural Anthropology

Rather than investigating 'Outsider Art' from an aesthetic perspective, this study is concerned with the socio-cultural construction of the 'Outsider Artist' as an art historical Other and the implications of the labelling practice for individual artists categorised as such. To facilitate an understanding of the genre from this point of view, I will make use of a range of conceptual tools introduced by post-structural and postcolonial authors from the 1950s onwards, most notably referring to theoretical delineations of Othering practices in interlinkage with their executing instruments: discourse, myth and stigma. Furthermore, the applicability of practice theory will be discussed in hindsight of the hybridity as well as inequality characterising the field of 'Outsider Art', accounting for both individual agency as well as the influence of normative, hegemonical structures on processes of identity formation.

3.1 Epistemology of Othering in the Social Sciences

The notion of an Other as essentially different and in opposition to a central Self may be understood as one of the constitutional ideas of modernity, informing and being reproduced by the Western philosophical discourse predominately since the late 18th century (Cartwright & Sturken, 2009). Based on the Cartesian subject containing a rational, fixed and unified identity, in his influential text *The Master-Slave Dialectic* (1807) Hegel proclaims that, even if partly recognising oneself in another, the identity of the Self is constituted by the "exclusion of every other from itself", asserting a supposed necessity of binary oppositions and clear demarcation lines in human thought (1807/1977, p. 231, § 186). According to anthropologist Eric Wolf (1982), on a broader societal scale the constructed gap between Self and Other thereby stands in pivotal interlinkage with the 'enlightened' ideology of a dual world order, disguising mutual exchanges and interconnectivity and instead essentialising differences to facilitate the colonial endeavours of the West. As Cultural Studies theorists Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken (2009) have delineated, to justify slavery, oppression and indeed the entire institution of colo-

nialism, from the 17th century onwards, a distinct set of ideologies were needed to strengthen and reproduce the position of Europe as the ruling centre[1] in contrast to a peripheral Other, marked as less developed on a socio-evolutionary scale always in favour of the former.

Based on the elaborations of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, who challenged the Cartesian idea of an autonomous and self-determined subject, post-structuralists and postcolonial theorists have argued against the proclaimed natural facticity of this dual world order and positivist subject conceptualisations. From the second half of the 20th century onwards, authors such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Frantz Fanon (1952), Jacques Derrida (1967) and Michel Foucault (1969) were revealing subject positions, identity formation and what is known to be 'true', as mediated and constructed via discourses. Attempting to expose the ideological character of hierarchical oppositions via deconstruction, Derrida (1967), for instance, introduced an understanding of meaning as exterior and the subject as decentred. Colonial representations proclaiming the *inherent* primitivity and inferiority of certain groups could thus be dismantled and uncovered as discursive creations by those in relative power—a practice which came to be known as 'Othering'.

Feminist scholar Gayatri Spivak was first to lay out the concept of Othering systematically in her essay *The Rami of Sirmur* (1985), examining British colonial power in India. In this text, Spivak demonstrates how a colonial Other has been constructed as morally inferior and produced as subordinate by those in power. Withholding knowledge and technology and demonstrating 'superiority' by making the colonised aware "who they are subject to" (Spivak, 1985, p. 254), the ability of the 'Other' to represent and define itself was eradicated as a result. Spivak delineates this practice of Othering and, with it, the symbolic degradation performed, as a multidimensional process being acted out simultaneously on varying levels of race, class and gender. Thus, Othering may also be understood as facilitating interlocking systems of oppressions and being characterised by 'intersectionality'—a concept subsequently introduced to feminist theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991.

Apart from Spivak, other postcolonial writers have likewise examined the imperial construction of the Other. Further accounting for exoticism and the colonial gaze, literary theorist Edward Said, for instance, has prominently defined Orientalism as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient" closely linked to the age of Enlightenment (1978/2003, p. 3). He exemplifies how, via the means of the discourse, an exotic image of the 'Orient' as a mythical, irrational, sensual and barbarian place has been (re)produced, with the latter being situated as inferior to the rational and civilised 'Occident' in cultural, technological and even genetic terms. As Said argues, Orientalism thereby represents a Eurocentric "family of ideas and a unifying set of values" forming an "archive" of common and essentialising ideas about the 'Orient' which are reinscribed by institutions and scholarship in the cultural hegemony

1 In this context, the term 'Europe' shall designate those Western European countries actively engaged with colonial expansion, thus predominantly referring to Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain and France.

of the normative West (1978/2003, p. 41f). Said lists social Darwinism[2] as one example of these ideas, underpinning representations of the Other as 'naturally' subordinate and further facilitating a 'scientific' legitimisation of colonial exploitation. Away from the sciences, the myth of a superior West and inferior Other has also been fostered in the arts, religious texts, literature and traveller's tales of the time, as Said demonstrates. Following medical anthropologist Lenore Manderson (2018), this practice reached its peak when 'living samples' of the colonised Other were showcased at World Fairs and in human zoos throughout Western Europe to testify their 'primitivity' to the public. Subsequent reversals and romantic idealisations of the 'exotic Other' as 'noble savages' during the Romantic era would effectively not contest but rather reinforce the ideology of a Western superiority even further (Hall, 2007a). Being of particular interest to the genealogy of 'Outsider Art', this issue will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4 with regards to the role of 'Primitive Art' for members of the avant-garde.

Importantly, the concept of the 'West' shall not be misunderstood as signifying place or geography, even though it is tightly interlinked with geopolitics, if seen from the perspective of colonialism. As sociologist Stuart Hall (2007a) delineates, the West is a historical and mythical construct itself, representing a conglomerate of ideological discourses which create and reproduce knowledge about an Other which it is not. Rather than a materialised locality, it may thus be understood as a particular worldview or philosophy guided by separation and subdivision, surpassing the realms of a geographically predetermined non-Western Other. From this perspective, the colonised subject may be seen as only one piece of an indefinite puzzle, sharing its 'Otherness' with a number of subjects similarly considered unsuitable *within* the geographical realms of the West.

Following Foucault (1961), as much as the colonised, those classified immigrants, homosexuals, women, disabled and mentally ill have faced exclusion and stigmatisation in Western societies, yet were often fixed as Others in a synchronic rather than evolutionary manner, prone to remain in their 'internal exile' and thought devoid of the ability to 'develop'.[3] These Othered groups often shared with the colonial subject the ascribed psychological constituency of being closer to nature, wild, raw and emotional, as opposed to the rational, refined and civilised norm from which they were attested to deviate (Hall, 2007a). Particularly noteworthy in this regard is Foucault's text *Madness*

2 Several authors, most prominently Herbert Spencer (1851), Lewis H. Morgan (1877) and Edward Tylor (1871), have transposed Darwin's biological concept of natural selection into societal realms, establishing a theory of social evolution and with it the idea of civilisation progressing through stages. In his book *Primitive Culture* (1871), Tylor, for instance, postulates a universal connectedness of humanity split into "different grades of civilization", moving from simple to complex, savage to cultured, raw to refined and spiritual to rational, with Western Europe 'naturally' residing at the top end of the scale.

3 Geographer Jean Francois Staszak (2009) proposes to take these 'internal exiles' literally. In contrast to the 'non-European Other', he argues, it is more difficult to implement coherent myths and discriminatory ideologies if the 'Other' is physically present and cohabitating the space of those fitting the norm. In these instances, spatial segregations and confinements are often fostered, creating clear physical demarcation lines to prevent 'contamination' of the Self via the 'dangerous' Other. Following Staszak, this logic is exemplified by practices relegating the 'insane' to asylums, women to the domestic area and certain ethnic groups to ghettos.

and Civilization (1961), in which he introduces 'insanity' not as a disease, but as a discursive instrument and "gesture of segregation", delineating how those individuals nonconforming or supposedly threatening the social order have been turned into the Other for the sake of 'protecting' society (1961/2006, p. 79). Foucault thereby demonstrates in detail how the 'mad' were culturally constructed as subhuman and modelled as the opposite of reason throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe—first becoming an ethical, then a medical problem. Resembling the idea of Othering, he proclaims that by this process "something inside man was placed outside of himself and pushed over the edge of our horizon" (Foucault, 1961/2006, p. 80). Building on the same theoretical strand, advocates of the Disability Studies such as Lennard Davis (2006), Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell (2000) have later on likewise engaged in the uncovering of systems of division and exclusion. Vouching for an understanding of 'disability' as a socio-cultural construct rather than a natural entity, they investigated modes of representation and the constitutions of (ab)normality in a similar fashion to Foucault.

Most of these writers may be understood as providing the breeding grounds for postcolonial and postmodern theory, or writing in the spirit of the latter. They have attempted to show how certain individuals are constructed as essentially different and pathologised as subhuman Others via hegemonial discourses, strengthening and legitimising the superior position of those groups already in power and pre-setting the invisible norm. However, the concept of Othering has also evoked fervent criticism, indicating the limitations of postcolonial theory.

Foucault, for instance, has been contested for his conceptualisation of mental illnesses as mere "social constructs" (Gutting, 2005, p. 50) as well as for having fetishised power albeit claiming to dismantle it by granting little or no agency to those 'oppressed' (Davis, 2006b). With his focus on the discourse of the coloniser, Said has come under similar attack. Neglecting the heterogeneity, contradictions and numerous internal divisions within institutions performing Orientalism, literary theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) proclaims that Said effectively reproduces what he sets out to deconstruct by displaying the 'Occident' as a monolithic and unified entity of power. Cultural anthropologist Andre Gingrich (2004) has further criticised the concept of Othering for leaving binaries uncontested and reinscribing oppositional Self/Other dichotomies. According to him, Spivak's Others appear as passive objects rather than active subjects throughout her writings, thus contributing to their being silenced once more. Consequently, sociologist Chetan Bhatt declares postcolonial theory "a kind of heroic, narcissistic victimology", representing the "subaltern [as] simply voiceless" (2006, p. 101).

Rigid conceptualisations of an oppositional Self and Other may indeed fail to see the grey areas and the in-between, as Bhabha demonstrates in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Attempting to break with the binarism between 'coloniser' and 'colonised' and relativising strong counter-groupings of victims vs. those in power, he vouches for an understanding of social relations as being more complex, nuanced and ambiguous than has been acknowledged by many of his forerunners. With subject positions, agency and power being under constant negotiation rather than predetermined or fixed, he directs the focus to the hybridity of all cultural processes and meanings, pointing to their dependency on time and context. By doing so, Bhabha grants all parties fluid and heterogeneous identities which cannot be placed on a simplified us/them or Self/Other

spectrum. In a similar manner, Hall has conceptualised the postmodern subject as decentred and dislocated, having no permanent identity but rather becoming a "moveable feast" (2007b, p. 598), thus further fragmenting and transcending essentialising subject depictions.

For the present study, both approaches carry with them a certain danger. Initial Othering conceptualisations, as laid out by Spivak, Said and Foucault, may indeed simplify and underestimate the agency of the 'Other', granting too much power to and thereby reproducing the 'superior' position of dominant groups. However, subsequent relegations of the Self/Other dichotomy by Hall and Bhabha, who build on the idea of fragmented and hybrid identities, plurality and decentralisation, may conversely run the risk of disguising unequal power relationships between groups, relativise colonial responsibility and paradoxically play into the hands of hegemony and capitalism, as critics Ella Shohat (1992), Anne McClintock (1992) and Arif Dirlik (1997) have pointed out.

Accounting for these criticisms, in the present study I will attempt to bridge this gap by making use of the 'traditional' concept of Othering in synergy with practice theory, as initially outlined by Bourdieu. Putting equal weight on individual agency and structural constraints, the 'Outsider Art' field shall thus be grasped from a combination of theoretical viewpoints rather than settling for one strand only.

3.2 The Discursive Production of 'Outsider Art/ists' in Art History

Just as much as the legacies of colonial doctrines still prompt inequality, ethnical conflicts and transcontinental imperialism, many art worlds are similarly infiltrated by hierarchies deriving from this shared historical and political background, urging an examination of the latter from the perspective of postcolonial theory. Despite frequent proclamations of the increasing plurality and blurred boundaries of art worlds and academic efforts to establish a critical global art history, the flourishing and popularity of 'Outsider Art' may be understood as exemplifying the limits and hegemonial structures still underlying the Western arts. In the UK, these tend to materialise in art education, the media, exhibitions and on the art market, in which particular sets of differences not confirming to the invisible norm of the contemporary arts, are either excluded and ignored or, at best, 'included'—but exoticised.

Far from being an art form "without precedent or tradition" (Musgrave & Cardinal, 1979), I argue that 'Outsider Art' stands in line with historically Othered art forms such as 'Naïve Art' or 'Primitive Art', continuing the modern project rather than disrupting it. As a genre, it is similarly finding its legitimacy in the 'enlightened' construction of a Self/Other duality and its co-related myths, which were created, reinforced and reproduced by modernism in the Western arts in the 19th century as indicated by Cartwright and Sturken (2009). Like its ancestors, the discursive constitution of the 'Outsider Artist' is thereby informed by an imaginary split of the human and creative mind into sophisticated/raw, rational/irrational and civilised/savage dichotomies, with artists belonging to the genre consequently often being treated as "endogenous primitives" (Maclagan, 1991, p. 18). Within the arts, and especially following the Romantic movement, the inher-

ent ranking of such oppositional pairs has at times been turned upside-down, leaving art historian Hal Foster to conclude that the 'primitive' in Western art history is considered both "deprivative" *and* "supplemental" (1985, p. 58). As I attempt to show throughout this study, this also holds true for the image of the 'Outsider Artist' who, just as much as the historical 'primitive', is articulated "as a spectacle of savagery or as a state of grace; as a socius without writing or the word, without history or cultural complexity; or as a site of originary unity, symbolic plenitude, natural vitality" (Foster, 1985, p. 58f). Either way, the subject in question is "fixed as a structural opposite or a dialectic other" (Foster, 1985, p. 59), with colonial binaries being reinscribed to the benefit of a privileged yet invisible norm, setting what is to be considered 'proper' and 'true' art by comparison. These unequal power relationships significantly inform the constitution of 'Outsider Art' and the evaluation of art by 'non-professionals', yet have thus far not been thoroughly investigated from a postcolonial stance.

Building on Said, Foucault and Spivak, in the present study I will demonstrate how the constitution of 'Outsider Art' may be understood as an Othering practice. As an institution riddled with relics of a colonial past and nostalgia for monolithic truths, 'Outsider Art' represents a regressive format, allowing for the imagined gap between Self and Other to be romanticised and celebrated—a gap which at the same time tends to be decried as on the verge of being lost to the postmodern subject of hybridity. I acknowledge the above-mentioned criticisms by authors such as Gingrich, yet would like to argue that, in the particular case of 'Outsider Art', hasty attempts to transcend a Self/Other dialectic are not only precluded but highly problematic. On one hand, this is due to the certitude that, even if trying to surpass the dialectic, it would be reintroduced through the backdoor by the terminology itself. On the other hand, an entire eradication of 'Outsider Art' as a genre, or its 'transcendence', risks rendering invisible once again the rule-setting norms and hegemonial discourses informing contemporary art worlds, which can however potentially be revealed and challenged by the genre due to its existence as a mirror-image.

In accordance with the underlying incentive, the first part of this study will predominately focus on the discursive development as well as the historical and contemporary role of 'Outsider Art/ists' as the Other in Western art history, and investigate the myths generated and surrounding the genre to this day. Since 'Outsider Artists' often do not name themselves as such, are 'discovered' and then introduced to the art world by 'professionals', this practice of Othering may be understood as following traditional colonial motives. I am aware that putting the focus on those individuals and institutions having established and reproduced the discourse of 'Outsider Art' throughout the 20th century may risk overemphasising their positions of power or even reinscribing dualities of 'oppressor' and 'victim'. However, a sole reproduction of the established Western art historical canon is thereby not my intention, nor do I wish to strengthen the questionable relevance of its most prominent figures. Instead, I am convinced that the ambiguous role of the 'Outsider Artist' and the constituency of the discourse will only ever become evident in contrast *to* these 'expert' dispositions and their power to invent an Other, thus providing the necessary foundations to contextualise the second part of this study.

It is in this latter part that I will introduce the artists affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field to the discussion, thereby performing a critique on modern narratives of the Other not only in theory, but further destabilising the latter by the empirical methods employed. To re-evaluate the genre from the artists' point of view, I will follow Bhabha who, as indicated above, has demonstrated that culture and the relations of power underlying it are not absolute but dynamic processes of negotiation, with Self/Other dualities being too simple to account for the flexibility, hybridity and multifariousness of the social world and subject identities. Shifting from an initial speaking *about* to the—in the field—rather unorthodox format of speaking *with* the artists, I thereby intend to demonstrate the failings of a binary logic, reveal the complexity, heterogeneity and agency of those individuals labelled 'Outsider Artists', and thus provide new perspectives to think about or even overcome 'Outsider Art'.

As indicated, the question of aesthetics will thereby be left aside and the implications of the genre for affiliated artists will instead be investigated from a social-scientific viewpoint. To facilitate this process, a set of theoretical tools (i.e. field, discourse, myth and stigma) will be employed in addition to the empirical methods outlined previously, delineating the inner mechanisms of Othering practices.

3.3 The Social Field of 'Outsider Art' and Forms of Capital in Art Worlds

To grasp the particularities of the 'Outsider Art' world and its ethical implications, I consider it useful to combine Bourdieu's concept of the field (1975) with theories concerning the social constitution of art worlds, as put forward by Becker (1982). Building on art critic Arthur Danto's institutional theory of art[4], Becker defines art worlds as an "established network of cooperative links among participants" who, in a joint effort, produce as well as determine what is to be considered and valued as art on the grounds of their shared conventions (Becker, 1982, p. 35). Any art world, including 'Outsider Art', may thus be understood as a field of cultural production, with Bourdieu (1996) stressing an understanding of artists and artworks as situated within and being produced by their respective social and historical contexts, rather than representing independent creators or creations.

Bourdieu denotes the term 'field' in a similar manner to Becker's 'conventions' as a "historically generated system of shared meaning" (as summarised by Iellatchitch et al., 2003, p. 732). Rather than static, these meanings constituting a field (i.e. a particular art world) and the legitimacy of certain positions, are continuously disseminated and negotiated by a variety of institutions (i.e. art collections, exhibitions, museums, art markets, media, art education). They are further (re)produced by a number of gatekeepers to these institutions and other influential actors in the field, not only via the means of the discourse, but also via processes of selection, framing, labelling and other

4 In his text *The Artworld* (1964), Danto instigated a paradigm change in art theory by shifting the focus from the artwork to the institutions and gatekeepers holding the power to legitimise certain objects as art. He thereby accounted for the fact that anything can be art as long as the art world context allows for it and recognises it as such.

types of control, as Bourdieu (1983) indicates.[5] Considering the shifting dispositions and ever-changing relations between actors, not all of these possess equal authority to 'speak' or control the dissemination of knowledge. Instead, the respective agency of individuals is limited or enhanced depending on the time and context of their interaction as well as their current positioning and resources (Diaz-Bone, 2002). Thus, it follows that social fields must be understood as infiltrated by hierarchies rather than representing egalitarian and homogeneous constitutions—they are a "locus of struggles" with power and influence being under constant negotiation (Bourdieu 1975, p. 19). According to Bourdieu (1987), to access or advance their position in the field, individuals need to acquire and mobilise certain forms of capital. He distinguishes between three forms of capital in which the potential power of an individual actor in the field resides: economic capital (monetary assets), cultural capital (education, qualifications; also, possession of art collections, owning galleries, etc.) and social capital (social relations, networking, class membership, etc. allowing access to resources and knowledge). All of these may be transformed into *symbolic capital* via social recognition gained from competing actors, with the particularity of 'Outsider Art' being that this transformation of capital seems to be reversed or at times even denied to those who fill the 'artist' subject positions in the field.

Perhaps more so than any other art field, 'Outsider Art' is characterised by *patronage*, indicating a split and underlying inequality between those who name/discover and those who are named/discovered. The field is composed by a range of 'professional' actors (hereafter referred to as 'key players' and 'gatekeepers', mostly consisting of established artists, collectors, critics, gallerists, dealers, publishers, educators, curators and writers) as well as 'unprofessional' actors ('Outsider Artists'). As indicated above, these occupy different and shifting positions in the field, dispose of varying amounts of capital, are less or more well-networked and recognised and thus less or more influential and 'heard'. Considering that power is under constant negotiation and dispersed unevenly, the conglomerate of subject positions held either by 'professionals' or 'unprofessionals' is not representative of a homogenous group. However, the 'professionals' may still be understood as relatively superior in the grander context of the field, since their occupied positions and various roles taken allow for a one-directional practice of framing and labelling. Those classified as 'Outsider Artists' on the 'Other' end of the spectrum likewise represent a heterogeneous array of diverse artists, yet may still be grasped as a subordinate group, since they are conceptually created and "defined into existence" (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 422) as 'Outsiders' by art world insiders and placed into the field under discursive (if not material) patronage, with or without

5 Sociologists Susanne Janssen and Marc Verboord (2015) use the terms 'tastemakers', 'gatekeepers', 'surrogate customers' and 'cultural mediators' to indicate the various powerful roles available in a particular art world. An actor occupying these respective positions can exert power by selecting, editing, co-creating, connecting, selling, marketing, distributing, evaluating, classifying or censoring artworks and artists. Institutions like galleries or museums may hereby act as "check points", inhibiting or allowing certain cultural products to circulate and be consumed, while critics, academia and the media "legitimize" gatekeepers in the first place and facilitate labelling, classification and particular sorts of framing, which in turn influence the taste of the audience (Janssen & Verboord 2015, p. 7; p. 12).

their knowing.[6] Often, they have already experienced being socially Othered elsewhere due to their deviation from invisible yet ruling norms constituting the idea of 'proper' human beings in meritocratic societies. Their variously attested differences (be it in physical appearance, form of communication, worldview, lifestyle, etc.) are likely to be classed as deficits by the latter, resulting in marginalisation. Being consequently pigeonholed as 'disabled', 'mentally ill', etc. in turn limits access to positions of power and opportunities in society, making these voices less likely to be heard, as has been frequently remarked by advocates of the Disability Studies.[7] Established and successful art world professionals, on the other hand, largely tend to reflect societal norms, or may even be considered elites in certain respects. In the field of 'Outsider Art', historically as of now, these professionals mostly consist of well-educated, rhetorically adept, 'able-bodied' white men of the middle and upper classes in the metropolitan areas of the anglo- and francophone West. Possessing more social, cultural and economic capital from the outset, these groups hold the authority to construct and disseminate *meaning* (i.e. what is considered reasonable, true, normal, professional and valuable in a particular context and moment in time) and thus institutionalise a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 2000, p. 132f) or a "regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 269). In the present context, the figure of the 'Outsider Artist' may be understood as one particular incarnation and discursive invention of these regimes, with certain representatives and institutions benefiting directly or indirectly from its existence. To understand how these subject positions are legitimised, how power is exerted and how social inequality is (re)produced in the field of 'Outsider Art', it is worthwhile taking a closer look at the inner workings of the discourse and its facilitation via the employment of myths.

3.4 Stigmatisation and Co-Related Myths of 'Outsider Art'

As much as culture in general, 'Outsider Art' as a field may be understood as being constituted and mediated via discourses, resulting in the construction of certain individuals as 'Outsider Artists'. Based on Foucault, Hall defines discourses as

6 Bourdieu calls these actors "naives" (1983, p. 342) and indicates that they might as well be outside when creating, but upon being recognised by others they enter the field, regardless of their own interest in or knowledge of the latter.

7 In the Disability Studies, the Othering practice of 'disabling' is often historically linked to the introduction of statistics determining 'normalcy' in the 18th and 19th centuries. Davis (2006a), for instance, has shown how the idea of a statistically verifiable norm supposedly reflecting the average human being, has resulted in performing a subdivision of society into standard and non-standard subpopulation. Constituting the 'normal' body and mind and thus "creat[ing] the concept of the disabled body" while "ideologically consolidating the power of the bourgeoisie", Davis grasps the 'normal' as a discursive invention accompanying industrialisation (2006a, p. 6). In combination with 'natural selection' as proposed by Darwin, these ideas would be instrumentalised later on to 'legitimise' eugenics and the elimination of "defectives" (including the 'disabled', the 'insane', alcoholics, prostitutes, homosexuals, etc.), thought to threaten the health of society (Davis, 2006a, p. 7; p. 9). Thus signifying the 'ancestors' of individuals now classed 'Outsider Artists', I will discuss the entanglement of the socio-political context with artworks considered 'primitive' or 'entartet' in further detail in section 4.4.

> a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed. (Hall, 2007a, p. 201)

Since all knowledge and meaning is socially produced via discourses, their power as a formative, selecting and censoring practice becomes evident. As systems of exclusion, asserting a particular frame of perceiving, speaking about, understanding, and making sense of the world, Foucault classes the discourse as "a violence we do to things" or at least "a practicality we impose on them" (1981, p. 67). Relativising the importance of a specific content transmitted, he further instigates that the discourse cannot merely be grasped as the transporting plate on which systems of power are served, but as the very object of power one may desire to take hold of. 'Expert' groups dominating knowledge production and distribution via media, education, certain professions or—in the present context—art world institutions, thereby do not only dispose of the definitory means to selectively represent 'truth', determine normalcy, and write 'history', as indicated above. They also have the means to construct certain individuals as socially Other, fixating and silencing the latter by overwriting and withdrawing possibilities for self-representation. In this manner, the discourse does not only represent a form of knowledge about a topic, but also contains the possibility to construct and frame an entity or subject in one particular way, but not another (Hall, 2007a). It is thus worthwhile to consider the process of Othering as a censoring discursive practice, with 'Outsider Art' being a prime example of the latter.

As shown, a conglomerate of key players with specific interests negotiates, reaches a consensus and defines what is and is not considered art or a legitimate artist in any given art world at any given time, thereby setting its relative boundaries. Rather than on aesthetics or conceptual ideas, in the case of 'Outsider Art', the focus hereby predominately lies on estimating which individuals have already been *socially* Othered enough to be safely included and, in a second step, have their artistic works labelled 'Outsider Art' on these grounds. This intersectional discrimination is facilitated in both social and artistic realms via the discursive practice of Othering, but will be thoroughly discussed in this text only with regards to an individual's affiliation with the 'Outsider Art' field. In order to do so, I will follow Sune Qvotrup Jensen who, drawing on the writings of sociologists Michael Schwalbe (2000), Ruth Lister (2004) and Stephen Riggins (1997), defines Othering as a

> discursive process by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups. Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate. (Jensen, 2011, p. 65)

Considering the criticism voiced by Gingrich, Bhatt and Bhabha as shown above, such definitions may appear overtly binary and perhaps too simplistic to grasp the complexity of social phenomena and the actual hybridity of 'inferior'/ 'superior' groups. Never-

theless, I consider this theoretical model of Othering useful to outline the constitutional inequality and imbalance between subject positions in the field, enabling a better overall understanding of the artists' perspectives and possibilities for agency.

Applying Jensen's abstract definition of Othering to the 'Outsider Art' world, those he terms "powerful groups" may thus be understood as the heterogeneous assortment of art world professionals, whereas the "subordinate group" may be understood as consisting of the various individuals classed 'Outsider Artists'. The one-sided process of delineating 'Outsiders', taken by itself, indicates that the discursive practice of Othering is preceded by already established inequalities, while asymmetrical power relationships are being reproduced at the same time. As sociologist Dick Hebdige (2006) points out, dominant ideologies thereby represent the interests of dominant groups, with differing and 'subordinate' voices which do not fit or even challenge pre-set norms and orders, being suppressed, or selectively recuperated. This procedure is further accompanied by strategically limiting how individuals classed as 'Outsider Artists' are represented, providing the selective framework and conditions under which they can and cannot be understood. According to sociologist Shyon Baumann, it is this largely disguised framing process of labelling, defining, accepting and rejecting certain artworks and artists to and from the field that creates a "narrative" of insiders and outsiders, which is in turn infiltrated by a particular set of ideologies (2007, p. 59ff). With respect to 'Outsider Art', the ideologies underpinning the discursive practice of Othering are operationalised by the employment of a specific set of myths which may in turn be experienced as stigmata on an individual scale.

In *Mythologies* (1973), semiologist Roland Barthes investigates how meaning is constructed via myth. He considers myths as a "type of speech" and "mode of signification", acknowledging their inherent ideological character usually remaining in disguise (Barthes, 1973, p. 117; p. 142). According to Barthes, the problematic potential of myths lies within their capability to transform historical, man-made constructions into statements *appearing* to represent disinterested, natural facts and thus disguising the motivations informing their very constitution. As an ideological tool, the characteristic of the myth is not to "deny", but to "talk about things": it "purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (Barthes, 1973, p. 156). Any discourse can be understood as infiltrated by an assortment of such myths, which are delivered in the form of 'true essentials' or 'universal givens' in a particular society, disguising implicit power relations. Although often used synonymously with the concept of 'discourse' as outlined by Foucault, in the present context I grasp 'myths' as tools operationalising the power of the discourse. From this perspective, 'Outsider Art' in general and the imagined figure of the 'Outsider Artist' in particular, may be understood as discursive formations constituted by specific sets of myths. These myths, or what Jensen has called the "problematic and/or inferior characteristics" ascribed in the process of Othering, in the present application include declarations of the artists being 'raw', 'uncultured', 'insane', 'unintentional', 'unaware', 'uninfluenced', 'pure', 'uncorrupted', 'primitive' or 'exotic'. In their derogatory, or much more often romanticised framing, they are interlinked with colonial vocabulary and carry the connotational baggage of a modern dual world order. They are thus to be considered political and much

more than randomly assigned labels in art history or disconnected, superficial ascriptions representing the 'true' and 'natural essence' of said artists. With their social constructedness and ideological nature generally concealed they hint at the existence of a centre from which power is exerted via attesting Otherness. Evidently, the rawness, primitivity and unculturedness ascribed to certain 'Outsider Artists' cannot be understood as characterising a person's 'essential core'—even though it is often represented as such. As myths, they draw their entire meaning from being a *relational* category to the 'cultured' and 'refined' norms of historical and contemporary Western art worlds, and may be experienced as stigmatising by those individuals attested to differ.

Investigating the social construction of identity, sociologist Erving Goffman introduced the term 'stigma' in his book of the same title in 1963, analysing the psychological impact of labelling on individuals. Goffman defines stigma as a trait of "undesired differentness" an individual may possess in comparison to an anticipated norm (1963/2006, p. 132). Indicating its relational character, he suggests that all human differences hold the potential to be stigmatised and reconfigured as a marker of inferiority. Similar to myth, a stigma thereby reflects the values of a dominant group and is determined by the standards of the latter, rather than representing the 'natural essence' of an individual as Other. It is worth pointing out that Goffman limits his definition of stigma to being based on undesired features yet, as this study shows, these might as well be romanticised, still however yielding similar consequences. Whether the imagined rawness and unculturedness of a particular artist is considered a positive or negative feature turns out to be an internal matter of debate only, leaving the prevailing myths as such uncontested and likewise disregarding the 'Outsider Artist's' voice. Either way, a number of artists are forcefully constructed and fixed as a homogeneous group via the discourse, with their various differences being simplified, essentialised, naturalised, pathologised and turned into a radically alien Other. By doing so, the myth and, effectively, the practice of stigmatisation and Othering results in a reduction of human beings into stereotypical characters. As a social signifier, it overshadows the manifold identities, self-ascriptions, diverse particularities and artistic messages of individual artists. As will be demonstrated throughout the following chapters, the artists are thereby not only silenced, but effectively dehumanised and 'enfreaked', with their art as well as their story and life circumstances being fetishised and exoticised.[8] As Goffman has shown, it is via this particular process that an individual may be transformed "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" and consequently being perceived to be "not quite human" (1963/2006, p. 131f). This in turn may invite discriminatory practices and significantly "reduc[e] the life chances" of particular individuals, turning the practice of Othering into a powerful instrument of social control (Goffman, 1963/2006, p. 132). For individual artists affiliated with the field, being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' is thus

8 With reference to David Hevey, Disability Studies theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson defines the term 'enfreakment' as "cultural rituals that stylize, silence, differentiate and distance the persons whose bodies the freak-hunters or showmen colonize and commercialize […] collaps[ing] all those differences into a 'freakery', a single amorphous category of corporeal otherness" (1996, p. 10). According to Waltz and James (2009), this process not only objectifies people with disabilities, it also ensures their creative work is looked upon as if being of less quality.

not confined to an ideological meta-level but can yield various consequences for their psychological well-being, identity construction and socio-economic circumstances. In anticipation of the empirical findings of this study, I argue that their ascribed authenticity in particular is linked to limitations of agency, relegating without impeding the transcendence of oppositional subject positions.

3.5 Agency, Intersectionality and Transcendence of Binaries

To understand the Othered positionality of artists in the 'Outsider Art' field and their respective scope for action, it is worthwhile making use of Bourdieu's vocabulary and practice theory once more. Initially introduced by the latter, yet enriched by anthropologist Sherry Ortner (2006) with more thorough considerations of diachronic power dynamics, practice theory sets out to overcome the opposition between structural constraint and individual agency. According to Ortner, it "restore[s] the actor to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that constrain (but also enable) social action" (2006, p. 3). The 'Outsider Art' world in particular is infiltrated by a power imbalance in which certain subject positions are by default restricted, as they have been created as such by those who enjoy greater mobility and opportunities for action. However, the power exerted is not absolute but relative to the field, allowing for agency to be reintroduced on a wider societal scale and transcending the rigid structures informing the 'Outsider Art' world. With regards to this relativisation, I consider it a necessity to grasp the 'Outsider Art' field as a continuous area of tension, not only in hindsight of the shifting dispositions outlined above, but also when looking at it from a theoretical stance.

Goffman's stigma theory, for example, has been criticised for neglecting power relationships, institutionalised discrimination and the larger social context facilitating stigmatisation, by his rather exclusive focus on the individual. On the other end of the spectrum, Foucault has been criticised for over-articulating the dominance and structural power of certain groups and institutions, thereby losing sight of the individual subject and possibilities for resistance and agency (Castellani, 1999). Rather than stopping there, sociologist Stacey Hannem (2012) outlines the benefits of combining both theoretical viewpoints, just as much as one may attempt to account for the shortcomings of Foucault's by enriching them with Bhabha's idea of malleable, hybrid and flexible identity formation. In a similar manner, the rather eclectic mix of theories so far combined shall allow for looking at 'Outsider Art' from a variety of perspectives and avoid over- or underestimating either individual agency or structural power restraints. To discuss the issue of agency it will therefore be necessary to outline first how its relegation results from the Othering processes exemplified above, and only then how these constraints may be strategically circumvented or dealt with by individual artists in the field.

As I would like to argue, the extent of agency 'granted' to artists affiliated with 'Outsider Art' is inextricably linked to their pre-set designation as authentic. The predominant myths informing the constitution of the 'Outsider Artist' (as raw, uncultured, unintentional, unaware, uninfluenced, pure, uncorrupted), taken together, tend to be

handled by key players as 'proof' of an individual's authenticity and legitimacy to being placed in the field. 'Authenticity' may thus be seen as the master myth, the most proficient sales tool on the market, since as Waltz and James point out with reference to Fine, "what collectors are buying is not validation of the talent of artists […], but an 'ideology of authenticity' in art" (2009, p. 376). From the perspective of the artist, this preconditioned requirement of authenticity significantly relegates forms of agency, representing the core mechanism reproducing the hegemonial structure and power inequalities of the field. For artists to attain positions in the 'Outsider Art' world, the capital of authenticity is needed, which does however tend to work in a *reverse* manner to all other capital forms outlined by Bourdieu. To artists who actively seek to belong and engage with the field, access is almost instantly denied since, according to its ruling tenor, 'authenticity' cannot be self-applied independently because its intentional use automatically spoils its claim (Fine, 2004). Consequently, an artist would lose the capital required to access the field by the very means of *attempting* to access it and, much more so, by trying to transform their 'authenticity' into other forms of capital or self-empowerment once access has been granted. As indicated above, up to now, artists tend to be positioned as 'Outsider Artists' and introduced to the field only by key players, who have the economic, cultural or social capital to do so. The discovery narrative and successful placement of an artist may in turn advance a professional actor's position and symbolic capital in the greater network of 'Outsider Art'. The recognition and benefits for a particular artist, however, may in this constellation often operate as a form of capital *for* someone else who may further gain 'authenticity' by association, yet often remain limited for the 'Outsider Artist' themselves. The deferral of benefits and constraining of agency constituting the field thus grants the continuity of structural exploitation, as indicated by sociologists Steven Dubin (1997) and Fine (2004), and as I argue, also reproduces inequalities on a larger socio-economic scale. This is due to the claimed authenticity of an artist being inextricably linked with the requirement of the latter to have a *lack* in all other forms of capital.

In a rather perverse twist—and contrary to the positions taken by professional actors—the artist's position in the field is legitimised by the relative *absence* of economic, cultural and social capital. The poorer and less educated the artist is believed to be, the more they struggle with networking and/or engage in 'unconventional' forms of communication, the greater their 'disinterest' in the art world—the more the artist's recognition (i.e. symbolic capital) in the field rises. In short: the more an artist is thought to deviate from the norms embodied by the promulgators of the field, the better. Due to this dynamic, an ongoing imbalance in power is reinscribed into the latter and heightened in those cases in which the artist does not even know they are part of the field or is unaware of its existence. A diversion is then highly likely, with benefits going straight to key players and institutions, bypassing the artist on whose grounds they were achieved. The restriction of agency is however not always externally imposed, but may also be internalised by the individuals stigmatised, who may engage in certain forms of self-censorship as a result. Feminist scholars have frequently demonstrated that ideologies not only strengthen asymmetrical power relationships between groups by advantaging already dominant groups, but *also* by convincing the oppressed group of their 'natural'

inferiority—their identity construction is hence affected by "internalized oppression", in the words of Sandra Lee Bartky (1990, p. 51).

Following Foucault, Hall and Barthes, hegemony is enforced by discourses which establish specific frames of reference, representational systems and vocabulary that govern social communication. Under these conditions, resistance within the field of 'Outsider Art' might even more be difficult, since it would need to be articulated in the dominant language of the discourse to be heard and, even if this is done, would most likely result in an artist's expulsion from the field via this self-same spoiling of 'authenticity'. According to philosopher Judith Butler (2005), such issues are not limited to the realms of language alone, but go deeper. Hegemony exerts power by constituting who is considered a serious subject holding a 'reasonable' voice in the first place, thereby regulating who is considered worth being listened to and who is not. As Foucault has demonstrated, being classed an 'Outsider' or labelled 'insane', goes hand in hand with the consideration of *not* being a reasonable subject—thus acting as a form of "dehumanizing violence" in Butler's wording (2004, p. 217). If solely seen from this theoretical perspective, the 'Outsider Artist' might appear doomed and an eternal victim to the repressive structures of the field. However, as the empirical section of this study will demonstrate, the experiences and self-understanding of individual artists cannot be reduced to their subject position and defy claims of absolute hegemony, even within the tightly restricted field of 'Outsider Art' and much more so beyond it.

The important difference to note here is that the subject position 'Outsider Artist' is not tantamount to the individual labelled as such. Rather, the label 'Outsider Artist', as any other label, is a uniform reduction, with the artist's identity being far more complex, heterogeneous and hybrid than can or is indented to be grasped by such constructs. It is also worth keeping in mind that even though an artist's agency might indeed be restricted, and their mobility constrained in the field of 'Outsider Art', at any given time individuals are involved and interact with a variety of different social fields which are intersecting and do not exemplify autonomous entities. In each field, circumstance, and context they may take on different roles, externalise and represent parts of their identities in varying emphasis, thus yielding ever-changing consequences with fluctuations in power dynamics. In some fields, individuals may feel included while being simultaneously excluded from others, and experience being stigmatised and discriminated as well as being recognised and welcomed at the same time. Following Bhabha, subject positions, identity and meaning are thus always "ambivalent" and "hybrid", depending on the context and relationship of a particular individual with other actors in a respective field (1994, p. 35f). Rather than being rigidly placed in abstract oppositions, dispositions and possibilities for agency are likewise characterised by an "in-between" and "beyond" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4).

To account for this intersectional character, to grant agency and to counteract the dehumanising effects of stigmatisation, I argue in accordance with the social model of disability[9] that there is no such thing as an essential 'Outsider Artist', but only individuals *affiliated* with the field of 'Outsider Art'. Having just relativised the absolute influence

9 The social model of disability, as exemplified by sociologist Tom Shakespeare (2006), proclaims that individuals are disabled by society rather than by their impairment or 'essential' difference.

of the latter, this is not to say that being classed an 'Outsider' goes unnoticed by the individual. Sociologist Manuel Castells (2010) has shown that the social construction of identity always takes place in a dialogue and context marked by power relationships. Nevertheless, individuals always have "space for agency" (Jensen, 2011, p. 74) to actively (dis)engage with their disposition, if only in the background of the official narrative constituting the field. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, artists deal with their association to the field in different ways, and may perceive their positioning and stigmatisation as 'Outsider Artists' as only minor to their self-understanding, remain largely indifferent or even benevolent to it. Although many artists interviewed have recognised the negative experience that 'stigma sticks', under particular circumstances ascribed identities can be repossessed and stereotypes challenged. With the ascription of being an 'Outsider Artist' further not representing an eternal marker but depending on shifts in societal meanings of difference and context, the artist's stand- and viewpoint on the subject likewise tends to fluctuate.

As will be shown later on, the field is far from static but continuously changing. While its recognition within the greater contemporary arts is rising, and romantic notions of an Other seem to attract ever-larger audiences, the power of historical key players is slowly dwindling, and critiques of Othering processes and deconstruction of colonial traditions in the art historical canon rising. The rather recent introduction of social media is likely to set further impulses and circumvent traditional gatekeepers, and the opening up of charities, studios and ateliers may further undermine historically grown power relationships. Being in a fluctuating state of upheaval, this study can thus only provide a dissecting snapshot, drawing its material from a variety of sources and hopefully further facilitating a diversification of the field via its methodological approach and showcase of empirical findings.

With this reasoning in mind, I will capitalise and place the label 'Outsider Art/ist' in single quotation marks throughout this text as a reminder of its constructedness.

4. Historical Readings and Discursive Genealogies of 'Outsider Art'

Considering creative expression as a universal trait of mankind that is exercised no matter if it is seen or acknowledged, it is a matter of great difficulty to pinpoint the exact onset of the peculiar phenomenon now called 'Outsider Art'. Lacking stylistic coherences, artist statements or manifestos shared and promoted by an exclusive group of artists, 'Outsider Art' cannot be understood as yet another movement or era in the timeline of the Western art historical canon. Perhaps more fittingly, the genre, much like its discursive predecessors 'Primitive Art', the 'Art of the Insane' and 'Naïve Art', may be grasped a utopian by-product of early avant-garde movements. As a projection surface, it represents the ever-changing aesthetic preferences and ideas about the 'Other' held by art world insiders and prominent advocates of these art forms, while providing only little insight about the artists labelled as such. Considering this imbalance in knowledge production, the unequally distributed positions of power in the field of 'Outsider Art' and the tendency of the artists' heterogeneity to vanish behind the mythic veil of their supposedly being 'raw', 'uncultured' or 'insane', any attempt to retrace the history of the genre is, by definition, going to be flawed and one-sided. With its main arenas being North America and Western Europe, 'Outsider Art' has been and still is a rather selective project, bearing as a "symptom of modernism" (Elkins, 2006, p. 75) severe political implications with regards to democratic ideals of participation, and having only recently opened up to include a wider range of perspectives and voices.

Forfeiting the possibility of providing objective accounts, the European history of 'Outsider Art'—as any other history—is far from linear, yet in its official version, as promulgated by authors such as Cardinal (1972), Rhodes (2000), Maizels (1996) or MacGregor (1989), still often represented as following a red thread. I will orient myself on the largely congruent timeline offered by these key players in the field, who have all declared the 'discovery' of artistic productions of psychiatric patients in the 19th century as the onset of the genre. This may well be an acceptable starting point, considering that psychiatric hospitals have long been the only institutions recording and archiving limited selections of works produced by so-called 'Outsiders' for future generations. As will be outlined below, the increasing aesthetic, clinical and diagnostic consideration of

patient artworks was thereby fuelled by the medicalisation of 'madness' and the early onsets of psychotherapy, as well as by Romanticism inspiring a number of fin-de-siècle artists in their attempts to redefine and overthrow established notions of art.

Throughout this text, the investigation of the relationship between and appropriation of 'Insane Art', 'Primitive Art', 'Folk Art' and 'Naïve Art' on the grounds of their supposedly shared Otherness, will be geographically limited to France, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. This is due to the declared art world 'centres' of the latter becoming decisive in the constitution of 'Outsider Art' throughout the 20th century, starting with Walter Morgenthaler's and Hans Prinzhorn's extensive elaborations on the 'Art of the Insane' in the 1920s. The contributions of both authors will be discussed as counter-positions to rising tendencies declaring the 'insane' as well as avant-garde artists *degenerate*—a practice culminating in the systematic prosecution of the latter in Nazi Germany from the late 1930s onwards. Subsequent sections will look at the mythic appropriation of 'madness' as an ideological tool of resistance among the Surrealists in France, taking the Expressionist and Dadaist notion of insanity one step further and preparing the groundworks for Jean Dubuffet's subsequent establishment of 'Art Brut' as a distinct genre in the mid-1940s. Dubuffet's position will be contrasted with anti-psychiatric endeavours deconstructing the concept of insanity in the 1960s, followed by an exemplary outline of alternative institutional and art therapeutical set-ups running under the banner of 'Art Brut' from the 1970s. The focus will then be shifted to the UK and on the art historical and curatorial contributions of Roger Cardinal who introduced the term 'Outsider Art' in 1972, closing with a brief discussion of the position of the genre on the global art market, its commodification and rising popularity.

4.1 Precursor I: Psychiatric Institutions, Enlightened Ideas and Romanticism

As historian Sander Gilman (2014) and sociologist Andrew Scull (2015) demonstrate, varying depictions of the 'insane' by canonically well-respected artists (e.g. Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Dürer, Pieter Huys, Peter Paul Rubens, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Théodore Géricault, Francisco de Goya, Eugène Delacroix) have a long history in the European arts and may be read as indicators of ever-changing ideas about 'madness' throughout the centuries. It was, however, only in the 19th century that the artworks produced by those declared 'insane' were also considered worth studying, and the first point at which they began appearing in the literature.

The final plate of *A Rake's Progress* (1735–1763) by British artist William Hogarth is often considered as a crucial signpost in this regard, since it counts as one of the earliest known depictions of a patient in the act of creating, here represented as drawing on the hospital walls. MacGregor, who has discussed this engraving in depth, underlines its importance for the upcoming study of the 'Art of the Insane'. He speculates that it was the artists among the visitors to the asylum who may have first taken notice of and been inspired by the creative productions of inmates, even though the act of drawing would also selectively occupy the interest of physicians from the earliest onsets of psychiatric confinement (MacGregor, 1989).

Figure 1. Hogarth, W. (1735–1763). A Rake's Progress, Plate 8, In the Madhouse (Engraving). Savannah College of Art and Design.

Following Foucault, Hogarth's plate may also be contextualised more generally as having been produced at a turning point in the societal perception of 'insanity'. According to Foucault (1961), modern ideas of the late 18th and early 19th centuries mark an important shift in the understanding of the term and had a lasting effect on the institutional courses of action taken in dealing with those perceived 'insane'. In his disquisition, Foucault proclaims that, up until the Renaissance, 'madness' was predominately understood as a spiritual manifestation of diabolic evil, or conversely as some sort of visionary knowledge or even human reflection of divine reason. During the Enlightenment, it was stripped of this mythical aura and reconstructed as the polar opposite of reason, with the 'insane' now being secularised and treated as moral subjects—no longer a religious matter, but one of social order, as Foucault surmises. Understood as having "freely chosen the path of mistake against truth and reason", the 'mad' were consequently confined to corrective institutions and asylums in increasingly large numbers, together with other 'inconvenient' and supposedly threatening deviants like criminals, the incurably ill, vagabonds, prostitutes, vagrants, paupers or the blasphemous (Foucault, 1961/2006, p. 54f). According to Foucault, it was their ascribed intension of nonconformity with the norms of society that initially legitimised their banishing, disciplining and exclusion and promoted their becoming of alienated 'Outsiders' from which society had to be 'protected'. In the late 18th century 'madness' was reconceptualised yet again, this time to a natural object of science and disease of the body, which could be clinically observed, treated and perhaps even cured. To some extent ridding 'madness' from its stigma, this contributed to a redefinition of the 'insane' subject to a *person*

suffering from mental illness, as physician James Birley (1990) indicates. This shift is crucial also to historian Edward Shorter (1997), who demonstrates that from their respective beginnings, nowadays infamous psychiatric institutions such as the Bethlem Royal Hospital London (est. 1330), Bethel Hospital Norwich (est. 1713), Bicêtre Hospital (est. 1742) and the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière (est. 1656) in Paris, as well as other smaller asylums and private 'madhouses', had been solely custodial, lacking any sincere therapeutic function. Along with the development of a pronounced medical consciousness, the practice of confinement was then however differentiated throughout the 19th century—violent handlings were reportedly decreasing, many patients were unchained, and their self-control encouraged (Scull, 2015). Some physicians further aimed to overturn the warehousing of the 'mad' by attempting to heal the 'insane', for example via listening to their thoughts and ideas or providing occupational and recreative activities, including, at times, the provision of art materials (Shorter, 1997).

Early References to Creatively Active Patients

Following the trajectories of the "great confinement" as outlined by Foucault (1961/2006, p. 35), the extensive accounts of Shorter (1997) and Scull (2015) on the genealogy of psychiatry, as well as MacGregor's investigations into the early onsets of 'Outsider Art' (1989), there seems to have been a rising diagnostic, therapeutic and aesthetic interest in the works created by asylum inmates co-aligning with the development of both modern psychiatry and the onsets of psychotherapy.

In *Treatise on Insanity* (1801), French psychiatrist Philippe Pinel provides one of the earliest scientific accounts on the creative activity of professionally trained psychiatric patients, indicating that drawing and painting may have a therapeutic effect. More interested in the spontaneous acts of image-making by untrained patients was American psychiatrist Benjamin Rush, who even acknowledged these works as "wonderful" (p. 153f) in his *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind* from 1835. Neither provided any thorough descriptions or reproductions of the imagery however, but merely referred to their existence.

British psychiatrist John Haslam is widely acknowledged for being the first author who has reproduced actual examples of patient artwork in his book, providing a detailed study of James Tilly Matthew's creations in *Illustrations of Madness* (1810). Even though Haslam has reportedly produced his study to prove the 'madness' of his patient (MacGregor, 1989), his work may still be considered of crucial importance since it contains many direct quotations from Matthew's notebooks, thus partially enabling an artist-based understanding of his drawings and conserving what would have otherwise most likely been lost or forgotten. Also noteworthy are the cases of Jonathan Martin and Richard Dadd, who were both provided with art materials during their incarceration in the 1850s, with the creative activities of well-known and professionally trained artist Dadd having been actively encouraged and supported by his psychiatrist (Eiss, 2012). In my understanding, this as well as the newspaper coverage and rising public interest in the lives and works of Martin and Dadd, indicate an important shift in attitude and awareness towards artistically active patients, perhaps further ensuring that a great amount of their work and notes have survived to this day. Like Matthew's

case, however, most journalists and critics would evaluate Martin's and Dadd's images from a sole pathological point of view, eager to find traces of 'insanity' in their artistic productions.

MacGregor attributes the general absence of in-depth evaluations, the tendency to pathologise and the relative reluctance of psychiatrists to engage any further with these creative expressions not only to the prevalent definition of art at the time, but first and foremost to the perception of 'madness' as "a mental state overriding the individuality of the patient" (1989, p. 38). Since art and rationality were linked in the 'enlightened' perspective, it followed that the 'mad' patient would, by definition, not possess the necessary means to create meaningful art. Based on the belief that the 'insane' had lost their identity, their behaviour and actions were considered irrational in most cases—hence their artmaking was also not 'seen', or if so, only as an externalised act of their 'insanity' and therefore necessarily pathological, as MacGregor speculates.

Indeed, deeper examinations would become common practice only in the late 19th century, owing much to the growing influence of Romanticism and conceptions of subjectivity and individuality, which slowly gained ground within psychiatric circles (Gilman, 1985). In this respect, psychiatrists Paul Max Simon and William Noyes may be understood as having prepared the ground for a more thorough investigation of patient artworks. Considering them as a means for the 'insane' to communicate, Simon outlined the diagnostic potential of these works in his two articles *L'imagination dans la folie* (1876) and *Les écrites et les dessins des aliénés* (1888). Although he would refrain from using the term 'art', in both articles Simon did represent them as meaningful contributions which may contain the key to the inner workings of the patient's mind, further rejecting a reading of these expressions as pathological symptoms. Likewise, Noyes suggested in his article *Paranoia: A Study of the Evolution of Systematized Delusions of Grandeur* (1888) that the act of painting was not pathological, but a healthy activity worth encouraging and potentially revealing an underlying system of interrelated ideas which may then be decoded.

Despite acknowledging their symbolic content and even grasping these artistic expressions as a language, Simon—as well as his aforementioned predecessors and contemporaries—was adhering to the then prevailing standards of judging the arts, and was far from acknowledging the creative works of his patients as 'real' art. Nevertheless, their writings may be considered rare exceptions, since most psychiatrists during the 19th century were still handling the artistic produce of psychiatric patients as mere illustrations of their mental disturbance—if not discarding them as meaningless rubbish from the very beginning. Apart from these early appreciators, the pejorative terms many physicians used to describe the creative expressions by patients thereby stood in close alignment with early evaluations of impressionist painters. Their artworks were met with equal parts ignorance and hostility by most art critics, who would at times disregard these artists altogether as delusional lunatics, as literary theorist Leonard Diepeveen demonstrates in *The Difficulties of Modernism* (2003).

Thus, the readings of the artworks of psychiatric patients as well as avant-garde artists in the 19th century find themselves in a similar field of tension, moving from romantically inclined celebrations of the 'mad genius' to their being declared 'degenerate', taking the direction to the opposite extreme.

Between Romantic Idealisations of 'Madness' and Derogatory Claims of Degeneracy

As Shorter (1997) points out, there have been two general strands of interpreting mental illness in the 19th century, with the dominant branch being biological psychiatry, and psychosocial psychiatry remaining its smaller counterpart until its temporary breakthrough in the early 20th century. While the assertation that mental illnesses have a genetic component helped to medicalise and thereby presumably somewhat lessen the stigma of the 'insane', this achievement would be partly overturned again with the idea of 'degeneracy' introduced by psychiatrist Bénédict-Auguste Morel in the 1850s. According to the latter, the 'madness' of 'degenerates' would "recapitulate in their bodies the pathological organic characteristics of a number of previous generations", thus declaring 'insanity' inheritable while further attesting it to worsen as it passes from generation to generation (Morel, 1857, pp. iii–ix). Psychiatrists Valentin Magnan and Maurice Paul Legrain would develop this idea further and, furnishing it with moral judgements on a societal level, proclaim:

> Degeneracy is more than an individual disease, it is a social menace: it is important to combat it with a rigorous form of social hygiene. One must not forget that the degenerate is often a dangerous individual against whom society should and must reserve the right to defend itself. (Legrain & Magnan, 1895, p. 235)

Promulgations declaring that the 'insane' and other 'deviants' such as alcoholics, homosexuals, prostitutes, anarchists and feminists were dangerous and infectious 'degenerates' can be found with increasing frequency in the boulevard press from this point onwards, eventually providing a 'rationale' for sterilisation laws and euthanasia in Nazi Germany, as Gilman (1985) has shown. According to the latter, very early on, the pictorial creations of asylum patients were discussed as pathological signs of 'degenerate' minds and products of mental disturbance in the very same context, with the concept of degeneracy thereby crucially informing the discourse around the supposed link between creativity and madness at the turn of the 20th century.

Physician, anthropologist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso counts as one of the first who amassed a vast collection of paintings, drawings and sculptures produced by patients—a conglomerate still on display at the Museum of Criminal Anthropology in Turin today. This collection would build the basis of his book *The Man of Genius* (1891), in which he provides several classification criteria for 'insane art', understanding the latter as an expression of illness and devoid of any aesthetic value. Declaring all artists 'degenerate', Lombroso proclaimed that their genius must be grasped as a form of "moral insanity" and took the artworks produced by 'psychotics' as proof of this statement, supposedly testifying the degenerate mental condition of the maker. Physicians and conservative art critics were also quick to relate ideas of inherent degeneracy to upcoming trends in modern art and avant-garde art practices of embracing the 'primitives', condemning them altogether as 'insane'. Inspired by Lombroso's equation of artistic genius and degenerate madness, the physician Max Nordau, for example, would perpetuate such views in his book *Degeneration* (1895), declaring all art to be criminal and "an irrational symptom of psychological illness" (1895/2018, p. 321). With the 'insane' artist

at least safely confined in the asylum, the avant-garde artist was seen as a much more detrimental threat to society, potentially infecting the public with 'degenerate' ideas. This worry was pronounced strongly by Teophilus Hyslop, superintendent at Bethlem Hospital until 1910, who warns about art critics who voice their appreciation for the 'Art of the Insane', indicating the supposed dangerous implications of the latter:

> That the works of insane artists may be crude, absurd, or vile matters little so long as they exert no corrupting influence on society, and so long as society fully appreciates their pathological significance. Unfortunately, however, some creations which emanate from degenerates are revered by the borderland critics, blindly admired by the equally borderland public, and their real nature is not adequately dealt with by the correcting influence of the sane. (Hyslop, 1916, p. 38)

Although judging the modern arts in an equally unflattering manner, Sigmund Freud firmly rejected the concept of degeneracy and, with his interest in the depths of the unconscious, would have a more edifying impact on the scholarly appreciation of the 'Art of the Insane' around the same time.

As an advocate of psychosocial psychiatry, Freud eradicated clear demarcation lines between the 'healthy norm' and 'sick degenerates' established by biological psychiatry, instead proclaiming mental illnesses to being acquired rather than inherited (Scull, 2015). Shifting the search of the origins of mental illnesses from the organic and biological to the level of meaning and symbols, he indicated that 'madness' may not be a problem of the 'Other' but to some degree may lurk in all of us. As psychiatrist Rose Spiegel indicates, Freud thereby successfully revised then prevailing understandings of the image of human nature, attacking the concept of degeneracy as "a belief-system [carrying] a sense of doom and foreordained inferiority and futility" (1986, p. 8). With his technique of psychoanalysis revolving around free association, Freud would instead introduce a much more optimistic therapeutic approach, prospecting the possibility of change. By bringing unconscious conflicts and long-past events into the consciousness, patients would be led to cure themselves and resolve their suffering, independent of their biological predisposition. Freud's focus on the unconscious must thereby be grasped as tightly interwoven with the introspective endeavours and interest in irrational emotionality by his Romantic precursors in the arts and poetry as well as early psychosocial psychiatry, which had thus far been overshadowed by its medically oriented counterpart (Shorter, 1997).

Members of the Romantic movement—quite contrary to the spirit of Enlightenment, rationality and scientifically 'objective' rapprochements to mental illnesses—idealised 'madness', celebrating and embracing its irrationality, as Beveridge (2001) demonstrates. Already at its height in the beginning of the 19th century, the Romantics turned away from technology, objective science and representational art; and inwards in search for purity, solitude, radical sentiments and the sublime. In their depictions of the 'insane', artists such as Géricault, Goya and Delacroix would emphasise individualism and subjectivity and portray 'madness' as an isolated but superior and pure state, unrestrained by social norms, cultural conventions or morality. Reinforcing the idea of the artist as an 'Outsider' and reviving the supposed link between genius and madness already promulgated by Plato, the 'insane' were celebrated as heroes who have

supposedly "broken free from the cage of reason and logic" (Beveridge, 2001, p. 597). Writers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Lord Byron, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire and William Blake would likewise promote this view in their respective writings, further reproducing the myth of the 'mad genius'.

Considering feelings as superior to intellect, not just the mere act of creating, but the content of works produced by the asylum inmates, would move to the centre of attention and the 'madman', admired as undiluted in his spontaneous expression, become a "visionary who alone could see realities invisible to others" (MacGregor, 1989, p. 72). Following MacGregor, in this process, the 'madman' was "transformed from a mindless, unfeeling animal into a heroic embodiment of the Romantic ideal, his art a pure expression of the Romantic imagination unchained" (1989, p. 4). Such idealistic reinterpretations were also applied to the colonised 'primitive' and 'savages' around the same time, whose ascribed natural purity—seemingly untouched by the pressures of a rapidly mechanising, artificial and alienating society—was seen as desirable and noble. Counteracting derogatory concepts of the 'primitives' as voiced by Darwin (1871), Thomas Hobbes (1651) and Edmund Burke (1790), such re-conceptualisations seem to have been prepared for by philosophers like Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) or Johann Gottfried Herder (1784) who celebrated folk culture, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche in their pronounced cultural pessimism and, perhaps most prominently, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the 'noble savage' (1754).

As MacGregor (1989) indicates, both the development and rising popularity of psychoanalysis, with its focus on the unconscious, sentiments and feelings, as well as the artistic celebrations of subjectivity, irrationality and spirituality, favoured a new and closer confrontation with previously unseen artworks and perspectives. It seems to have triggered widespread attention and interest in the 'Art of the Insane' and a positive change in attitude towards these works, substantially informing the discourse about 'Outsider Art' to this day. Presumably, the increasing contact between artists and psychiatrists during the 19th century may have also contributed to the de-stigmatisation and acknowledgement of the 'insane' as individuals whose thoughts, experiences and creations were now being considered valuable and worthwhile paying attention to.

However, even though the progressive contributions of psychiatrists such as Pinel, Simon and Freud may have considerably influenced the study of the 'Art of the Insane', they were still followers of rather conventional taste, with Freud even overtly expressing hostile attitudes towards modern art, as art historian Donald Kuspit (2000) illustrates. Starting and maintaining their collections and investigations predominately out of scientific, rather than aesthetic interests, within the realms of psychiatry, the study of patient art was thus bound to reach a dead end. According to MacGregor, in the beginning of the 20th century it was instead the task of artists, art historians, collectors and art critics, "to break through the barrier that divided these images from the world of art, and to recognize among the mad the presence of great artists and pure art" (1989, p. 193).

4.2 Precursor II: Avant-Garde Movements and Appropriations of the 'Other'

Considering the official trajectories of Western art history as promulgated by art historians such as Ernst Gombrich (2006) or Arnold Hauser (1999), the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century are often proclaimed to stand out as those periods, in which the very idea of art underwent a radical transformation and expansion. With Germany, the UK and France among the self-declared art world centres, advocates of Romanticism and later on many members of modern avant-garde movements, would display a certain dissatisfaction with the academy and Western culture, disillusioned by the effects of industrialisation and longing to escape from its supposed oppression. As indicated above, a cultural pessimism had been developing in close alignment with the notion of living in a progress-oriented, highly mechanised, alienating and increasingly individualised society, informing much of the artistic and literary resistance from the Romantic era onwards. Historians Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas have defined this 'cultural pessimism' as

> the discontent of the civilized with civilization, or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it. It is the belief of men living in a highly evolved and complex cultural condition that a life far simpler and less sophisticated in some or all respects is a more desirable life. (Lovejoy & Boas, 1935, p. 7)

As literary theorist Andrew Maunder (2010) suggests, this counter-focus on simplicity, and with it the intuition and spontaneity celebrated by many philosophers, critics and artists from the mid-19th century onwards, may have been evoked by the overt emphasis on rationality, science and progress prevalent since the Enlightenment. In this context, the idea behind the artwork gained more and more weight, and so did the idealisation of the artist genius as a troubled but visionary anti-hero and outcast of society, who alone would have access to the underlying truths of life, aiming to "depict not the thing, but the effect it produces" (Mallarmé, 1945, p. 365). Thus, when looking at the handful of those modern artists who managed to secure their place as 'masters' in European art history, from Impressionism onwards, two major themes of *Escapism* become apparent:

- A turn inwards—attending to sentiments, feelings, dreams, and the unconscious mind.
- A turn towards the 'Other'—focusing on those who were believed to have uninhibited access to the realms of the point above, due to their supposed rawness, simplicity and closeness to nature.

Following sociologist Stepjan Mestrovic (2010), in either case, a deliberate turn away from the realities of industrialisation, political unrest and depersonalisation was performed by fin-de-siècle artists in a countercultural demeanour emphasising those aspects which were feared to become obsolete: the spiritual, natural, emotional, imaginative, pure and authentic. This inherent wish for social change and idealisation of inner experiences on one hand and the heroisation of 'rural folk', peasants, 'tribal exotics', children and the 'insane' on the other, form the art historical breeding ground

for the subsequently emerging category of 'Outsider Art' and are based on the notion of primitivity.

Turning Primitivity Upside-Down

Following Hiller (1991) the hype of the 'primitive' in the self-acclaimed European art world centres at the turn of the 20th century is closely intertwined with the modern constitution of avant-garde movements and, as one of its most decisive features, has been influential well into the late 20th century. As a set of ideas, the discourse about primitivity and exoticism came up during the Enlightenment in concurrence with industrialisation and European colonial expansion, functioning along the lines of one-sided Othering processes as delineated in the previous chapter. As Rhodes critically points out, far removed from the idea of engaging in a dialogue, many modern artists saw the 'Other' "through the distorting lens of Western constructions of the primitive", regarding the latter "as always more instinctive, less bound by artistic convention and history, and as somehow closer to fundamental aspects of human existence" (1994, p. 8f). These assumptions may be understood as resulting from the Social-Darwinian discourse prevalent at the time, with scientists such as Lucien Lévy Bruhl (1910) and Ernst Haeckel (1899) placing certain groups of people closer to the origins of humanity and nature on an imagined unilinear scale of progress towards civilisation and nuanced sophistication.

But *who* were these 'primitives'? Although historically mostly used to designate 'savage tribal groups' such as 'the Africans' or 'the Polynesians', when looking at the written accounts and manifestos of a number of avant-garde artists, it becomes clear that the individuals classed 'primitive' are not geographically confined to the non-European. In their attempt to attack established values and turn away from academic and traditional Western aesthetics, artists like Maurice de Vlaminck, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Pablo Picasso, George Braque, André Derain, Amedeo Modigliani and later Max Ernst and André Breton, were actively seeking new modes of expression, eager to explore the unconscious roots of their creativity. In this endeavour, the art of supposedly 'naïve' and folk painters, 'psychotics' and 'madmen', children and 'savages', proved to be a fruitful point of reference and inspiration, since their work was understood as the most pure, intuitive and spontaneous expression of creativity, "unmuddied by artistic training or received knowledge" (Rhodes, 2000, p. 8). Being Othered according to the same principle of a supposedly shared primitive mindset, the individuals belonging to these groups were conceptualised by avant-garde artists as "hold[ing] up a mirror of lost innocence and authenticity to a civilization […] over complex and riven by falseness", as Rhodes surmises (2000, p. 24). In a similar manner, their pictorial expressions were interpreted as a "liberating disregard for cultural convention", soon becoming highly valued artworks worth studying and collecting (Beveridge, 2001, p. 595). Kandinsky and Marc, for example, made a habit out of showcasing works by children, the 'insane', 'savages' and the 'naïve' alongside those from avant-garde circles, stressing the notion of a shared, universal human creativity (MacGregor, 1989). In a review, Klee would likewise proclaim such common grounds when stating:

> These [Blue Rider pictures] are primitive beginnings in art, such as one usually finds in ethnographic collections or at home in one's nursery. Do not laugh, reader! Children also have artistic ability, and there is wisdom in their having it! The more helpless they are, the more instructive are the examples they furnish us; and they must be preserved free from corruption from an early age. Parallel phenomena are provided by works of the mentally diseased; neither childish behaviour nor madness are insulting words here, as they commonly are. All this is to be taken very seriously when it comes to reforming today's art. (Klee, 1912/1992, p. 266)

In my understanding, this statement indicates one of the most crucial features of Primitivism: the positive reinvention of the formerly derogatory label 'primitive' as virtuous, losing its sole means of describing a deficiency. Counteracting derogatory conceptualisations, the 'savages', the 'insane', 'rural folk'—as well as the notion of 'undeveloped' and 'primitive' childishness—were thereby heaved upon a pedestal, with those modern artists engaged in their construction virtually flipping the Social-Darwinian model of evolution in their proposal for social and artistic change. Fuelled by Romanticism, the underlying agenda of this discursive flip is exemplified among others by leader of the Arts & Crafts Movement William Morris. He would celebrate the supposed purity of folk culture, representing the latter as firmly rooted in unchanging local customs, untouched by technology and civilisation. The latter was detested by Morris, who blamed the "cold ugliness of industrialization" for having taken away creativity from the people, rendering the world and its products artificial and soulless (Zolberg, 2015, p. 506). Despite Morris' critical act of rebellion, the appropriation of the 'primitive' as a vehicle and countercultural instrument of critique has, however, first and foremost been exercised by Post-Impressionist and Expressionist artists, who have significantly contributed to the shifting context in which the works of the 'insane' and 'savages' were discussed and consumed from this point onwards.

De/Recontextualisations of 'Tribal Artefacts'

As Zolberg (2015) suggests, the widespread fad for exotica, travel books and colonial literature from the early 18th century onwards, as well as the showcase of 'savages' at the World's Fairs (e.g. Crystal Palace Exhibition, London, 1851; Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1855), may be interpreted as not only serving for the exotic fantasies of the public, but also underlining the 'prolific' status of Western civilisation in an attempt to legitimise colonialisation. Following a similar agenda, the 'tribal artefacts' of 'savages' had been part of many *Kunst- and Wunderkammern* since the 16th century, from the 19th century onwards also being featured in newly established ethnographic and natural history museums, as anthropologist Fred Myers (2006) points out. Displayed as estranging scientific curiosities, Zolberg (1997) and Perry (1993) suggest that they may have been instrumentalised as 'evidence' of the barbaric nature, lack of culture and inhumanity attested to their creators, thus 'proving' their inferiority and reconfirming their place at the lower ends of social evolution.

Considered the expert field of ethnology, it was only at the turn of the 20th century for these works to be re-evaluated as 'true art' from an aesthetical point of view and

be turned to now testify the opposite: the innately pure creativity and supposedly pre-rational, childlike mentality of the 'primitive'. As Rhodes (1994) delineates, the latter had already been a popular belief by the beginning of the 20th century and nurtured through respective representations of the 'savages' in colonial exhibitions, magazines and travel reports. 'Tribal art' from central and southern Africa, the Americas and Oceania would raise the most interest among avant-garde artists. Proclaiming to be the first to 'discover' the artistic value of African sculptures were the Fauves in 1906, in particular de Vlaminck and Derain, influencing Matisse, Picasso and Modigliani in their quest for the 'primitive' shortly after, as retraced by art scholar Michael Landert (2011). Following art historian Robert Goldwater (1986), in Germany influential traces of 'tribal art' may also be found in the Brücke group from as early as 1904, in the paintings of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Max Pechstein and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. Reportedly, Emil Nolde passionately collected 'exotic art' and was fascinated by its "absolute primitiveness, its intense, often grotesque expression of strength and life in the very simplest form" (as cited in Goldwater, 1986, p. 105). Expressing a pronounced cultural pessimism, he states:

> Primeval man lives within his nature. He is at one with it and a part of the whole universe. Occasionally I feel that he is the only real human being left, while we are more like marionettes, spoilt, artificial and completely in the dark. (Nolde as cited in Fowler & Abadie, 1986, p. 201)

The material 'exotic artefacts' which served as the basis for such statements may thereby be understood as having been rendered into fetishes and "magical commodities" (Foster, 1985, p. 57), interpreted as objectified expressions of irrational beliefs and magical powers supposedly informing their 'primitive' makers. According to anthropologist Ingrid Kreide-Damani (1992), of all objects it was African masks in particular, which had been thoroughly emptied of their initial ritual-bound purpose by modern artists in this process, consequently functioning as mere projection surfaces for European fantasies. Rhodes indicates that this disinterest in the original context is most prominently exemplified by Picasso who "read into African sculpture precisely those expressive qualities that he wished to achieve in his own work at that time" (1994, p. 116). Picasso may have thus facilitated a form of stylistic appropriation which, in hindsight to Foster (1985), may be called 'morphological Primitivism', with Maclagan even accusing avant-garde artists of "theft" by "extracting the object from its original context […] and [giving it] a new value, one that may not have been part of the intentions of its maker" (1987, p. 10).

This practice of Othering may have been particularly successful due to the fact that most artists engaging with it had not personally encountered these 'savage' creators or the local contexts in which their objects were produced (Rhodes, 1994). Yet even those who did travel to remote non-European places, like Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff and Pechstein, seem to have made no genuine effort to 'go native'. As Rhodes points out, "while they argued a sense of fellowship with these indigenous communities, these artists made no attempt to settle or to share the life of the inhabitants" (1994, p. 34). This is most prominently exemplified by Post-Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin, who left France and settled in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, and for many years clung to the idea of residing in a sexually free, pure and untouched society (Rhodes, 1994). Even though

the inhabitants reportedly did not quite live up to their attested primitivity, Gauguin would, in his paintings and writings, refrain from any deeper engagements, preferring to pursue his initial utopian vision: providing the European public with a mythic image of uninfluenced purity (Kreide-Damani, 1992). Gauguin thereby proceeded with a tradition already established by writers such as Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Francois René de Chateaubriand, now contributing to a romantic reading of the 'savage Other' and their material culture through an artistic rather than scientific lens, still, however, remaining steadfast in the Eurocentric perspective and celebrating their supposed primitivity from afar.

De/Recontextualisations of the 'Art of the Insane'

Previously considered the expert field of psychiatry and similarly to 'tribal artefacts', the art produced by asylum inmates was removed from its former scientific context and established as a central aesthetic reference point within the arts from the late 19th century onwards.

As art historian Thomas Röske (2003) points out, madness as a theme had been booming in the beginning of the 20th century and runs prominently through Expressionist painting, literature and drama, tempting many artists to depict and market themselves as 'madmen'. Vincent van Gogh was a likely candidate to serve as an initial reference point, his tragic and 'insane' existence becoming an actual lifestyle which artists such as Oskar Kokoschka, Emil Nolde and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner aspired to and even envied, as MacGregor (1989) indicates. Apart from Kirchner, who had actually been hospitalised and treated for mental illness, Kokoschka especially is renowned for his efforts to represent himself as a 'mad genius', wishing to produce deliberately ugly and grotesque "nerve-mad portraits" (Kokoschka, 1909/1984, p. 10). As an inward-turning art form desiring self-knowledge and intuitive, spontaneous emotionality, the advocates of Expressionism thereby took a clear stance against reason, rationality and calculated composition. Founding their ideas on the belief in a primitive creative urge or the "principle of inner necessity", as Kandinsky termed it in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910), many Expressionist painters celebrated 'insanity', seeking after new pictorial styles and giving their work an appearance of 'madness'. Hence, perhaps unsurprisingly, the first major exhibition of Expressionist art in 1906 provoked a range of drastic reviews, such as the following:

> There are only two possible ways to explain this absurd exhibition: either one assumes that the majority of the members and guests of the Association are incurably insane, or else that one deals here with brazen bluffers who know the desire for sensation of our time only too well and are trying to make use of this boom. For my part, I tend towards the latter opinion—in spite of holy assurances to the contrary; yet I am willing to accept the former out of the goodness of my heart. (Review as cited in Selz, 1974, p. 196)

As already indicated, it was not only the idea of 'madness' which became an inspiring countercultural instrument, but also the artworks produced by those believed to be 'genuinely insane'. Paul Klee counts as one of the earliest artists making explicit refer-

ence to 'psychotic' art, which he reportedly came into contact with in 1905 and later on enthusiastically promoted as a decisive component for the further development of art (Ferrier, 1998). As will be exemplified below, like Klee, a number of avant-garde artists came to appreciate the 'Art of the Insane' for their abstract forms and 'emotional expressiveness' from this point onwards. The increasing contact of artists with these works has thereby been made possible by psychiatrists reviewing their collections and organising exhibitions around the subject, most notably the display of 'Psychotic Art' at Bethlem Hospital London in 1900, the opening of the Mad Museum by Auguste Marie at the hospital Villejuif in 1905 as well as temporary expositions of 'Insane Art' in Berlin 1913 and Moscow 1914.

In this context, Marcel Réja (1873–1957) is generally acknowledged as being the first art critic—and psychiatrist incognito[1]—having evaluated the 'Art of the Insane' from an entirely aesthetic point of view, rejecting the pathologising bias of his colleagues and predecessors in his book *Art by the Mad* (1907). Rather than attesting these works diagnostic labels, he understood them as primitive expressions of a universal creativity, stating unisono with many avant-garde artists that the 'insane', the 'savages', prehistoric artists, prisoners, 'naïves', children and spiritual mediums have unique access to the elementary sources of the creative impulse from which more complex art may then arise. In theoretical closeness to Freud, Réja may have thereby somewhat lessened the perception of the 'insane' as the far distant Other, outlining their expressions as not different in kind to that of the 'healthy' artist but as "exaggerations" of the same sources which 'normally' remain hidden and obscure (1907/1997, p. 22). Réja would indeed clearly dissociate his stance from Lombroso and Nordau when stating:

> Wir suchen nicht danach, wieweit ein Künstler als verrückt gelten kann, sondern inwieweit ein offenkundiger Wahnsinn künstlerischen Ausdruck ermöglicht. [We are not attempting to constitute to what extent an artist can be understood as insane, but to what extent insanity facilitates artistic expression.] (1907/1997, p. 17–own translation)

Such statements may be understood as a strong counterproposal to psychopathological and demeaning evaluations of modern art, leading MacGregor to declare Réja "the pioneer of a new phase of aesthetic response to psychotic art" (1989, p. 177). Nevertheless, Réja would still clearly separate these artforms from 'high art', seeing them at the most as "embryonic forms" of the latter and at times devaluing them as being solely decorative (1907/1997, p. 29; p. 161). Yet even those artists declaring the 'Art of the Insane' to be the only true art would do so on the grounds of attesting a primitive mindset to their creators, thus remaining in clear opposition as their sophisticated reviewers in much the same manner.

1 Réja's real name was Paul Meunier. He hid his occupation as a psychiatrist behind the pseudonym Marcel Réja whenever engaging in activities as an art critic, and was careful to keep these two identities separate for decades.

Consequences of Primitivism

The above examples indicate that the 'primitive' is a *relational* category and the reversion one as simple as that: a turn from negative to positive discrimination, still taking the greater scheme of the superiority of the 'Self' and the inferiority of the 'Other' for granted. Both 'tribal artefacts' and the 'Art of the Insane' have been heaved out of the scientific contexts in which they were often derogatorily reviewed, now placed in museums and valued for their intrinsic 'purity'. The idea of the 'mad artist' or 'barbaric savage' thereby fulfilled a deliberating function and was instrumentalised by a number of avant-garde artists as a discursive matchstick to ignite social change and revolutionise traditional Western arts practices. Even if replacing negative with positive connotations, the status of the 'Other', however, remained largely unaltered and uncontested, with the voices of those labelled left unheard and colonial legacies reproduced. Following philosopher Jesse Prinz (2017), in their appropriating demeanour, fin-de-siècle artists engaging with the works of the 'insane' and 'savages', may have even further isolated and decontextualised these 'artefacts', reinforcing colonial misreadings by showing little interest if the Expressionist qualities and meanings they read into this art corresponded in any way with the original context of their creation. Furthermore, information about the latter may even have been openly rejected to ensure that the mysteriousness of the artwork and the believed Otherness of its creator remained intact.

The relative ignorance and insistence on seeing only what one wants to see is also most prominently exemplified by the avant-gardist reception of 'naïve' artist Henry Rousseau. A former toll collector and 'Sunday painter', Rousseau had been 'discovered' by the avant-garde around 1905, with his artworks subsequently achieving high prices on the market due to the promoting efforts of art dealer Wilhelm Uhde. Rousseau was embraced by the latter for his "simple charme" (1911/2005, p. 27) and as "a great innocent, with little knowledge of the wiles of the world" (Uhde, 1911/2005, p. 36). Picasso and Kandinsky likewise cherished Rousseau for his childlike innocence, thus further "banalizing" (Green, 2005, p. 87) and reinforcing the myth of the artist as being unaware and uncorrupted by the art world.

However, as Rousseau delineates in his autobiographical notes, to the contrary of such attestations he was very much influenced by academic traditionalism, longing to be part of the establishment and aiming for realistic depictions, even if not necessarily achieving them. Speaking about himself in the third person, Rousseau at one point proclaims that "he is in the process of becoming one of our best realist painters" (as cited in Rich, 1942, p. 22), further stating that, in his artistic endeavours, he is very much inspired by Gérôme and Clément. His sincerity and self-awareness as an artist is further exemplified by his self-portrait from 1890, as seen in Figure 2.

The avant-gardist admiration of Rousseau indicates a particular form of misrecognition which will be of central concern in the empirical section of this book: it was exactly the failing of his self-set intentions and 'technical inadequacy' which avant-garde artists were attracted to, ignoring Rousseau's statements of following conservative aims in their overt rejection of the very same academic traditions. While the 'Outsider' status of avant-garde artists was deliberate and self-chosen, Rousseau remained an 'Outsider' involuntarily. With his art not intending to rebel or revolutionise, it was still being re-

duced to these features by his admirers, whose perspective would largely overshadow Rousseau's own account. The obvious discrepancy between externally ascribed and self-proclaimed artist identity revealed in such one-sided Othering practices and instrumentalisations has also been indicated by Goldwater with reference to Rousseau. Otherwise less critically oriented, in his survey on *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Goldwater speaks about the contrast between "the aim of the artist and his achievement", which can be understood as the emic, self-intentional side and "the achievement of the artist and its appreciation" as the etic side, not necessarily being "relevant to the aim and intention of the 'naïve' artists themselves" but rather for "the production of the 'sophisticated' artists" (Goldwater, 1986, pp. 178–180).

Figure 2. Rousseau, H. (1890). Myself: Portrait—Landscape (Oil on Canvas). National Gallery, Prague.

With the 'discovery' of 'Primitive Art' having thus been informed by a direction already taken, only those aspects confirming the supposedly simplistic, primal and archaic mindset and purity of its creator seem to have been appreciated, with the latter's

work merely being squashed from one into another corset of pre-set values, ideas and ideals. Consequently, Foster (2001) understands the concept of primitivity as a non-dialogical device telling us much more about the identity of the appropriating artists, collectors, and critics, while obscuring those they are supposedly referring to. With the 'primitive' being allowed "to speak only through the voice of his […] interpreters" (Rhodes, 1994, p. 78), 'Naïve Art', the 'Art of the Insane', 'Folk Art' as well as the art of children, have thereby been rendered to empty vessels to be filled with primitivist fantasies. As Othered fetishes, these art forms have not only served as an instrument to challenge, expand and revive the Western cultural system as proclaimed, but at the same time strengthened the self-appointed superiority and privileged positions of a number of artists therein, as Foster (1985) argues. Rather than severely subverting, threatening or undermining, the 'exotic Other' may have thereby served solely as a comfortable, fashionable thrill, with Staszak stating that "exoticism is less the pleasure of confronting Otherness than the pleasure of having the satisfaction of experiencing the sight of a reassuring version of this confrontation, true to our fantasies, that comforts us in our identity and superiority" (2009, p. 6).

Despite these extensive criticisms, the romantic reinterpretation of 'insanity', the primitivist search for the fundamental sources of creativity and the fascination with the Other expressed by artists and scholars did also have a positive side. The early collections of visual documents, poems and letters of psychiatric patients by artistically inclined physicians bear witness to the experiences of asylum inmates whose voices have only recently been acknowledged and rediscovered as valuable and unique historical sources which may otherwise have been lost. Likewise, the overall appreciative review of art world 'Outsiders' did favour a new and closer confrontation with previously disregarded artworks, individuals and perspectives, and despite their appropriative practices, certainly diversified and enriched the artistic landscape.

This is of crucial importance considering that, in the early 20th century, the enthusiasm for the 'Other' has not been met by the wider public nor by most art critics of the day. Quite to the contrary, the vast amount of demeaning reviews—most notably those by Nordau and Hyslop[2]—seem to have outnumbered the few positive engagements with these works, at least in Germany, contributing to a distinct climate of hostility towards the 'Art of the Insane'. In consideration of this context and building on the primitivist and romantic groundwork outlined above, the contributions of Walter Morgenthaler and Hans Prinzhorn in particular must be understood as rare and risky glimpses, providing alternative viewpoints in the midst of overwhelmingly pathologising and devaluing attitudes.

2 Hyslop curated the Bethlem Hospital exhibition in 1900 but despised the works on show, expounding rather coarsely: "they ignore all contemporary ideals as to what is beautiful, significant, and worthy to be portrayed, and it is thus that free play is given to the workings of their defective minds, and whereby they evolve their absurd crudities, stupid distortions of natural objects, and obscure nebulous productions which, being merely reflections of their own diseased brains, bear no resemblance to anything known to the normal senses or intellect" (Hyslop, 1916, p. 35).

4.3 The 'Insane' Artist as Master: The Legacies and Contributions of Hans Prinzhorn and Walter Morgenthaler

The first writers who thoroughly discussed and expressed wholehearted appreciation for the artistic creations of asylum inmates as the work of artists and not as a sign of 'insanity' were psychiatrists Hans Prinzhorn (1886–1933) in Germany and Walter Morgenthaler (1882–1965) in Switzerland. Rejecting clinical approaches when reviewing patient art, they would base their elaborations on psychological and aesthetic viewpoints only. Becoming literary classics in the field, their respective books are still regarded as crucially important references when talking about the history of 'Outsider Art', with MacGregor describing Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler as "masters of both disciplines, in the borderland between psychiatry and art" (1989, p. 212). Both were indeed well-versed in the arts, had a rather progressive outlook and were strongly influenced by ideas brought forward by advocates of Romanticism, Expressionism as well as psychosocial psychiatry and psychoanalysis. As did their avant-gardist predecessors and contemporaries, they valued spontaneity, expressiveness and immediacy, and based most of their theories on the assumption of an inborn creative urge declared inherent in all mankind and supposedly observable in its most pristine form in the artistic productions of 'psychotics'.

Morgenthaler's and Prinzhorn's contributions share striking similarities in this regard, although Morgenthaler's monograph *Madness and Art: The Life and Works of Adolf Wölfli* (1921) is exceptional, as it breaks with the medical convention of using initials, numbers or pseudonyms to anonymise patients, as Prinzhorn would still do. Instead, Morgenthaler focuses on the case history and artistic work of one single patient, the peasant Adolf Wölfli, who reportedly began to draw, musically compose and write in 1899. Throughout the study, Wölfli is portrayed as a sincere artist whose oeuvre at the time of his death in 1930 consisted of a 45-volume autobiographical project of books containing around 25,000 pages of paintings, drawings, collages, prose, hymns and psalms prominently featuring his alter ego, St Adolf II. The sheer vastness of his work and Morgenthaler's enthusiastic publicity had a huge impact and led many admirers such as Rhodes to pronounce Wölfli "the greatest and certainly the most famous Outsider Artist" (2000, p. 8). Declaring a mental patient an artist did not fall on fruitful grounds within psychiatric circles; however, when Morgenthaler set out to his extensive analysis of Wölfli's artistic style and personality, it was clear from the start that he did so as an art critic with a non-medical audience in mind, primarily driven by personal fascination rather than scientific objective. According to MacGregor (1989), this had an immediate effect on Wölfli, who was endorsing the use of his real name, subsequently even proposed his own exhibition and catalogue and was very much aware of his rising fame as an artist, following Morgenthaler's publication. Likewise, the demand for his work and commissions increased to an overwhelming extent, with Wölfli reportedly reluctant to respond to these external requests:

> Occasionally it will […] occur to him to give a drawing, without expecting anything in return, to someone he particularly likes, especially to women and children. This is infrequent; on the contrary one often has to press him quite energetically to get him to

> make drawings from which others may profit. He usually answers that he doesn't have the time or that he has more intelligent things to do. (Morgenthaler, 1921/1992, p. 26)

It is striking that Morgenthaler felt the apparent necessity to force Wölfli and "press him quite energetically" to create these works, yet as art historian Elka Spoerri points out, apart from working on his giant autobiography, the artist had already engaged in producing single-sheet drawings as "Bread Art" for the sole means of selling or exchanging them for drawing materials from 1916 onwards and was somewhat used to this process (1997, p. 58). Although Morgenthaler's position remains questionable in this regard, he may still be credited for having recognised the influence the social environment and pronounced interest of the physician may have on an artist, their work and creative process. In the writings of Prinzhorn, however, comments on the asylum context and the artists' thoughts about their confinement are entirely missing. This is all the more regrettable considering that Prinzhorn must have been well aware of such views. His collection contains many notes by patients, often integrated or accompanying their artworks, commenting on their experiences in the hospital environment and interactions with staff and doctors. While this is certainly a substantial blind spot, Prinzhorn's work *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) may nevertheless be acknowledged for its much greater impact on the appreciation, understanding and later establishment of 'Outsider Art' as a distinct genre on an international scale, also reproducing patient artworks in high quality and representing them in an artbook format for the first time. It is furthermore to the merit of Prinzhorn that he rescued a vast amount of patient work—much more than he reviewed in his book—which may have otherwise been thrown away or destroyed, as was general practice before and unfortunately even after his appointment in Heidelberg (Röske in Beetz, 2007).

Having studied psychology, philosophy, art history and medicine, Prinzhorn encounters the 'artistry' of asylum patients from an interdisciplinary vantage point. His knowledge in the arts as well as his psychiatric background equipped him well to make important contributions in both fields while also addressing and keeping a wider audience in mind. Aware of his unique background, Karl Wilmanns, then director at the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic, appointed Prinzhorn in 1919 to organise and enlarge the pre-existing collection of patient art in the clinic, which was founded around 1900 by previous head psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin (Röske, 2013a). When he left in 1921, Prinzhorn had added more than 5,000 objects, sculptures, drawings and paintings from more than 400 patients, mostly diagnosed as 'schizophrenic', to the collection (Röske, 2005b). Out of these works, which he obtained from a range of psychiatric hospitals across Europe, he selected 10 'outstanding' patients whom he declared 'schizophrenic masters': Karl Brendel (Genzel), August Klotz (Klett), Peter Moog (Meyer), August Neter (Natterer), Johann Knüpfer (Knopf), Viktor Orth (Clemens von Oertzen), Hermann Beil (Behle), Heinrich Welz (Hyacinth von Wieser), Joseph Sell (Schneller) and Franz Pohl (Franz Karl Bühler).[3]

3 List of pseudonyms for patients created by Prinzhorn with real names in brackets. Attempting to understand why Prinzhorn exclusively reviewed artworks by male patients, Röske (2010) suggests that female patients may have generally had less opportunities to creatively express themselves in the asylum environment, with their often craft-based works perhaps also not having been considered of equal worth or interest.

In his study, Prinzhorn provides an in-depth investigation of the formal aesthetics and individual styles of his 'masters', although doing so in a slightly more detached manner than Morgenthaler. Like Morgenthaler, he acknowledges the patients listed as genuine artists rather than clinical case studies; however, in contrast to the former, refrains from using the term 'art' in his discussion, opting instead for the term 'Bildnerei' (artistry/imagery). Prinzhorn excuses this by expressing the wish to remain neutral and non-judgemental:

> The word 'art' includes a value judgment within its fixed emotional connotations. It sets up a distinction between one class of created objects and another very similar one which is dismissed as 'non-art'. The pictorial works with which this study is concerned and the problems they present are not measured according to their merits but instead are viewed psychologically. (1922/1972, p. 1)

This proclamation, celebrated by MacGregor as a "powerful determination to break down walls" (1989, p. 196), may trick the reader into believing they are being provided with neutral evaluations, with Prinzhorn disguising his personal opinions behind the veil of seemingly objective science. Considering his compliance with avant-gardist values, his position is however heavily biased by default, leading him to review only those artworks which he perceived as "especially rewarding" (1922/1972, p. 94) and reconfirming the schizophrenic-Expressionist and 'uncanny' aesthetic he was looking for. That Prinzhorn was at least partially aware of providing misleading representations is explicated by Thomas Röske, director of the collection since 2002, who states that Prinzhorn intentionally omitted works from his book that did not fit his aesthetic criteria, were too 'conventional' or may otherwise visually 'weaken the impact' of the artists discussed (Röske, 2006a). While representing the specific examples chosen as resembling the universal groundworks underlying any kind of human creative activity, at the same time Prinzhorn reinforced a perception of the artists as 'autistic Outsiders' who compulsively produce the same kind of work over and over again. As Rhodes summarises, Prinzhorn thereby

> saw the 'imitation of nature' and 'illusionism' in art as evidence of [a] compromise [to reason, causality and socialisation] and as a result he tended to ignore such work, preferring that in which these primitive urges seemed to be more purely manifest. In this way he provided theoretical confirmation for one of the abiding central tenets of Outsider Art, namely that its forms should be direct, raw, and non-illusionistic. (Rhodes, 2000, p. 61)

Hence, rather than having 'discovered' the well-springs of a universal creative flow as proclaimed, Prinzhorn seems to have consciously read Expressionist qualities *into* the works of asylum patients to prove his point, much in the same manner the primitivists did before him. Foster accordingly speaks of a "creative misreading" and "modernist projection" performed by Prinzhorn, who "us[ed] the art of the mentally ill to propose a metaphysical essence of art" (2001, p. 17), with curator Bettina Brand-Claussen likewise speaking of "expressionist wishful thinking" (1998, p. 12).

However, even though Prinzhorn may have failed in providing a non-judgemental account of the 'imagery' of individuals experiencing mental illness, the careful selec-

tions undertaken by both him and Morgenthaler must still be evaluated in light of their greater inclusive objective, enhancing the status and visibility of artistically active patients remarkably by their proclamation of a commonly shared creative instinct.

Universal Commonalities vs. Psychopathological Differences

Deeply inspired by studies into the unconscious mind and the belief in an underlying creativity shared by all human beings, in their respective works, Morgenthaler and Prinzhorn follow a clear agenda with an all-encompassing goal in mind. Prinzhorn in particular was eager to establish a universal psychology of pictorial composition, declaring that 'sane' and 'insane', 'trained' and 'self-taught' artists are driven by the same, inborn creative urges and share a common configurative basis. Thus—and this may be considered the central point of his argument—there would be no such thing as a distinct 'mad art', but a "pictorial creative power […] which under the right conditions can break forth in every person" (Prinzhorn, 1922/1972, p. 274). Morgenthaler likewise speaks of the innate, expressive drive as being a primary human trait present among all people not only in artists, and independent of their being 'sick' or 'healthy'.

Following Prinzhorn, both the Expressionist and the 'schizophrenic' artist share a disavowal of the outside world and perform a decisive turn inwards; their artworks can therefore not be distinguished from one another. Acknowledging the powerful means of discursive configurations, Prinzhorn implies that any proclamation of difference in this regard must consequently be intentional and socially constructed; *invented* rather than 'discovered', when he states:

> Neither the extremes of sick and healthy nor those of art and non-art are clearly distinguishable except dialectically. The observer, if he is completely honest, will find polar contrasts together with countless transitions, which he can label accurately, but not without drawing on current cultural conventions whose limitations will perhaps be painfully clear to him. (Prinzhorn, 1922/1972, p. 4)

This is a starkly destigmatising statement, counteracting previous inclinations to pathologise patient artworks and having a valorising impact on the evaluation of the latter from this point onwards. However, previously reigning essentialising and pathologising tendencies were not ultimately deconstructed, but simply moved and reintroduced again at the socio-cultural and psychological level, on which Prinzhorn as well as Morgenthaler declared a vast difference between 'sick' and 'healthy' artists into existence. Both stick to the argument that creative urges are a universal human trait, adding with regret that they would remain mostly obscure in the 'healthy' individual, being suppressed by modern culture and society. By contrast, they would be exposed to a heightened degree in 'schizophrenic' patients, who supposedly flout social conventions by their inability to submit to them and express their impulses spontaneously, circumventing any rational or societal objections. In alignment with Réja they thus conclude that the universal structure of creative instincts may be studied in its most uncorrupted form in the 'insane':

> The mentally ill, from whom the veneer of convention has fallen away, would provide one with an opportunity to see deeper into the structure of humanness, and to penetrate the psyche more deeply, than would be possible with healthy people. (Morgenthaler as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 209)

The idea of the culturally disguised inner depths of the unconscious soul and the suppression of irrational drives and emotional impulses being set free by mental illness has, most prominently, formed the basis of Freud's investigations, but is grounded in Romanticism. An all-too-easy equation between the psyche and image which predisposes "aesthetic essentialism" after Foster (2001, p. 9) has already been prepared for by psychiatrists such as Benjamin Rush in 1835, who would enthusiastically proclaim the following when presented with patient artworks:

> The disease which thus evolves these new and wonderful talents and operations of the mind may be compared to an earthquake which, by convulsing the upper strata of our globe, throws upon its surface precious and splendid fossils, the existence of which was unknown to the proprietors of the soil in which they were buried. (1835, p. 152)

Anticipating Prinzhorn's and Morgenthaler's statements on a more modest account, physician and poet Pliny Earle summarises such sentiments in 1845, stating that "the only difference between the sane and the insane, is that the former conceal their thoughts, while the latter give them utterance" (p. 195). Following Prinzhorn, the schizophrenic artist would do so largely unaware, without having a choice, and being driven uncontrollably by his needs and urges:

> The configurative process, instinctive and free of purpose, breaks through in these people without any demonstrable external stimulus or direction—they know not what they do. […] It is certain that nowhere else do we find the components of the configurative process, which is subconsciously present in every man, in such an unadulterated state. (Prinzhorn, 1922/1972, p. 269)

This short paragraph contains several romantically inclined assumptions and myths which are presented as facts and evoke a clear-cut image of the patient artist as Other. Their illness supposedly shuts them off from their environment and outside influences, takes over their whole being and reduces the individual to the helpless state of a literally *disabled* victim—their 'schizophrenia' laying bare the inner depths of their souls and forcing them to spontaneously create.

Prinzhorn's reasoning is strongly informed by Primitivism: as was common practice in the early 20th century, he would discuss the supposedly uninhibited expression of those 'schizophrenic masters' in close alignment with the artistic creations of the 'primitive', 'tribal groups' and children. Over the course of a process already instigated by the early avant-garde, these groups were violently rendered faceless and reduced to hollow vessels through which the rushing stream of a universal, irrational consciousness was believed to pass through without restriction or constraint. The psyche and the image thereby became the same, mutually reconfirming each other's supposed essence. Curator Jon Thompson (1998) consequently suggests that Prinzhorn's use of the label

'schizophrenic' is not so much medically grounded[4] as it is employed to establish a distinct socio-psychological difference among groups, in the same manner that the labels 'oriental' or 'primitive' tend to. Following Thompson, the introduction of the myth of the 'schizophrenic genius' has thus only strengthened the "status quo" of certain groups in an "artistic and cultural ranking" and offered the art world just another label to separate 'normal' and 'cultural' from 'abnormal' and 'uncultured' art (1998, p. 10). This separatist tendency features prominently in Morgenthaler's and Prinzhorn's work, who both present a strikingly coherent image of the schizophrenic artist, whom they compared to the 'separate entity' of the avant-garde Expressionist. Despite of their belief in universal creative instincts, Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler thereby drew a sharp line between the 'schizophrenic' and 'healthy' artist which may be summarised as in Figure 3.

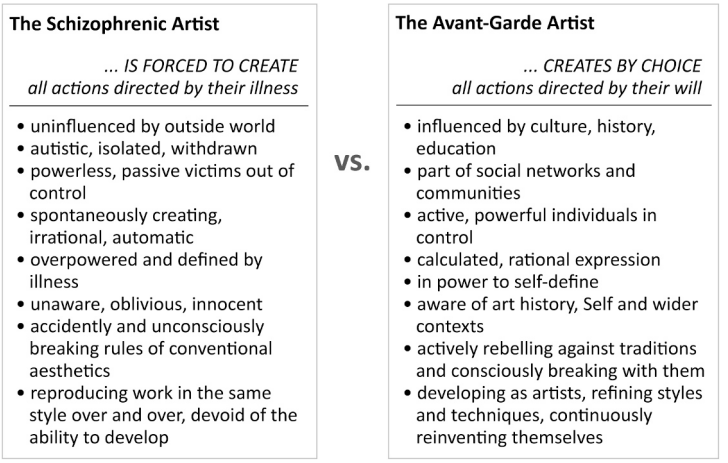


Figure 3. The Schizophrenic vs. The Avant-Garde Artist as Suggested in Prinzhorn's and Morgenthaler's Writings (Own Depiction).

As psychiatrist Walter Ritter von Baeyer summarises in the introduction to Prinzhorn's book, the latter accounts the difference between both groups to "the fact that the schizophrenic artist has to adapt to the fateful psychotic alienation and transformation of his world, while the nonpsychotic, mentally healthy artist turns away consciously from the familiar reality" (1972, p. vi). While the avant-garde artist is granted a multifaceted personality and hybrid identity enjoying a heightened level of agency and control, the 'schizophrenic' artist is reduced to a rather one-dimensional

4 As Thompson (1998) indicates, the patients who were categorised as 'schizophrenic' during Prinzhorn's time were a rather heterogeneous group, also including people who may have been institutionalised for being too eccentric, embarrassing, rebellious, or difficult to handle, and who would nowadays most likely not be hospitalised at all. As a result, the diagnoses and clinical notes are equally inconsistent, and Prinzhorn's statements must be treated with caution in this respect.

character, stuck, predefined and limited by his all-encompassing illness and passively at the mercy of his irrational instincts and compulsions. Still, however, the latter is declared by Prinzhorn as the real and authentic *ideal* since their creative works would spring directly and undiluted from the unconscious. The avant-garde artist, on the other hand, in an effort to reach this state, would only ever be able to produce "intellectual substitutes" (Prinzhorn, 1922/1972, p. 272). Morgenthaler proclaims a similar difference between the mentally ill and the avant-garde artist and embellishes the position of Wölfli in a comparably romantic tone as elaborate and even enviable. Like Prinzhorn he enunciates that, while the resulting artwork of both might look similar, their purpose and approach is inherently different:

> If an architect chooses to pull an old house down in order to construct a better one in its place, and if on another occasion a house is destroyed by an earthquake, the field of ruins which results can appear to be exactly similar. Modern artists—for the most part hyper intellectuals, supersaturated with modern culture—seek to return to specific artistic fundamental elements through a systematic destruction of previously existing forms. In Wölfli's case, however, such fundamental elements were brought to light by the process of a sickness which destroyed the logical and other mental functions. Parts of mighty foundation pillars of art are laid bare here, foundation pillars which certain modern trends are still looking for in their dismantling endeavors. (Morgenthaler, 1921/1992, p. 89f)

To underline his argument, Morgenthaler further states that "Wölfli [has] never created in accordance with an ideal, but entirely in response to his instincts. He doesn't know the laws by which he works, but he obeys them unreservedly" (1921/1992, p. 90). This statement largely resembles the above cited quote by Prinzhorn, who was convinced that these artists 'do not know what they do'—a myth which would later on become one of the main strands in the constitution of the 'Outsider Art' genre.

With Prinzhorn largely ignoring the social context and Morgenthaler likewise only making short observations in passing, both works lack a critical contextualisation or consideration of the impacts of the psychiatric and socio-cultural environment on the individual, with the artworks appearing as having been mysteriously formed in a vacuum. Both authors portray the artistic productions of their patients as compulsive and spontaneous expressions of psychologically experienced pain, conflicts and confusion resulting from their distinct illnesses, indicating that the artists are uninfluenced by external sources and unable to make conscious choices about their art. Maclagan (2009) criticises the tendency to deny patients the personal responsibility and individual liability for their creations by making some anonymous, unconscious force or instinct accountable for the work. In line with this critique, Johannes Herbert Plokker (1964) and more radical advocates of the anti-psychiatry movement point out that, after all, it might not have been the illness 'forcing' the schizophrenic artist to create, but the devastating, depressing and isolating experience of their psychiatric confinement in a time when asylums were still bleak warehouses, not offering much occupational therapy. Psychiatrist and curator Inge Jádi suggests that, in these contexts, creative activities may have provided the patient a possibility to reassert their individuality and deal with the loss of freedom and privacy, constant control and isolation experienced during

incarceration (Jádi in Beetz, 2007). Following art critic Guy Brett, their art may thus be understood as an "autonomous response to the experience of oppression" and a "means to retain one's humanity when the humanity is threatened" (1986, p. 10f). Consequently, these artworks cannot be reduced to being disconnected expressions of the alienated, schizophrenic Self, mysteriously laying bare the 'inner depths' of the psyche. They must be granted the status of being profound and sincere individual actions and reactions of patients trying to seize control over their personal Self, world and environment, which they were not disconnected from but remained very much in interexchange with.

Likewise, and contradicting assertions of their spontaneous expressions coming out of nowhere, several patients in the Heidelberg collection—most notably Prinzhorn's favourite, Franz Karl Bühler—were professionally trained, well-regarded artisans before they fell ill, supposedly knowing very well what they 'did' (Röske, 2003). With regard to additional notions of their being uninfluenced, Ferrier (1998) points to the fact that the number of psychiatric patients who would produce artistic works was very small, and must have, by default, provoked certain reactions among other patients and doctors, in turn affecting the artistic process. Foster (2001) therefore warns against readings of the asylum as a homogeneous place, indicating that certain individuals, like the sculptor Karl Genzel, have been in a privileged position as they have been granted materials and presumably received some sort of encouragement from psychiatrists to further engage with their creative work.

Contradictions and Relevance of Prinzhorn's and Morgenthaler's Works

In conclusion, Prinzhorn's as well as Morgenthaler's contributions may be considered contradictory to a certain extent, as they reconfirm the very distinctions they set out to diminish. On one hand, they acknowledge the artworks produced by psychiatric patients as being on par with established artists, aiming to abate the gap between 'healthy' and 'sick' artists. Focusing on universally shared creative instincts, they have rendered the possibility of a diagnostic reading obsolete, and refute the idea of a 'mad art'. At the same time, however, they declare into existence a difference in approach and purpose, with the art of asylum inmates supposedly being crucially informed by their illness, representing their 'schizophrenic masters' as "living in a world of their own" and articulating a mysterious "private language" (Maclagan, 2009, p. 82). This differentiating aspect is best observable in Prinzhorn, who even felt the need to establish the category of 'schizophrenic imagery'—not to be confused with 'art'—declaring the 'schizophrenic master' as unique in their uninhibited access to the depths of the soul, "detached from humanity" and creating in "complete autistic isolation" (Prinzhorn, 1922/1972, p. 266). In a paradoxical manner, both Morgenthaler and Prinzhorn thereby de- *and* reconstructed pathological features of individual artists, with the quality of their 'Otherness' simply being shifted from the formal, aesthetic level to the artist's personality, overshadowing other aspects of their biography and identity. While warning against pathological readings of artworks as executed by Lombroso and Nordau, they engaged in an overtly pathological reading of the artist personality instead, declaring the seemingly hermetic psychological constitution of the artist as the prime marker of difference.

In their defence, Morgenthaler and Prinzhorn did not instrumentalise this difference to denigrate or negatively stigmatise the 'insane'; much to the contrary declaring them to be truly authentic human beings. Both authors were thereby acting against the prevalent fashion of their times to pathologise creative expression, and were outspoken critics of the by then very popular notion of 'degeneracy'. Perceiving the artistic products of psychiatric patients as a means to deal with their inner unrest, an aid to reinstate stability and re-establish order where there had been chaos, Prinzhorn states that the purpose of all expressive gestures is to reach out, "to actualize the psyche and thereby to build a bridge from the self to others" (1922/1972, p. 13).

Morgenthaler's and Prinzhorn's proclamation of a universally shared urge for creative expression and the discussion of their patients' artmaking as a positive, constructive, *regenerating* activity rather than a negative, destructive, *degenerate* facility, may have significantly underpinned the subsequent development of art therapy—likewise profoundly impacting a number of avant-garde artists. First and foremost, they must however be read in the light of the interwar period, with the devastation experienced by millions and the general anxiety, pessimism and societal tension following World War I, presumably having also deeply affected both authors. As Röske reports, Prinzhorn returned from the war a "nihilist", having lost his belief in cultural traditions and tried to establish a new understanding of art—longing for purity, authenticity and innocence (2006a, p. 149). No matter how "misguided" such approaches may be, as Ferrier insists (1998, p. 22), looking at these theories from a different angle they lay bare alternative, democratic approaches to define art and provide a strong political argument against tendencies to pathologise deviant behaviour. Since the latter was not only common practice but on the increase in the first half of the 20th century, Prinzhorn's and Morgenthaler's writings may be considered brave political statements and in their humanistic, inclusive demeanour acknowledged for counteracting the rise of nationalist-conservative tendencies promoting exclusion.

4.4 'Degenerate Art' and the Fate of the 'Art of the Insane' in Germany until 1945

During the short-lived Weimar Republic, which offered art museums and institutions unprecedented freedom and possibilities, collections of modern, avant-garde and 'primitive' art had been thriving. These artistically open-minded endeavours to which Morgenthaler's and Prinzhorn's work may also be ascribed, would however come to an abrupt halt during the transition to fascism and the onset of the Nazi era. Already in the early 1920s, Hitler would engage in reproducing pre-existing discourses denigrating modern art as pathological, further fuelling an understanding of these works as evidence of the creators' 'degenerate' minds—preparatory ideas around which his subsequent cultural policies would be closely modelled. As a result of the increasingly negative atmosphere and attacks on avant-garde artists launched by some parts of the public, press, conservative academics and politicians, the Heidelberg clinic and other specialist institutions stopped collecting 'Irrenkunst' around 1930, and a number of artists likewise sensed that celebrating 'insanity' may soon become a matter of great

risk, as Beardsley (2003) retraces. Many of those who had previously celebrated the 'Art of the Insane' began to drastically reshape and change their officially pronounced attitudes and identities. Kirchner, for example, would start warning others about the 'influence' of Prinzhorn's book and invested considerable effort into finding and destroying his own medical files to eliminate any documentation of his time spent in asylums. Likewise, the artist Alfred Kubin, who had initially been a fervent advocate of Prinzhorn's collection, chose to abandon his self-ascribed image as a 'mad' artist to that of a "dreamer" around the same time, as Röske documents (2003, p. 38).

When the NSDAP came to power in 1933, Hitler immediately began to infiltrate art institutions and galleries around Germany, promoting his Nordic-Grecian aesthetic ideal and denouncing abstract avant-garde art in an attempt to 'purify' German culture. Exhibitions juxtaposing 'degenerate' and 'Jewish art' to 'healthy', 'German art' increased in number and size, 'horror chambers of art' defaming modern art were installed in several cities, and progressive museum directors and art teachers dismissed and replaced by conservative, anti-modern supporters of the NSDAP (Gilman, 1985). These efforts would culminate in the notorious exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), first on show in Munich in 1937, and then touring the country with varying sets of artworks on display until 1941.

Figure 4. Dada Wall, Room 3—Degenerate Art Exhibition Munich (1937).
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv.

Put together by the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, the opening of the show consisted of 650 confiscated objects by 112 artists mainly associated with Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism and New Objectivity—chaotically hung, badly lit, randomly arranged, partly unframed and accompanied by derogatory statements on the wall (Levi, 1998). Shortly after, in 1938, the "Law on Confiscation of Products of De-

generate Art" would be decreed and a further 20,000 works classified as dangerous and illegal, confiscated and added to the inventory.

The exhibition, as well as its catalogue, prominently featured works of psychiatric patients, mainly taken from the Prinzhorn collection and used as reference material to prove the supposedly shared 'degenerate' mental state of modern artists and 'madmen', now in direct reversal and opposition to Prinzhorn's proclamation of their unity based on commonly shared creative urges. As Gilman indicates, this has by no means been a novelty; the term 'degeneracy' was already a "fixture" in the media discourse about modern art when the Nazis installed the exhibition in 1937 (1985, p. 593). Negatively comparing avant-garde artists to the 'insane' had been popular practice by then, as the writings of psychiatrist Wilhelm Weygrandt testify who put modern art under a decisively pathological light in his articles *Kunst und Wahnsinn* and *Pathologische Erscheinungen in der modernen Kunst* in 1921. Apart from such theoretical explorations, the practical juxtapositions of the *Degenerate Art* show had a distinct forerunner in architect and art critic Paul Schultze-Naumburg. In his book *Art and Race* from 1928, he would correlate Expressionists such as Picasso, Modigliani, Nolde and Schmidt-Rottluff and their self-portraits with photographs of "physically deformed degenerates" which he further characterised as the "genuine hell of inferior human beings" (1928/1994, p. 498). By linking physical appearance to mental symptoms, Schultze-Naumburg was convinced he had provided evidence for the 'degenerate' state of both the avant-garde artist as well as the mentally ill, continuously outlining their contagious danger to the 'pure' and 'healthy' Aryan race. When Hitler staged the *Degenerate Art* exhibition, he proceeded closely along these lines, distributing his hatred for modern art on a by then unprecedented scale. Having attracted more than two million visitors, according to Foster it had been "the greatest exposure of both modernist and mentally ill art", at its time and may be grasped a strategic attempt to nurture hostility among the public (2001, p. 6f). As a propaganda instrument, the show aimed to fuel public repulsion and anger about the waste of tax money, discrediting the Weimar Republic for betraying Nordic ideals of beauty and promoting the need for totalitarian policies. Defamatory expositions such as these may be understood as having effectively reinforced the fascist system, ridding it from threatening representations of diversity, individuality and independence, and providing a public justification for the subsequent persecution of 'degenerates'.

Those artists who were already associated with the 'insane' and have overtly expressed their positive inclinations towards them in the past, were under special attack. Their fate would eventually be met by nearly all artists whose works contained the necessary elements thought to be in spiritual alignment with the "idiots, cretins and paralytics" (Entartete Kunst Exhibition Guide, 1937, p. 18). Those artists brave enough to continue practising their profession were threatened with imprisonment, banned from working and stripped of their artworks, which were sometimes sold, but more often simply destroyed (Gilman, 1985). Still, the forced end of many artists' careers due to being labelled 'degenerate' would prove to be only the first step in the course of an increasingly violent and intensifying persecution.

As mentioned above, the concept of 'degeneracy' was already persistent in informing the public imagination from the 19th century onwards. Under the Nazis, the groups subsumed under the term were however extended, now including Jews, Slavs, Roma/Sinti,

prostitutes, political opponents, eccentrics, avant-garde artists, people with disabilities, mental illnesses or 'deviant' sexual orientations, and other individuals for one reason or another deemed 'anti-social'. Being classified 'degenerate' in this context was more than a stigma—it meant being among the 'unworthy' and 'undesirable', contaminating the Aryan race Hitler so fiercely defended. Taking inspiration from Francis Galton's concept of Eugenics, in 1933 Hitler issued the "Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring", enforcing the compulsory sterilisation of all citizens deemed 'degenerate', especially preventing 'the insane' and 'disabled' from passing on their 'unfit' genes. This would eventually result in the systematic extermination of most asylum inmates and people with disabilities in the 1940s, after launching the T4 programme in 1939.

As Brand-Claussen et al. (2012) detected during their research, of the artists included in the Prinzhorn collection, at least 20 had been murdered during Hitler's reign—among them Franz Karl Bühler and Joseph Schneller who were featured prominently in Prinzhorn's book.[5] Tragically, it was Carl Schneider, who had been leading the Heidelberg clinic and taking over the Prinzhorn collection in 1933, who would become the director of the T4 extermination programme, passionately advocating for the elimination of especially those inmates incapable of working. Unsurprisingly, creative activities were not considered proper work by Schneider—quite the contrary. As a faithful and loyal advocate of the Nazi ideology, Schneider sharply contested Prinzhorn's ideas, denigrated the 'Art of the Insane' in alignment with Kraepelin as "picture salad" (as cited in Gilman, 1985, p. 237) and even actively demolished artworks created by patients in an attempt to discipline them (Röske, 2013a). It is a miracle that, under these circumstances, the Prinzhorn collection survived. Along with the interest in psychiatric art it did, however, disappear into oblivion after the war—as did the previously highly esteemed international positioning of Germany in the fields of the arts and science. With the prosecution and enforced mass-exodus of many prolific academics and artists, after Hitler's fall, the dominant centre for progressive research, liberal debate and free artistic expression would thus shift from the German-speaking countries to Anglo-French territories.

4.5 'Insanity' as an Ideological Tool of Cultural Politics and Resistance

By the 1930s it had become common practice for many avant-garde artists in the self-declared cultural centres of Europe to present their works indiscriminately alongside those produced by psychiatric patients and other non-established artists, aligning themselves with the idea of 'insanity' and cherishing the works of those believed to

5 Most victims of the T4 programme have not been documented and identification efforts rely on scarce traces. Presumably a much larger number of artists included in the Prinzhorn Collection have suffered and died during the Holocaust than those in the following list, whose extermination has been officially confirmed by recent research: Paul Gösch, Franz Karl Bühler, Joseph Schneller, Karl Ahrendt, Alois Dallmayr, Johann Faulhaber, Konstantin Klees, Karl Moser, Heinrich Grebing, Anna Margarete Kuskop, Johanna Melitta Arnold, Gustav Sievers, Ernst Bernhardt, Eva Bouterwek, Gertrud Fleck, Anton Fuchs, Auguste Opel, Mathäus Lorenz Seitz, Johannes Tauber, Peter Zeiher, Wilhelm Werner (Röske, 2013a).

have unrestrained access to their subconscious minds. As indicated above, in Germany this admiration and association with the 'madmen' backfired to a dramatic extent, when in 1937 Hitler would declare them 'degenerate' and initiate their prosecution. By contrast, identification processes with the 'insane' among members of the French avant-garde proceeded relatively unhindered, with the Surrealists and, later on, Dubuffet, taking many of their incentives from German authors and artists. In this context, the works of Morgenthaler and especially Prinzhorn would become major influences and sources of inspiration to many artists in the interwar period, during, and after World War II.

As art historians Charles Harrison and Paul Wood suggest, the transition of Franco-German avant-garde movements, as well as the intensifying turn towards irrationality and fragmentary artistic practices from the Expressionists to the Dadaists to the Surrealists, may only be accurately understood if seen as a "response to the modern condition" and embedded in the grander socio-political context of its time (1999, p. 129). The devastating impact of World War I triggered much anxiety, and left many artists and intellectuals in Western Europe longing for a new beginning. Their concerns, wishes and proposals for alternative world orders have been voiced in a rapid succession of manifestos, with the idea of 'schizophrenia' often taking centre stage and becoming a convenient, malleable conceptual instrument to critique and attack established cultural norms, values and morals. In line with a growing cultural pessimism, it had become fashionable to declare civilisation as 'false' and 'sick' (e.g. Freud, 1930) and juxtapose psychiatric patients as its 'healthy' opponent—honest, authentic and sane, with poet Paul Éluard famously stating:

> We who love them understand that the insane refuse to be cured. We know well that it is we who are locked up when the asylum door is shut: the prison is outside the asylum, liberty is to be found inside. (Éluard as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 275)

As a result, an increasing number of artists would align themselves with the 'mad' for ideological reasons and "in conscious opposition to the structure of society" (Gilman, 1985, p. 587). The Expressionists and Dadaists, along with the writings of Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler, laid the foundations for these romantic and rebellious practices of the Surrealists that were ultimately built upon by the discourses of 'Art Brut' and 'Outsider Art'.

Preparatory Measures: The Instrument of 'Insanity' in Dadaism

At its earliest, the reversal of a 'sick society' vs. the 'sane madmen' has perhaps been performed by the Dadaists, who would denounce reason, rationality and logic as being responsible for sending humanity into war, instead opening the floodgates to the absurd, paradoxical and irrational.

Dadaist Hugo Ball, for example, has frequently portrayed himself as a 'mad' and 'schizophrenic' poet, using his self-ascribed identity as a device for social criticism. Such a customary practice was this, that George Grosz would describe Dadaism as characterised by "the organized use of insanity to express contempt for a bankrupt world". The Dadaists would, however, not only make use of the myth of insanity, but

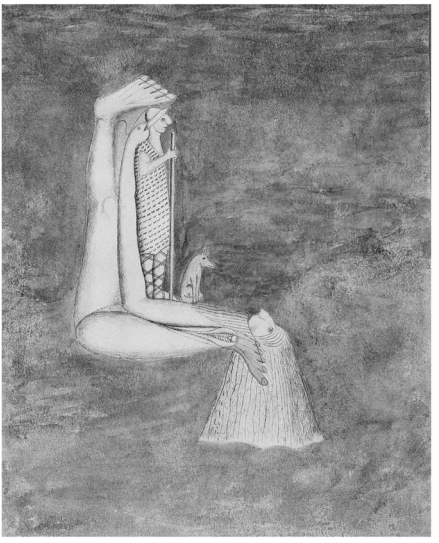
also employ the concept of primitivity as a facilitating instrument, when peppering their soirées with 'negro dance' and modelling costumes and masks according to native African, North American or Oceanic artefacts. These were of course anything but absurd, primitive or meaningless in their respective local contexts, but nevertheless utilised by the Dadaists in their function as a "liberating counter-cosmos" (Dada Africa BG Companion, 2016), to shock bourgeois Western culture and "negate the 'meaning' of life to which Europe has so far subscribed" (Hausmann as cited in Dada Africa BG Companion, 2016). The Dadaists would thereby playfully express their commitment to chaos, irrationality and 'primitive wildness', often representing themselves as being out of control and guided by either 'madness' or a particular spirit in a performative, at times childlike, manner. As demonstrated above, among the Expressionists this intermixing of myths on the grounds of a supposedly shared innocence, rawness and purity between the 'insane', the 'savages' and children, was already common practice. Even though the Dadaists accused the Expressionists of false spiritualism, they did not comprise their Eurocentrism, furnishing their artworks and performances with a mysticism just as pronounced and likewise reproducing exotic ideas about the Other.

One artist known for having built a bridge across movements from Expressionism to Surrealism, always remaining faithful to the primitivist idea, is Paul Klee (1879–1940). He has been particularly keen on proclaiming the supposed innocence and superior creativity of the art of 'savages', children and the 'insane', providing a set of mystifying quotes about the hidden, obscure depths of the soul and thereby bolstering the myths which still inform the core of the 'Outsider Art' discourse now. According to Klee, "art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible" (1920/1959, p. 5)—a goal which he believed is achieved unintentionally and naturally by individuals holding a 'primitive' mindset (Klee, 1962). This echoes Réja's and precedes Prinzhorn's and Morgenthaler's approach, with an additional feature being Klee's perhaps more intimate viewpoint resulting from his own artistic practice, which was theoretically and practically informed by Primitivism, as critics of his appropriative practices testify (e.g. Foster, 2001). However, it is the artist Max Ernst (1891–1976) who is often quoted as being a much more brazen example when it comes to the issue of appropriation.

Linking Dadaism to Surrealism, in Cologne Max Ernst was already exhibiting his work and that of other avant-garde artists alongside works by children, the 'insane' and 'savages' in 1919, not intending to outline their differences but their similarities in providing alternative perspectives and ways of seeing. Röske (2011a) speculates that, very early on, Ernst may have been aware of Prinzhorn's collection, considering that he already made use of the technique of freely combining heterogeneous pictorial elements in his collages by 1920. This process, the art historian Werner Spies (1974) believes, has been very much influenced by the work of patient-artists, particularly by August Natterer, one of the 'schizophrenic masters' in Prinzhorn's book. The pictorial traces Spies refers to may be detectable in Ernst's later work, most prominently in *Oedipus* from 1931.

Considering examples such as these, MacGregor even proclaims that Ernst's whole artistic practice would solely consist of "borrowing" pictorial resources of the 'insane' and 'primitive' (1989, p. 278)—an approach coming dangerously close to "theft", of which Ernst was indeed accused of several times (e.g. Nationalgalerie SMB Exhibition

Leaflet, 2018). This may be an issue worth investigating in its own right, and indeed there have been a number of art critics and historians pointing to the crude similarities between Ernst's images and those of the Prinzhorn collection (Prokopoff, 1984; Spies, 1974; Cardinal, 1992; Foster, 2001). What matters in the context of this study is that it was Ernst who introduced Prinzhorn's book to the Surrealist circle in 1922—by then a still exclusively literary movement (Foster, 2001). Reportedly, Prinzhorn's book was received enthusiastically and as a frequent point of reference soon turned into the Surrealist's "bible" (Röske, 2011a, p. 12). Apart from the subsequent evolution of the movement's pictorial strand, along with the ideas of poet Guillaume Apollinaire, the Romantic works of Arthur Rimbaud, Comte de Lautréamont, Stéphane Mallarmé, Gérard de Nerval and selected readings of Freud, it would also crucially inform Breton's first Surrealist Manifesto in 1924.



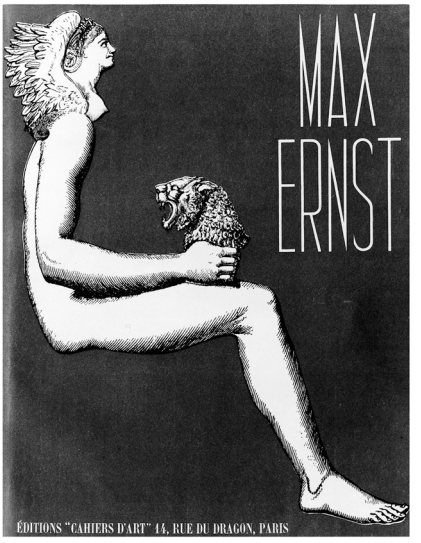


Figure 5 (left). Natterer, A. (1919). Wunder-Hirthe (Pencil, Watercolour on Cardboard). Sammlung Prinzhorn, Heidelberg.
Figure 6 (right). Ernst, M. (1931). Oedipus (Magazine Cover, 1937). Éditions Cahiers d'Art, Paris.

The Romantic Ideal of 'Madness' in Surrealism

Building on his experiences as a medical assistant treating psychiatric patients and shell shock victims during World War I, the poet André Breton (1896–1966) was convinced that the "psychic operations of madness" (Rhodes, 2000, p. 82) would provide uninhibited access to the elusive inner world of the individual. He was intrigued by the altered realities individuals under psychosis experience, and considered their mental states as much more authentic and indiscriminately more desirable than the 'corrupted' mindsets of calculating, controlling and rational individuals. The Surreal-

ists were convinced, that the 'mad'—as well as children, 'savages' and, to some extent, spiritualists and psychic mediums—are "drawing on the very well-springs of the imagination" (Ferrier, 1998, p. 11) and are endued with pure creativity. In this context, psychiatric patients in particular were idealised as role models and perceived as experiencing the "state of absolute freedom" (Beveridge, 2001, p. 597) Breton so much longed for. He thus developed several intuitive techniques which were meant to equip the 'culturally constrained' individual to step out of civilisation and leave moral order, controlling reason and social conventions behind to explore their own psychic depths. Games, chance compositions and unpredictable procedures, but especially the virtues of dreams, hypnosis and trance-like states building on the psychoanalytic method of free association, were marketed by Breton as the Surrealist method liberating the imagination of the artist, allowing them to surpass the reigns of logic and lure the subconscious into visibility. These "simulation attempts" (Röske, 2005b, p. 152), undertaken by the Surrealists to imitate the 'schizophrenic' creative process and their romantic admiration for the 'insane', culminated in the utilisation and appropriation of the concept of madness to an unprecedented extent, and would also come to negatively affect a number of individuals experiencing mental illness.

The romantic idealism displayed by the Surrealists may to some extent be accountable to the fact that most members of the movement had not had any contact with psychiatric patients. Yet even Breton, who was very knowledgeable in this regard and must have been aware of the devastating pain many patients experience, effectively engaged in idealisations when stating:

> I am willing to admit that they are, to some degree, victims of their imagination […] but their profound indifference to the way in which we judge them, and even to the various punishments meted out to them, allows us to suppose that they derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination, that they enjoy their madness sufficiently to endure the thought that its validity does not extend beyond themselves. […] I could spend my whole life prying loose the secrets of the insane. These people are honest to a fault, and their naiveté has no peer but my own. (Breton, 1924/2007, p. 5)

In this statement, Breton's heroic depiction of the 'madman' does not only overwrite the actual experiences of psychiatric patients—their potential suffering is neglected, with their isolation and exclusion being aestheticised. In contrast to Prinzhorn, who adheres to an image of the 'schizophrenic artist' as *victim*, the Surrealists established a trope of the 'insane' as *refusers* of cultural life, who have actively chosen to remain on the 'outside' and thus "take[n] possession of their true selves" (Becker, 2000, p. 79). While such sentiments bear destigmatising implications, they still seem pervaded by ignorance. As Rhodes has observed, Breton was solely interested in 'madness' as a "philosophical ideal rather than a state to be entered irrevocably" (2000, p. 84) and would stubbornly cling to this viewpoint even when its very foundations were shaken by disenchanting real-life events like his encounters with Robert Desnos and Léona Camille Ghislaine Delcourt, hereafter referred to as 'Nadja'.

Appropriations of 'Madness' by Breton: Robert Desnos and Nadja

Deploying the technique of automatic drawing in trance-like states at its best, the artist Robert Desnos was admired by Breton as a "prophet of Surrealism", coming exceptionally close to his envisioned state of irrationality (Breton, 1924/2007). However, when Desnos' moods and behaviours became more extreme and uncontrollable, Breton was increasingly bewildered and would eventually abandon Desnos and expel him from the Surrealist movement. MacGregor reckons that this may have been the first time Breton recognised the danger involved in his automatism-experiments. He seemed to have ignored these risks, however, and did not cease to "accompany others into realms they could not handle" (MacGregor, 1989, p. 276) as his subsequent involvement with Nadja, a woman affected by mental health issues demonstrates. Breton met Nadja on the streets of Paris and spent a short but intense relationship with her, struck by her attested mysterious and irrational Otherness. Supposedly leading the real Surrealist life, Nadja would become Breton's muse and inspire him to publish a semi-autobiographical novel depicting their encounter in 1928. Reportedly, Nadja willingly produced drawings on demand and, aware of her increasing dependency, even voiced her concerns of feeling exploited and "oppressed" by the increasingly powerful Breton (as cited in Ladimer, 1980, p. 189). Breton, on the other hand, would remain in a rather dissociated spectator position at all times:

> Now she tells me of my power over her, of my faculty for making her think and do what I desire, perhaps more than I think I desire. Because of this, she begs me to do nothing against her. (Breton, 1928/1960, p. 79)

When Nadja became increasingly delusional, Breton would reportedly remain ignorant of her mental condition but, rather unnerved, dissociated himself from her, effectively "marginalizing her out of his life" (Conley, 2003, p. 120) as he did with Desnos.

As literary theorist Katharine Conley indicates, both Desnos and Nadja "shared a similar fate of glamorization for irrational behaviour, followed by a distancing and silencing by Breton" (2003, p. 120) with the difference being that Desnos managed to have a rather successful career after his unfortunate collision with Breton, while Nadja ended up being confined in an asylum for the rest of her life. As psychoanalyst Harold Wylie suggests, Nadja's personality has been 'absorbed' as a whole by Breton, with her identity being reduced to a literary character, serving as a mirror and "catalyst in Breton's discovery of Self" (1970, p. 100).[6] Wylie accordingly refers to Breton as a "vampire" (1970, p. 100), whose irresponsible 'achievements' are also denounced by Susan Sontag, who states that the "Surrealists heralded the benefits that would accrue

6 This resonates with many feminist comments opining that women in Surrealism were generally not acknowledged for having made any important contributions, except from filling their roles as "inspirational objects of erotic desire" (Conley, 2003, p. 113). In line with this, de Beauvoir remarks that "Breton does not speak of woman as a subject" but as a "key to the beyond", "deeply anchored in nature" and "very close to earth": "Truth, Beauty, Poetry – She is All: once more all under the form of the Other. All except herself" (de Beauvoir, 1949/1974, p. 268).

from unlocking the gates of reason and ignored the abominations" (1988, p. xxvi). MacGregor, alarmed by such behaviour, voices his concern in more general terms:

> With this passage, a new and highly dangerous attitude toward the insane emerges, a tendency to exploit and manipulate individuals who are mentally unstable or even psychotic in the belief that their artistic productions are far more significant than their psychological condition, justifying manipulating the one with the view to obtaining the other. (MacGregor, 1989, p. 276)

Breton's position as an ex-medical assistant and as the 'father of Surrealism' is rather unique in this context—and ridden by paradoxes. As much as he envisioned and longed for ready access to pure automatic states in his manifesto, he was alarmed and irritated by those who appeared to come close to achieving this absolute Surrealist state. As Conley remarks, "Breton set himself and 'his friends' neatly on the sane side of the divide between mental illness and health and stepped back from the danger of letting go", always holding on to "common sense" (2003, p. 121). Shying away from the 'actual' experience of 'madness' and remaining in the superior safe space of the rational observer drastically undermined his authoritarian position on the Surrealist experience. This weak spot did not go unnoticed by Desnos, who would react against Breton at one point with fierce anger: "Breton has never created anything. All of his activity is based on literary or artistic criticism. […] Breton who profits from Surrealism, is no different from the Pope" (1930/1999, p. 486f).

Appropriations of 'Madness' by Dalí and Artaud

Breton's strategy stands in stark contrast to the approach of the perhaps most prominent advocate of Surrealism, Salvador Dalí. Dalí would make use of the label 'insanity' in a much more abstract form and, concerned with his own persona, grasped the concept of the mad genius in a self-referential manner, turning his self-ascribed insanity into a marketing instrument. Whereas Breton's novel *Nadja* may be interpreted as a "collision between an intellectual theory of madness and the actual experience of the sufferer" (Beveridge, 2001, p. 597), Dalí's ideas are entirely decontextualised and possibly at the furthest removed from the empirical grounds of mental illness. In 1939 he would publish his own manifesto, titled *Declaration of Independence of the Imagination and Man's Right to His Own Madness*, and says of himself that he tried

> by every possible means to go mad—or rather, doing everything in my conscious power to welcome and help that madness which I felt clearly intended to take up its abode in my spirit. […] I made desperate efforts […] adding each morning a little fuel to my folly. (Dalí, 1942/1993, p. 223)

Furnishing the myth of his eccentric public figure, MacGregor states that, for Dalí, the Surrealist endeavour may have been effectively nothing more than "game playing on the edge of the abyss" (1989, p. 286). If Dalí was to enter this abyss, he would do so with "his ego intact […] in a protective diving suite" he snidely concludes (MacGregor, 1989, p. 286). Ironically, the discourse surrounding Dalí's (in)sanity eventually came to

overshadow the discussion of his work much in the same way the prevalent discourse about 'Outsider Art' does about its artists in question.

The established Surrealist idea of madness, by which medical terms were superficially appropriated and one-sided readings of 'insanity' facilitated via their overpowering, mythic ascriptions, was to some extent outweighed by Surrealist playwright and actor Antoine Artaud. Demonstrating the terrifying experience of his own mental breakdown in 1937, he undermined romantic views and counteracted the idea of insanity as a state of freedom. Artaud, who has spent many years in asylums and received electric shock and insulin-shock therapy, has been exceptionally angry about his treatment in psychiatry and likened himself to van Gogh, who he pronounced as having been "suicided by society" much in the same manner (Artaud, 1947). At some point during his hospitalisation in Rodez, Artaud began to draw and sent frequent letters to his former Surrealist friends in Paris, informing them about his condition. As Rhodes concludes, this "madness from inside [...] stripped Surrealist attitudes of their naïve romanticism" (2000, p. 85) and may have acted as a reminder of those aspects which were otherwise preferably forgotten. However, as Breton and Éluard, Artaud likewise engaged in a portrayal of the 'mad' as sane rebels who are at war with a sick society, thereby turning his own position into one of empowerment rather than victimisation:

> What is an authentic madman? It is a man who preferred to become mad, in the socially accepted sense of the word, rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honor. So society has strangled in its asylums all those it wanted to get rid of or protect itself from, because they refused to become its accomplices in certain great nastinesses. For a madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it prevented from uttering certain intolerable truths. (Artaud, 1947/1988, p. 485)

Perhaps it is this oscillation between a representation of the 'insane' as either passively suffering victims or wilful refusers of society which best describes the respective positions of Prinzhorn/Morgenthaler and the Dadaists/Surrealists. As demonstrated, the psychiatric background of both Prinzhorn and Breton did not prevent them from essentialist readings of 'madness': whether it be metaphorical idealisations and nullifications of the existence of mental illness or an overexposure of the turmoil of the painfully driven 'schizophrenic master'. Here, the opposite ends of a spectrum are encountered, revealing the hybrid discursive constitution of 'madness' in its given time and context as well as its value as cultural capital and identity signifier for those involved in its construction. From this point onwards, both interpretive ends of 'insanity' would become contradictory yet essential features, with Dubuffet combining Prinzhorn's and Breton's approach when conceptualising the genre 'Art Brut'.

4.6 Jean Dubuffet and the Establishment of 'Art Brut'

One of the most influential collectors, promotors and proclaimed enthusiasts of art produced outside the mainstream was French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985). Introducing the term 'Art Brut'[7] in 1945, he managed to encompass all the loose strings of referencing the art of 'social outcasts' by attaching a definite label to them, discussing their art as a distinct genre and bringing individuals into the spotlight who were previously confined to act in the shadows of established art world 'insiders'. By that time, the niche in which Dubuffet was operating had already been carefully carved out by Prinzhorn and Breton, with the cultural pessimism and romantic myths he had been driven by largely resembling those informing most European avant-garde movements since the 19th century. Dubuffet, however, went one step further by putting a stamp on this very heterogeneous group of marginalised artists, thereby launching an irritating loop of de/re-stigmatisation and negative/positive discrimination in which many 'Outsider Artists' still find themselves to this day. Heaving 'Art Brut' artists out of their position as mere reference material and exotic accessories by seemingly cutting the umbilical cord to the 'insiders', Dubuffet placed them on an exclusive pedestal to be acknowledged as the realest, truest and most authentic artists. The artificial gulf he created between 'professional' art world insiders and 'anti-cultural' art world outsiders indeed raised the visibility of those previously neglected, at the same time, however, resulting in an over-determination and essentialisation of their being Other. This discrepancy would come to haunt 'Art Brut' and eventually move Dubuffet to rethink some of his radical ideas, but by then the initial clear-cut separation had already caught momentum, sticking with the 'Outsider Art' discourse ever since.

In the 1940s Dubuffet began to collect work by untrained artists who lived 'outside' or on the fringes of society, and were presumably unaware of art history and uninfluenced by the 'false standards' of the established art world. He greatly disapproved of 'professional', established artists, who he called a "cohort of careerist intellectuals"—further characterising them as an empty, artificial, calculated and market-driven elite emulating false notions of art and beauty (Dubuffet, 1948/1992, p. 593). Dubuffet was convinced that true art and pure creativity can never flourish in educational environments or art institutional settings, arguing instead that it must hit the viewer unexpectedly, be elusive in nature and impossible to get hold of:

> Art doesn't go to sleep in the bed made for it; it would sooner run away than say its own name: what it likes is to be incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets its own name. (Dubuffet, 1949/1973, p. 90)

Most of Dubuffet's writings are based on a constructed division between the two groups mentioned above, which he portrayed in drastic oversimplification to underline his argument:

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7 Originally deriving from wine jargon, the term 'brut' can be translated as 'raw' but, as Rhodes points out, also bears other connotations in French such as "simplicity", "naturalness", "ill-breeding" and "clownishness" (2000, p. 23).

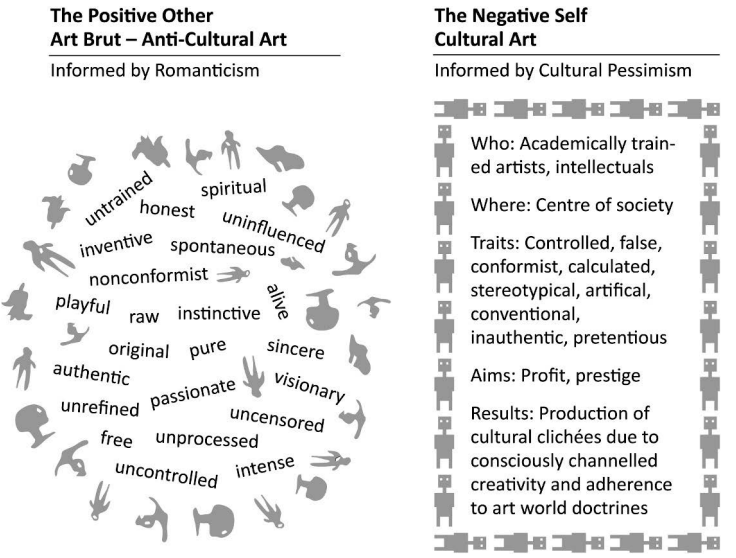

Figure 7. Schematic Illustration of Dubuffet's Juxtaposition and Attributions to 'Art Brut' in Contrast to 'Cultural Art' (Own Depiction).

The attributes used to justify proclamations of such oppositional extremes[8] make evident that Dubuffet's judgement of whether something was 'Art Brut' or not did not derive from stylistic or formal aspects of artworks (as he would often proclaim) but from a distinct belief in the existence of a far removed, essentially Other mindset. If not inherently different, the latter was at least believed to be characterised by an unusually pronounced ease of access to a supposedly true and hidden inner Self. It may therefore be plausible to follow Dubuffet-specialist Kent Minturm in surmising that Dubuffet conceptualised 'Art Brut' as a "mental operation or activity", rather than an artform with specific technical characteristics (2004, p. 257). DiMaggio likewise highlights the unconscious as Dubuffet's main area of interest, with the latter believing it to contain the "primary source of creativity" (2013, p. 24). Dubuffet accordingly demands that the value of all art shall be measured against the 'freedom' of the individual expressing their unconscious. He was convinced that this freedom was the privilege of

8 The production of radical divisions is not unique to Dubuffet, but may have been inspired by schematic models of the raw vs. the cooked or cold vs. hot societies, as published by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss around the same time. According to Minturn (2004), both authors were indeed in regular contact and shared the conviction that the 'primitives' were more immediate in their expression, decrying that the 'civilised' individuals they lived among in the West had long lost their authenticity (Lévi-Strauss, 1958). While Lévi-Strauss was fiercely contested for his binary models (e.g. Leach, 1991), Dubuffet largely evaded such criticism as he did not operate under the disciplinary wings of the social sciences, but art history, in which Othering practices of this kind have only recently been attended to.

those individuals whose isolation from cultural influences would allow them to independently explore and give way to their impulses, guaranteeing the utmost 'authenticity' of their expression. To encounter such art, Dubuffet left the schools, academies, salons, galleries and museums of the 'official' art world behind, seeking out those seemingly unaffected by the many whims and fashions of the prevailing mainstream. In his search for 'authentic' and 'pure' art he thereby largely relegated the field of acquisition to psychiatric institutions. Still, Dubuffet consistently proclaimed to be solely interested in the artworks and "absolute[ly] indifferen[t]" towards the mental condition or biography of the artist, further stating to "ignore […] completely" the issue of whether an artist is reputedly sane or mad (Dubuffet as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 302). Much like Prinzhorn, he contested the idea of a 'psychopathological art', famously stating that "there is no art of the insane any more than there is an art of dyspeptics or an art of people with knee complaints" (Dubuffet, 1949/1988, p. 33). By dissolving genres like 'Psychotic Art' or 'Art of the Insane' under the 'neutral' umbrella term 'Art Brut', Dubuffet attempted to rid patient-artists of their stigma and remove these works once and for all from the medical setting. At the same time, however, he praised the special abilities of the 'mad' and declared 'insanity' as the "mainspring of all creativity and inventiveness" (1967/1988, p. 35), thereby paradoxically reinforcing their exclusive status even further and, with the genre distinction 'Art Brut', fixating rather than dissolving the borders he wished to overcome.

Attempting to make sense of this contradictory approach, I argue with Gilman that Dubuffet may have simply transformed socio-psychological factors into an aesthetic doctrine, allowing for his interest in the former to remain in disguise via the performance of a "mythopoesis of mental illness" (Gilman, 1985, p. 228). This hidden agenda is exemplified by Dubuffet's rather uniform aesthetic preference for works that 'look' crude, simple and primitive in style and which, between the lines, were 'confirming' the presupposed irrational, mysterious and Other mindset of the artist, while—much like Prinzhorn—he rejected artworks bearing too conventional traces, even if stemming from the same source. As Thompson (1998) points out, those works which have been chosen by Dubuffet and may qualify as 'raw' in the expected sense of the word are no different in their 'wildness' to those produced by many mainstream artists around the same time. Even for Dubuffet, determining if a certain work of art is 'Art Brut' only by looking at it may have been an impossible task, with its classification necessarily depending on contextual information. That he was indeed eager to acquire the latter is exemplified by Dubuffet's insistence that the individuals who may be classified 'Art Brut' had to be 'innocent', uneducated and indifferent to fame and public recognition, showing no intentions of commercialising their own inventions or making any financial gain, as Landert (2011) shows.

Much like the members of previous avant-garde movements, in his quest for authentic creativity Dubuffet threw a vast range of heterogeneous individuals into the same box on the grounds of a presumably shared primitive mentality; innately different from the 'civilised' one and irrational in character. To his initial collection of children's drawings, he added works of mediumistic art (e.g. Augustin Lesage, Madge

Gill)[9] and also acquired a large stock of 'Psychotic Art' (e.g. Heinrich Anton Müller, Aloïse Corbaz, Adolf Wölfli) after visiting several mental asylums in Switzerland and France in 1945. Dubuffet was drawn also to works by other 'eccentrics', 'social misfits' and self-taught artists (e.g. Gaston Chaissac, Scottie Wilson), who were to his liking due to their work supposedly "escap[ing] cultural conditioning and proceed[ing] from truly original mental attitudes" (Dubuffet, 1967/1988, p. 34). All of these artists were accommodated by Dubuffet under the term 'Art Brut', which eased the set-up of defining criteria for inclusion into his collection and as a genre, was further promoted in a series of publications entitled *Les Fascicules de L'Art Brut*.

From the beginning, Dubuffet was very precise about the particularities of his newly invented genre. According to him, only those works qualify as 'Art Brut' which are

> produced by persons unscathed by artistic culture, where mimicry plays little or no part. These artists derive everything—subjects, choice of materials, means of transposition, rhythms, styles of writing, etc.—from their own depths, and not from conventions of classical or fashionable art. We are witness here to a completely pure artistic operation, raw, brute, and entirely reinvented in all of its phases solely by means of the artists' own impulses. It is thus an art which manifests an unparalleled inventiveness, unlike cultural art, with its chameleon- and monkey-like aspects. (Dubuffet, 1949/1988, p. 33)

Dubuffet's words strongly echo Prinzhorn's idea of the uninfluenced, uncultured and autistic artist forced to express their inner Self and revealing some underlying, archaic, universal truth of mankind which presumably got obstructed in most other individuals by the 'evils' of civilisation. As Röske indicates, it might indeed be no coincidence that the longing for a "new beginning" in the arts and society and the idealisation of 'Outsiders' as bearing the hope of a revitalisation of culture had peaked in both cases right after the respective ends of World War I (Prinzhorn) and World War II (Dubuffet) (2008, p. 103). Röske assumes that, in the face of devastation and disillusionment caused by the war, both authors were driven by a pronounced nihilism, fiercely rejecting mainstream values and seeking in the art of the 'insane' a new "reservoir of mental health", in the words of Breton (1948/2002, p. 316). Maclagan (2009) likewise suggests that myths of an original and pure creativity supersede the art historical context and are responses to the cultural crises and socio-political context of the respective post-war eras both authors were living and working in. In contrast to Prinzhorn, however, Dubuffet did not limit his focus to the artistic productions of asylum inmates, but extended this group to include also other artists who 'unintentionally' fell out of conventional frames.

Operating in a time when countercultural movements were on the rise and attacking the 'system' became en vogue not only in academia but also in large parts

9 In this context, the term 'medium' refers to individuals who strive to communicate with 'other' worlds, ancestors, spirits and ghosts by rituals, prayers and invocations. Already the Surrealists, and most notably Breton, had an outspoken interest in mediums and their techniques, likening them to the Surrealist method of psychic automatism.

of the public, Dubuffet's concept of 'Art Brut' appears to fit in nicely with its many rebellious undertones. However, contrary to other social movements and aspirations for self-empowerment which started to flourish and gain public acceptance around the same time (the Civil Rights Movement, Feminism, Gay Liberation, etc.), those artists confined to the compartment 'Art Brut' did not step into visibility on their own terms—instead Dubuffet was fighting for recognition *on their behalf*. This authoritarian advocacy reveals the perhaps most eminent paradox and irony running through the history and discourse of 'Outsider Art': as soon as those individuals labelled as Other were indeed to speak up for themselves, confidently demand attention or even dare to criticise their patrons, they would be dismissed from the realms of 'Art Brut' or 'Outsider Art' and often sink into oblivion once more, for violating the genres' most essential commandments of purity, innocence, and authenticity. Perhaps the most prominent historical example of this paradoxical effect is artist Gaston Chaissac, who was included in the 'Art Brut' collection and then expelled from it again when Dubuffet found out that he had been in contact with various artists and intellectuals and commercially exhibited in galleries (Maizels, 1996). Chaissac's subsequent rise in recognition proved to be a further transgression of Dubuffet's rules, solidifying his expulsion and resembling the experiences of several more recently active artists in the same category, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6.

The Rise and Fall of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut

Dubuffet was rigorous when it came to deciding who had the necessary credentials to belong to 'Art Brut' and 'unawareness'—assuring that the artists in question were not going to be able to talk back—was definitely one of them. This seems necessary, as any kind of alternative voice would have inevitably threatened such a totalitarian construction and exposed the fragility of his ideology. It can be assumed that Dubuffet was very much aware of his powerful position and, to prevent 'Art Brut' from being reduced to a private project under his name, he decided to base his ideas on larger grounds by establishing the *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* in 1948. The agenda of this group of artists and intellectuals—at its height including more than 60 members[10]—was to promote 'Art Brut' and ensure that these works were not only preserved but exhibited with the respect they deserve. Due to their protective approach, most works were shown only to select audiences who were thought to be sensitive enough to really appreciate this form of art and refrain from evaluating it according to established standards or in view of the art market. Reportedly, even the label 'Art Brut' was protected, and could only be used for artists and works which had previously received the official blessings from Dubuffet and the Compagnie (Maizels, 1996). At all times, the group exercised full control over the works, deciding where and to whom they were shown but refusing to exhibit them alongside other contemporary art or in group exhibitions, fearing they would be devalued if compared (Fol et al., 2015). Despite their

10 Among these were the founding members André Breton, Jean Paulhan, Charles Ratton, Michel Tapié and Henri-Pierre Roché but also other well-known figures such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Cocteau, Albert Camus, Tristan Tzara and Henri Michaux.

overprotective approach, the group eventually organised a public exposition of 200 works by 63 artists at the Parisian Galerie René Drouin in 1949, but it was not until 1972 that the collection—intermittently housed in the US for a decade and by now containing 5,000 artworks by 200 artists—found a perennial home in the Château de Beaulieu in Lausanne and was permanently opened to the public in 1976. By that time the Compagnie de l'Art Brut was already long-gone. Shortly after their foundation the group fell out and dissolved again in 1951, reportedly due to Dubuffet refusing to compromise on his authority over the subject (Wilson, 1992). His intransigent attitude would eventually also cost him his friendship with Breton, who was unsuccessfully vouching for an inclusion of the Surrealists under the rubric 'Art Brut' on the grounds that they—although presumably more 'logical' and 'rational'—would have an equalling "commitment to authenticity"; an assertion Dubuffet was outraged by (Conley, 2006, pp. 135–138).

As it seems, before during and after the tenure of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, it was predominantly Dubuffet setting the tone through his writing, lecturing, collecting and exhibiting practices. In most instances he expressed his opinions in poetic extremes and in a manifesto-like attire which held the potential to reach beyond specialist artist audiences, yet at the same time carefully shielding 'Art Brut' from too close theoretical or critical inspection.

It is perhaps of little surprise that, with his purist approach, being challenged continuously by the 'cultural contaminations' lingering in France, needing to 'adulterate' artists like Chaissac and defend his proclamations of purity, between 1947 and 1949 Dubuffet chose to turn elsewhere, namely North Africa, to find what he longed to see and perhaps temporarily evading from being scrutinised. In a lecture in 1951 he contemplates:

> We are beginning to ask ourselves whether our Occident doesn't have something to learn from these savages. It could very well be that in various domains their solutions and approaches, which have struck us as simplistic, are ultimately wiser than ours. I personally have a very high regard for the values of primitive peoples: instinct, passion, caprice, violence, madness. (Dubuffet, Arts Club of Chicago, 1951)

The last sentence particularly resembles Dubuffet's refusal to reflect his own bias, which is instead projected and represented as the essential values of those 'Others' he had 'discovered'. Concluding from the writings produced during his time in Algeria, much like Gauguin, Dubuffet seems to have been primarily interested in reconfirming his mythological understanding of the foreign Other rather than seeking to establish a dialogue on eye-level. Such an attempt would most likely have resulted in diminishing exactly those differences Dubuffet was eager to find—a risk he was evidently not prepared to take, neither in North Africa nor in France with the 'Art Brut' artists under his patronage. Dubuffet may have been well aware of the limitations of his concept when at one point speaking of 'Art Brut' as a tendency and "pole" of orientation, rather than an absolute position (Dubuffet, 1967). Until the very end, however, he would retain a notion of authentic primitivity and cling to his initially established categories, simply creating the genre 'Neuve Invention' to account for those 'semi-influenced' artists who may fall in-between the essentially good and bad ends of 'authentic' vs. 'false' art.

Contradictions and Consequences of Dubuffet's Writings

In the many polemic texts following Dubuffet's introduction of the term, the lingering metaphorical polarisation between 'cultural' and 'raw' art was not only written into concrete existence but defended in unprecedented force and sincerity. The concept of 'Art Brut' thereby comprised of many contradictions and inconsistencies, with the most obvious paradox being the actual reinforcement of exactly those barriers Dubuffet wished to tear down. Frequently referring to the already established romantic inversion of the negative, cultivated Self and the positive, intuitive Other, Dubuffet managed to fix these elusive myths with his permeating terminology, provoking more and more critics to accuse him of "reduc[ing] the complex art world to a juxtaposition of polemical exaggerations" (Landert, 2011, p. 35). It also soon became evident that Dubuffet's project was doomed to choke on its own contradictions, first and foremost because, at all times, he was operating from the 'cultural inside' and the very centre of the 'official' art world he so much despised of, as curator Antonia Dapena-Tretter (2017) critically remarks. Unable to leave the only field behind which bore the necessary institutions to grant him and his project recognition, he was forced to use the means of the established discourse to make himself understood. Despite his initial hopes to reach the 'common man', it was ultimately well-educated colleagues and like-minded intellectuals who possessed the necessary cultural capital to follow his intentions and properly apprehend his aspirations.[11]

Rhodes points to a further paradox when observing that 'Art Brut' had been "born out of a desire to escape the straitjacket of the art market", but ironically turned into an "alternative orthodoxy", eventually being assimilated fully back into the mainstream again (2000, p. 14). As Maclagan demonstrates, these "dynamics of controversy" and the slow process of "cultural digestion" of initially outraging and shocking content, are not particular to Dubuffet's case but a familiar characteristic of all avant-garde movements of the early 20th century (2009, p. 69). In a wider sense they may also resemble the politics of capitalist recuperation, in which radical and countercultural ideas are eventually absorbed and become a neutralised part of the system, losing all their initial destructive spikes and reformative potentials. Dubuffet desperately tried to quarantine 'Art Brut' to avoid such commodification, for example by urging the artists Raphael Lonné and Magali Herrera to not apprehend or speak of themselves as artists (Maclagan, 2009). By doing so, he not only exploited his powerful position in relegating the 'Other' to its predefined place, but evidently fought a lost battle as the proclaimed purity of 'Art Brut' artists would paradoxically turn into their hottest selling point.

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11 Dubuffet initially called 'Art Brut' "the voice of the common man", who he conceptualised in opposition to 'culture' as defined by elites. After realising how 'submissive' the 'general public' was to dominant discourses, he did however resign from this position: "Perhaps in the 1940s I had more confidence in the man in the street. Now I'm more discouraged. He is more strongly conditioned by cultural ideas than are the intellectuals. It is far more difficult to decondition him" (Dubuffet as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 308).

What Dubuffet achieved is questionable, but remarkable nonetheless. Considering the rise of postmodern theory and decolonialisation processes culminating in the 1960s, it would soon become a lost cause trying to justify the existence of a label or the grouping of individuals on the grounds of a supposedly shared inherent essence thought to ultimately determine their 'Otherness'. Categories such as race, class, gender, madness or disability which had been used previously to proclaim differences on 'natural' grounds would collapse under their own weight, revealing not their 'essence' but instead their social constructedness. The pressure resulting from a socio-political climate increasingly questioning authority and deconstructing hegemonic, one-sided Western histories as well as the diversification of voices due to the 'writing back' of those formerly Othered presumably had a substantial impact also affecting the wider public. It is peculiar that under these circumstances a purist invention such as 'Art Brut' has not been dismantled by postcolonial deconstructivism, yet in the guise of 'Outsider Art' even managed to rise to considerable fame, reviving essentialising ascriptions such as 'ahistorical', 'irrational', 'simple' and 'raw' and making colonial voiceovers respectable once again through the backdoor.

Even if at times following a documentary approach and attempting to let the work speak 'for itself' in the *Cahiers de l'Art Brut*, on the whole Dubuffet acted above the heads of the many artists he 'discovered', overshadowing their voices with polemic assertions and editorial doctrines. It may be further plausible to view 'Art Brut' as a project tailored for Dubuffet's own benefit, considering that a great many artists under his wing remained excluded, despite their 'inclusion' due to their being left uninformed about their reputation in or even existence of the field. Dubuffet was aware of this inequality and position of definitory power, confirming his status as main beneficiary when stating in 1951:

> The five exhibitors care not in the slightest about this sort of thing [critical acclaim]. Besides, they don't even know this exhibition is taking place […]. All five are, in fact, at the time of writing shut away behind the padlocked doors of a lunatic asylum. And when you find yourself in a situation like that, you have more serious things to think about than seeing your name mentioned favorably by art critics in the press. (Dubuffet, 1951/1973, p. 94)

Even though Dubuffet's statements raise many ethical concerns, his work still achieved a lasting impact—especially in raising the profile of creatively active patients in psychiatric institutions and promoting the recognition of their works as art. He did so at a time when art therapy was not yet established and creative productions by patients were still often neglected or destroyed by hospital staff. The concept of 'Art Brut' may have thus contributed to a change in perspective of psychiatric staff members, promulgating that the creative activities, thoughts and feelings of patients are worthwhile considering, keeping and collecting, perhaps in turn raising the self-esteem and feeling of autonomy among some individuals.

Even though Dubuffet was certainly one of the most prominent enthusiasts and advocates, raising the profile of and interest in the 'Art of the Insane' may not be attributed to his efforts only. As Beardsley (2003) and Maclagan (2009) indicate, by the time Dubuffet became active, the audience had already been prepared for 'Art Brut'.

A climate of acceptance for such art had been cultivated by the increasing absorption of avant-gardist ideas into the mainstream and the rising number of exhibitions of 'psychiatric art' across Europe, alongside the ambitions of countercultural movements and grassroots activists rebelling against established norms and celebrating the 'insane' as the anti-heroes of society. Rather fittingly, Dubuffet's engagement with and discussion of the concept of insanity (contradictory as it may be) thereby surpasses the realms of the art world, being relevant on a much broader societal scale. As MacGregor indicates, in contrast to his romantically inclined predecessors, Dubuffet's ideas resonate with the "advanced psychiatric thinking" (1989, p. 302) of the day, striking many chords with the anti-psychiatry movement and congruently feeding into the development of alternative therapeutic practices and treatments for individuals with mental health issues.

4.7 Pondering the Existence of 'Madness': Anti-Psychiatry, Art Therapy and 'Art Brut' Institutionalised

The anti-psychiatry movement, long prepared for but coming to the fore only in the 1960s, was a reaction against the growing tendency to medicalise mental illness, excoriating established treatment practices as repressive instruments to mould the 'patient' "to conform with massified social expectations" (Cooper, 1967, p. x). The movement was in opposition to a range of physical therapies such as electroconvulsive therapy, as well as to the introduction and aggressive marketing of psychotropic drugs by pharmaceutical companies starting in the mid-1950s (Scull, 2015). Predominately a political and ideologically motivated project, it stimulated an intellectual debate about the origins of mental illnesses, had a crucial impact on and helped to reform psychiatry from the core.

As mentioned above, in 1961 Foucault published his influential book *Madness and Civilization*, looking at 'insanity' not as a genetically determined disease, but declaring it a discursive construction used to legitimise the separation and exclusion of individuals who did not conform with the norms of a given society. In the same year, radical anti-psychiatrists Thomas Szasz and Erving Goffman likewise dismantled the idea of mental illness as an invention and political instrument to drown alternative viewpoints and expel differently thinking individuals. Other, neo-Marxist-inclined members of the movement, such as Franco Basaglia (1968), would more specifically redefine mental illness as a logical, individual reaction to an oppressive system, perceiving psychiatric treatment as a tool to control those who did not or could not play by the rules of capitalism. This conglomerate of distinct yet closely adjacent ideas was eventually distilled into a more abstract labelling theory by sociologist Thomas Scheff. In his book *Being Mentally Ill: A Sociological Theory* (1966) Scheff concludes that a diagnosis of mental illness does not tell us anything about the person, but rather expresses the incapability of a system to handle deviances, turning rule-breakers into targets for social control by labelling them.

In consideration of such views, it is unsurprising that the asylum was not only disregarded as an institution failing to heal, but as the epicentre turning 'sane' people

into 'madmen' in the first place. Following Goffman (1961), long-term confinement, alienation and dehumanising treatment experienced in the 'total institution' of the mental hospital, inevitably elicits pathological behaviour in any given individual—an effect psychiatrist Russell Barton termed "institutional neurosis" (1966). Goffman, and many other anti-psychiatrists, consequently condemned any kind of confinement, demanding the closing down of asylums. By their attempt to free 'the mentally ill' from their supposed oppression and reissue them with human value and respect, anti-psychiatric activists may have followed noble motives, yet still argued in abstract absolutes, largely carrying out their debates over the heads, or rather on the backs, of psychiatric patients. Dissolving the patient-category, closing asylums and reducing mental illness to a sole ideological instrument bore serious implications. Not only do such notions ignore the heterogeneity of individual experiences and negate the suffering endured by many but, via the process of deinstitutionalisation, some former patients were now also deprived of their livelihoods, care and support as a result of being redefined and left to their own devices in a community which was often less welcoming to the 'Other' than perhaps previously envisioned (Scull, 2015).

Such practical and theoretical problems arising from the concept of and dealing with 'madness' are yet to be solved. For better or worse, radical anti-psychiatric notions declaring mental illness as practically non-existent did not stand the test of time.[12] Likewise, there remains a matter of lively debate over whether mental illness is to be grasped a fixed entity and decisive "break in the normal life-curve", as psychiatrist Karl Jaspers (1913/1997, p. 18) once put it, or if there are fluent transitions and intersections between 'sanity' and 'insanity', rejecting linear or even oppositional readings of 'sick' and 'healthy'. The current trend certainly tends to favour the latter, coming with its own risks of diluting intense psychotic experiences by over-pathologising society and claiming that every human being may be neurotic and any kind of difference or eccentricity a medical problem. Regardless of which side one takes, implicit to many of these debates is the notion that mental illness—if not entirely socially constructed—is something *bad*; a harmful disease needing to be cured. The anti-psychiatrist R. D. Laing as well as Dubuffet would decisively act against such interpretations. Vigorously turning negative into positive discrimination, they instead declared 'insanity' a constructive and highly useful experience, re-embellishing the old romantic image of the 'insane' and once again making the many intersections between the art and socio-medical sector evident.

12 In this regard I personally align myself with Shorter's (1997) understanding of mental disorders as empirical realities and more than social constructs, while still acknowledging that the individual experience, the variables determining whether a certain behaviour is considered 'crazy', as well as the established ways of evaluating and dealing with this state by society, are depending on socio-cultural conventions.

Anti-Psychiatric Claims of 'Insanity' as a Positive Trait

Leaving the question of the actual 'realness' of mental illness uncontested, Laing argued from a rather telescopic point of view for schizophrenia to be understood as an adaption or rather a creative response of sensitive individuals to a mad world. Ascribing those declared schizophrenic some kind of special insight he proclaimed that it is through the 'insane' that "the light beg[ins] to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed-minds" (1967, p. 107). Laing's words evoke a certain sense of Romanticism and, indeed, his writings closely resemble Dubuffet's ideas, with one profound element however dividing the basis of both authors' stances: their experience in the psychiatric setting.

While the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Laing had spent extensive time in the latter, in Dubuffet's views a certain naiveté—already prevalent in the Surrealists' reception of Prinzhorn's writings—is exposed. Dubuffet has taken the anti-psychiatric notion to an extreme by accusing psychiatrists of intentionally smothering the creativity of patients through medication and therapy and by portraying 'insane' artists as wilful refusers. According to Dubuffet, the latter have deliberately alienated themselves from society and rejected the "ordinary view of things", revolting against any attempts to inflict on them predefined norms which may repress their personal freedom. Instead, the 'insane' would have "replaced […] the traditional way of understanding the world" with a "deliberate revision, a new system of insights and practices which […] opens on exaltation and jubilation" (Dubuffet as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 305). Accordingly, Dubuffet declares the 'madman' to be "a reformer, an inventor of new systems, intoxicated with invention", further stating:

> I believe that the creation of art is intimately linked with the spirit of revolt. Insanity represents a refusal to adopt a view of reality that is imposed by custom. Art consists in constructing or inventing a mirror in which all of the universe is reflected. An artist is a man who creates a parallel universe, who doesn't want an imposed universe inflicted on him. He wants to do it himself. That is a definition of insanity. The insane are people who push creativity further than professional artists, who believe in it totally. (Dubuffet as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 303)

Dubuffet concludes that there is no such thing as psychopathological art—if anything, all artists are to be considered 'insane' or 'disturbed', since they are united by their dissatisfaction and revolt against the status quo. His outspoken idealisation of 'insanity' thereby produces an "aestheticization of madness" in the words of sociologist Anne Bowler, meaning "a process wherein insanity is constructed as a form of artistic strategy with little or no regard for the injurious effects of mental illness in the life of the asylum artist" (1997, p. 30). Not only does Bowler attest that the liberating effect of mental illness, as proclaimed by Dubuffet, thereby transcends the empirical grounding of anti-psychiatric ideas, but that the asylum likewise turns into an inevitable place of revolt for many of his followers.

From the 1960s onwards, many 'experts' of what was to become 'Outsider Art', such as Cardinal (1979), MacGregor (1989), or Thévoz (1995), would—contrary to anti-psychiatric demands to close psychiatric institutions—express a certain nostalgia for

the isolating asylum, with Thévoz even speaking of the artworks produced in such settings as a "secondary gain of internment" (1995, p. 155). Fearing that the image-making activity and 'free' creative expression of individuals experiencing psychosis would vanish if the traditional asylum was shut down, these authors condemned the replacement of confinement with community care programmes and despised new medication and alternative therapeutic practices such as art therapy. They seem to have done so despite or rather, because of the fact that these approaches evidently alleviated the suffering many individuals were experiencing, at times also averting their social exclusion and isolation. Among key players in the field, then as now, it is often proclaimed that it is exactly those parameters which may push individuals to create great art, with the quality of their work supposedly decreasing the better an artist feels, yet being enhanced in intensity when the artist is in crisis. Accordingly, Dubuffet concludes with suspicion that nowadays doctors want to "cure creativity" and "kill originality" (as cited in MacGregor, 1989, p. 359), with Thévoz likewise complaining that "therapeutic concerns and supervision [have] finally neutralized spontaneity, personal commitment, and the spirit of anti-authoritarianism, which are the necessary components for artistic creation" (as cited in Peiry, 2001, p. 198). MacGregor even claims that the psychiatric profession as a whole is "hostile to image-making activity because it is inclined to take the lid off rather than holding it firmly on" (1989, p. 310). Such views inevitably raise ethical concerns and point to the possibility of vulnerable individuals being exploited in the interest of art world professionals, or even being withheld medication—an issue which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

At this point I would like to emphasise that many of those authors who decry the loss of 'great art' and blame the introduction of new psychotropic drugs, the reduction of long-term hospitalisation and deinstitutionalisation as well as structured art therapy as inhibiting the truly 'authentic' expression of the individual, have done so with obvious disregard for the well-being of the latter. Likewise, both the portrayal of people with mental illnesses as helpless *victims* who are driven by an urgency to create (Prinzhorn) as well as declarations of their 'madness' being a wilful act of *refusal* (Dubuffet), may be understood as rather detached from and overshadowing the differing empirical realities effectively experienced. While notions of their being refusers tend to deny or romanticise suffering by overestimating agency, the former overstates the presupposed pain of the very same individuals, in turn undermining their agency.

Even though both versions are in effect patronising and essentialist readings, the writings of the above-mentioned authors (just as much as the work of anti-psychiatric activists) may nevertheless be considered as having also had positive impacts. Provoking a reconfiguration of conservative psychiatric treatment models and contributing to a more positive image of mental illness, they would provide the inspirational basis upon which 'unorthodox' therapeutical uses of creativity would spread and flourish among a new generation of psychiatrists and psychotherapists.

Art Therapy and its Alternatives

Dubuffet developed his 'Art Brut' concept at a time when experimental approaches in art therapy were developed, tested and implemented in and outside of many psychiatric hospitals across the US and Europe. Evolving out of occupational therapy, art therapy aims at the self-empowerment of the individual through the process of visual and symbolic expression and the resulting sense of accomplishment via completion (American Art Therapy Association, 2017). Perceiving creative activity not as a sign of refusal or rebellion against the environment nor as an expression of 'degeneracy', many art therapists point to the reformative quality of artmaking as a sign of health, by which patients attempt to reach out and re-establish contact with their surroundings. Subscribing to this view, Foster therefore concludes to the contrary of many avant-gardist readings that the 'Art of the Insane' is not made to "break" the symbolic order, but rather in its "breach" (2004, p. 208).

Artist Edward Adamson, who has set up an art studio on the hospital grounds of Netherne and already worked there with psychiatric patients in 1948, is often referred to as a pioneer and 'father of British art therapy', setting an example for non-interventionist working practices following the above-mentioned credo. Refraining from giving instructions and instead inviting the patients to express themselves freely (Dax, 1953), Adamson may be understood as having laid the foundations for the development of the currently very widespread art studio programmes in the UK, in which individual choices are encouraged and the work of participants—at least in theory—is not judged, analysed or evaluated. Adamson shared many beliefs with Dubuffet and established the *Adamson Collection of Art* around the same time as Dubuffet introduced 'Art Brut'. However, in the literature about 'Outsider Art' his work remains largely underrepresented, as much as Laing's revolutionary Kingsley Hall experiment which gave rise to the publication *Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* (Barnes & Berke, 1971), in which the 'schizophrenic' painter Mary Barnes provides an extensive description of her experiences and artistic intentions in her own words. The relative ignorance many purist key players express towards the latter may perhaps be accountable to the circumstance, that the 'Art Brut'/'Outsider Art' field displays little interest in participatory approaches which may deconstruct the 'Otherness' of certain artists. Furthermore, Adamson and Laing always remained in the medical context, expressing a wish to heal the patients and therefore supposedly were too 'influential' and 'prescriptive'. As indicated above, art therapy was and is condemned by many art world professionals due to the works created in such settings supposedly functioning as "alternative communication devices" between the patient and doctor, rather than as 'art' in its own right (Röske, 2010, p. 6). Since the art therapist, by definition, interferes with the work of the patient to some extent (as does the socio-cultural context either way), from this perspective, the result can only ever be of 'inferior' aesthetic quality if measured in terms of the 'authenticity' required by gatekeepers such as Dubuffet. Having said that, much of the most highly regarded work in the field has been produced in such settings, thus sustaining the genre as a whole.

Accounting for the discrepancies and criticisms mentioned above, many alternative set-ups were envisioned and experimented with; some more closely aligned to the

needs of the art world and pursuing a distinct non-interventionist approach, others remaining steadfast in the realms of social work and therapy, focusing on the artist rather than the artwork. At present, and perhaps for the better, art therapy is still lacking a clear definition and is implemented in various ways, always depending on the individual approach of the studio lead either being more therapeutically or artistically oriented in spirit and practice.

One of the pioneers for alternative studio programmes breaching the medical and the arts sector and following the idea of creative expression being therapeutic in itself was Austrian psychiatrist Leo Navratil (1921–2006). He was in contact with Dubuffet and set up an art studio for a select group of patients, whose artistic creations he considered extraordinary. In 1981 he founded the *Centre for Art Psychotherapy*—in 1986 renamed into the *Artist's House*—at the psychiatric clinic Maria Gugging in Klosterneuburg. Then a refuge for creatively active asylum inmates, it is by now an institution in its own right, completely detached from the hospital environment, with an independently run gallery, gift shop and café. While his successor, psychiatrist and artist Johann Feilacher, has always emphatically stressed the fact that they are not running an art therapy studio or social project—perhaps to avoid scaring off collectors for the above-mentioned reasons—Navratil did not let go of the psychiatric perspective until the very end. He continuously researched and published about the supposed link between creativity and psychosis, presenting an arbitrary range of formal elements as 'evidence' of the creator's psychopathological constitution, at one point even stating that "the psychosis is the artist" (1965, p. 39). Navratil was met with harsh critique for his pathologising of the artworks produced[13], and was likewise scorned for his authoritarian demands in urging patients to draw against their will, as he admits on several occasions in his book *Schizophrenia and Art* (1965, p. 26; p. 43f). Despite Navratil's problematic over-exposition of the idea of 'madness' and his overarching medical approach, he was also fascinated by the artistic quality of the works, prompting Maclagan to suspect that he may have felt torn between his psychiatric stance and "a more generous view of his patient's work as art with a real value of its own" (2009, p. 97). Perhaps the latter did indeed outweigh the former, considering that Navratil eventually abandoned the idea of curing or re-socialising his patients, instead promoting them as artists and putting their work at the very centre of attention. According to him,

> the creative efforts of the artist-patients thrive precisely because of their deviation from the norm, drawing sustenance from those very psychological conditions which

13 Inspired by Helmut Rennert's controversial study *Merkmale schizophrener Malerei* (1962), Navratil established a catalogue of stylistic elements to systematise 'schizophrenic art'. As Röske (2008) demonstrates, Navratil's criteria are far from universal psychopathological indicators but expressions of the time in which the work was produced, found to a similar extent in the 'professional' arts. He therefore criticises Navratil for having performed a step backwards in comparison to Prinzhorn: even though both authors ignore the influence of the socio-cultural environment on the artist, presenting patient artworks as ahistorical and timeless expressions of the unconscious mind, Prinzhorn is rather careful and largely avoids dissecting stylistic criteria in the 'imagery' of the 'insane'.

psychiatry ordinarily attempts to eliminate. In the artist's house the hospital is not preparing patients to re-enter society in the role which was once theirs, but rather offering them a new social identity. (Navratil, 1994, p. 210)

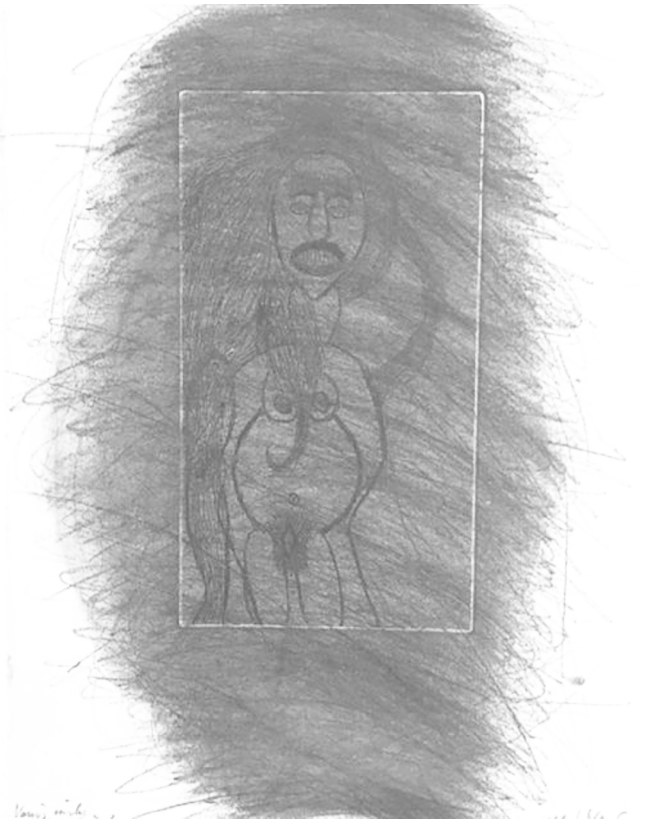

Figure 8. Hauser, J. & Rainer, A. (1994). Venus unter blauer Tuchtent (Mixed Media). Sammlung Arnulf Rainer.

Vouching for recognition of these works as being on par with mainstream art, Navratil frequently engaged with the Austrian avant-garde and international art world, organising exhibitions and, from the 1970s, marketing and selling the works created by his patients. Since then, prices on the art market have been continuously rising and many Gugging artists, such as Johann Hauser, Oswald Tschirtner and August Walla, have acclaimed international reputation—circumstances which in themselves bear therapeutic effects, Navratil was convinced. A further push in publicity was achieved through the enthusiastic reception and promotion of the Gugging project by a range of artists, most notably Arnulf Rainer, Peter Pongratz and Alfred Hrdlicka. Navratil stood in particularly close exchange with Rainer, who does not only possess

one of the largest private collections of 'Art Brut', but also collaborated with some of the artists in Gugging himself. Due to the lack of information and notes on these projects, it remains unclear if these collaborations occured in dialogue and on equal grounds. Given Rainer's frequent mimicking and self-representation as mentally disturbed (see the photographic project *Face Farces*) it may be speculated that there was a certain interest involved on his part to operationalise and digest the mystic aura of the 'authentic, insane Outsider' for his own benefit. In Figure 8, an imbalance in authorship may be noticeable, perhaps even bordering on the edges of a patronising takeover. While Gugging-artist Johann Hauser evidently drew the figure in the middle as a foundation, in a second step, the latter was entirely overpainted and covered by Rainer's 'voice'. Rainer did not only overpaint Hauser's work but also many other works, giving way to his self-acclaimed obsession to conceal. The exterminating element in his approach reveals Rainer's powerful position in any kind of 'collaboration' which is asserted by the artist himself, when stating that his ultimate aim is to "permanently annulate" and "destroy" the "approximate, detailed, and restless", so something "better" may mature from it (Rainer, 1980, p. 66).

Analogous to this example, I would like to refer to one piece illustrating the early archival practice of the Collection de l'Art Brut. In a similarly authoritarian manner, Dubuffet not only theoretically, but also quite literally put a stamp on selected artworks, enshrining his ownership and their demarcation as 'Brut' for all times.

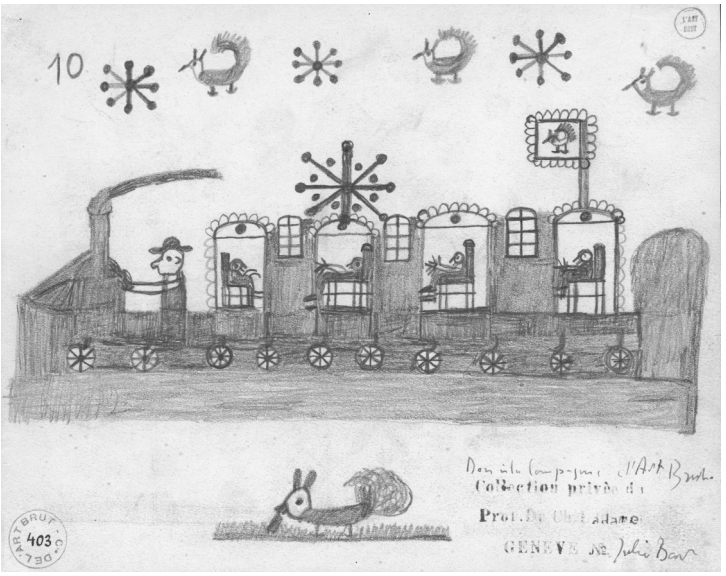

Figure 9. Bar, J. (1920). Untitled (Pencil on Paper). Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne.

Despite the prominent reference to its previous owner, Dr Ladamer, Julie Bar's drawing (Figure 9) is covered in several 'Art Brut' stamps and collection notes which are placed in a protruding manner inside the image, rather than discreetly on the back (as is common practice in cataloguing 'professional' artworks). Such ways of dealing with artwork may be interpreted as revealing a certain disrespect towards the artist, and deliver the notion that the collector, in this case Dubuffet, feels a sense of entitlement to boldly mark someone else's creation, thereby transforming it into his own. Through such behaviour, Dubuffet and Rainer represent themselves as being quite literally one step or level *above* the artists they are dealing with, confidently putting their respective second layer on top of an original work of art, and thus diminishing and distorting the significance and expressiveness of the initial artist's voice.

Even though not of central concern to this study, this short excursion to practical examples shall illustrate some of the most obvious inequalities in the relationship between patient-artists and art world professionals, which are usually not easily detectable, taking place as they do on the meta-level of the discourse. In the realms of the spoken and written word, these imbalances are often expressed much subtly and evasively, frequently overshadowing ethical concerns to such an extent that it becomes almost impossible to dismantle or look behind the upheld image of the collector, curator or institution. However, this does not mean that one-sided marking and marketing processes, in which artists have little or no say, are a relic of the past. Today, places like the Artist's House in Gugging are increasingly caught in the crossfire and have been heavily criticised for reproducing authoritarian frameworks. Schüssler (2006) has provided an extensive ethnography concerning the latter, and Maclagan likewise stresses that "these patients are positively solicited to make art, and may even be under some pressure, more or less subtle, to do so. Artworks are made that would not otherwise have been made, and that could sometimes be seen as artefacts of the institutions" (2009, p. 98). The Gugging works hence effectively reinforce the idea of 'asylum art', even though Feilacher—as already Dubuffet and later on Cardinal—asserts that the artist's biography and illness is of "private concern" and completely irrelevant to the creative process or the appreciation of these works as genuine art (2004, p. 17). Maclagan outright dismisses such claims as pretentious, stating that the "story behind the work" was and is an "intrinsic part of its 'authenticity'" and cannot be downplayed (2009, p. 100). He criticises the evident contradiction displayed by the Gugging management when proclaiming it is the work alone that matters, considering that the Artist's House was and still is "a curiously old-fashioned set-up, with the patient artists almost as much on show as their artwork" (Maclagan, 2009, p. 101).

Even though the Artist's House remains an island project in Austria, encapsulated, exclusive and raising ethical concerns in its efficient workings as an "Art Brut factory" (Carré d'Artistes, n.d.), in its beginning stages it undoubtedly had a profound influence on the evolving landscape of art projects in the social sector, acting as an inspiration for working creatively with people with mental illnesses or disabilities.

Despite regular implementations of art therapy programmes in most hospitals in psychiatric day centres across Europe today, a great number of open studios, ateliers and art charity programmes have been launched as alternative options since the 1970s,

especially in the UK. Following rather progressive approaches in their endeavour to democratise art, overcome art world boundaries and enhance inclusion, many projects are funded by the government, the Arts Council, and other foundations. They invite socially marginalised artists to work with them, and provide access to facilities, assistance and art supplies in an unintrusive studio environment. In such contexts the creation of idiosyncratic works is flourishing, making a shift to the unique position of the UK indispensable. Being one of the most proficient hotspots in the promotion of 'Outsider Art' in the past 50 years, as well as forming the basis of my empirical research, all subsequent chapters will thus lay their emphasis on the British field.

4.8 Internationalisation of 'Art Brut': Roger Cardinal's 'Outsider Art'

In 1972, British art theorist Roger Cardinal (1940–2019) coined the term 'Outsider Art' in his seminal book of the same title, introducing the English equivalent to Dubuffet's 'Art Brut'. Cardinal's conception and terminology would spread worldwide and is still the most frequently used today—in ever more open and 'inclusive' ways—largely relegating use of the term 'Art Brut' into its discursive shadows. It may be feasible to assume that this process was not intended by Cardinal to such an extent, considering that he effectively follows Dubuffet's predefined path, only insignificantly branching off at times. In correspondence with Dubuffet, Cardinal focusses on works by psychiatric patients, likewise clinging to the Expressionist ideal of his predecessors and sharing their enthusiasm for an untutored, 'anti-cultural' art. He fully subscribes to Dubuffet's generalising paradigm of the 'Brut' artist as rebel and refuser, yet proclaims less rigid qualification criteria, including artists who consciously reject their training and who would have previously fallen into the somewhat less significant category of 'Neuve Invention' in Dubuffet's selection.

The first part of the book reads like a manifesto for alternative art forms, with frequent regress to the writings of Dubuffet and Prinzhorn. In the much more extensive chapters following, a selection of artworks is reproduced, and 29 artists are biographically introduced, including the 'schizophrenic master' Adolf Wölfli, whose work is also featured on the front cover and now officially rebranded *Outsider Art*.

Considering Cardinal's devotion to Dubuffet, it is plausible yet startling, that except from its prominent placement on the front cover, the term 'Outsider Art' is entirely absent throughout the book, not even mentioned once by Cardinal, let alone defined. This is reportedly due to the fact that, shortly before publishing, the editor felt that the French term 'Art Brut' would confuse the English-speaking audience, demanding Cardinal to come up with a catchier title (Prinz, 2017). According to the latter, they subsequently went through "hundreds of titles", pondering alternative terminologies such as "the art of the artless" for their adequacy as replacements (Cardinal as cited in Volkersz, 1998, p. 24). Fortunately, Cardinal's reasoning and struggle to find an appropriate label is well documented. In a letter to Seymour Rosen, founder of *SPACES*[14], in

14 SPACES (spacesarchives.org) is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to the documentation and preservation of vernacular 'Outsider' environments.

1987 he voices some of his concerns, dismissing terms "which allude to the creator's social or mental status", such as "isolate art", "maverick art", "folk art", "visionary art", "schizophrenic art". Rather than onto odd biographies, he instead vouches for a term focusing on the "aesthetic impact", listing possibilities such as "self-taught art", "autodidact art", "untutored art", "idiosyncratic art", "original art", "outlaw aesthetics", "estranged art", "unfettered art", "breakaway art", "unmediated art"—yet none of which he discerns to be "incisive" enough either (Cardinal as cited in Tuchman, 1992, p. 11).

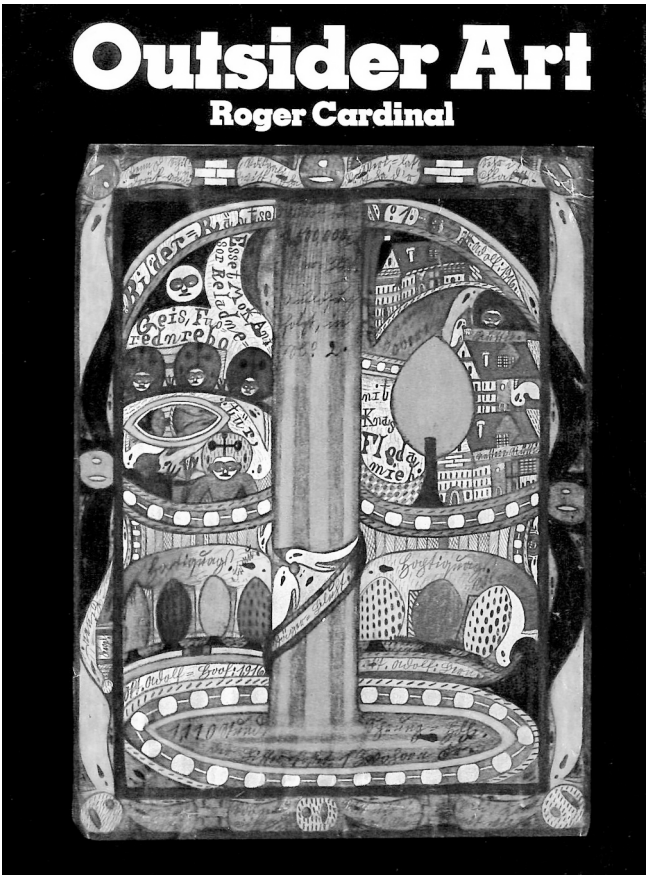

Figure 10. Outsider Art by Roger Cardinal (1972) (Book Cover). Praeger Publishers.

Considering this list of options, one might wonder how the course of 'Outsider Art' would have run had one of the less sensationalist alternatives been chosen in its place. However, Cardinal would opt for and always return to the term 'Outsider Art' while at the same time denouncing the importance of the artist's biography. Like Dubuffet,

he proclaims to be interested in the aesthetics and formal aspects of the artworks alone—an irritating contradiction considering the extent of biographical information both authors have provided in their respective writings and their frequent romantic celebration of a supposedly pure inner vision of the marginalised artist.

In fact, Cardinal's suggested yet disguised direction does not only shine through in the elaborate constructions of his writings. It is rather obvious that whenever he speaks about 'Outsider Art' he refers to the social and psychological disposition of the artist and much less to their art as detached from these spheres. As Prinz indicates, it is indeed inherently impossible to do otherwise, since the introduction of the term 'Outsider', coming with its own distinct denotations, "marks a conceptual shift from art brut (which conveys roughness of execution) to a spatial conceptualization: outsider artists are, by definition, cut off from the art world" (2017, p. 258f). This perspective reveals the most crucial distinction to Dubuffet, whose desire for the social context and biography to be omitted in the process of evaluating the artwork remained, if unsuccessful, largely uncontested under the terminological fig leaf 'raw'. 'Brut' could always be remodelled into a concealing and safe category of aesthetic style, covering its more conflicting and persistent social connotations. By using the term 'Outsider', however, this discursive emergency escape route towards the aesthetics was cut off, and the artists as the Other more clearly tagged, fixed and spatially confined than ever before.

In the historical course of 'Outsider Art', the formal aesthetic would gradually disappear from the set of evaluative criteria,[15] being replaced by a compelling focus on social attributes and parameters. Cardinal was wary of this step, perhaps correctly sensing what opening Pandora's box and releasing the previously understated fascination with the 'Other' might entail:

> I was a bit worried because of the idea of the Outsider, a romantic and thrilling sort of idea, a sort of highwayman, or a thief, someone that steals by in the night. Rather than what most of the people involved actually are, simply, if you like, externally quite ordinary and often quite accessible but having an intense inner life. (Cardinal as cited in Volkersz, 1998, p. 24)

The wording in this paragraph reveals Cardinal's standpoint to the contrary of his primary statement: although he insists on the artists to be in fact "quite ordinary and accessible", almost normative that is, the discursively invented "romantic and thrilling" *idea* of their being Other outweighs the virtuality of their cultural embeddedness. Even though Cardinal later on admits that "the art of even the most doggedly self-reliant creator is likely to include allusions to the ambient culture, reflecting the impact of an era and an environment upon the individual consciousness" (2006, p. 24), in his

15 This has to do with the circumstance that most stylistic traits previously declared typical for the 'Art of the Insane'—e.g. the compulsive, the horror vacuii, the urge to express one's entrapment and create—have been reinterpreted as reactions to psychiatric confinement and not as the mysterious essence of a pure inner Self of the 'Outsider', as Prinzhorn and even many contemporaries of Dubuffet, such as Rennert and Navratil, were still eager to proclaim.

writings he continually represents 'Outsider Artists' as pure, uncorrupted isolates, "inwards-turning and imaginative—self-contained as it were" (Cardinal as cited in Volkersz, 1998, p. 25). He further states that these artists are "possessed of an expressive impulsive and […] externalize that impulse in an unmonitored way, […] spontaneous and unprogrammed" (1993, p. 29). Their works have "no specifically artistic character" but are "metaphors of interiority" and "distinctive reports on psychic life, as so many allegorical portraits of inner space" (Cardinal, 2006, p. 22). Cardinal thus attests that 'Outsider Art' has the potential to bring us "face to face with the raw process of creation" (1979, p. 35), evading and distracting from the underlying issue—that expressiveness alone does not guarantee for its results to be considered as having artistic quality. As philosopher David Davies (2009) remarks, the Romantic obsession with 'pure' expression does not explain why certain works are considered art while others do not qualify as such. The evaluation criteria for producing 'authentic' art must indeed lie elsewhere: perhaps in the biography, circumstance of creation and story of the artist, as Fine (2004) suggests, or in the 'disinterested' manner these artists supposedly display, following Hahl et al. (2017). That these features vastly outweigh Cardinal's proclaimed focus on the sole aesthetics of 'Outsider Art' is exemplified throughout his writings, yet has perhaps most strikingly informed the curatorial framing of the first major 'Outsider Art' exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1979.

Working on an Image: 'Outsiders' at the Hayward Gallery, London, 1979

One of the historical milestones that pushed 'Outsider Art' into international popularity, raised its market value and triggered widespread controversies concerning the issue of labelling was the legendary show *Outsiders: An Art Without Precedent or Tradition*, held in 1979. Mounted at the renowned Hayward Gallery in London, publicly funded by the Arts Council and co-curated by Cardinal and art dealer and collector Victor Musgrave, *Outsiders* was showcasing over 400 drawings, paintings, sculptures, architectural structures and mobile objects by 42 artists. Many of the artists featured in the show would subsequently garner international reputations and become the eternal 'stars' of the 'Outsider Art' genre, i.e. Aloïse Corbaz, Henry Darger, Madge Gill, Johann Hauser, Augustine Lesage, Martin Ramírez, Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern, August Walla, Scottie Wilson, Francis Marshall and Michel Nedjar. Just like Dubuffet's collection in Lausanne, the walls were painted black, thus achieving a more dramatic effect and opposing the established way of mounting 'cultural' art on sterile, white walls.

In numbers the show was a great success, attracting more than 38.000 visitors and receiving a great deal of attention not only from the public and media, but also from galleries, museums and collectors abroad (Serota, 2005). Most critics, however, discussed the show with mixed feelings and, according to a rather affronted Musgrave, "slated it both in the press and on the radio [… with] the general tenor [being] that these artists are all mad, don't bother" (as cited in Serota, 2005, p. 36). Recollecting the voices condemning Impressionism at the end of the 19th century, the critiques Musgrave refers to indeed invoke a certain déjà-vu when the art on show is described as "the awful work of lunatics", "unbelievably depressing" and "filled with quite dread-

ful and horrible and disturbing things" (as cited in Maizels, 1996, p. 77). Interestingly, Musgrave was convinced that, in contrast to these critics, the show was well received and 'properly' understood by the general public, who according to him, "came to the gallery, didn't ask what it was […] just looked at it and were inspired by it" (as cited in Serota, 2005, p. 37).

Figure 11. Edwards, M. (1979) Installation View. Outsiders: An Art Without Precedent or Tradition (Photograph). Hayward Gallery, London.

Considering the lack of data, it is impossible to know if the audience indeed veered into one particular direction, but it may be assumed that opinions about the show were as diverse and heterogeneous as the individuals crammed into the solid 'general public' box. Either way, the *Outsiders* show has reportedly stirred up confusion and controversy but also sparked enthusiasm and inspiration within the wider art world. In its capacity to attack the "domain of 'official' art history" in one of its very centres, the show must therefore, according to Thompson, be acknowledged as far "more than a passing historical curiosity", but an unsettling experience, challenging established norms and values (1998, p. 8). The lingering uneasiness the show triggered in the British art world[16] had evidently been anticipated by Joanna Drew, then director of the Arts Council, who is eager to dissociate her institution from the project on the first page of the exhibition catalogue:

> The arts council does not normally invoke the cautionary note that 'the views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily of the editors'

16 Thompson (1998) believes that the apparent doubts to host such an exhibition were indeed a British issue. He speculates that the British imagination was unprepared, while Dubuffet could build on previous art movements in France, such as Surrealism and Dadaism, sure of being supported by the likes of Breton, Masson, Artaud and Malraux. According to Thompson, the UK only opened up to such art in the mid-1980s, when a new, critical art history forced its way into the academies.

> in its exhibition catalogues. But in this case, as one of the major cultural institutions in the brightly-lit centre of the city [reference to Cardinal's text below, MS] we have been invaded at our own invitation, by 'outsiders', and we cannot be expected to accept entirely claims of artistic and spiritual dominance made on their behalf. There is a sense in which the selectors of this exhibition are explorer-ethnographers discovering artists whose culture is wholly alien. (1979, p. 7)

Taking the chance to upset a perhaps otherwise rather well protected art world elite, Musgrave and Cardinal engaged most fiercely with embellishing the mysterious figure of the 'Outsider', once and for all discursively casting its mythic connotations in stone. Further exploiting the "ethnographic" (or rather colonial) theme remarked upon by Drew, Musgrave and Cardinal represented themselves as 'discoverers' in rather epic wording. Musgrave enounces: "it is as if we have abruptly stumbled upon a secret race of creative giants inhabiting a land, we always knew existed but of which we had received only glimmers and intimations" (1979, p. 8). In recourse to Dubuffet's vocabulary and protective demeanour, he further warns the audience against making cultural comparisons in order not to betray "the spirit of 'chemically pure' invention" (Musgrave, 1979, p. 14). It was, however, Cardinal's text in the exhibition catalogue which truly made 'Outsider Art' live up to its name. Now unburdened by his initial wariness, he engages with the concept of the 'Outsider' and highlights the actual fabric of the discourse with unparalleled, diligent care, providing the most vivid account of those myths still informing the 'Outsider Art' discourse to this day. I would therefore like to reproduce the introduction to Cardinal's text in full before critically building upon its contents.

> **'Singular Visions'—Roger Cardinal**
>
> The streets are well lit in the centre of the city. Here lies an elegant square with a triumphal arch and statues of shiny marble; all about rise the citadels and pagodas that house the standards and traditions of the academic arts. There is no trace of disorder, no hint of hesitancy in the smooth running of affairs. Each inhabitant of the city centre knows his place, and each newcomer must submit to polite but scrupulous testing of his credentials before being allotted a position. It is true that there are problems of space, and squabbles may arise between those with rival claims. But on the whole disputes are rare and restricted to mandarin questions of status and precedence. The inhabitants collaborate to enshrine the past and to ensure that what comes after shunts neatly into place without hiatus. Nothing disturbs the sense of fairness and exactitude in these proceedings. And nobody who has attained a position within this sedate arena feels at all inclined to query the fact that a few streets away the lights begin to dim.
>
> Walk into these streets and you find agitated movement. Figures scurry about haggard-faced: these are the impatient men who feel their time is long overdue. They are magnetised by the thought of one day entering the central square in triumph. Are they not constantly grooming themselves in readiness, even though they sometimes sport a self-protective attitude of bohemian disdain for success? Soon they too will press forward into the light and gain the approval of the authorities.
>
> But walk further. Pass through the suburbs of the city and listen to the noises in the

> night. Something is stirring, an anonymous ferment. As you walk, the light fades and things become incoherent. Further still and the streets peter out into grassy lanes, the dwellings become spaced out and decrepit. Beyond the limits of the city, a sombre landscape stretches forth into apparent emptiness. You lean forward across the boundary line, ragged and ill defined. The authorities occasionally speak of fencing in the city, but thus far have not exerted themselves in this task. They seem to have every confidence in their invulnerability to challenge from without.
>
> These territories which lie beyond are off limits to those who inhabit the city centre. No one in his right mind would venture here. Yet somewhere in this vast space there are wanderers, hermits and isolated squatters. They do not belong to the city. They have no official papers, and yet seem indifferent to the fact. They scarcely glance at the glow in the sky which marks the centre. Living outside the jurisdiction of the system, they are happy as they are and the work they do, carried out in conditions of secrecy and isolation, carries its own justification. They have no desire for promotion or recognition, so often another name for supervision. They work to their own specifications and, curiously, none seems to know that the others exist, so engrossed is each in his own activity. These are the Outsiders, dwellers in the zone of darkness upon which anyone coming from the central light can only dimly focus. Only if you strain your eyes can you make out the astonishing shapes looming out of the uncertain night.
>
> Who are these Outsiders who seem so unconcerned about the splendours of the Cultural City? Where do they come from and what can they be thinking? Until we know their background, how shall we know what to make of them? They are not entered in the records of the central authority. They possess no official qualifications as artists. They have attended no classes, gained no diplomas. They are not subsidised nor even recognised. They seem to work on their own, for themselves, for the fun of it. They know nothing of the trends and snobberies of the cultural centre, with its beflagged museums and smart contemporary galleries. They work to no commission, without links or debts to the establishment. Many are social misfits; all prefer the rule of the imagination to the strictures of officialdom. Deprived of the blandishments enjoyed by the professional artist, the Outsiders create their work in a spirit of indifference towards, if not plain ignorance of the public world of art. Instinctive and independent, they appear to tackle the business of making art as if it had never existed before they came along. What they make has a primal freshness: it is the product of an authentic impulse to create and is free of conscious artifice. It has nothing to do with contrivance and academic standards, everything to do with passion and caprice.
>
> *Cardinal, R., 'Outsiders' Exhibition Catalogue, 1979, p. 20f*

As will be demonstrated below, Cardinal's efforts to poetically evoke and refine the image of the 'Outsider' paid off and came to fruition in the decades following the exhibition. When reading the text reproduced above, I could not help but envision the 'Outsiders' as wild, yet shy animals, inhabiting a dangerous, barbarian and forbidden zone, if informally and discursively, still securely fenced off from civilisation. It took a strenuous effort to remind myself that, in all three instances, Cardinal is speaking about *people* and that indeed, the central focus is supposed to remain on their art-

making, despite the deliberately emotional and metaphorical super-structure luring the reader off topic.

In a rather generalising demeanour, Cardinal's text divides the entirety of art-making individuals into three apparently homogenous groups, placing them much like game pieces onto seemingly purified spatial spheres—either into the centre, its transitional zone or onto the outside periphery.

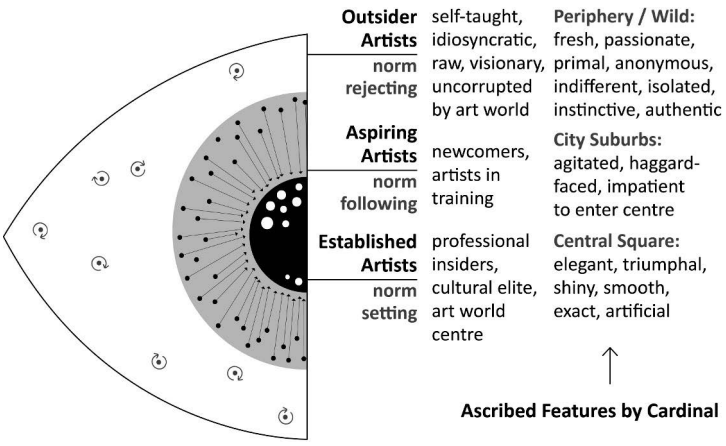

Figure 12. Schematic Illustration of Roger Cardinal's Essay Singular Visions (1979). Conceptualisation of the spatial-sphere model and its metaphorical contents as suggested by the text (Own Depiction).

Seen in its abstracted version (Figure 12), Cardinal's model is reminiscent of sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's *World System Theory*, developed around the same time and promulgated in writing from 1974. With a central focus on the global capitalist economy, Wallerstein likewise divides the world into three spatial spheres, ranging from the leading central core or metropolitan (the 'first world') to the semi-periphery, eventually reaching the destitute periphery (or 'third world'). In her investigation into the constitution of art worlds, artist Martha Rosler accordingly refers to Wallerstein's model as a fitting allegory, describing the "high art world" as a pyramid with an "immensely wide base leading up to a very small pinnacle" or a "set of interlocking rings, some close to the centre, others further away" (1997, p. 21). It is worth nothing that Wallerstein eventually fell into disrepute within the social sciences for providing oversimplified accounts of much more complex, heterogeneous and polycentric societal networks (e.g. Appadurai, 1990) while Cardinal, much like Dubuffet, has largely remained uncontested for his Othering practices within the realms of art history. Demanding that the audience "develop new antennae through which to receive the alien message" (1974, p. 96), Cardinal still enjoys a certain immunity from such criticism perhaps due to the predominance of a rather Eurocentric Western art historical canon, whose modern declarations of 'insides'/'outsides' and colonial heritage of un-

equal relationships of power continue to be safely guarded to ensure its exclusivity and, perhaps with increasing significance, its products' value as financial assets.

As indicated above, the European gaze informing the traditional art historical canon came under fire from the 1980s onwards, with art historian Griselda Pollock describing the discipline of art history as an export product of European universities, permeated by nationalist ideologies. According to her, these traces tend to be covered by a pronounced focus on abstract aesthetics, offering a "false screen" of autonomous history (Pollock, 2014, p. 13). Even though some maintain that art worlds have opened up in the last decades, claiming to observe inclusive democratisation processes and a breakdown of strict boundaries, in alignment with Pollock, Claudia Mattos (2014), Vera Zolberg (2010) and Russell Ferguson (1992) point to the omnipotence of the undefined, invisible centre of Western dominance in art history, still dictating who is effectively seen and whose voice is heard.[17] According to Pollock, these constitutions often remain in disguise, since 'art' is still largely represented as the mystical expression of the 'genius artist', with the discipline tending to shield itself from in-depth socio-political contextualisations. In the present study, it is the latter which is of central interest, as well as the circumstance extensively outlined by sociologist Diana Crane (2009), that the art market and the respective 'worlds' it draws its works and artists from, are still in the controlling hands of a tiny portion of international gatekeepers, who have very particular interests in keeping up clear boundaries between the insides and outsides. This circumstance is most diligently expressed in Cardinal's writings and may perhaps explain the unassailability of 'Outsider Art', providing the context from which his writings and the subsequent path taken by the 'Outsider Art' discourse may be understood.

4.9 Commodification, Global Art Markets and Rising Popularity

In her sociological reflections on the global art market, Crane (2009) retraces the development of the latter from the post-war era to now, marking its shifts and significant changes. She states that, before the 1980s, a pronounced split between 'high culture' (including contemporary art) and 'popular culture' (including film, TV and commercial music) separated both realms based on their differing reward systems. The pop cultural field of "large-scale cultural production", as Bourdieu called it in 1983, was focused on gaining material rewards, directed at a mass consumer market and centred around industrial (re)production. The elite representing the 'high culture', on the other

17 In 1997 Zolberg still optimistically announces that "the arts today exhibit a degree of fluidity, openness to new possibilities, and inclusiveness that is historically unprecedented. The barriers between high and low art, art and politics, art and religious rite, art and emotional expression, art and therapy, art and life itself have been significantly breached. Led by a changing body of practitioners, art can be intended or unintended, made by professionals or non-professionals." (1997, p. 2). In 2010, however, she redirects her argument, stating: "There persists a sense in which the fine arts, associated with elites rather than masses, continue to hold a position of privilege. […] Distinctions between high and popular art forms have a durable tradition in relatively liberal, modernizing societies, with expanding economies and rising middle classes" (2010, p. 101f).

hand, was characterised by their craftmanship, selectively addressing a comparatively small audience and following the traditional, modern artist trajectory. Often forming communities, these artists produced unique pieces in the studio and pursued first and foremost a distinct aesthetic goal in their practice. In this "restricted field of production" (Bourdieu, 1983), symbolic rewards such as being represented by prestigious galleries and major museums as well as being part of an exclusive network of artists were more important than sole financial gain. Accordingly, curators, gallerists, artist peers and critics were considered the most powerful players and gatekeepers in the art world, forming in alliance a consensus about the value of the works as well as setting the standards against which to measure them. However, as Crane indicates, from the 1960s onwards, the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular culture' would increasingly erode and the fields of production merge, reforming the definition of art by incorporating references to popular culture, advertising and mass media; eventually even turning large-scale industrial production into a viable option. At last ditching the age-old obsession with the object-centred 'aura' of unique originality and technical handicraft, many artists thus redirected their focus to conceptual ideas.

In alignment with Crane's demonstrations, many of today's most successful artists, such as Damien Hirst, Maurizio Cattelan, Takashi Murakami and Jeff Koons, indeed state that they lack the interest and technical know-how to create the works they imagine, instead focusing on building *brands* and employing assistants to do the practical work for them. Accordingly, Crane compares these artists to "entrepreneur[s] running a business which operates in a global market", calculating marketability and reacting to trends and fashions, and thus catering for a new class of gatekeepers consisting of so-called "mega-collectors" (2009, p. 343). Following Crane, in recent years the latter have taken over the contemporary art world and market, predominately making their appearance as investors in the stock market and being less driven by aesthetic interests or personal enthusiasm for art. Investing in certain artists and pushing their market value, as well as financing galleries and museums of their liking, these stakeholders set trends through their purchasing behaviour and relegate the independency of curators and institutions who are increasingly sponsored from 'above', neither possessing the authority to decide what is shown in a museum nor the financial assets to independently participate in the art market (Cuno, 1997). According to Crane, it is this small group of dealers and super-rich collectors, as well as corporations, auction houses and international art fairs mainly located in the US, UK, Germany, France, and China, which thus 'define' contemporary art and have been ruling the global art market from the 1990s onwards. Regarding the latter's attested focus on commercial rather than aesthetic concerns, artist and activist Guillermo Gómez-Peña pessimistically surmises that the only meaningful role artists can play today is that of "cynical entertainers" and "decorators of the omnipresent horror vacui" (2001, p. 11), if they are not yet entirely sucked up in the "unself-conscious crudity, double-dealing, and self-promotion" of the high art world (Rosler, 1997, p. 20).

Seen in this light, the role and potential function of 'Outsider Art' to fill a particular aesthetic void and satisfy an intensifying longing for 'authenticity' becomes very much apparent. In today's established artworld, spontaneous, unsettling and deeply personal expressions—or at least works that appear as such—are notably absent, as are radical

avant-garde movements. Art historian and critic N. F. Karlins decries that "much 'insider' art has become […] an intellectual game rather than a daring yet structured exploration of the unknown" (1997, p. 93), with contemporary artists often attested to manipulate the art world and market to improve their status. The romantic stereotype of the modern artist as society's outsider, living entirely according to their own rules and freely expressing their impulses uncensored, is considered by many as being under threat of extinction, while the desire for an actor playing exactly this role and providing an alternative projection surface undeniably enjoys good health.[18] Zolberg resumes:

> Outsider art appealed to art world cognoscenti, not only visually, but because of its congruence with Romantic notions of the authentic, misunderstood, creative genius. Outsiders possessed purity, spontaneity, sincerity, authenticity as opposed to the contrivance, artificiality and insincerity of civilized society. Given today's world, these outsiders came to represent our lost soul. (1997, p. 2)

To this I would like to add that what came to fuel the fascination with the 'Outsider Artist' from the 1970s onwards was not primarily their being 'uninfluenced' by conformist aesthetic ideals of the established art world, as was the case up until then. Now it was first and foremost the artists' supposed disinterest and uncorruptedness in light of an all-encompassing, trend-setting art market and consumer culture. In the 1970s, the many myths constituting 'Outsider Art' seem to have catered for the values of authenticity thought to be at risk through increasing commodification, appealing as an escapist fantasy to an appreciative Western post-war generation which, according to Röske, was characterised by a "culture of introspection" focusing on the depths, expansion and 'authentic' expression of the individual psyche (2005a, p. 58). Considering the prevalent countercultural spirit and the influence of anti-psychiatric and other emancipatory movements, it is perhaps also no coincidence that, in the very same period in which the Prinzhorn collection was rediscovered, Navratil's, Dubuffet's and Cardinal's writings recruited a considerable number of followers.

Denouncing the "ambition, careerism, commercialism and opportunism" of professional artists, artist Victor Willing celebrates the "unworldly" 'Outsiders' for offering us "a tantalizing glimpse of the pure in the heart", declaring their supposed self-centredness as pivotal to their integrity (1987, p. 7f). Karlins further argues that "Outsider Art encompasses all that the academic art market leaves out—the work of the self-taught is, above all, characterised by intensity, physicality and a fresh, idiosyncratic vision. Its makers are compulsive, sometimes even frenzied, art makers" (1997, p. 94) who, according to gallerist Lorri Berenberg, "express human experiences and emotions that we can all relate to" (as cited in Boriss-Krimsky, 2001, p. 15), much in contrast to the cold, sophisticated and technologically complex contemporary art world. Collector Betty-Carol Sellen further proclaims that 'Outsider Art' "is direct, honest, and

18 The modern artist as unfettered by the art market as such, is of course a myth of equally idealistic construction. As art historian Michael FitzGerald (1997) points out, artists like Picasso and Matisse have consistently displayed their desires for publicity, commercial and financial gain and have eagerly promoted themselves to sell their art.

communicates with the viewer. It is accessible. It is straight from the soul. It can be beautiful, or scary, or weird, but it is nearly always 'real'" (1993, p. 1).

All of these statements have essentially already been voiced by Dubuffet, who fervently dismissed what was to become conceptual art as early as in 1949, proclaiming that, "when it is mixed with ideas, art becomes oxidized and worthless", celebrating instead the "vision" of 'Art Brut' artists as truly artistic and having "nothing to do with intellectuals and academics" (Dubuffet, 1948/1992, p. 594). In today's discourse, this oppositional image of the *thinking* and somewhat 'corrupted' professional artist vs. the *feeling* and thus more 'authentic' 'Outsider Artist' is still overtly pronounced, often appearing to be mutually exclusive and raising the intriguing question of how the obsession to ascribe and diagnose 'Outsider Art' with an anti-capitalist realness quotient may be explained.

Sociologists Oliver Hahl, Ezra Zuckerman and Minjae Kim (2017), provide one possible explanation, and have shown in their study that highbrow art world professionals whose status is linked to extrinsic rewards, social and material gains are often morally questioned for their motives and met with suspicion by their audiences. According to Hahl et al., this results in a particular "authenticity-insecurity" in those individuals who otherwise claim for prosocial sensitivity and morals, and who are consequently inclined to turn to lowbrow 'Outsider Artists' to make up for their 'inauthenticity' (2017, p 848f). Since 'Outsider Artists' are thought to produce their art in a disinterested manner, unaware of art world standards, indifferent to fame and solely driven by intrinsic rewards, they are externally marked as authentic and consumed as such by the art world proper. By appreciating 'authentic' lowbrow objects, Hahl et al. suggest that suspicions about the moral character of highbrow actors and their own "authenticity-insecurity" are resolved and their status and distinction even further strengthened by doing so. As a distracting veil, 'Outsider Art' may thus be used to accentuate one's own position and cover the immoral traces often connected with status achievement, without, however, threatening the very same status. Cardinal's and Dubuffet's expressed fear of 'Outsider Artists' becoming 'contaminated' by the art market and their concern about "protect[ing] the authenticity" of 'Outsider Art' (Cardinal, 1979, p. 23) may well be read, in this light, as a wish to protect and secure their own status. Indeed, it seems as if 'Outsider Art' receives its remarkable sturdiness from the very permeability of its largely elusive content, predominately catering for the needs of a number of established art world professionals. In its capacity to act as a mirror, the individuals chosen to be 'Outsiders' are clothed in a countercultural robe, with the genre becoming an oppositional reference point and "mobile contrary to the fixed point represented by conformist academic art" (Cardinal, 1979, p. 23), emptied of any inherited limitations, ascribed characteristics or regional flavours. This feature is most undilutedly presented in Musgrave's and Cardinal's writings, in both of which it remains unclear *who* these 'Outsiders' really are, other than opposing figureheads serving the author's purpose to reveal the supposedly "incestuous sterility" (Musgrave, 1979, p. 12) and capitalist corruption of the contemporary art world. The assumption that 'Outsider Art' is largely defined by what it is *not*, telling us much more about the 'insiders' than the individual in question, appears to be confirmed once more. Effectively, the fate of 'Outsider Art' seems to have been inscribed in its very DNA, forcing

it by definition to turn into the negative film and ancillary shadow to the established art world. As a hollow vessel, it may be filled by anyone and anything not matching concurrent art world standards, yet still providing the aesthetics of authenticity and a seemingly personal story.

Despite Hahl et al.'s insistence on the concept of 'Outsider Art' being first and foremost beneficial to art world professionals as a form of moral capital—apart from its obvious potential of also being economically viable to these elites—I would like to add, on a more positive note, that 'Outsider Art' also fulfils an *inspirational* function. Even if its ascribed authenticity may be considered little more than a myth, the interest and belief in 'Outsider Art' itself appears to be genuine (or authentic, if you will). As a guiding ideal and projection surface for innovation and alternative worldviews, the *idea* of 'Outsider Art' may indeed have the potential to spark inspiration in the viewer, providing an almost spiritual form of escapism for an ever-larger audience, perhaps inflicted with varying degrees of cultural pessimism and an increasing need for the 'authentic'.

As Prinz (2017), Röske (2008), Moran (2005) and many others have observed, the fascination with and popularity of 'Outsider Art' has been continuously rising over the last four decades. Having turned into a major international phenomenon, particularly in the US and Western Europe, 'Outsider Art' was shown on par with mainstream art by Harald Szeeman at the *Documenta 5* in 1972, resulting in the establishment of a considerable number of institutions focusing exclusively on the promotion of 'Outsider Art' and further securing an increasing market share after the peak of the art market bubble in the 1980s (Prinz, 2017). Specialised museums and galleries are flourishing[19] and many mainstream museums, such as the MOMA in New York, have opened their collections to include 'Outsider Art', regularly showcasing the latter alongside 'established' contemporary works. In 1989, the art magazine *Raw Vision* was launched by John Maizels and since 1993 specialised 'Outsider Art' fairs have been taking place annually in New York and Paris—the very heart of the established art world. In 2013, the Venice Biennale, curated by Massimilano Gioni, was entirely dedicated to 'Outsider Art', further increasing its popularity, and with the auction house Christie's installing its own "Outsider and Vernacular Art" lot category, prices have been rising ever since.

The audience for 'Outsider Art' was, however, never limited to these specialist institutional realms attracting predominately well-read art lovers and investors. Already in 1985, Howard Finster's work appeared on the cover of the Talking Heads album *Little Creatures* and in 1987 on R.E.M.'s *Reckoning*. When Pulp singer Jarvis Cocker's documentary series *Journeys into the Outside* was eventually broadcasted on Channel 4 in 1998 and an entire episode of *The Simpsons* devoted to 'Outsider Art' in 1999, it was clear that by now the phenomenon had also reached a mass audience which may have been less well-versed in the arts otherwise.

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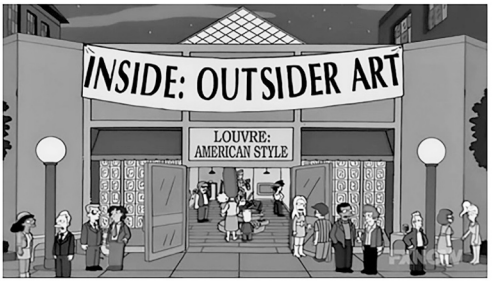
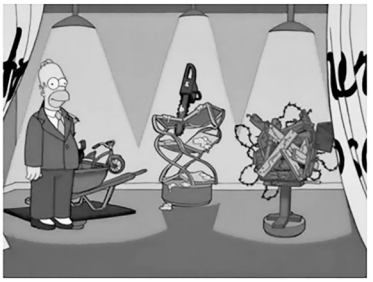
19 i.e. Art en Marge (Brussels, BE; est. 1986), Halle Saint Pierre (Paris, FR; est. 1986), Museum im Lagerhaus (St. Gallen, CH; est. 1988), Intuit (Chicago, IL; est. 1991), American Visionary Art Museum (Baltimore, MD; est. 1995), Museum Charlotte Zander (Schloß Bönnigheim, DE; est. 1996), Kunsthaus Kannen (Münster, DE; est. 1996), Museum of Outsider Art (Moscow, RU; est. 1996), abcd Collection (Paris, FR; est. 1999).





Figures 13 & 14. The Simpsons (1999). Mom and Pop Art (TV Episode). The 'discovery' of Homer Simpson as an 'Outsider Artist'. Fox Network.

Considering this boom in interest, effectively blurring the insider/outsider distinction even further, a great number of articles appeared in the press headlining "The Outsiders Are In" (Kroll, 1987, *Newsweek*), "Outsider Inside" (Scott, 2003, *The Irish Times*), "Outside In" (Steward, 2001, *Modern Painters*). Cardinal has strongly disapproved of such developments, further denouncing the broadening of the 'Outsider Art' genre and stating that, since the introduction of the term, "people have misused it, and have stretched it, and have applied it in all sorts of ways […]. But to apply it to just anything obviously will eventually make it meaningless" (Cardinal as cited in Volkersz, 1998, p. 24). Reflecting these developments of terminological expansion and supposed intermixing of outsiders/insiders, Maclagan surmises that today 'Outsider Art' is "a bit like a species that once inhabited the wild, was then declared an endangered species, and as a result was rescued and decanted into safari parks or zoos, but that may now have to face the alternative of dying or being hunted to extinction" (2009, pp. 21–23).

I would like to argue to the contrary of Cardinal's and Maclagan's statements, that despite the omnipresence of a range of rather critical voices, its presumed blurriness and prominent spot within the art world centre, the oppositional concept of 'Outsider Art' is currently still in good shape. With Cardinal describing 'Outsider Artists' as the artistic equivalent to "terrorists" (1972, p. 179) and their art as an "anarchic attack on smoothly running systems" (1979, p. 35), on a discursive level, his contributions may be understood as a radicalisation rather than a dilution of Dubuffet's ideas, as sometimes proclaimed. Furthermore, and considering the evident reluctance of the press, museums and collectors to fully accept assimilation or indeed an all-inclusive merging of both 'Outsider' and contemporary art, marginality instead seems to have become a fixed and distinctly commodified asset of 'Otherness'. As a signifier for an apparently much-needed 'authenticity' in today's "mainstream bizarre"[20], *difference*

20 Gómez-Peña introduced the term "mainstream bizarre" to account for the increasing commodification of extremes in today's media, in which radical behaviour, alternative subcultures, marginalised groups and eccentric individuals are not excluded but incorporated into the mainstream. Exploiting these groups as a superficial "spectacle" devoid of any content—"the more dangerous, other, thorny, and exotic these margins, the better"—they become stylised and, in effect, meaningless. The goal of the mainstream bizarre, according to Gómez-Peña, is "to entice more

becomes a form of cultural capital and the myth of the 'Outsider Artist' central in an "economy of attention" (Franck, 2018), with the commercialisation of the genre having been accelerated by its inventors, albeit contrary to their stated intentions.

As will be demonstrated in the empirical section of this study, in the past as present, 'Outsider Art' not only fills a bespoke gap catering for sentimental longings in a niche audience, certain actors in the field also seem to benefit greatly from its discursive existence, thus ensuring its longevity. As Gómez-Peña remarks:

> For the global impresario, embarked on an eternal art safari, there are still lots of extreme emotions and dangerous experiences to explore beyond art, ineffable fringes and sordid realities to discover, document, and bring back to the gallery, the Biennale, or the film festival. (2001, p. 17)

In consideration of the still strong position the concept of authenticity holds in Western societies, literary theorist Aleida Assmann's resumé that in our postmodern age "all identities are thought of as 'constructed'" and therefore "we do no longer find ourselves in the predicament of having to distinguish between a 'sincere message' and a 'false' life" (2014, pp. 44f) may perhaps be safely discarded. 'Outsider Art' testifies that, despite postmodern claims to the contrary, grand narratives ingrained in binary and oppositional thinking modes still exercise a luring fascination to many—even if fashionably disguised by labels such as 'diversity', 'equality' and 'inclusivity'.

To fully grasp the complex role 'Outsider Art' plays in the UK today, not only surviving but thriving in its modern conceptualisation as a counterpart to the established art world, the next part of this study will focus on investigating how the myths informing the 'Outsider Art' discourse outlined in this historical chapter have been reproduced in the British media since 2000. This will be accompanied by a delineation of the extent and context in which artists are invited and 'allowed' to speak, testing the possibility of a much more participatory approach by subsequently shifting the focus entirely to the thoughts and experiences recollected by those individuals labelled 'Outsider Artists'.

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consumers while providing them with the illusion of experiencing (vicariously) all the sharp edges and strong emotions that their superficial lives lack" (2001, p. 13). He declares the international art world as being infected by the same virus, voyeuristically turning to the 'Outsiders', subsequently commodifying, framing and appropriating their "crises" by exhibiting their art in museums (Gómez-Peña, 2001, p. 16).

5. Contemporary Discourses and Media Representations of 'Outsider Art' in the UK

In the following chapters the empirical findings of this study will be presented in two parts, largely coinciding with their methodological approach. They will provide deeper insight into the constructed image of 'Outsider Art/ists' in contemporary British media in comparison to artist statements, and investigate the impacts of Othering practices on the lived experience and the individuals' self-understanding as artists.

The present section will examine the modes of representing artists subsumed under the label across platforms and discuss the influence of currently active key players. Of particular interest will be romantic and derogatory Othering practices in hindsight of curatorial framing techniques in large-scale 'Outsider Art' exhibitions, informing the majority of media reports. These findings will be contrasted with alternative representational practices by charities and small-scale initiatives reconciling the arts and the social sector. Subsequently, the appearances of the artists' voices in their presumed visibility across media sources will be evaluated in terms of their potential to contest mediated myths of the 'Outsider', further introducing critical statements voiced in hindsight of the latter by artists who have participated in this study. Based on a concluding list of generalising features ascribed to 'Outsider Artists' in historical as well as contemporary discourses, these empirical examples shall challenge and dismantle purist and derogatory myths surrounding the genre. Accordingly, the focus of Chapter 6 will lie entirely on the individuals behind the label, shifting the perspective to the artists' point of view and introducing their experiences and ideas to the discourse.

5.1 The Framing of 'Outsider Art/ists' in Contemporary British Media

To analyse the current disposition of 'Outsider Art' in the British media landscape from 2000 until 2020, the field will be split into three intersecting realms. Based on a data pool containing material from mass media sources, art journals and media specialising in 'Outsider Art', I will contrast reports with a particular focus on usage of terminology,

attitude of speaker, representational mode and artist participation.[1] This will help to identify the most influential key players and debates governing the field today and examine if, how and to what extent individual 'Outsider Artists' are consulted, present and actively participating in the media. For this purpose, the following material[2] has been selected:

Mass Media Reports	**Art Magazines & Art Journals**	**Specialised 'Outsider Art' Media**
National newspapers: Daily Mail [2], The Guardian [36], Metro [3], Daily Mirror [1], The Telegraph [12], Evening Standard [8], Daily Express [1], The Times [22], The Sun [-], Daily Star [-], i-news [3], further including BBC News Online [6], The Independent [11]. TV broadcasts: BBC [1], ITV [-], Channel 4 [3], Sky [-]. Radio broadcasts: BBC 1–5 [3].	Apollo [6], Art Monthly [3], Art Review [2], British Art Journal [-], Burlington Magazine [2], Creative Review [-], Frieze Magazine [3], Tate etc. [-], The Art Newspaper [5], Jackdaw [-].	Magazines and Blogs with focus on 'Outsider Art': Raw Vision, KD Outsider Art Blog, Disability Arts Online. Books/Articles with focus on 'Outsider Art': Maizels, J. (Raw Creations: Outsider Art and Beyond, 2000; Outsider Art Sourcebook, 2009) Rhodes, C. (Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives, 2000; Inner Worlds Outside, 2006), Maclagan, D. (Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace, 2009; Line Let Loose, 2014), Cardinal, R. (The Alternative Guide to the Universe, 2013).

Figure 15. Selective Sample for Media Review.

The selection for the mass media sample is based on national newspapers with the highest circulation and combined print and online branch reach (PAMCo, 2018) as well as terrestrial broadcasters with the highest viewing shares (BARB, 2018). Due to the lack of comparable statistic evaluations for general and specialised art media, the

1 These pre-defined categories have guided the investigation of all materials listed. Screening reports for 'usage of terminology' helped determining how labelling practices are operationalised by the most visible actors in the field. The 'author's attitude' refers to their evaluation of 'Outsider Art' in comparison to other genres as well as critical or confirmatory stances towards the historical discourse. The 'representational mode' focuses on the adjectives used to describe 'Outsider Art/ists', also scrutinising how historical myths and binary concepts are reproduced. Lastly, the material has been examined for 'artist participation': when, how, and in what context does the artist's voice appear, and what are they 'allowed' to say?

2 The list includes all initially consulted media. The quantity of relevant reports concerning 'Outsider Art' is reflected by the number in brackets next to each source. The data pool comprises material published and broadcasted in the UK between 2000 and 2020, as a relevant exception also including the Channel 4 documentary *Journeys into the Outside* released in 1999. Note that this list of materials is not exhaustive due to the archival access restrictions of many institutions.

remaining data sets have been selected based on their estimated visibility, reputation and impact in the field and art world at large. For this purpose, from all art magazines and journals published in the UK, not only those with the highest circulation have been extracted, but also those which are referenced frequently in art schools and universities and are part of the general stock in the museum shops of the National Gallery, the Tate and the V&A. The representativity of this selection was then matched with recommendations by the specialist reference team of the National Art Library in London. Furthermore, a sample of specialised 'Outsider Art' media has been collated, focusing on those institutions and individuals whose contributions have made a significant impact on the current understanding and reception of the genre in the UK. Due to the niche character of 'Outsider Art', those considered 'experts' were easily detectable, with specialised material about the topic remaining relatively scarce in quantity.

After retrieving all reports accessible from these conglomerates, the results were screened for relevance. Those only mentioning 'Outsider Art' in passing, as well as short advertisements for exhibitions or book releases and articles surpassing the UK focus of this study were disregarded. All reports that will be subsequently referred to put their primary focus on 'Outsider Art', devoting the entire content to a discussion of the subject or on the portrayal of artists associated with the term.

Cross-Referencing and Mediated Otherness Across Platforms

The material available indicates that media reports about 'Outsider Art' are scarce, yet on the increase and appearing in mainstream media largely to coincide with the onset of national exhibitions, explaining a peak in media coverage in the years 2006, 2011 and 2013.[3] Some of these dates also relate to international art world events which may raise the interest or 'verify' the validity of certain trends then echoed in national exhibitions and broadcasts. In 2013, for example, the 55th Venice Biennale, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, was running under the banner *The Encyclopedic Palace*, exclusively showcasing 'Outsider Art'. As a result, the already controversial genre turned into a hot topic in the international art world, with the Hayward Gallery and Wellcome Collection in London installing two of the largest 'Outsider Art' exhibitions in the UK to date in the same year. In their choice of framing, these institutions, as well as the curators involved, would exercise crucial influence over how the national media reported not only about the event, but 'Outsider Art' in general.

3 There are particular events which dominate the contents of media reports in each respective year, with those most frequently referenced being *Inner Worlds Outside* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2006), the exhibition of the *Museum of Everything* at major retailer Selfridges in London Oxford Street (2011), the Venice Biennale (2013), *Alternative Guide to the Universe* (Hayward Gallery, 2013), *Souzou: Outsider Art from Japan* (Wellcome Collection, 2013), the BBC documentary *Imagine: Turning the Art World Inside Out* (2013), as well as the opening of the Gallery of Everything in Marylebone, London in 2016. The year 2013, with more than 20 in-depth reports, marks the all-time high in newspaper coverage of 'Outsider Art', generating 4+ times more reports than in 2012, and still twice as much as the average number in the years following.

When looking at newspaper coverage of 'Outsider Art' and reviews of related events, in most cases the representation of 'Outsider Artists' is closely interlinked with and reproducing the viewpoints of historical key players such as Dubuffet, whose statements tend be transposed into the present day and are often left uncontested. Today's 'experts', like the often-consulted editor of *Raw Vision* magazine, John Maizels, or the frequently quoted James Brett, founder and curator of the Museum of Everything, for example, are inclined to resonate the rather generalising, romantic historical canon depicted in Chapter 4. In rather absolute terms, Maizels declares to *The Guardian*, that 'Outsider Artists' are "people who are *completely* out of it, automatic. They *never* make changes or mistakes, don't take the pencil off the paper until it's finished. It just flows from the subconscious" (2000, October 29—own emphasis). On BBC Radio 3 he further proclaims that these artists "don't have *any* dealings with art schools or galleries", that they work "*entirely* from the soul" and are "doing it for them *only*" (2013, March 27—own emphasis). Brett takes a similar direction when he likens 'Outsider Art' to "cave art" (*Art Monthly*, 2012, p. 11)—a distinct art form that directly "speaks to the instincts" (*The Times*, 2011, July 21), is "purely emotional", "unpretentious" and therefore "quite truthful" (*The Independent*, 2011, October 8).

It is this form of Othering undertaken by key players such as Brett and Maizels which builds the basis upon which the myth of the 'Outsider Artist' is then further embellished by many newspapers, largely following the principles of the "economy of attention" as outlined by economist Georg Franck (2018). Rather than providing a balanced account of events, solely to inform or educate, the case of 'Outsider Art' exemplifies that, at present, most mass media institutions prioritise the attraction of audiences with perhaps increasingly limited attention spans. As Franck indicates, it is first and foremost "their desire for sensation [which] must be satisfied" (2018, p. 9) to sustain the existence of a respective media source as a whole—a trend which, according to media theorist Stuart Allan (2019), in the UK also affects public service broadcasters who increasingly rely on commercial revenue. This circumstance seems to foster one-sided representations, overemphasis on difference and the construction of 'freaks' as a practice tending to serve already dominant social groups and facilitating cultural oppression, as philosopher Douglas Kellner (2006) points out. Based on media theorist Larry Gross's statement that "representation in the mediated 'reality' of our mass culture is itself power" (as cited in Kellner, 2006, p. xxxi), Kellner consequently vouches for an understanding of representation as a political event in its capacity to set norms and values, constitute identity and potentially reproduce discrimination. In this respect, the Othering practices used to demarcate the 'Outsider Artist' may very well be understood as exemplars of such hegemonial structures, protecting untagged invisible norms, the 'insiders' behind their construction as well as exclusive definitions of art. In the media, this is quite vividly exemplified by the catchy headlines as well as sensationalist wording chosen in many reports on 'Outsider Artists'. Whether one is invited to "Meet the Misfits" (*The Guardian*, 2006, May 4) or "Welcome[d] to the Asylum" by *The Times* (2006, May 4), in most cases the audience is provided with details about the tragic life story of an artist or information about their illnesses, disabilities or personal 'eccentricities'. Specialised 'Outsider Art' media like *Raw Vision* also make sure to mention such details, yet do so under more sympathetic headlines, retaining their

primary focus on aesthetic considerations of artworks. Since this study refrains both from delving into a depiction of biographical or diagnostic details and, as previously stated, does not address formal aesthetics, styles and techniques, it is of particular interest what is left when these parameters are taken out of the equation.

Romantic and Derogatory Othering Practices

Underlying most art journal and newspaper articles seems to be the question whether 'Outsider Art' can be considered 'real' art. Frequently, the stance of an individual author on the issue is easily detectable, yet an overall tone of a particular media institution can hardly be made out. Nevertheless, there seems to be a tendency to protect the status quo and refrain from promulgating an all-encompassing or inclusive understanding of art in most art journals, while demands for the latter are vouched for and conservative viewpoints challenged in specialised 'Outsider Art' media. Such consistent positionings do not occur in mainstream media channels. For example, the large number of lengthy articles about 'Outsider Art' published by the left-leaning *Guardian* is unprecedented in other newspapers and may indicate their particulate interest in the subject. They can still, however, not be grasped as progressive advocates of the genre. While at one point they do bring in Marc Steene, founder of charity Outside In, who campaigns for 'Outsider Art' to be valued just as any other art form (2013, July 10), within a matter of four weeks another article is published, declaring that 'Outsider Art' "by implication" cannot be understood as 'real' art, since the artists subsumed under the label would "live beyond the reach of cultural conditioning" and therefore do not possess the "informed aesthetic understanding" required (*The Guardian*, 2013, August 7). Likewise, some articles in the right-leaning *Times* celebrate 'Outsider Art' and vouch for its inclusion (2013, June 3), while in others it is dismissed as the mad work of "complete crackpots" (*The Times*, 2006, May 4). To conclude, whether an inclusive or exclusive, conservative or progressive stance towards art is taken seems to largely depend on the author's individual alignment with pro- and contra-positions taken by key players, and does not necessarily reflect the political inclinations otherwise expressed by these sources. However, no matter in which direction the case is argued, most journalists writing for the selected media sources listed produce a form of either romantic or derogatory Othering. During this process, largely the same generalising features are ascribed to 'Outsider Art/ists' as the conglomerate of structured extracts from newspapers in Figure 16 exemplifies. The fragments depicted are aligned with the respective realm of Othering representing the overall tone of each report featured.[4] About two thirds of reports in mainstream media produce a form of general or 'neutral' Othering, by which the supposedly estranged character of the 'Outsider Artist' is presented as naturally given and the wording often chosen so as to make these representations appear non-judgemental or even objectively factual. This form of Othering seems to build the foundation upon which reports are then taken further either into the romantic or the derogatory realm, depending on the author's personal

4 References are abbreviated in brackets, stating the date of publication and media source [G=*Guardian*, IN=*Independent*, ES=*Evening Standard*, TI=*Times*, TG=*Telegraph*, ME=*Metro*, MI=*Mirror*].

inclinations. To some extent, they may also be considered an updated version of the controversial discussion of the 'Art of the Insane' already held in the early 20th century, likewise oscillating between positive (romantic) and negative (pathological) readings.

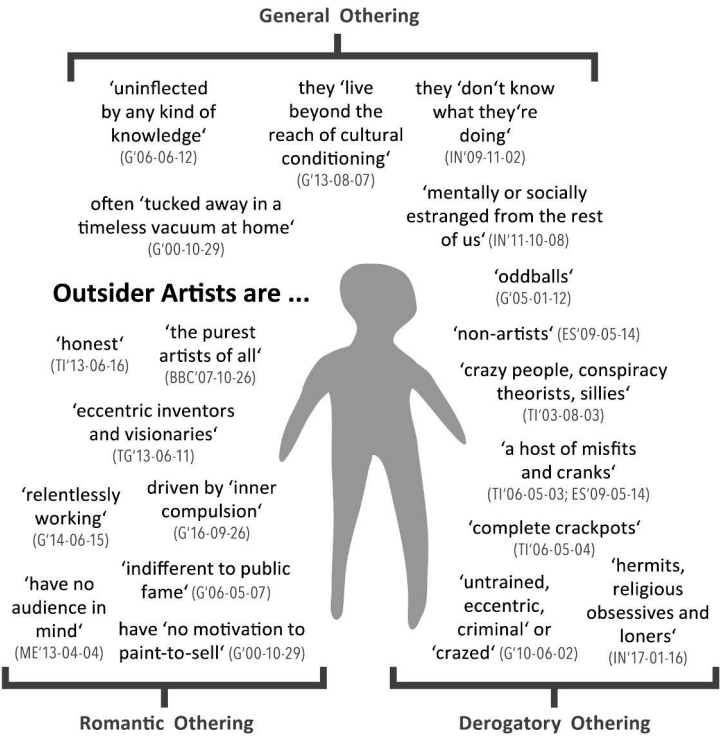

Figure 16. Forms of Othering in UK Newspapers (Own Depiction).

Based on the present sample, the diversity of Othering processes is most evenly spread in newspapers, whereas radio shows and TV documentaries more often engage in general and romantic Othering. Art journals also refrain from the use of demeaning labels, however at times disguise negative discrimination behind a veil of sophisticated language. Likewise, strong wording is largely absent in most specialised 'Outsider Art' media, with representational forms of Othering being openly criticised—particularly on smaller platforms such as the *KD Outsider Art Blog*[5] or *Disability Arts Online*.[6]

5 kdoutsiderart.com is a blog run by Kate Davey, art historian and Training Program Manager at charity Outside In. In her blog, Davey takes a critical look at the 'Outsider Art' term and curatorial approaches, reviews exhibitions and portrays her favourite artists. Apart from artist interviews, she also shares articles written and edited by the artists themselves.

6 disabilityarts.online is an online community led by people with disabilities and founded by Colin Hambrook in 2002. Providing a platform to share opinions, thoughts, but also project re-

Interestingly, even though the number of reports about 'Outsider Art' has increased over the past two decades, a shift in perspective regarding the forms of Othering depicted above cannot be made out. Now as ever, there seems to be a clear divide between proponents and adversaries of 'Outsider Art', with their respective discomfort or enchantment also being expressed when attempting to define the term.

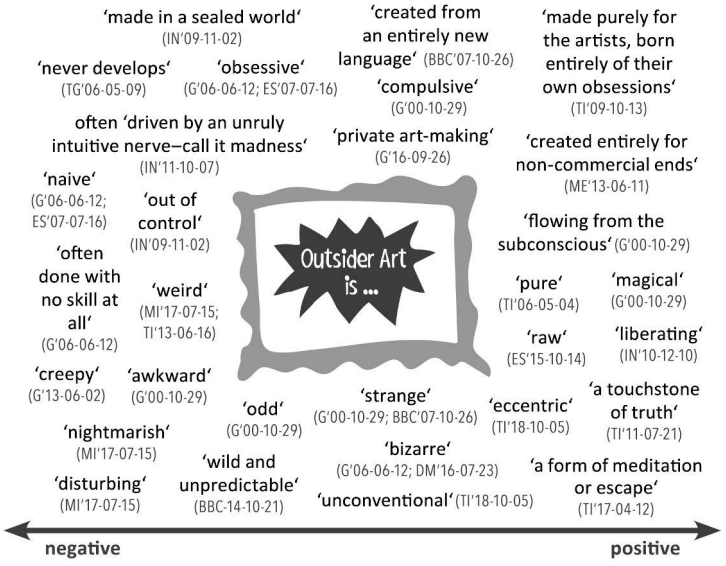

Figure 17. Definitions of 'Outsider Art' in UK Newspapers (Own Depiction).

Figure 17 shows the markers most frequently used to define 'Outsider Art' in UK newspapers, reflecting the authors' tendency to an either welcoming or dismissive attitude towards the genre. In the contextual scope of the entire report, the selections listed have each appeared as defining characteristics in sentences phrased to describe the essential characteristics and/or define 'Outsider Art'.

When comparing figures 16 and 17, it is striking that the ascribed features delineating both the artist and their work largely overlap. Thus, in congruence with the historical foundations of the genre, 'Outsider Art' still seems to be defined by who or what the 'Outsider Artist' persona behind the work is believed to be, often with total disregard for artistic concerns or an artist's intentions.

The evaluation of an 'Outsider' artwork is however not the only thing depending on the imagined social and psychological standing of its individual creator. As the media sample indicates, the artworks are often understood as a means to establish access *to* these artists, who in turn tend to be represented as inhibiting an entirely different

ports, interviews, events and job opportunities, the organisation aims to support and promote marginalised artists, stimulating exchange.

universe than 'our own'. This supposed otherworldliness of the 'Outsider Artist' is most prominently reproduced in the titles, make-up and curatorial conceptualisations of major 'Outsider Art' exhibitions in the UK. Considering that most media reports are published with reference to and receptive of these shows as indicated above, the next sections will be dedicated to the means of Othered representations from this perspective.

5.2 Negotiating Difference in Large-Scale 'Outsider Art' Exhibitions

When revising the exhibition history of 'Outsider Art' in the UK, there appears to be a red thread running from the seminal *Outsiders* show in 1979 to the present day. Although the means of displaying 'Outsider Art' have diversified and the term itself has become rather blurry, a certain reluctance is still expressed by many curators and art institutions to display these works as or alongside 'normal' art. Indeed, it remains a matter of lively debate whether such an approach would be desirable at all, as philosopher Karen Jones, art historian Anthony White and curators Eugen Koh and Nurin Veis (2010) remark in their extensive discussion of the up- and downsides of framing techniques when curating 'Outsider Art'.

Considering the increasing number of critical debates and rising awareness of ethical issues when displaying 'Outsider Art', Othering practices today seem to be more refined than perhaps half a century ago. Yet, even if many curators are more careful and less bold in their wording, their message remains clearly distinguishable in most cases: the 'Outsider Artist' lives in another world, a parallel universe of some sort. And if one further takes the marketing material, titles and press releases of these exhibitions by their word, by visiting a particular show, the prospective audience is provided with the unique opportunity to catch a glimpse into these Other(ed) spheres. Such ideas are then frequently echoed and processed further in mainstream media, as mentioned above and illustrated below.

Figure 18 shows the narrative building blocks informing the marketing and media coverage of most large-scale 'Outsider Art' exhibitions. In a great number of reviews as well as in official catalogues, the basic narrative, as seen on the left, establishes the 'Outsider Artist' as a separate entity, positioned in another world. In a subsequent step, their artworks are then frequently represented as windows providing direct access to these normally sealed-off, 'otherworldly' spheres or 'unfiltered' insight into the artist's soul, as depicted on the right. Thereby, the artwork is rendered a device by which the private secrets of the troubled creator may supposedly be explored at a safe distance. Not only is the artist's position thereby determined but, in my understanding, the audience likewise objectified and perhaps unwillingly forced into the role of the voyeuristic spectator. In facilitation of this process, the construction of the artist's otherworldliness in most curatorial settings is achieved either verbally, via biographical emphasis or through Othered settings of contextual representation focusing on formal aspects. To understand how such Othering practices are instigated, these, as well as the reception of curatorial approaches attempting to break with one-sided representations, will be discussed in the following sections.

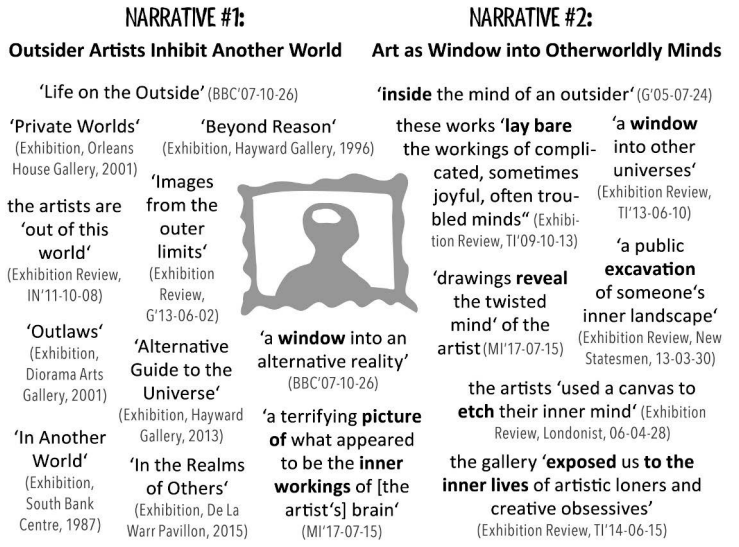

Figure 18. Common Narratives in Representing 'Outsider Art/ists' in Exhibitions and Reviews (Own Depiction).

Curatorial Strategy #1: Biographical Emphasis

In *On Outsider Art and the Margins of the Mainstream* (2007), art historian Marcus Davies distinguishes four curatorial approaches in the framing of 'Outsider Art': biographical, formal, appropriative and patrimonial. According to Davies, out of these, the biographical approach is the one most frequently encountered in the 'Outsider Art' field, performing a severe segregation between 'Outsiders' and 'professional' insiders of whose private life normally only little information is provided. As Jones et al. remark, this extra information may however provide the viewer access to unconventional works which may otherwise not feature in the arts canon, thus holding "the potential to amplify the voice of the disenfranchised, enabling a connection between Outsider artists and their audiences" (2010, Appendix p. 29). Still, the mythic image of an artist's Otherness may thereby be reinforced, with the life story overshadowing the artwork and rendering it almost impossible to critically evaluate the latter, as art critic Tessa de Carlo indicates (Jones et al., 2010).

The exhibition *Private Worlds: Visionary & Outsider Art* (Orleans House Gallery, 2001) may be considered an example of a curatorial approach based on biographical emphasis, as the text provided to contextualise the artworks on display as well as the exhibition catalogue demonstrate. With the focus being shifted from the aesthetic to the psychopathological realm, Rhodes states in the latter that "Outsider Art exhibits a special sort of vulnerability, and this, finally, is the mark of its honesty and inextricable strand in its aesthetic appeal" (2001). From proposing the vulnerability of an artist as an integer aesthetic quality, it seems a small step only into pathologising

the individual and artwork at hand—a suggested direction which has indeed been followed by the *Evening Standard* when concluding that the audience is dealing with "artists who paint with pain" (2001, September 17). It is receptions such as these which confirm the risks of representing 'Outsider Art' as a by-product of illness, reinforcing the idea of a fundamental difference between 'Outsiders' and 'real' artists.

For much the same reasons, in 2006 the exhibition *Inner Landscapes: Outsider & Visionary Art* at Plymouth Arts Centre became the target of criticism in *Art Monthly* for having "categories of mental illness stand in where we would normally find references to manifestos, movements, prizes won, or issues dealt with" (2006, p. 20). This criticism was amplified by *Disability Arts Online*, which—in a review of the 2013 show *Alternative Guide to the Universe* at the Hayward Gallery London—states that a given impairment may lead "to place us within settings where art is expressed as a means of therapy and recovery and this leads to a devaluation of the work or to 'interesting' back stories" (2013). That this is a valid concern is confirmed once more by the media's reception, with *The Guardian* concluding that "the life stories that accompany [the artworks]—of untold suffering, illness and courage—are far more affecting than the images" (2013, June 16).

Figure 19. Southbank Centre (2013). Alternative Guide to the Universe (Video). Installation view. Hayward Gallery, London.

In my opinion, the professional display of 'Outsider Art' in this major exhibition has certainly endorsed the work as important artistic contributions, reflecting the by now high acclaim of the genre. However, attesting that the artists' work "conjures a kind of parallel universe where ingenuity and inventiveness trump common sense and received wisdom" (Exhibition Catalogue, Wertheim & Cardinal, 2013), further delving into the artists' personal histories to 'validate' this point may reinforce rather than alleviate patronising representations of the artists as Other. Consequently, *Disability Arts Online* "require[s] that the work should stand for itself" (2013), and many of the

artists participating in this study have likewise contested the use of biographical text to frame artworks in exhibits. Lilly, for example, acknowledges that it can help "to have some sort of backstory" next to an image displayed, yet at the same time disregards such practice for "ethical reasons" (Int., 2017, July 17).[7] She further states that she never engages with accompanying text in exhibitions as a matter of principle, because "I'm not there to read" (Int., 2017, July 17). Yet, as the following example shows, even if labels, accompanying texts or background information about the artists are kept to a minimum, the way in which certain artworks are arranged, hung and displayed can tell the story of the 'Other' equally well.

Curatorial Strategy #2: Formal Emphasis

According to Davies, curatorial approaches emphasising formal aspects favour "aesthetic engagement with the artworks and encourage[] critical evaluations of the assumed polarities of Outsider and mainstream art" (2007). Jones et al. remark that, in these cases, the work is presented in a manner that allows it to "speak for [it]self", focusing on aesthetic choices only (2010, p. 14). However, as Röske points out, there is danger involved if no information is provided at all, since any viewer is compelled to draw conclusions from the artwork to its creator, if only subconsciously. Where no further information is provided, he warns, facts will automatically be replaced by stereotypes in the viewer's mind, no matter if one is confronted with 'professional' or 'Outsider Art' (Röske, 2006a). Thus, if not muted by too much information, the lack of any can create a vacuum which may just as extensively be filled with Othered ascriptions, now imagined by the viewer instead of being provided by the curator. According to Maclagan, this effect results from the circumstance that confronting an artwork "is a complex imaginative response, which includes not only recreations of how the work was made, but also deductions and fantasies about the life story of the person who made it" (2009, p. 41). When the 'different' status of 'Outsider Art' is too hastily abolished or left unexplained, these responses may at present tend towards the negative since, according to Röske's observations, the experiences of people with mental illnesses, disabilities, etc. are still not seen as being of equal value, worth or interest in the larger realms of society (Field Notes BG, 2018, December 7).

Such negative effects and Othered readings indeed feature in many reviews of shows installed by the Museum of Everything (MOEV), which follows a curatorial approach with a largely formal emphasis, reacting against the sterility of 'white cube' representations. Founder of the museum, James Brett, denounces the label 'Outsider Art' for its stereotypical and derogatory connotations (e.g. in *The Guardian*, 2016, September 26; *The Times*, 2011, July 21) and tends to refrain from providing extensive biographical information of the artists in his collection. However, when installing his exhibitions, he still takes a primitivist stance, making his few critical comments appear contradictory in comparison.

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7 Information retrieved from personal interview with the artist. All artists' statements cited hereafter will appear anonymised, as indicated in Chapter 2. The forenames stated are pseudonyms assigned by the author for easier reference and coherence.

Figure 20. Krief, N. (2012). Installation View of Exhibition #1.1 (Photograph). The Museum of Everything, London / Chalet Society, Paris.

Figure 20 resembles the common format in which artworks are represented by the MOEV. While the mounting is deliberately amateurish, the artworks cluttered and hung in a condensed manner, labels and background information about the artists are largely absent. Even the small passages of text provided do not give much insight into the artist's intention, as they consist—at least in the case of *Exhibition #1*—of interpretations by prominent admirers of 'Outsider Art', such as Nick Cave, Thurston Moore, Grayson Perry and Hans Ulrich Obrist, who all write exclusively *about* the artists on show, explicating their own, personal interest in the 'Other'. The resulting effect of this formal approach, as demonstrated in reviews, seems comparable with those responding to the Hayward instalment based on biographical emphasis. Now, however, it is not the text but as *The Independent* critically remarks, "cramped corridors [that] imitate cramped mental states" (2009, November 2), effectively reinforcing the idea of the artworks as psychopathological symptoms. Further accounting for the above-stated myth of being provided access to 'otherworldly minds', in their review of *Exhibition #1*, *The Times* celebrates what they perceive as a unique opportunity to "explore the landscape of someone's mind, inspect their hopes in minute detail, wander around

their fears rendered in 3-D and watch their obsessions play out in front of you over and over again" (2009, October 13).

Despite the gallery installations exemplified above, a further example of Brett's framing technique is depicted in the film still below, taken from one of the museums' promotional videos, documenting a roadtrip taken by Brett and his team through Russia in 2012 aiming to recruit unknown, self-taught artists.

Figure 21. MOEV (2012). The Kazan Movie of Everything // Exhibition #5 – Russia 2012 (Video). Artists and visitors queuing to present work and/or look at pre-approved artworks. The Museum of Everything, London.

The MOEV, also a wandering pop-up institution, frequently issues calls for "untrained, unintentional, undiscovered and unclassifiable artists" (MOEV Website, n.d.) to come forward and present their work to the museum's panel. Figure 21 showcases one of these recruitment sessions, underlining once more the formal emphasis and makeshift approach taken in representing the artworks, which are—no matter if located in established galleries, at the Venice Biennale, the Tate, Selfridges, the Frieze Art Fair or on the road—always framed in the corporate red-and-white handwritten signposts designed by Brett.

It is these spectacular shows which frequently raise the attention and feature in the British mainstream media, with the latter remaining in two minds about the choice of framing. Brett has been praised and scorned alike for putting together "freak shows" (*The Independent*, 2009, November 2) and "travelling circuses" (*Glass Magazine*, 2013, August 2), occasionally also being distinguished for having established 'Outsider Art' as a "brand" (*The Independent*, 2011, October 8).

The artists participating in this study have been equally varied in their responding evaluation, with Andy remarking that the MOEV's shows are "good fun the way they are exhibited" (Int., 2017, July 3), while Josh, who has been included in one of the shows, contends that they are "distasteful" in their circus-like demeanour (Int., 2017,

July 4). It is worth noting that Josh's dislike of the formal representation chosen by the museum is closely interlinked with a general critique on the "exploitative" practices of the institution when acquiring 'Outsider' artworks. As stated by him and several other artists I have met, if approved by the above-stated selection panel, artists are expected to donate their work for free to the MOEV, with some artists even being "persuad[ed]" to hand over and exhibit their work, as Brett himself admits (*The Times*, 2013, May 1). In my understanding, these "hidden treasure hunts" (*The Times*, 2013, May 1) are thus not only problematic because of their decontextualised, formal choice of framing, but also highly questionable practices which contradict Brett's officially stated ambition to treat 'private' artists on equal terms with 'professional' artists in his proclaimed attempt to bring them "equivalence" (*The Guardian*, 2016, September 26). Members of the EOA[8], especially former vice president Raija Kallioinen (2011, November 19), have declared this an issue of alarming ethical concern, but such critical stances have not been adopted by the mainstream media when reviewing the MOEV so far.

Considering the at times problematic circumstances of acquiring work for 'Outsider' shows, the Othered narratives informing the representation of 'Outsider Art' and the connotations the term itself brings along, it seems to matter little if a biographical or formal approach is taken. As long as these works run under the label 'Outsider Art' or any of its synonyms, the Othering resulting seems inevitable, and trying to eschew differentiation a futile exercise. As the following example shows, this is, however, not for the lack of trying.

Curatorial Strategy #3: Appropriative Emphasis

It is striking that art shows which put their focus exclusively on 'Outsider Art', like the examples mentioned above, tend to be well received by the media, while exhibitions trying to relinquish differentiation by showing 'Outsider Art' alongside 'mainstream' art, or even proclaiming that they are practically the same, are often depreciated. According to Davies (as cited in Jones et al., 2010), the appropriative strategy followed by curators attempting the latter focuses on aesthetic and intellectual interchanges between 'Outsider Artists' and 'professional' artists, their respective artworks and creative practices. Following art historian Donald Preziosi, such an approach may challenge conservative art historical and museological receptions of modernity and "restore[] heterogeneity and multiplicity", by indicating interwoven complexities and bridging the gap between the internal and external (1992, p. 305). Nevertheless, this curatorial technique has also evoked criticism in the field. Röske (2013b), for example, proclaims that, by likening and evaluating 'Outsider Art' according to the general principles of

8 Founded in 2009, the EOA may be considered an ethical watchdog of the 'Outsider Art' field, acting as "an umbrella organization for all cultural workers devoted to the promotion of marginalized art in the European cultural sector" (EOA Website, n.d.). Attempting to enhance dialogue, provide a networking platform for those working in the field and "protect the rights of outsider artists" (EOA Website, n.d.), many studios, charities, galleries, and museums seek to be part of the association and join their annual conferences.

established art, different, non-normative experiences and marginalised voices may once again be subjugated under hegemonial banners, and effectively disappear.

The touring exhibition *Inner Worlds Outside*, installed at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2006 and curated by Monika Kinley and Jon Thompson, has followed such an appropriative strategy, perhaps indeed inviting hegemonial readings such as those warned by Röske. Yet it seems it has further revealed a pronounced longing for differentiation among reviewers, counteracting any tendencies of these artworks to submerge with each other or being evaluated according to the same set of principles. In *Inner Worlds Outside*, the works of the most well-known 'Outsider Artists' were shown alongside those of established modern 'masters'.[9] As prominently announced in the exhibition catalogue, the authors attempt to eradicate the imaginary border between 'insiders' and 'Outsiders' by stating that both are "alienated manifestations of modernity", with "all human minds [being] fundamentally the same" (Spira et al., 2006). Attesting, much like Morgenthaler and Prinzhorn, that all artists retrieve their creativity from the same space, the show makes no distinctions between the untrained or trained, the ill or healthy—instead grouping all artworks around themes. On many private blogs as well as smaller websites the show was celebrated for "explod[ing] the myths surrounding Outsiders" (*Art Daily*, 2006, May 16) and "knock[ing] the pro artist off his high-culture pedestal" (*Robber Bridegroom Blog*, 2006, May 26). In the mainstream media, however, it was less fondly reviewed.[10]

One reporter for *The Guardian* writes that he was "left disturbed" by the shows' attempt to "excise differences, pretending they don't exist" (2006, May 4). In another article it is suggested that hanging 'Outsiders' next to modern 'masters' may simply be "misguided" (*The Guardian*, 2006, May 7) or, as put more bluntly by *The Telegraph*, "utterly ridiculous", "post-modernist crap" (2006, May 9). According to the latter, the shows' main failure consists of avoiding to draw distinctions between the art of the 'sane' and the 'insane', which reputedly would be of a "wholly different order":

> In mainstream art there is a gulf between the artist's identity and his work. That gulf does not exist among Outsider Artists. I don't deny that the mad scrawls of a religious maniac named WC Rice, who lives in rural Georgia, aren't visually compelling. But that is, because hand-lettered signs allow us to peer into the dark soul of a deeply troubled mind. Rice cannot not make his art. He is driven not by creativity but by compulsion. As an obsessive, he has no choice about what he says in it. (The Telegraph, 2006, May 9)

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9 Artists featured include Adolf Wölfli, Aloise Corbaz, Madge Gill, Scottie Wilson, Martin Ramirez, Henry Darger, Joan Miró, Francis Picabia, Francis Bacon, Wassily Kandinsky and Jean Dubuffet.

10 Apparently disoriented by the experience of such combinations, *The Times* at one point suggests to just consider everyone on the show an 'insider', since they are all "displayed by a major gallery" after all (2006, May 3). Yet, in another review, written by the same author (Rachel Campbell-Johnston) the tone is less inclusive, declaring the opposite: "Are artists all mad? You might easily think so if you go down the Whitechapel this week. […] The visitor is left staring with perplexed curiosity into the secret fantasies of—to put it quite bluntly—complete crackpots. […] The screws are so loose it's amazing the pictures don't just drop off the walls" (*The Times*, 2006, May 4).

This quote reflects one of the most common narratives circling around 'Outsider Art', going back to the early 20th century and apparently having lost none of its topicality. Not only are the artworks of 'Outsider Artists' perceived as transitory, one-sided appliances which supposedly allow the audience to scrutinise the artists' mind, as seen above; the artist is likewise imagined as a kind of device forced to express their unconscious, continuously and uncontrollably producing visual prints of their inner world, as if performing a mechanical act. Attesting that the artist would thereby "lack consciousness" (*The Guardian*, 2000, October 29)—long prepared for by historical key players like Prinzhorn—inevitably dehumanises the individual and renders their work to unfiltered outpourings.

While the *Metro* maintains that "art is art, outsider or otherwise" (2013, November 20), the reasoning outlined above leaves *The Times* to resume that "their creative process has nothing to do with being an artist" (2003, August 3). For 'insider' appreciators and often promulgated by media with a focus on 'Outsider Art'; however, it is precisely this perceived lack of intention and assumed purity that testifies that one is confronted with a 'real' artist. Renowned artist and Turner-prize winner Grayson Perry, for instance, remarks, that in "the glossy advertorials of contemporary art […] lots of art looks like art but tastes like cardboard" (*The Times*, 2011, July 21). Nowadays, 'Outsider Art' would signal "innocence and authenticity" and, as *The Times* concludes, "become a touchstone of truth in our knowingly ironic, self-consciously referential, commercially driven, media savvy art scene" (2011, July 21).

Adversaries as well as proponents of 'Outsider Art' thereby seem to engage in a phantom discussion often fuelled by curatorial frameworks with an appropriative emphasis or other attempts to eradicate clear-cut boundaries between 'insiders' and 'Outsiders'. In a great many cases, either side expresses the wish for separation to be continued on the grounds of the assumption that 'Outsider Artists' lack consciousness—a presupposition either interpreted as positive or negative, but at its core remaining unquestioned, thus further reproducing the mythical existence of the 'Outsider Artist' as Other.

Concluding from the controversial reviews of large-scale exhibitions either putting their emphasis on a biographical, formal or appropriative perspective, the representation of 'Outsider Art' seems to constantly oscillate between pathologising or romanticising the 'Other', yet in any case leaving a presumed otherworldliness uncontested. With 'Outsider Art' being the obvious ethical minefield it is, one is left wondering whether there can be a 'right' way to exhibit such work at all. I believe this is indeed possible, if—apart from a preferably overt disengagement with exploitative 'discovery' practices—the myths reproduced throughout most 'Outsider Art' exhibitions, are deconstructed by breaking with a top-down curatorial approach. A great many curators, dealers and collectors of 'Outsider Art' have reportedly never personally met the artists they represent or whose works they own. Even less likely is it that one encounters curators who have a disability, mental illness or belong in any other way to a marginalised group. However, ridding oneself of preconceptions like unintentionality, madness or otherworldliness seems possible only if one steps closer and engages in a dialogue with the artist and, for art institutions, to allow for a diversification of its personnel and methods to include "atypical forms of communication", as curator

Amanda Cachia demands (2014, p. 122f). In my opinion, the proclaimed Otherness of 'Outsider Artists' will then most likely evaporate, revealing behind it heterogeneous individuals expressing feelings, intentions and aspirations commonly shared between human beings and making formerly Othered experiences of, for instance, mental illness accessible to a wider audience. In hindsight of this complexity, authors like Röske (Field Notes BG, 2019) and Davey (2011) appeal to the educative responsibility of curators and the importance of finding an intermediary path, accounting for rather than neglecting or overemphasising difference and thus potentially relegating rather than reinforcing stigmatisation and social marginalisation. To envisage how such a project may be facilitated, it seems fruitful to turn to small-scale exhibitions organised by charities who work closely with individual artists. Many of these will make use of what Davies (2007) has called a "patrimonial" curatorial strategy in which the complex background of a particular artist is neither ignored nor embellished, but their perhaps differing experience, as well as the socio-cultural context informing their work, is acknowledged and the artist supported accordingly.

5.3 Participatory Ethics and Small-Scale 'Outsider Art' Exhibitions

Most established art institutions in the UK such as the Tate, Hayward Gallery and the Royal Academy of the Arts officially state their commitment to inclusivity, equality and diversity. It seems, however, that these policies are predominately followed in the organisations' marketing and attempt to attract more varied audiences. When it comes to deciding which artists are on show and what kind of artworks are selected for their permanent collections, the above-mentioned policies have little impact.[11] Often, a rather conservative art historical canon is being reproduced, mainly emphasising already privileged voices, as artist and curator Aidan Moesby (2017) demonstrates in his evaluation of the current state of curators with disabilities in the UK. Rosler likewise concludes, that such institutions are "operating primarily by the light of abstractions, rather than lived experience" (1997, p. 23), with museum professionals still being recruited predominately from social elites and overall reluctant to engage in a dialogue with 'Outsiders'. By contrast, many smaller art organisations, grassroots initiatives and charities who work closely with individuals labelled 'Outsider Artists' or which may even be run by the latter, seem to take their commitment to equality, inclusivity and diversity rather seriously. Effectively, it is often these parameters that an organisation is built upon and funded for by institutions such as the Arts Council, other

11 In recent years, the Royal Academy of Art has hosted the event *InPractice*, an access and community programme, in which artists "facing barriers to the art world" (RA Website, n.d.) are invited to present and share their work with others. The Tate has likewise introduced a *disABILITY* network in which artists and art of the Tate's collection are interpreted. These singular events do however not seem to touch the core of the institutions' overall practice and may even appear as an alibi, deflecting from conservative practices still defining their very centre. The Tate, for example, is still reluctant to include work associated with 'Outsider Art' into its permanent collection, and the chances getting into the Royal Academy's prestigious summer show as an 'Outsider Artist' are slim, to say the least, as some artists (who will be featured in subsequent chapters) have testified.

smaller foundations or private donors. In most cases, the underlying philosophical values are thereby not only expressed in the charities' respectful interaction with artists, but also in their approach in representing 'Outsider Art' across various media and at exhibitions. Most charities may first and foremost be considered social projects, adhering to person-centred practices and prioritising the well-being, personal development and social participation of the artists. Only in addition to these aims will some also venture into and seek recognition from the established art world, at times pushing their own ethical boundaries or encountering conflicts of interests, as will be shown below.

Curatorial Strategy #4: Patrimonial Emphasis

One charity which has managed to bridge the gap between the arts and social sector while largely evading the issues briefly indicated above is Outside In. The by now nationally acclaimed and leading charity in the field of British 'Outsider Art' was founded in Chichester in 2006 by artist Marc Steene. "Provid[ing] a platform for artists who face significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance or isolation", the project aims to "create a fairer artworld which rejects traditional values and institutional judgments about whose work can and should be displayed" (Outside In Website, n.d.). The idea of an inclusive platform is crucial to the constitution of the charity and reflected on all levels of engagement. Not only does Outside In provide a free online gallery space, which more than 2,600 artists now make use of, they also invite artists to submit their work for open exhibitions held in various galleries and museums, further granting awards and residencies. To make sure they reach artists who often have difficulties accessing such schemes or calls, they frequently deliver cost-free workshops across the UK to which anyone can show up and be supported in photographing their work, setting up an online gallery or writing an artist statement. Many of the workshop facilitators are participating artists themselves and have previously received training via the charity's Step-up programme, conveying skills in working with collections, leading workshops, and curating exhibitions. I align myself with Steene in believing that pursuing such a concept of "shared responsibility and ownership" (*The Guardian*, 2013, July 10), continuous support of artists as well as active engagement with established art institutions to demonstrate how diversity, equality and inclusion can be put into practice, is a necessary step in the right direction. That most artists also greatly approve of such a scheme has been confirmed by my research—13 out of 15 interviewees have at some point independently brought up this topic and positively referenced Outside In.

With the artists encouraged to take the presentation of their work into their own hands, the selection of artworks shown, the content of labels in exhibitions as well as the texts reproduced in accompanying catalogues, are noticeably different to the material associated with the large-scale shows investigated previously. As with several other community arts organisations and charities, Outside In follows Davies' patrimonial approach, focusing on "fostering relationships with artists grounded in a profound respect for their creative processes and social/cultural environments that inform their work" (Davies as cited in Jones et al., 2010, Appendix p. 30). Thereby, the background

of an artist is neither ignored nor distorted as an Othered feature; difference and diversity are acknowledged, with the focus being laid on enhancing the agency of the artist, for example by promoting self-representation. The exhibition catalogues of Outside In—most of which feature direct artist quotations as well as statements written by the artists (or someone close to them) alongside their artworks—may be considered an instrument in operationalising this patrimonial approach. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Outside In: Journeys* held at auction house Sotheby's in 2018, for example, only about a fifth of all text—introduction and acknowledgements—derives from the project's management, with the remainder consisting entirely of artist statements. The latter exemplifies that, if given the opportunity, most artists tend to speak about the inspiration for their making, their practice, materials and techniques, the content of their work or express the meaning it has to them or that they seek to convey. Only a small proportion provides details about their biography or mentions a particular illness or disability. Artist Andrew Omoding, for example, states:

> I like making my work. I choose materials, nice materials. I like to do sewing and make stories. I make stories for everybody to look at my work. I did my exhibition in Brighton. I like my exhibition. People came to see my work. They liked it. They said, 'good work Andrew'. I talk about my work. People like my stories. I would like to do different work. More sewing. Put stories in. Do drawing line and sew it and put in my work so everybody will like it. For example, I would like to make a blind and put a story inside it. I like to make very big work. Bigger and bigger. I like do more exhibitions. (Omoding in 'Journeys' Exhibition Catalogue, 2018, p. 30)

In contrast to the image of the disengaged, reclusive 'Outsider Artist' as commonly reproduced in mainstream media, Omoding's statement indicates that he is not only aware of and excited about the opportunity to exhibit his work—he very much has an audience in mind when creating, and likes to interact and exchange ideas with the latter. Omoding's agency and engagement to represent himself in his own words has been further encouraged by charities Action Space and Outside In, as exemplified in Figure 22, depicting a presentation of the artist at the Phoenix Art Space in Brighton.

The contents of catalogues like *Journeys*, including statements such as the ones from Omoding, reveal just how much force may go into a deliberate decontextualisation of 'Outsider' artworks in established art world settings, and to what extent the artist's intention or wish to share a particular story may at times be ignored, silenced or overwritten. Organisations like Outside In are aware of such practices and take active measures to counteract flamboyant Othering practices with increasing impact. In his advocation of the charity's agenda, Steene even appeared in the art journal *Apollo* and in *The Guardian*, presenting what reads like a manifesto of an envisioned, all-inclusive art world:

> We recognize them as artists in their own right—sidestepping any art world labelling and the freak show interest often directed at artists from non-traditional backgrounds. It is a healthy and important reminder that we are dealing with individuals when we talk about the collectivizing of artists under the umbrella terms such as outsiders, visionaries, naives, primitive or untaught. With Outside In we are seeking

> to create a safe space where artists, with a range of often challenging life situations, can be themselves, without judging or labelling. […] We need to consider how we stop ghettoizing these artists into separate subcultures, displayed in exhibitions under collective (and sometimes reductive) banners. […] It may seem like an impossible utopian fantasy, but I would like to see an art world where artists of all shapes and sizes are understood and valued and the opportunities are equally shared; for gallerists to embrace a wider programme that includes a broader and more inclusive range of concepts and understanding around art. And for us to have successfully built the understanding in our communities that creativity can lie in the least likely of places. […] At some level, success in this area is about us, as a sector, providing the vehicles and platforms that will allow the artists we work with to take centre stage—as individual creators, each with their own voice. (Steene in *The Guardian*, 2013, July 10)

Figure 22. Action Space (2017). Andrew Omoding is October Action Space Featured artist. (Photograph / Twitter post). Andrew Omoding presenting his work at Phoenix Art Space, Brighton. Action Space, London.

Contrasting Small- and Large-Scale Curatorial Approaches

Acting as a kind of national meta-association, many artists under the wing of Outside In are also part of other, smaller charities and initiatives which, scattered across the country, provide support for artists with mental illnesses and/or disabilities on a

regular basis. In most of these studios, ateliers or workshops, artists will work closely together with supporting staff and are assisted according to their individual needs in the process of their artistic development throughout the time of their attending. Perhaps due to being in such close personal contact with the artists, in most exhibitions and projects organised by local organisations, the condescending or patronising tone sometimes encountered in 'established' displays remains largely absent. As a downside however, exhibitions organised by charitable institutions are often condemned to the sole status of being social or community projects lacking artistic merit. In their respective communities, by parents, carers and the artists themselves, these charities are often highly regarded, some being mentioned in local newspapers or even flagging up in the announcements section of *Raw Vision*. Yet overall, most of the exhibitions in the small-scale sector, even if unmatched in quantity and variety[12], have so far not made it into mainstream media, let alone art magazines or the art world at large.

It seems established institutions remain largely oblivious to such initiatives, only selectively turning towards them if work or new stories need to be retrieved for singular but major shows, or if the collective efforts of organisations like Outside In become so large in scale that they cannot be safely ignored anymore. Despite the rare exception of the latter, it is still the large-scale exhibitions depicted previously, which attract most of the media's attention.

While these tend to focus on an etic approach in their representational strategies, often solely speaking *about* the artist, charities seem to largely follow an emic approach, speaking *with* the artist, however achieving comparatively little visibility by doing so. Based on my experience in the field, I consider that the crucial point is that small-scale initiatives, which have limited resources, often solely promote events via their websites, social media or newsletters, largely addressing closed-circle audiences that already know where and what to look for or have personal ties with charity members or participating artists. Many charities also refrain from using the term 'Outsider Art'[13] and the provision of demeaning but 'exciting' stories, thereby perhaps decreasing their media visibility even further. Major art institutions and acknowledged curators, on the other hand, are often less sensitive when it comes to using such terms or concepts. They achieve a much wider reach via extended and often sensationalist media coverage, thereby attracting new audiences which may have been

12 According to the UK's Government Charity Commission Database, 41,744 charities are currently registered in the arts/culture/heritage/science sector, with 13,794 of those working with people with disabilities (Register of Charities Website, December 2020). An investigation into how many of these actively participate in the 'Outsider Art' world would surpass the limitations of this study. However, some of the most prominent charities in the field, which have either been externally framed as promoting or making self-referential use of the term 'Outsider Art', are *Outside In*, *Action Space*, *Shape Arts*, *Projectability*, *Project Artworks*, *Core Arts*, *CoolTan Arts*, *Venture Arts*, *Candid Arts Trust*, *Creative Futures*, *Creative Response*, *Artscape*, *Stretch* and *Centre Pieces*. Most of these charities organise exhibitions on a regular, if small-scale, basis.

13 A trick to circumvent this is to mention the label 'Outsider Art' somewhere on the website, while in the same breath criticising and condemning its use. Some charities seem to have—perhaps involuntarily—adopted this strategy, thus remaining visible and flagging up on search engines when 'Outsider Art' is looked up.

unknowledgeable about the subject beforehand. Hence, these institutions seem better equipped to efficiently promulgate a story of Otherness, with smaller initiatives often remaining rather invisible in their battle to counteract condescending representations and promote artist participation. Correlating with this ratio seem to be conflicting intentions and political agendas, with major shows on one hand following a story/artwork-centred approach, while many charities, on the other, demonstrate a person-centred approach. When looking at artists appearing in both realms, it is as if during the journey by which some venture from the charity to the art world sector, the artist is turned from *subject* into *object*, from *one of us* into the *Other* by the very same process.

However, in consideration of this interpretation, I would like to note that both charities and art world institutions cannot be subdivided as neatly into opposing categories, and should also not be read as such. The arts and social sector largely overlap—especially in the 'Outsider Art' field—with many charities, gallery owners and curators effectively finding themselves in a transitory field of tension, in which the 'difference' of an artist and their supposed Otherness is constantly being negotiated. Established art world professionals may downplay Otherness and design projects and events pronouncing inclusion and equality to acquire funding from the social sector, as shown by van Heddeghem (2016). Likewise, charities may make use of sensationalist techniques to gain attention and raise visibility in the media or art world sector if public funding does not suffice. Project Artworks, for example, instigated a show called *In the Realms of Others* at the De La Warr Pavilion in 2015, in which studio participants were on display and could be observed by the audience while creating. At the same time, they were being deliberately demoted to "makers" rather than represented as artists (Press Release, PAW, 2015). This was instantly spun further by *The Guardian*, which headlined according to the established narrative in large-scale exhibitions, "Extraordinary Outsiders: the makers who don't know they're artists—a rare glimpse into their secret worlds" (2015, September 16).

These practices, as well as the complicated in-between positioning of many charities and institutions in the 'Outsider Art' field, indicate some of the most pressing ethical concerns in the intertwining arts and social sector: if individual participants do not perceive themselves as artists and have no interest in the art world, who benefits from representing them as such in established museums and galleries? If, on the other hand, the individuals proclaim themselves to be artists, who has the right, and on what grounds, to deny this title to them, denigrating them to eternal 'makers' and to the social sector, respectively? How much emphasis do I, as a curator, put on a particular difference or supposed Otherness of someone to achieve visibility? And of whose benefit is this visibility if it does not lead to the recognition and inclusion of the artists into a more diverse art world and society?

While a conclusive clarification of these questions may be unfeasible, the concerns they express can be understood as crucially informing the above-mentioned field of tension and negotiation of difference in large- and small-scale curatorial practices. The effects of the latter will feature strongly from Chapter 6 onwards in the reflections provided by artists labelled 'Outsiders', but for now I would like to close this chapter

with a general evaluation of the visibility of the latter's voice appearing in the media thus far.

5.4 Participation, Self-Representation and Visibility of the Artist's Voice

Concluding from the media analysis and in consideration of the examples depicted above, there is a strong indication that the romantic myths established and reproduced throughout the 19th and 20th centuries are still very much alive and govern the representation of 'Outsider Art' in exhibitions, the media and to a certain extent also influence charitable institutions in their marketing. These myths about the Other are fostered continuously, and in particular via curatorial practices with a biographical or formal emphasis, as exemplified by the majority of large-scale exhibitions. The increasing media coverage, popularity and growing interest in the genre further testify that there may be an ongoing need for a clearly delineated—if imaginary—Other which consequently flourishes in the UK. Having lost none of its fascination, the romantic proclamation and adherence to the figure of the 'Outsider' thereby stands in stark contrast to policies promoting inclusion, diversity and equality.

Being aware of this conflict, many cultural institutions and 'expert' voices in the media downplay their engagement with emphasising difference by proclaiming that "Outsider art is in" (BBC, 2013, May 30), "The Outsider is coming in" (*The Times*, 2013, June 3) and that 'Outsider Artists' are "Outsiders no more" (*Art Newspaper*, 2013, June). Curator and gallery director Jane England even announces that she wishes to one day see a room dedicated to 'Outsider Art' at the Tate Modern (*The Guardian*, 2000, October 29). Such statements are not only deceiving—considering that 'Outsider Art' has been part and parcel of the 'inside' all along—they also illustrate the currently limited understanding of the idea of inclusion: it is confused with and stops at integration.

The 'Outsiders' may have indeed come in, but as I would like to argue, predominately as objectified bodies, conceptualised projection surfaces and ominous bearers of curios and tragic life stories. In most cases, they are still not met at eye-level or granted the status of fully conscious human beings, thus spinning the tiresome questioning of their right to be understood as genuine artists infinitely further. What is introduced to the debate is not the 'Outsider Artist' as a person, not even his/her artwork as such, but instead the mythic idea *of* and *about* their work and life. Thus, 'Outsider Art' may perhaps be more fittingly considered a sophisticated piece of conceptual art, created over the past few decades in a collective effort by art world professionals, always on the heels of the new and unusual. This power imbalance indicates once more that the mediators in the field of 'Outsider Art' are not *discoverers* but *inventors*, with Maclagan appropriately admitting at the ICA panel discussion that "we create Outsider Artists for our own needs" (2010, February 11).

In the following chapters I will attempt to break this cycle by inviting a range of artists to reflect upon their experiences of inclusion/exclusion and labelling as 'Outsiders'. Now I would like to conclude this chapter by concentrating on the few occasions in which the artist's voice indeed appears in the media, its contextualisation, and the extent of what the artist is 'allowed' to say in each respective format.

As demonstrated above, most media reports circle around major exhibitions, with the representation of 'Outsider Artists' largely relying on how these shows are curated and framed. Established institutions like the Hayward Gallery thereby dictate a specific understanding of 'Outsider Art' which feeds back into the media. Grassroots projects and charities vouching for a different understanding of 'Outsider Art' and artist participation are numerous in quantity, yet often yield only little reach in comparison, mostly remaining overshadowed by more powerful voices engaging in Othering practices. Overall, the momentary ratio of the artist's voice appearing in the media as measured against presumed visibility reaching new audiences, may be roughly summarised as such:

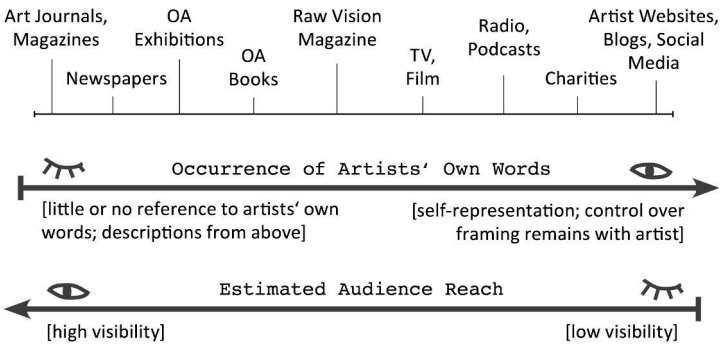

Figure 23. From Small to Large-Scale Publicity. A ranking of media sources according to their presumed visibility in the field (Own Depiction).

Figure 23 provides an overview of media sources in correlation with the appearance of the artist's voice in reference to their presumed visibility. The occurrence of individual artists in their own words has been measured by the number of direct quotations and appearances on camera/radio, as well as their estimated influence in editing the material. The likelihood of being seen/heard, on the other hand, has been estimated via the general reach of a particular source in the respective field as depicted in the beginning of this chapter, plus the amount of cross-referencing undertaken between sources and by participants of this study.

It seems that in mainstream media one can detect an 'authentic Outsider' by their elusive appearance or general absence. While direct reference to artist statements or quotations are rare in renowned art magazines and journals, newspapers and major exhibitions, this is to some extent also true for specialised literature about 'Outsider Art'. In most books and articles written by key players in the field, the individual behind the label seldomly appears. If they are indeed quoted and referenced personally, or even filmed for a few seconds speaking in person, their appearance tends to remain neatly packaged in short segments, often fragmentary and decontextualised, either to illustrate an obsessive and engrossed working practice or to confirm an artist's

supposed weird- or otherworldliness. Critical reflections, proclaimed awareness of audiences or any kind of 'rational' art world referencing undertaken by a respective artist, on the other hand, remain scarce.

Among others, this tendency is exemplified in the most renowned literature about 'Outsider Art' in which established artists, collectors, curators and historical key players in the field are frequently and extensively referenced, while the artists forming the centre of the discussion remain largely underrepresented in their own voice. For instance, in Maclagan's critical survey *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace* (2009), a book of 170 pages, there appears only one direct quotation by Wölfli, stating that his artistic process "would surely drive a person crazy if he weren't already" (p. 78f). In Lyle Rexer's *How to Look at Outsider Art* (2005), consisting of 171 pages, a total of four quotations turns up (p. 58, p. 75, p. 102, p. 129), largely containing statements from artists concerning their being driven to create by some unknown force or spirit. The frequency of direct quotations is higher in John Maizel's *Raw Creation: Outsider Art & Beyond* (1996) with 13 artists appearing with 1 or 2 sentences each in a book of 230 pages; however, in most cases again contextualised so as to confirm a supposedly mysterious or obsessive working practice. In Colin Rhodes' *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000), quotes by 'Outsider Artists' can be found on 24 of its 217 pages, nevertheless following the same pattern.

From these few selections, most artists referenced are already dead, and their ever-same statements re-quoted from a pool of previously published materials rather than collected in direct interaction with the artist. The chance of gaining better insight and finding out more about currently active artists is higher in *Raw Vision* magazine, which occasionally even reproduces artist interviews. Yet overall, the descriptive contents and references to curators, collectors and other art world professionals still vastly outweigh any unmediated dialogue with the artist.

To a certain extent, this ratio differs in TV documentaries and on the radio, in which the limitations of the written word are further surpassed by the artist appearing in situ. Even if heavily edited and coming with their own restrictions, these sources supply material which contains extra information (e.g. body language, tone of voice, facial expressions) about the artist, giving otherwise invisible hints on the context of the interview setting, their engagement and un/easiness with the presenter or the questions asked. Aside from the 'expert-led' and rather romanticising BBC documentary *Turning the Art World Inside Out* (2013), it is Jarvis Cocker's three-part series, *Journeys into the Outside* (Channel 4, 1999), which illustrates this point and exemplifies the potential of the audio-visual approach.

Despite Cocker's predominate presence, the series is very much artist centred. Even in cases when the artist is unavailable, archived material of earlier interviews are spooled in, and neighbours, family members and caretakers of artworks/environments are invited to share their memories. Only once does Cocker consult another 'expert'—then director of the Collection de l'Art Brut, Michel Thévoz—to "make sense of it all" ('Journeys', 1999–3). However, when claiming that 'Art Brut' "is disinterested art, created by people who don't care about success or wealth", by virtue of this film's approach, the otherwise well-respected key player Thévoz looks out of place. This may result from the circumstance that such statements, which largely reflect the histori-

cal discourse and in particular Dubuffet's stance, are disproven in the series almost instantly by the heterogeneous variety of artists presented in the same sequence. Contrary to the statement of Thévoz, what all artists featured seem to have in common is that they are very much 'interested' in their art, with many outright welcoming the success, attention, fame and wealth coming with and from it. Artist Howard Finster most prominently illustrates the oft-downplayed commercial interests of some 'Outsider Artists'—he has a gift shop, helpers to produce his work and embraces the chance to appear on national TV. In addition to the case of Finster, Cocker has interviewed a rather heterogeneous range of self-taught as well as trained artists, some of whom spontaneously create, while others present meticulously prepared and detailed plans for their constructions and works. A further diversification is facilitated by the inclination of some individuals to refrain from labelling themselves 'artists', while others confidently claim this very status. Some even interrupt or hijack the conversation with Cocker in ways that would be difficult to convey in written text, but further illustrate the individuals' agency and critical engagement which is otherwise often denied. While the artist Chomo, for example, states that he does not want to take part in Cocker's "fuckwit cinema" ('Journeys', 1999–1), artist Robert Garcet takes the opportunity to declare to the host: "The media has never listened […] The media, that is you" ('Journeys', 1999–3). Feeling "unwelcomed", as he later declares to *The Guardian* (2016, September 26), Cocker ends the interview at this point but refrains from cutting the sequence from the final film. Even if remaining largely uncritical about such issues, in this case Cocker's proclamation of feeling like he has been "trespassing private property" ('Journeys', 1999–3), perhaps indirectly acknowledges that he, as well as other members of his profession, at times may have crossed a line.

Judging from the few audio-visual sources available, the overt Othering based on biographical emphasis which often informs written text or curatorial framings is, if far from absent, much subtler in these sources. Presumably a representation of individuals as otherworldly aliens may be facilitated more easily if one cannot see or hear the artist. In the audio-visual accounts provided by *Journeys into the Outside*, however, the artists undoubtedly appear in the form of human beings in communicative interaction and thus very much as part of 'our' universe. The heterogeneity and complexity of the artists' identities is likewise indicated when individuals classed 'Outsiders' are interviewed in radio shows or appear on podcasts. On a rare occasion, BBC Radio 4 even let the artists produce and edit an entire show themselves. Aired as part of the *Art of Now* format, in the programme *Outsiders* (2018, September 9), hosting artist David Tovey makes a positional statement right at the start: "They make us feel like impostors. The orb of the art world, the establishment". Tovey then introduces snippets of his art class, interviews artists and charities as well as Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England. The topics discussed range from the absence of critics with disabilities, the neglect of students with special educational needs at university to Self/Other-labelling and identification of barriers for progressing in the art world. Furthermore, the rarely mentioned issue of power and class is also discussed:

> We don't have power, we don't have authority, that is surely what diversity means? People of colour, people who aren't abled bodied […] the make-up of your team, your

> curatorial staff, your press-team, at all levels of the institution, not just who is in the gallery. That's what needs to be diverse as well. It's not just about who you are showing, it is about behind closed doors—who's got stakes in that conversation? What does diversity actually mean to these white heads of the institutions, these white directors? Is it about just visible diversity or about having equity? Because I want equity, I want stakes in the institution. That's the only way I can say that for sure change is possible. (artist Lyv Wynter in BBC Radio 4 'Outsiders', 2018)

Even while acknowledging the progress already made, artist Tony Heaton resumes that "every step you go makes you conscious how much further you have to go" (BBC Radio 4 'Outsiders', 2018). To hear such statements on a public broadcaster is exceptional, however proficiently limited and on such scale a rare occasion to date. By contrast, a high share of artist participation can be made out in the videos uploaded by charities such as Project Ability, Outside In or Action Space, which follow a considerate and sensitive representational approach, yet achieving relatively low visibility in comparison. Heterogeneous and critical voices also appear in the semi-private and contained environment of the annual conferences organised by the EOA, which, despite their commendable motives and critical mindset, may at times still appear rather inaccessible. Attempting to counteract Othering tendencies and promote self-representation among artists, in May 2018 the EOA aspired "to place artists at the heart of the conference" (Evaluation Report, 2018, p. 7), modelling the whole event around the theme of *The Artist's Voice*. Taking place at the Pallant House in Chichester, over the course of three days artists were invited to present their work, with some also participating in panel discussions. Still however, the number of artists represented only a small percentage, with a divide between artists and 'professionals' clearly marking the atmosphere of the event. Despite the largely positive feedback reproduced in the evaluation report issued by Outside In, one artist reflects on her experience of presenting work at the EOA as follows:

> I suffer from extreme anxiety and so this is difficult for me. Also, being here in the place, it's a bit posh if you know what I mean, and all of these people know lots about art. I don't know half of the stuff that the people here do. (Evaluation Report, 2018, p. 21)

The overarching presence of 'professionals' at the EOA has also been negatively remarked on by artist Mike Inglis at the *eQuality* conference in Stockholm in 2019. In preparation for his speech he states that there were "a few things that made me angry today", subsequently asking the audience to raise their hands—first those who are involved in the arts as curators, gallerists, support workers, etc. and second those who are artists. Addressing the imbalance, he resumes:

> THAT'S the boundary. […] the artists, we are the birds and the rest of you are very well meaning but you make money from us. For us it does not matter [the labelling], YOU are the ornithologists. […] Who's got the right to decide? Each and every one of us [artists], and none of you [art world professionals]. Each artist can decide, the rest of you are just voices. (Field Notes EOA, 2019, May 24)

Thus, it becomes apparent that the issue of participation presents a problem even to those initiatives which otherwise hold ethical standards high, underlining once more the importance of charitable institutions to instigate, experiment with and enable different forms of agency on the ground.

Apart from these institutional settings, the level of control over their respective representation is of course at its highest, and critical voices manifold on personal blogs, artist websites and social media profiles. The future will tell if these "alternative public spheres"—as Kellner and Kahn (2006, p. 720) have called them—will effectively undermine one-sided representational practices by traditional media. At present, the latter still seem to have sovereignty and definitional power in the 'Outsider Art' field, with the majority of self-directed accounts by artists being rather difficult to find, as they generally do not flag up on search engines and are not readily accessible or marketed to gain the attention of large audiences. In combination with the outcomes of interviews and participant observations, however, they form the core and will feature strongly in the remaining parts of this study.

The schematics depicted in Figure 23 indicate the underlying problem this study seeks to address, and which has already been brought to attention by Moesby, Wynter and Cachia above. Instances in which the artists effectively represent themselves remain largely in the shadows of more powerful, ascriptive media accounts, while the more an artist in the 'Outsider Art' field aspires to participate in the discourse, the less they will be heard. This paradoxical phenomenon seems to result from the mythical construct of 'high-cultural contamination': demonstrating knowledge of the field, displaying an interest in success, or going from private to public, the 'Outsider Artist' risks losing the very status which, as demonstrated, largely rests on the idea of uncorrupted innocence, authenticity and purity. As if not wanting to disturb the mystery of the carefully constructed Other and perhaps to protect the investments of beneficiaries in the field, chances are low that the artist's voice will be amplified in the media when they dare to express discontent, self-awareness or engage in behaviour otherwise posing a risk to the myth of the 'Outsider'. Effectively, knowing 'too much', expressing a longing for inclusion or any kind of emancipatory behaviours often automatically consigns the artist into oblivion. As will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, far from established art world circles, many former 'Outsider Artists' thus find themselves *outside* of 'Outsider Art', with self-empowering tendencies being stifled by the rules and regulations constituting the genre, ensuring the reproduction of its colonial demeanour.

It is the intention of this study to disrupt the hegemonial structures having so long informed the field by introducing a variety of counter-narratives and inviting artists to share their part of the story. I am convinced that once these usually hidden perspectives are brought to the fore, it will become obvious how one-sided many media representations depicted in this chapter really are, and presumably also were in the historical accounts preceding the status quo. The empirical data guiding the following chapters shall thus serve as a countermeasure to generalising, exoticising and simplifying depictions of the 'Outsider Artist', focusing instead on the heterogeneous character of the experiences, subjective meanings and hybrid identities of the individual behind the label. Acknowledging the artist as an active participant in

their socio-cultural context and attempting to provide a multifaceted account, I hope to contribute to a re-evaluation of 'Outsider Art', to illustrate its diversification and challenge, if not dismantle, the many myths which have constituted the genre and its precursors for more than a century.

6. Introducing the Individual Behind the 'Outsider'

When beginning to look for research participants, I was confronted with the most intrinsic question evoked by the genre: *Who* is an 'Outsider Artist' and *where* do I find them?

When considering the biographies of currently active 'Outsider Artists' in the UK, it becomes apparent that a significant number of individuals are affiliated with and represented by charities, whereas those regarded as established, 'professional' artists are more likely to having followed the path of mainstream art schooling. Nevertheless, there are many exceptions to this and other purist rules. To avoid being entangled in a narrowly defined understanding of 'Outsider Art' and risk a reinforcement of the myths I set out to deconstruct, reference to ascribed authenticity markers such as 'disability', 'madness' or being 'self-taught' have been refrained from in the selection process. Instead, the field of enquiry was left as open as possible, with the only guiding criteria being that the artists participating had to have some association with the field, either by being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' by others or by actively claiming this status for themselves. Consequently, this study's pool of data reflects a vast range of voices. It includes artists who may unintentionally diverge from the current art paradigm by having chosen a different frame of artistic reference to those who deliberately reject established standards. Relatively unknown artists with little or no contact to art dealers and galleries appear alongside those who have been featured in *Raw Vision*, sell at the Outsider Art Fair or are part of renowned collections. Further encompassed are artists who embrace the idea of being Other as well as those who have been 'discovered' and marked as such without their choosing, recognising their respective positions as continuously oscillating between 'normality' and 'deviance', inclusion and exclusion, 'insider' and 'outsider', depending on the time and context of their framing. Already confronted with the exposed variety of the field at this stage, one might be inclined to ask what *is* the essential feature connecting all these individuals with each other? And how is the image of the 'Outsider Artist' as a neatly mediated Other affected in consideration of this newly introduced set of data?

6.1 Crosschecking Mediated Myths

As the following chapters will demonstrate, the one aspect uniting all 'Outsider Artists' selected for this study, and perhaps also more generally, is their experience of marginalisation. The carefully modelled myths of the artists' essential Otherness which have accompanied my investigation of the discourse so far evaporate the moment empirical examples are introduced to the debate. Due to its deconstructive implications, such practice undoubtedly threatens the carefully modelled figure of the 'Outsider Artist' and is thus averted by purist advocates of the genre. It is the latter who frequently express the fear that 'Outsider Art' may become contaminated, worrying that its 'authenticity' might become corrupted if the art and artists labelled as such are treated equally to or granted the same sovereignty as 'normal' artists. That these genteel worries and proclamations of the 'Outsider' needing to be protected in their purity in many cases do not concern the well-being of the artist but are at best patronising instruments in disguise, has already been indicated previously. How the artists afflicted experience such practices, what strategies they develop to counteract or manage these forces and to what extent they perceive the ascriptions made as mythical or factual, will be of central concern from now on. To set the scene for what follows, I would like to revise the most common assumptions and mythic conceptions outlined in chapters 4 and 5 one last time, and re-evaluate these features and classification criteria now with regard to the additional information gathered from the empirical data collected in the field.

Myth #1: 'Outsider Art' as aesthetically different to 'normal' art

Perhaps one of the most frequently contested myths is the claim that the supposed psychological deviance of 'Outsider Artists' is reproduced aesthetically in their work. As shown in Chapter 4, the reduction of artworks to psychopathological testimonies has already been challenged in the early 20th century, and the clear-cut yet artificial boundaries between 'sane' and 'insane' art have further eroded throughout the course of the century. Landert consequently states that "any attempt to define the phenomenon based on stylistic considerations is evidently doomed", considering that "anything that exists in mainstream art also exists in Outsider Art" (2011, p. 38). Nevertheless, there are still authors like Rexer who cling to the notion that particular "stylistic approaches […] accompany extreme psychic states" (2005, p. 39), with key players such as Rebecca Hoffberger, director of the American Visionary Art Museum, claiming that, while she cannot define 'Outsider Art', she "know[s] it when [she] see[s] it" (BBC 'Turning the Art World Inside Out', 2013).

Historically and up to the present day, the umbrella term 'Outsider Art' has covered a wide range of artists who work across different media and styles, making use of an inexhaustible variety of techniques and materials. As I have argued, when confronted with an artwork alone and without the provision of any further contextual information, it is impossible to tell whether one is presented with 'Outsider' or 'professional' art. Even if Hoffberger and Rexer disagree, this also seems to be the underlying consensus shared among most key players today, perhaps explaining the

tendency of some to overemphasise and essentialise difference in the biography or believed mindset of an artist instead.

Even though 'Outsider Art' is not based on a commonly shared set of aesthetic criteria, nor can the artists be grouped together in any meaningful way concerning the subject matters addressed, there nevertheless still exists a rather selective 'Outsider Art' canon, or what Prinz has called the "outsider style" (2017, p. 262). Being shaped by the aesthetic interests of art world insiders, in publications about and major exhibitions of 'Outsider Art', the ever-same assortment of images is being reproduced, predominately featuring 'crude' expressive painting styles, repetitive detail, horror vacuii compositions and the use of found objects and unusual materials, which seem to sell particularly well. Thus, by often wilfully ignoring the rest of an artist's oeuvre, from Prinzhorn onwards many 'Outsiders' have been and are recognised by key players for one particular type of work only, which is then presented to the audience as a rigid part and parcel of a bigger story. This results in the effect that 'Outsider Art' may indeed appear as the aesthetic Other, with 'Outsider Artists' being misrepresented as compulsively producing the same thing over and over again in a timeless vacuum, apparently devoid of the ability to develop and at the mercy of their all-encompassing 'madness'.

However, when looking at this study's sample of nearly 2,000 'Outsider Artists', it becomes clear that there is a maximum variation not only among different artists subsumed under the label, but often also within each artist's individual body of work. Alec, an artist whose experiences will feature strongly in upcoming chapters, is one such example. His works range from rather traditional still lives and object studies, deliberately making art historical references, to more abstract yet intricate, doodle-inspired figurines. The same goes for Julie, who works across media including stone, clay, collage, drawing and painting, showcasing a level of technical skill in representational forms that has tricked viewers into believing her to be 'professionally trained'. Her subject matter ranges from anatomical studies to scribbles appearing more expressive in style and depicting "momentary emotional states" (Int. Julie, 2017, June 17). Dan's work, on the other hand, covers non-objective digital painting, printmaking, photography, minimal and conceptual art, is often concerned with political issues and lacking what one may call a signature style. Of course, there are also many artists like Beth, who choose to work in one medium or technique only, yet even in these cases changes and developments are very much apparent if one consults the whole range of their work and not just selective pieces. Numerous visual examples of this vast variety of artistic approaches in association with 'Outsider Art' can be found online, although access to an artist's all-encompassing archive is of course limited. For the purpose of this study, this short overview shall suffice as a demonstration of the manifold stylistic traits displayed and aesthetic choices made by artists subsumed under the label, indicating that any generalising criteria concerning 'Outsider' artworks are expressions of a selective insider canon rather than inherent features of the art composed by 'Outsider Artists'.

Myth #2: Uncontrollable expressive urges, socio-cultural disengagement and indifference

Another persistent presumption regarding 'Outsider Artists' is the myth that the individuals are obsessed and entirely engrossed in the process of making, not caring about the result and unfettered by conventions or socio-cultural influences in their practice. As Thévoz famously stated in alignment with Dubuffet, taking further the ideal of the autonomous, uninfluenced 'Outsider' as instigated by Prinzhorn: "they wish to take nothing from culture, and they wish to contribute nothing to it" (1990, p. 34). Such statements are comparatively easy to refute, considering that every human being is necessarily part of a particular world, in constant exchange and communication with their immediate environment and therefore never isolated or shielded from its influences. Accordingly, MacGregor declares the supposed "unchanging continuity" of 'Outsider Art' as "illusory" (1989, p. 45), with Maclagan likewise rejecting the idea that 'Outsider Art' is created "out of the blue" or "in some kind of cultural vacuum" (2009, p. 16). Authors such as Rhodes (2000) and Röske (2006) have further dissected the work of historical and currently active 'Outsider Artists', demonstrating in practical examples the manifold references artists make within their work and how much of their everyday life, language, popular culture, political or religious beliefs are incorporated into their art. This proves once again that the works of 'Outsider Artists' are not ahistorical, timeless, culturally detached or completely alien to the rest of the world, as sometimes proclaimed. If they were, they would be entirely unintelligible to the 'terrestrial' audience and "we would have virtually no means of entering into discussion of the work of these artists", as Thompson points out (1998, p. 12). Much to the contrary, 'Outsider Art' "pass[es] easily from one critical domain to another" according to Thompson, who further adds that there can be no "exterior to categories like 'history', 'culture', or 'society'" and likewise "no 'Outsiders' unless they are also entirely beyond our ken" (1998, p. 12).

Admittedly, it is a bit more difficult to challenge assumptions such as the obsessive urge, spontaneous expression and process-orientation ascribed, if one does not seek to converse with the artist directly. If one does so, however, they will be presented with a varying range of working practices and habits which do not entirely disprove the claim of obsession, but put it in relative perspective, perhaps rather exemplifying a creative and material "flow" which, after anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013), can be understood as characteristic for creative practices in general.

Many artists taking part in this study have indeed declared that they tend to become "obsessed" and get carried away, further stating that they work "without thinking about it" (Int. Alec, 2017, July 24), or draw "without knowing" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17) where it might take them. Just as many artists, however, were eager to explain that they plan every single step of the process meticulously beforehand (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15), "always knowing what to do next" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 4). Some artists are keen on the processual aspect of their work, others more focused on the result, but most seem to be engaged with and care greatly about both, making strict divisions between process- and result-orientation look superfluous. The same goes for their many inspirations to make art in the first place.

Rather than reacting mechanically to some mysterious kind of impulse, as often believed, many artists actively seek inspiration in their environment and perceive their work in dialogue with or as an effect of experiences they have had. Working alongside non-verbal artists classified as 'Outsiders' for an extended period of time, the diachronic rooting of their work as connected to the individual life story as well as the constant decision-making processes informing their practice also becomes apparent in these cases. Direct conversations with artists and closer observations of this kind therefore effectively counteract notions that the work of 'Outsider Artists' may be uncontrolled, thoughtless, or dissociated outpourings triggered by unknown impulses. If, or to what extent, their or any kind of art may nevertheless be understood as a "doorway to the world of unconscious imagery" (Maclagan, 2013, p. 26) is a metaphysical question impossible to solve. While I doubt that any attempt to divide the conscious from the subconscious will be successful or of great use, even if this overhauled dichotomy may be acknowledged for a minute, one struggles to meaningfully attest any pivotal exemplars to each entity. In this regard, statements such as the ones from collector George Melly, who proclaims that, when looking at 'Outsider Art' "you lower a bucket into the mind, pull it up and examine it" (*The Guardian*, 2000, October 29), should be read most critically and in hindsight of the warnings already issued by Derrida. Refuting the idea of the imagined possibility of having a clear window providing access to the inner, most private essence of a person, Derrida (1967) argues that, despite the general intangibility of the latter, any such window would be necessarily tainted and always filtered through the process of signification. On the same grounds, Maclagan rejects readings of 'Outsider Art' as transparent expressions of a "private language" (2009, p. 82), further declaring the concept of an "inner world" in utter isolation yet directly transposed onto the canvas, as being highly problematic (2009, p. 75). Rather than rooted in the actual working practices or artworks, ascriptions of an assumed private subconscious in direct visual translation may thus be safely relocated to the realms of sentimental readings and wishful thinking among certain viewers. Nevertheless, they supply a clever tool to reframe the notion of difference in such a way that it can neither be validated nor disproven.

Myth #3: Unintentionality, uncorruptedness and unawareness

Building on the idea of the disengaged, uninfluenced, and process-oriented 'Outsider Artist' as just depicted is the assumption that these artists are not only entirely self-absorbed but also lack interest in the art world, are indifferent to fame, recognition by audiences and selling their work. According to the prevailing discourse reproduced in the media and specialised literature about 'Outsider Art', they do not consider themselves artists, are unaware of art history and produce their work by accident, without knowing what they are doing. DiMaggio, for example, proclaims that for 'Outsider Artists' "the decision to begin making art comes as suddenly and arbitrarily as an act of God and is not to be shared with an audience" (2013, p. 24). On such grounds, 'Outsider Artists' are often declared uncorrupted, free of unmoral cravings and considered the purest artists of all. Yet as Kallir points out, it is of course "no more possible to determine whether an artist has a 'sacred heart' than it is to x-ray

his or her soul" (2012, p. 26), shifting the ascribed intrinsic purity just as the above-mentioned idea of subconscious expression into the unverifiable, metaphysical realm.

As an infantilising and patronising allegation, the attestation of unintentionality is nevertheless easily contestable if empirical examples are taken into consideration. Neither during my research nor beyond it have I ever come across a human being who has 'accidently' produced an artwork, or for that matter, anything else. Following Disability Studies theorist and researcher Colin Griffiths, who has shown in his study concerning communicative interactions of people with severe disabilities that any "action requires an intention to act" (2010, p. 176), some artists may indeed not intent to make art; however, they always intent to *make*. Thus, any kind of creative activity, be it artistic or not, reflects agency. To deny or talk down an artists' ability to act intentionally or be conscious about their creative expression based on their supposed insanity, disability or Otherness dehumanises the individual to such an extent that some key players may indeed feel justified to speak *for* the artist or—worse—have no moral concerns about exploiting them.

Unsurprisingly, the assumed unawareness and innocent naiveté of 'Outsider Artists' does not resist closer examination either. All artists with whom I have worked, verbally or non-verbally express that they do not only know that they have *created* something and know that these works evoke reactions in others. They appreciate social interaction and recognition for their agency—a circumstance perhaps true on a universal level for any human being if following philosophers Charles Taylor (1993) and Axel Honneth (2000). The latter have described the desire for personal recognition as a basic human need, which may further define an individual's identity and build the groundworks of society. While some artists are indeed satisfied with being valued by their immediate social circle, there are also many who actively seek recognition as artists and openly voice an intention to sell and interest in exhibiting their work. An obvious example proving the latter is artist Andrew Omoding, featured in the previous chapter. A business-like attire is further demonstrated by prominent 'Outsiders' like Howard Finster and confirmed also by most of the artists participating in this study. While some, like Lilly, are attached to their work and struggle with giving it away, others like Alec "don't mind" selling it "to someone who enjoys the work and likes it" (Int., 2017, July 24). Chloe even reacted with dismay to my question concerning marketing and sales, stating with consternation: "Yes, OF COURSE I want to make money when I show my art!" (Int., 2017, July 13).

Thus, 'Outsider Artists' once again do not differ in these or other regards in any considerable way from other, 'normal' artists. As will be discussed subsequently, not even the oft-proclaimed distinction of the 'Outsider Artist' being 'self-taught' sets the artists under this label apart from those having been 'trained', prompting a reflection of the inevitable question: is it possible to learn art at all, and does the artist's ascribed isolation, mental illness or disability makes a difference in doing so?

Myth #4: The 'Outsider Artist' as inherently different in socio-psychological terms

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, pathological readings of 'Outsider' artworks are still frequently repeated in the media—although disregarded as inadequate by most key players. While many, following Prinzhorn, proclaim that in the artwork as such one cannot find materialised traces of an artist's 'madness' or any other kind of visual proof of an artist's assumed pathological psyche, entities such as 'mental illness' or 'disability' still remain largely uncontested as such. For most curators, it still seems feasible to group artworks of individuals with a disability together, as if they shared some sort of essential core testifying their 'inherent' difference. Thus, the stigma of disability can often act as a passport granting individuals access to the world of 'Outsider Art', while at the same time condemning these artists to the status of being the eternal biological and psychological Other. This seems to result from the underlying and still prominent medical definition of disability which has been majorly criticised by the disability rights movement from the 1970s onwards. Following the British model of disability and attempting to redefine the latter as a social and political category, artist and activist Simi Linton (2006) states that what unites the individual behind this category is not the presence of a particular impairment as such, but the social exclusion and marginalisation experienced because of it. The same is true for the label 'mental illness', which I have briefly examined in its social constructedness in Chapter 4 and which can be transposed to the label 'Outsider Art' in a similar manner.

Many artists with whom I have worked do not perceive themselves as outsiders, disabled or ill, instead maintaining that they are—to make use of the by now rather trite phrase, disabled by society. In turn, what is considered deviant, disabled or ill, changes with time and context and the individuals declared as such similarly develop, explaining intersecting experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Rather than static entities, as often portrayed, it seems plausible to conclude that neither the term 'disability' nor the person 'with' a disability is equipped with any essential core proving their eternal 'Otherness'. Likewise, the 'Outsider Artist' lacks any naturally determined feature or distinct quality that would render their classification as such feasible. It is a matter of perspective and choice whether one wants to focus on the familiar or strange in any given context of interaction. However, tainted by commonly shared stereotypes surrounding 'the disabled', 'the mentally ill' and the 'Outsider Artist', in everyday language and in the media the audience might indeed be inclined to overstate the peculiar. A shift in perspective is nevertheless possible, holding—as I am willing to demonstrate—the prospect of reconnecting with the artist behind such labelling, perhaps eventually rendering the term 'Outsider Art' obsolete, even for those who thus far insist on the existence of its supposedly pure essence.

Common Denominators Among 'Outsider Artists' and Reasons for Artmaking

That 'Outsider Art' is, in effect, undefinable as a genre and built on assumptions that are fairly easy to deconstruct has, of course, already been acknowledged by other authors in the field (e.g. Landert, 2011; Wexler & Derby, 2015; Zolberg, 2010). As seen in the historical review, even purists such as Dubuffet eventually had to admit that

proclaiming 'Art Brut' artists would live in an entirely different universe may perhaps be a little far-fetched. Nevertheless, one has to remain careful not to dismiss the phenomenon of 'Outsider Art' as an entirely theoretical fabrication. It *is* a social construct, yet one that makes its consequences felt by the individual and crucially impacts their self-understanding as artists. With this in mind, I would like to return to the initial question of this chapter: confronted with the assortment of fragmented and dislocated pieces of those former myths constructing the image of the 'Outsider Artist', is there anything to be found that connects these artists with each other? A common denominator justifying their association? Acknowledging the heterogeneity just demonstrated, I would like to argue that there is indeed.

As I have attempted to show, it is impossible to group 'Outsider Artists' stylistically, based on biography, or to tell them apart from 'professional' artists in terms of influences, working processes or intentionality. However, all artists participating in this study share the experience of having been marginalised or excluded from certain art world contexts due to a particular set of features that render them different to established norms in the arts or society at large. This exemplifies the relational quality of the term 'Outsider Art', which, according to art historian Lisa Stone, can interchangeably refer to

> an artist's relationship to dominant art culture (outside western culture's art mechanism); mental orientation (out of his/her mind); social and economic status (outside of conditions of empowerment); education (outside of art school); and physical condition (outside of perfect health). (Stone, 1994, p. 31)

For many artists participating in this study, two or more of these and other non-normative features—such as immigration background, sexual orientation or belonging to an ethnic minority—intersect, having instigated experiences of discrimination and confrontation with a multiplicity of barriers often long before an individual has commenced artmaking. Dan, for example, recalls his teenage years growing up in a council estate having had "a sense of being different" and "alienated from other kids" due to the immigration background of his parents, his way of "countercultural" dressing as well as frequent hospital stays (Int., 2017, July 4). Chloe likewise recollects intersecting experiences of exclusion during her childhood, describing herself as a "weird child" and "stereotypical outsider" whose sibling got all the credit for being "the arty one" while she herself was discouraged in her creative endeavours (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13). With her parents relocating and moving house frequently until eventually "they sectioned me and left the country", Chloe was left on her own at an early age and found refuge in an alternative community, where she started her artistic practice (Int., 2017, July 13).

These early and/or other ongoing experiences of marginalisation, which are shared in their multitudinous externalisations by the majority of artists participating in this study, have reportedly provoked in some an inclination towards artmaking as a coping mechanism, often described as "therapeutic". Alec states: "I was definitely very much isolated as a child, so I really withdrew into art. Art was a way of expressing myself and escaping in a lot of ways. Even more so now, I draw because I find it very therapeutic" (Int., 2017, July 24). Further reasons for artmaking may also include spiritual ones,

with Ryan stating that "I believe that if I don't try hard [to create] then God will punish me" (Int., 2017, July 2) and Jane declaring that she only does what she is "supposed" to do, painting a visual translation of messages she receives from spiritual forces (Int., 2017, June 26). Other artists simply express that the activity as such is enjoyable, that it "gives you something to do" (Int. Will, 2016, August 12) and that they value the freedom it provides, especially in light of other hardships and obstacles they may face in everyday life.

The key issue in all these cases is that most of the artists classified as 'Outsiders' seem to have initially developed their practice according to their own needs and not in obvious response to the requirements of the art world or market. However, they have not done so in a vacuum, and with art education being compulsory for every child in the UK, have been influenced by the regulatory practices of normative art institutions as well as the art historical canon.

In fact, it is often school—and art lessons in particular—that may enforce rather than alleviate a lingering feeling of being 'different'. Considering that art education represents and indoctrinates the dominant art paradigm via its curriculum, teaching and assessment methods, it demarcates and introduces students to what is 'good' and 'bad' art, consequently determining also who and what is to become 'insider' or 'outsider'. In tracing the individual artists' journeys, it therefore seems not only feasible but necessary to depart from their experiences in art education. Based on these, their facing and overcoming barriers as well as developed strategies to deal with inclusion/exclusion in the 'Outsider' and art world at large will then be discussed in a subsequent step.

6.2 Mainstream Art Education and the Re-Creation of the 'Outsider'

The reproduction of 'Outsider Art' by renowned professionals investigated in the historical overview and the representational practices in the media analysed in the last chapter demonstrate that the making of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' is a collective exercise. As Becker (1982) points out, any art world consists of a network of actors who reach a consensus of what is to be considered art and thereby set a framework of conventions and norms. These define the field and result in a shared sense of value, allowing for a measure to legitimate some works and artists while disregarding others. Sociologist András Szántó, who defines legitimacy as "the art world's principal measure of respect" (1997, p. 110), has illustrated how its underlying rules are mediated via certain institutions and has singled out the educational system to be the "supreme arbiter" in the field of the visual arts (1997, p. 111). Yet, considering the co-existence of a multiplicity of art worlds and their hierarchies within, *whose* story and *which* consensus is being taught depends on the overall positioning of a particular art world in the grander field of the arts as well as its respective symbolic capital, making it indeed feasible to speak of an "established" art world, as sociologist Henry Finney suggests (1997, p. 73). By contrast, due to the niche character of 'Outsider Art' in the predominant hierarchy set by the academic Western arts canon, as well as due to the supposedly defining features thought incompatible with art education, the represen-

tatives of the genre do not feature in and are frequently excluded from the latter. This chapter aims to demonstrate that 'Outsider Artists' are thereby not merely absent or overshadowed by the Western canon or teaching practices following the standards and frameworks of the established art world. Rather are they created in response to and are a necessary by-product of the latter's limited scope in distinguishing 'good' from 'bad' art and 'strong' from 'weak' students. It is the experiences of those 'failing' art education that make visible that the well-versed potential of art to challenge established meanings is recurrently neglected, that diversity—even if celebrated—is largely left unacknowledged, and that inclusivity is often reduced to the notion of integration as a result.

Public mainstream art education in the UK principally follows a normative paradigm in which adaption and conformity is rewarded. While primary and secondary schools mostly assess and measure artworks against technical perfection and flexibility in working with materials, the focus of further and higher art education lies on the conceptual, verbal framing of one's work and the conscious invention of oneself as an artist persona. Especially in the latter stages and at university, current art world fashions feature strongly and are resembled by the institutional setting, socialising emerging artists into the pre-existing yet ever-changing frameworks of the art world. The rather clear-cut formulae taught, the overt focus on sophisticated concepts and marketing strategies as well as the narrow definitory realms of what is to be considered 'good art' necessarily exclude many.

Those, who struggle to conform or refuse to adhere to the expected standards and who may communicate or create differently consequently tend to be submerged in the avalanche of normative art education. Since their reality and approach to creating often does not feature under the heading 'art' nor in the art historical canon and its aligned hegemonic paradigms, they find their voice neglected and tend to face an assortment of barriers as a result. These individuals do, however, often blossom in informal educational settings with a person- rather than outcome-centred approach, as well as in arts charities or SEN[1] schools. Be that as it may, when seeking recognition as artists, new barriers arise also with respect to these institutions, which are often scorned by art world professionals who denigrate the artworks produced in such settings to 'non-art' or, at best, 'Outsider Art'.

The present section will focus on identifying and investigating some of these barriers in detail, elaborate on their intersecting character and illustrate how different

1 In the UK, the term 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN) is applied to an individual if they "ha[ve] a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him" (Education Act 1996/312). It is mostly ascribed to those students who need additional support during class to achieve their targets and whose 'disability' is seen as restricting or preventing them from accessing general educational facilities and curricula. It is important to keep in mind that the abbreviation SEN is not used to tag a clearly defined group of people. Concluding from the Education Act, no child has SEN per se, but only in contrast to others, indicating the normative character of the educational system and predominant focus on integration rather than inclusion. Apart from direct comparisons to a pre-set norm in the classroom setting, it also depends on political regulations who is understood as having SEN or a disability in a particular time and context, as Davis (2006) indicates.

educational routes can influence experiences of inclusion and exclusion when seeking recognition in the established art world. Furthermore, the often complimentarily paired labels 'self-taught' and 'trained' will be discussed, and exemplary artist experiences from different educational settings introduced to illustrate assorted journeys through primary/secondary and special schools, SEN and arts colleges, as well as art university.

Standardisation and Normative Art Paradigms in Primary and Secondary Schools

Despite ongoing debates about abolishing art education from schools under the Conservative government and the decline in students choosing to pursue arts subjects for their GCSEs[2], music, art and design are still part of the national curriculum and compulsory for children aged 5 to 14 (Key Stage 1–3) in the UK. Since most artists participating in this study had not developed a distinctive way of working or sharpened focus on the arts at this age, the recollected experiences of art education in primary and secondary school are diverse. Of the small sample provided, a tendency can however be made out of those who grew up in an encouraging environment and were 'pre-trained' by artistically inclined family members to consequently also do well in early art education. Those artists who have received little or no encouragement, on the other hand, tend to have struggled more to succeed in art class. Overall, experiences in early art education show a maximum of variation among this study's participants. They range from artists like Ryan, who recalls being the best in art class (Int., 2017, July 2) and Rob who reportedly won art prizes and competitions "without even trying" (Int., 2017, July 2) to others like Lilly, who felt rushed to produce and unfairly treated, could not obtain the targeted standard and failed her GCSE in art as a result (Int., 2017, July 17). To understand what causes this variation and what impact early art education can have on maturing artists and those who will later be classified as 'Outsiders', it will be necessary to take a closer look at the underlying philosophy of the currently ruling art educational paradigm and its associated assessment criteria.

Considering the artistic engagement of both (now and then), the reasons Lilly failed and Rob succeeded cannot be understood as a result of Lilly being somewhat less creative. It may rather be accounted to Rob's adapting to provide for the required standards of art education, thus also being classed 'talented' by the latter. Lilly on the other hand, wanted to draw "what [she] had in mind", yet recalling that "there was zero time" allocated in arts class to do so. Describing her art tutor's teaching style as dominant, inscriptive and unpersonal, Lilly was aware that "talent was a clear marked thing" and that her approach would hardly ever qualify to meet the requirements (Int., 2018, February 10).

2 GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education (Key Stage 4). Due to the increasing emphasis on core subjects (literature, math, language, science, geography/history), the number of pupils taking GCSEs in art has fallen to its lowest for a decade according to statistics provided by the Education Policy Institute (2017), with funding for creative subjects likewise constantly decreasing as a recent BBC survey (2018, January 30) has shown.

In British secondary schools the measurements teachers apply to assess a students' artistic output follow rigid criteria and, as the Art and Design Review Group of the University of London has pointed out, are often "based on tests requiring capacities of recall and technical ability" with a "tendency towards increased prescription" (2005, p. 4f). This coincides not only with the recollections of many artists I have spoken to but also with my own experience of working in the British educational system as a teaching assistant in several schools. The artworks produced by pupils attending the latter were measured according to achieved technical perfection, quantity of work created, how well a set task was followed, a provided image copied or a technique applied. Furthermore, great importance tends to be placed on evaluating how thoroughly the process of making has been reflected in words, and related to canonical artists students have been taught about so far. The development of personal inclinations and interests did not matter much, nor individual creative expression, experimentation or imagination—if anything, these tendencies were often stifled or at times even actively discouraged.

Considering the predominance of a formal assessment system which values the personal engagement and diverse voices of students little in comparison to their expected following of predefined tasks and approaches to creating, teachers may or may not believe in the relevancy of the art paradigm they are instructed to teach, but in any case have very limited scope to alter it. Since the work produced by their students and art exams such as the GCSE are internally assessed but externally set and moderated by independent examination boards who do not personally know any of the students, art teachers are under constant pressure to deliver teaching that produces a standardised set of results. They are further subjected to regular inspections by Ofsted[3], increasing the pressure to conform to rather than innovate set standards and narrowing their already limited scope of options.[4]

A range of problems result from this system, which presses the arts into a normative corset and tries to quantitatively evaluate its outcomes as if they were mathematical equations. Educational researchers such as Ken Robinson (2017), Alice Wexler

3 Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, inspects and rates schools according to how well they perform and conform to nationally set standards, in turn leading to more funding for 'good' and 'outstanding' schools. Apart from its positive intensions (e.g. prevent discrimination, improve standards, ensure all learners receive excellent education), many, including educational charity Civitas, have criticised Ofsted for being flawed, punitive and dysfunctional (de Waal, 2006). According to a statement by the National Union of Teachers, "Ofsted has contributed to a culture of compliance under which schools and teachers prepare for evaluation out of fear rather than commitment and enthusiasm" (National Union of Teachers, 2009/7). For most art teachers I have met in the UK, these inspections do indeed cause emotional distress and reduce their interest in experimenting with novel teaching methods. Recent cuts in funding and the insecure future existence of art departments in British schools will perhaps even further exacerbate the pressures involved for teachers and students.

4 These pressures can yield absurd practical consequences. Near the end of term and close to external examination, I, as a teaching assistant was once instructed by an art teacher to paint and complete unfinished work in the sketchbooks of several 'weak' students. Being reluctant to start a task I considered profoundly unethical, the head of the art department indifferently remarked: "Don't make it look too perfect, otherwise they'll find out" (Field Notes Main Edu, 2016, June).

(2015) and Dennis Atkinson (2017) have critically discussed these issues, advocating for policy changes and indicating the potential of a reformed educational practice fostering rather than stifling creative thinking. Atkinson's critical evaluation of assessment criteria in arts GCSEs is noteworthy in this respect, as he points to the problematic discrepancies between students' immanent "drawing-meaning relation" (1998, p. 41), which often rather significantly diverges from the teacher's agenda following traditional and "established frameworks of doing and thinking" (Atkinson, 2017, p. 142).

While an in-depth analysis of these debates lies beyond the scope and intention of this study, I would nevertheless like to focus on one particular consequence of the issues raised by Atkinson: how the promulgation of a normative understanding of the arts in mainstream art education may produce class-internal segregation among students and consequently be exclusive rather than inclusive.

No matter how an individual student reacts to the standards they are confronted with in art class (i.e. trying to adapt to them and succeeding/failing, rejecting or being indifferent about them), at one point or another every student will have felt whether their own creating is deemed correct or not good enough under the prevailing system. At the very latest, when they receive their end-of-year certificates students will have learned what is considered 'good' and 'bad' art, that there is little time and tolerance for playful experiments and that making mistakes[5] needs to be avoided to obtain a reasonable grade. As art theorist and educator Andreas Brenne (2017) points out, due to their being openly structured, the arts hold the capacity to surpass the limitations of language and standardisation, in theory granting children agency which may not be possible in other subjects so easily. Yet a consideration of creative subjects as a 'safe space' for vulnerable or marginalised individuals remains largely inadequate in the British case, in which adaption to pre-existing conditions is rewarded and unusual approaches often neglected in a similar manner to other subjects with a more overt economic orientation. Consequently, critics like Robinson (2006), Atkinson (2017) and John Newbigin (n.d.)—Chairman of Creative England—have called for urgent reforms in art education, which in its current state wastes its potential to foster creative, inclusive and out-of-the-box thinking. An even more pressing concern and of particular relevance to this study are the practical implications of such homogenising art educational practices in the classroom and for students: they create 'Outsiders' by default.

As indicated above, the public and mainstream educational environments in which I have worked, as well as the experiences recollected by artists participating in this study, suggest that in schools there is often a divide between 'good' students and those, who are unable or unwilling to adapt to pre-set artistic and aesthetic standards. I would like to illustrate the implicit mechanisms of these normative educational practices as well as their consequences for the individual student by referring to a scenario I was involved in as a teaching assistant in a secondary school, and which emotionally rather moved me.

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5 Such 'mistakes' can, for instance, include leaving accidental marks in the sketchbook, painting off-topic, questioning the assignment or using techniques or materials in other (i.e. 'wrong') ways than they have been taught.

> It is Tuesday morning. As every other week, I am allocated to Anna [the art teacher] to help out as a teaching assistant in her class. I rush to get all the art materials ready for the students to arrive, while Anna provides me with the usual short intro of this weeks' task. Today, we are drawing natural objects—pinecones, leaves and an array of dried plants and fruit which she has brought in as model templates. While Anna gets her power point presentation ready with examples of 'properly' drawn versions of today's' task (an assortment taken from previous A-class students), I start rearranging the tables into different conglomerates as I am instructed to do in preparation of each class. This week's group will consist of 17 students, aged 13–14, and Anna informs me about her updated seating plan. The four tables near the wall and doors are reserved for the 'well-behaved' students, who normally quietly get on with the task, have neatly and well-kept sketchbooks and are graded best in class. The two tables adjacent to the teacher's desk, are reserved for those students who are already known to 'misbehave' or disrupt the lesson, are messing with materials, frequently plotting new ideas and playing tricks on their peers or staff rather than following the lesson. The third conglomerate of tables is placed right behind, near the window, close to the art materials and is reserved for children with SEN and their respective teaching assistants. It is this table, at which Stephen, the other teaching assistant and I, normally sit and work with our allocated students. Stephen, a man in his late fifties, is rather outgoing and talkative but at the same time astonishingly calm. Most of the time he works with Ben or rather, for him. They sit opposite of myself and Luke, a bubbly and easily distractible 13-year-old, who loves telling stories about football while drawing, often jokingly arguing with Stephen about their respective favourite teams. Ben, although he does not speak, seems to enjoy these lively conversations, often smiling yet avoiding eye-contact. Whenever Anna has finished her introduction to a particular task and demonstrated its possible execution in the beginning of the class, Stephen—in an almost automatic response—opens Ben's sketchbook in front of himself, looks at a blank or unfinished page, shortly revises the instructions of Anna and gets going with the task. I am still outraged by what has been going on for nearly 5 months now: While Stephen paints, Ben, the student, sits quietly to his left, watching his teaching assistant's brush as it moves on the paper. More often than not, however, Ben remains entirely disengaged, nodding off or chewing on his jumper. I keep wondering why Stephen does not address Ben or involve him in the process somehow. Why does he feel the need to paint for him? Admittedly, I do not know Ben very well—maybe he has no interest in the arts at all? During the many sessions assisting in this class, hardly ever have I seen Ben holding a pen or brush or working in his sketchbook. It appeared as if Stephen had fully taken over in quiet agreement with the art teacher, who, when I asked her about this situation again today, only sighed and looked at me with a concerned expression on her face. (Field Notes Main Edu, 2016, February)

This example not only contains in a nutshell the already mentioned issue of division, control and exclusion which is here manifested in a particular seating arrangement in the classroom. It also indicates the adherence to normative regimentations (i.e. showing 'well-done' examples of the task beforehand) and pressures art teachers face,

further illustrating their negative consequences on individual students who are included on paper, but excluded in practice. In such a system, teaching assistants seem to fully live up to their name: they do not assist learning, they assist teaching; and in doing so unintentionally inflict rather than alleviate pressures on students who already struggle to conform to the normative arts. This is not to say that such a system cannot be hijacked. The effectiveness of an inclusive approach can very well be tested by temporarily neglecting one's duties as a teaching assistant and leaving aside set instructions, imposed targets and lesson plans. The consequences of diverting from these frameworks can, however, be drastic for staff and students.

> It is Tuesday again. I enter the classroom and start preparing the usual setup. As the crowd of students starts flowing in, Anna takes me aside to tell me Stephen has called in sick today. She looks worried, apologises twice, and asks me to work with both Ben and Luke on this one occasion. […] Anna's introduction is kept brief today, since most students are continuing with the task set in the previous week—geometrical abstractions of more detailed imagery and the illustration of lights and shadows in three-dimensional objects. Luke obviously appreciates me sitting at the opposite side of the table today, and the freedom gained by not being constantly stared at while painting—a negative side effect necessarily occurring in any such 1:1 constellation. Ben, on the other hand, seems rather startled as I open his sketchbook and place it right in front of him. A few, long seconds pass. He appears to be confused, but as I offer him a set of pencils, he picks one and following a short hesitation and nodding approval of mine, starts drawing. As he draws, in apparent disregard to the image template provided by Anna, he suddenly starts speaking, in a long and uninterrupted stream, his voice trembling with excitement. I am struck and moved. I had no idea Ben could speak! I notice that the otherwise rather high noise levels in the classroom have softened, some of the students stare in our direction, Luke is peering over to see what Ben is drawing. Anna observes. Soon, everything, including the noise level, is back to normal, yet Ben keeps drawing and telling me his story as vigorously as in the beginning. He keeps doing so for the entire course of the remaining lesson. […] At the end of the lesson, as all the students including Ben and Luke rush out of the room, Anna approaches me. I show her with excitement what Ben had been drawing—a number of figures in shaky lines and what appeared to be their respective shadows. The shadows were however detached and placed in distance to the figures, as if not cast by them but existing in their own right. Anna looks at them swiftly and then makes clear that the drawing will not be assessed and removed from Ben's remaining 'oeuvre'—which is rather Stephen's. (Field Notes Main Edu, 2016, June)

As this example shows, it is possible to temporarily interrupt the normative workings of art education; however, the scope of acting remains limited and the system at large perhaps rather unaffected by said exceptions. Although such unauthorised intervention may reveal the creative potential of individual students, these practices are clearly unwelcome, do not fit into the system and are therefore largely suppressed. Had I not been on a temporary placement, I may have risked my job by this act of 'withholding' assistance, preventing Ben from making progress as understood by the 'inclusive' curriculum. By that time, I already knew Anna well and she had often told me in private

about her own struggles as an art teacher under these censorious conditions. Yet even if the hands of teaching staff may be tied, it is of course the students to whom these pressures are ultimately handed down.

Even in those cases where art education is positively recollected by artists such as Ryan and Rob, who will later *refuse* to adhere to established art standards and consciously align themselves with the 'Outsider Art' world, this system undoubtedly leaves its mark. Yet it may have had an even greater impact on students like Ben and Lilly, who—even if attempting to—had major difficulties *adapting* to these standards and were therefore condemned to 'fail'.

Person-Centred Approaches in Special and Mainstream Colleges

After secondary school, there are generally two options for artistically inclined individuals: either enrolling in college or choosing a non-educational route. Of those young people classed as having special educational needs who may have been 'included' yet thus far struggled to meet the requirements of public mainstream education, like Ben, both options may come with a set of barriers or even entirely move out of reach at this point. Further funding cuts have lowered the chances of students with SEN to secure a place in special or mainstream schools and colleges, with many being forced out of the educational system altogether (Spielman, 2018). The dire state of the UK's educational system regarding inclusivity prompted the UN in 2017 to issue a report warning that the country is failing to uphold the rights of people with disabilities. According to the report, the education system in its present state "is not equipped to respond to the requirements for high-quality inclusive education" and segregation of children with SEN is on the rise (United Nations, 2017, Article 24). Currently, students with SEN are at best integrated into mainstream educational settings and expected to "fit in with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7), thus not meeting the requirements of inclusion as called for by UNESCO. In contrast to integration, inclusion takes into consideration that every learner has different needs and that it is the responsibility of the school to provide teaching and support to meet these individual needs by "overcoming barriers to quality educational access, participation, learning processes and outcomes, and to ensure that all learners are valued and engaged equally" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 10). This coincides with Atkinson's demand to shift the perspective on the "immanence of learning" (2017, p. 143). With disregard to the neoliberal and economically oriented curriculum and prescription in art teaching, such an approach would be learner-centred and lay its focus on participation as well as on the exploration of "how something emerges and matters" (Atkinson, 2017, p. 142) and what artmaking signifies for a particular student in the "event of becoming" (Atkinson, 2017, p. 146). With many schools being unequipped to fulfil such demands even partially (as they are already struggling to implement inclusive policies on a more general scale) the responsibilities of local authorities often seem to be passed down to charitable institutions—a manifold of which are associated with the 'Outsider Art' field.

At this point it seems worth emphasising that those who did have the opportunity to attend special needs colleges, have been in a special school all along or are

part of an arts programme provided by a charity focusing on individuals with SEN, generally describe their experience much more positively than those who have been attending 'inclusive' mainstream schools. Considering the rigid assessment criteria in public education and the often poor implementation of inclusive teaching practices, this does perhaps not come as much of a surprise. Special schools and colleges, as well as disability arts charities follow a different approach—not only are they much more person-centred rather than product (i.e. outcome)-oriented, they usually also provide a caring rather than competitive environment. That individuals with disabilities often seem to be implicitly understood as being of little or no 'value' in neoliberal economies and meritocracies in this instance appears to have a paradoxically positive effect on their well-being. After all, special educational environments are largely free from the pressures that affect mainstream schools. Instead of focusing on quantitatively measurable results and grades, here, achievements tend to be evaluated qualitatively in terms of personal development, independence, communication skills and uplift in self-confidence. Furthermore, the omnipresence of stigmatisation when 'included' in mainstream schools is largely absent within special schools, as indicated by Emily, a student with SEN. Emily had already attended special college for several years when she approached my colleague one day and asked: "Someone just told me I am disabled. What does this mean?" (Field Notes SEN Edu, 2015, April).

When I undertook research in the mainstream secondary school mentioned above, such relative unawareness of being what is still commonly perceived as the socially classed Other did not exist. In fact, most children with SEN with whom I had worked in art class were well aware of their 'difference' and constantly reminded of it, perhaps going some way in explaining why so many were withdrawn or, at times, even anxious. Eric, for example, a student I was often assigned to, was rather quiet and not inclined to ask many questions, and was mostly alone during breaktime, keeping his gaze lowered. While he seldomly encountered open discrimination by classmates, he was often ignored and treated by many of his peers as if he did not exist. The reactions he got from teaching staff were comparably discouraging: his, as well as the creations by most children with SEN, never seemed to have quite met the standards and targets set, thereby understandably leaving Eric and others insecure and frightened of not being good enough in comparison to their classmates. Eric's positioning as Other was further stressed by the constant presence of a teaching assistant, which appears to be an obvious obstacle for many children to engage with others and build friendships.

By contrast, when I was doing research in the art department of a special college as well as in arts charities for children and adults with SEN, almost everyone had 1:1 support during lesson time, rendering this circumstance as nothing out of the ordinary. Furthermore, whatever had been created was appreciated, and artistic expression not only encouraged but evaluated with respect to the personal development of each individual student rather than measured against an average norm. That students were not continuously identified as being 'different' and consequently 'not good enough' had a noticeable effect. There was a lot more eye contact, verbal and non-verbal exchange between staff and students but also among peers. The students or programme participants in most cases seemed to be much more at ease, smiling or otherwise expressing their enthusiasm for working on a particular project, with

many being proud of their artistic achievements and eager to show them to others. Such motivation had been largely absent in those children with SEN and other pupils who produced 'non-normative' artworks with whom I had worked in mainstream education. In the latter environment, students learned very quickly that certain creative works have the 'merit' to be shown while others are best to be hidden away or, in the worst case, not produced at all in order not to attract negative attention. This coincides with Wexler and Derby's observation that mainstream public schools not only tend to disenfranchise children with SEN by overtly labelling them as 'different', but that, due to restrictive standards and the formalist preferences of art teachers, their art is also often seen as "talentless" and rarely encouraged (2015, p. 138). Thus, the individual reality of these children is denied and neglected in such contexts, enforcing the invisible status of artists with disabilities, whose art also seldomly features in the traditional canon of Western art history as taught in schools. Adherence to the latter may further convey to children with SEN that their experience is undesired in the arts, has no place in and value for society and may thus, per se, lower their motivation to seek recognition for their art or become artists. Stretching from primary/secondary to university education, the current system also withholds positive role models that children with SEN may identify with, leaving Moesby, a curator with a disability, to conclude that "we are written out of the canon of art history time and time again" (2017, November 9).

It is worth pointing out that the effects of a target-oriented vs. person-centred education I have thus far described are schematic sketches, deriving from my own staff and student experiences in different educational environments over five years, as well as many conversations I had with art educators, supporting staff, students and artists associated with other educational institutions. Based upon these, one must however be cautious not to jump to generalising conclusions. For instance, despite the person-centred orientation and appreciation of artistic diversity in special schools, patronising behaviour and the making of normative judgements may at times also be encountered here. The reverse is true for mainstream schools: there are of course many more schools that do not feature in my survey, with teachers who may have very well developed and implemented all-encompassing and inclusive practices in their classroom and do value non-normative approaches to creating.[6] Considering the restrictive structure of the current educational system in the UK and its regulatory instruments of control, however, it can be assumed that such countereffforts may have a rather short life cycle and are at best a drop in the ocean. Interestingly, a particular strand of arts education in mainstream colleges, namely BTEC, is perceived by many to provide an exception to this rule.

6 Note that this study only takes into consideration publicly funded schools and colleges. Alternative education, such as Waldorf or Montessori schools—which perhaps run closer to an envisioned inclusive arts education—do not feature in this study. This is due to the fact that none of the artists participating had a background in alternative schooling, and over the course of 10 years have I not come across any 'Outsider Artist' who did. Why that is might be of interest for future research, but will not be discussed further in this study.

The majority of artists participating in this study, who—with or without SEN—pursued art in mainstream college after finishing secondary school, experienced a peculiar revalidation of their individual approach to creating, chosen style or preferred aesthetic, which may have been disregarded beforehand. This revalidation may be accounted to a split of the art educational path into BTEC and A-Levels, introduced in the UK at college level (Key Stage 5).[7] Generally speaking, the A-Level course in art, which leads to an academic qualification, continues the traditional approach, is assessed via exams and appears to be a rather seamless transition from secondary art education. BTEC, on the other hand, is a vocational qualification, much more experimentally oriented and largely coursework based.

Many of those later classed as 'Outsider Artists' who have taken either of these courses, positively recollect their experiences at college and praise the opportunity they had to learn about new materials and techniques and the access to facilities. However, whereas A-Level courses in art are often perceived as being too prescriptive or traditional, the structure of BTEC courses tends to be celebrated. This is not only because they provide the opportunity to "learn bits of everything" (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3) and leave students "pretty much [to their] own devices" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1) but also because, as Lilly acknowledges, it is "not just down to your performance on a particular day" (Int., 2017, July 17) due to its coursework-based assessment. Although Andy interjects that he finds "the whole idea of marking a piece of art ridiculous" (Int., 2017, July 3), the BTEC system still seems to work particularly well for individuals who struggle with the performance-based educational system yet have a clear vision they want to follow. Within the constraints of public educational institutions, these courses seem to provide a little bit more freedom, allowing students who may face different sorts of barriers an alternative space to work in which their engagement is encouraged.

In my experience at this level, and especially during the foundation year, art teachers often appreciate if the personal drive and enthusiasm for making art in individuals who had to 'undergo' secondary art education has survived, hence interfering comparatively little with those who express clear intentions on what to make, no matter how much it may or may not adhere to norms or current fashions in the arts. Most teachers are aware that, at this stage, the irony and paradoxical consequences of a restrictive art education often come to the fore to their fullest: suddenly, students are expected to develop an individual creative language—a requirement that young children may have perhaps been prepared to fulfil, but which has often been systematically restrained in the course of secondary art education, echoing Robinson's famous remark that in the process of being educated, "we don't grow into creativity; we grow

7 In the UK, the term 'college' can refer both to further, post-16 education (e.g. in order to obtain A-Levels and BTEC) as well as to collegiate universities, which are subdivided into different colleges, awarding academic qualifications. To avoid confusion, in this text I will use the term 'college' for post-16/pre-university routes only, although many of the most renowned art universities in the UK have a collegiate structure (e.g. Goldsmiths College, University College London, Royal College of Art, Central Saint Martins College).

out of it" (2006). In these instances, those who already have an artistic practice developed according to their own rules (or necessities in dealing with difficulties) outside or despite of secondary education and who may have an unbroken enthusiasm to create, experience the relative freedom of the BTEC course as an advantage. Despite these predominately positive recollections, the normative art paradigm, if softened, also materialises at this stage. Certain expectations concerning established standards are implicitly introduced, or rather reproduced, leaving some students confused about the benchmarks used for grading their work. Former BTEC student Lilly, for instance, recalls that she had "lost the concept of creativity from mixed messages", meaning that on one hand she was told to create something "new", yet on the other, supposed to not only reference but replicate what has been created by others already (Int., 2018, February 10). It is perhaps due to this comparative approach that Alec adds he did not feel very confident with his art in the college environment (Int., 2017, July 24) and Josh likewise recalls feeling intimidated by his classmates. He remembers how they were "filling sketchbook after sketchbook" while he was working on meticulous individual pieces, never producing the sheer quantity of work others seemed to (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1). Additionally, he states that he never got proportions "right" and that he did not get the hang of painting straight lines, because no matter how hard he tried, "my hand guides me in a different direction" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1).

Despite these difficulties and the lingering normative expectations that are distinctly expressed in such statements, all of these artists agree that, in their experience, the positives outweigh the negatives when recollecting their time in college. Considering the supportive network colleges and teachers often provide, those students who struggle with the framework or who do things differently tend to be acknowledged. In this rather encouraging and reassuring environment, hopes, confidence and ambitions are fostered, prompting many students to apply for art degree courses at university—at which level, however, supportive structures often entirely dissolve, and harsh competition sets in.

Higher Education and Training in the Arts at University

Of those 'Outsider Artists' asked to recall their experiences concerning arts education from primary to college level, a variety of positionings can be found ranging from good, indifferent to bad, as illustrated throughout previous sections. However, when it comes to studying arts at university level, experiences tend to align almost universally towards the negative.

Although some artists note that they have had the occasional supportive tutor, access to facilities and gained new knowledge about artists and the arts in general, the vast majority—in fact all of the academically trained 'Outsider Artists' I have encountered—describe their time at university either as a "waste of time", counterproductive for their artistic "mission" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1) or even outright as a hurtful experience (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15; Int. Rob, 2017, July 2). While Josh and Lilly acknowledge that it might be beneficial for some, especially those with an "industrial" orientation, they agree that for them personally, the negatives outweigh the positives.

Some artists even frame their experience at university as having had a traumatising or devastating effect on their creative practice.

Leaving the safe space of school in its perhaps flawed but still committed attempts to be inclusive, at university competition is fierce, and unwelcomed differences tend to be felt in distinct emphasis. This may be due to the circumstance that, by entering university, one often transitions from an educational setting with non-practising artist-teachers under the duty of care into an institution that is integrated in an exclusive art world framework, whose tutors often have or had a professional career in the arts and are proficient competitors themselves. Since artists' CVs and the attainment of a degree still matter profoundly in making a career in the art world and finding representation by major dealers and galleries, the recommendations of certain tutors or names of particular universities can act as quality seals. Although Andy cynically remarks that, in today's climate, a degree is "worth nothing" and that you may "as well just bribe someone 10 grand" to get one, he as well as many others agrees that "if you went to Saint Martins or the Royal Academy, you're pretty much sorted" (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3).

Acting as gatekeepers, educational institutions such as the two well-renowned universities mentioned by Andy have the capacity to introduce fresh artists to the established art world and market, thus also teaching in anticipatory preparation of fulfilling the standards of the latter. In doing so, the actual artwork often appears to be signed-off as a by-product, while the creation of an artist persona, as well as the development of presentational and networking skills, move to the fore, as has also been observed by Finney (1997). Those who have already been most adapted to the art paradigm taught in school and college are often well prepared: their flexibility with techniques and materials allows them to swiftly react to art world trends. Furthermore, the properly ingrained 'reflective' text-production accompanying any artwork they have produced since secondary school may now develop into the creation of sophisticated concepts, making witty reference to art history and postmodern theory in a language that artist Grayson Perry once facetiously called "International Art English" (2016, p. 33).

In an environment in which the intellectual framing of an artwork at times becomes the artwork itself, the idea of artistic self-expression and a rigorous focus on the act of creating do not only appear unfashionable, but as an almost counter-productive, conservative practice. Also, not being able or disinterested in networking, struggling with, or being unwilling to compose conceptual statements and lacking the interest to refer to the art historical canon or react to contemporary hypes can present further, major obstacles. In a highly competitive environment such as university, with a predisposed and narrowly defined framework of what is to be considered 'good art' or a 'good artist', the emergence of categorical 'Outsiders' seems inevitable. The processual stages of becoming such an 'Outsider' are retraced in the following statement by Rob:

> I was in for a nasty shock at [university] […] I suddenly found myself with fierce competition from fellow art students. […] While [they] welcomed this new wave [of conceptual art], my work was much more steeped in tradition and nostalgia, so gradually

> I began to feel more and more isolated from the art community. With a mathematical problem, the answer is either wrong or right, there's no room for interpretation. But I always thought art was the opposite and there was no wrong or right seen as art is subjective. So, I found [art university] infuriating; how a tutor could push you down one creative avenue but close off another one. I soon found myself feeling like the individual against the system. (Int. Rob, 2017, July 2)

This experience is echoed by many of the artists participating in this study, although yielding different consequences. Some, like Rob, Andy or Josh, have finished their university degrees, yet remark that they learned only "little" (Int. Rob, 2017, June 29), "nothing" at all (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3) or that "it was a waste" and "setback" in their "mission" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1). Some of these artists declare that art university has inhibited their creativity to such an extent that they refrained from producing any art for years after they had finished their course. Josh, for example, is sure that he would have had "more work made now if I hadn't gone to university" and states that, after graduating, he was entirely unable to produce any work for four years (Int., 2017, July 1). Being under constant pressure to conform and fit into academic frameworks has further left many artists disillusioned. Even Rob, who declares that he managed to preserve creating in his "unpopular" style and to adhere to his own rules, has given up on art for almost a decade after finishing his university degree, only recently finding a way back to his creative roots (Int., 2017, July 2).[8]

Added devastating effects may occur, and an even greater strength to withstand academic pressures seems to be required from those who deviate not only from the artistic but also from the social mainstream and may face additional stigmatisation due to a disability or mental illness.

Sarah, who after a long time of institutionalisation and illness secured a place at Central Saint Martins, described to me in rich detail how a fellow student wilfully destroyed her work, how she has not been taken seriously and even been outright ignored by peers and tutors on several occasions (Int., 2017, June 15). Noticing that the university environment was a rather unsafe place to share her story, even intensifying the experience of being stigmatised, she recalls the silence she often encountered as the most unsettling effect. When presenting her work and thus exposing her vulnerability, "no one said anything. Yet we can talk about someone that had just five minutes earlier drawn lines on a piece of paper. I put myself out. And then you get NOTHING" (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15). While Sarah still managed to finish her degree,

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8 Such experiences have prompted numerous 'Outsider Artists', like Joe Coleman (who was kicked out of art school) to advise students to "get the fuck out of school cos you're not gonna learn a goddamn thing in that school. You have to go out there and live, you know, and that's where you find your art, not in art school" (BBC 'Turning the Art World Inside Out', 2013). Artist Paul Laffoley agrees: "if you're in an art school, that is the worst thing you can do" (BBC 'Turning the Art World Inside Out', 2013). Such experiences, in combination with unpopular aesthetic choices, also moved art educator James Elkins to conclude that "some art [especially expressionist styles that require 'naivitee'] is threatened and even destroyed by the studio classroom" (2001, p. 76). As a tutor, he consequently took the drastic measure "to tell neo-expressionist students to drop out of school. […] It's the only honest thing to do" (Elkins, 2001, p. 78).

similar experiences caused others, like Ryan, to drop out in the middle of the course. He tells me that he "had just been through a very strict education" and was "fed up with teachers telling me what to do", but that effectively his becoming schizophrenic and a drug addiction were the decisive factors in rendering his attendance at university impossible (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 3). The last point is crucial, as it indicates the intersecting character of exclusion and reconstitutes the ability to manage the pressure to conform to a matter of degree.

Those who deviate from the artistic norm and experience additional difficulties, for instance illnesses, as manageable, are often capable of finding ways to protect themselves, defend their practice and make it through the degree. Those, on the other hand, whose disability, illnesses, etc. can be *seen* or who communicate differently and thus have a "discredited stigma" according to Goffman (1963), tend to be treated as the omnipresent Other. Since art universities at large do not cater for such groups, these artists often drop out of or do not make it into university in the first place. With systems fostering the 'the survival of the fittest artist', individuals who may have initially engaged in artmaking to deal with or overcome barriers due to social marginalisation tend to find that their artistic practice itself can represent a barrier, even further intensifying the experience of marginalisation.[9] Some artists actively rebel against such restrictive art paradigms, within or outside of art education. Others are confused or overwhelmed by the dissonance experienced between these normative standards and their artistic approach, consequently making or not making it through university or in the art world at large. All artists interviewed who have been to university agree in hindsight that art education can be useful when learning about materials and techniques. Anything apart from these technical aspects, however, tends to be considered an infringement of one's vision and is rejected on these grounds. They agree that you do not have to study to learn how to make art, that university is definitely not the most recommendable place to do so, and, as Andy says, that ultimately "it's best to teach yourself" (Int., 2017, July 3). Lilly even proclaims that "education robs you from learning it yourself and from growing as a person", rejecting authoritarian teaching practices as a whole (Int., 2017, July 17). Josh and Sarah, on the other hand, are convinced that "you never learn from anyone other than yourself" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1) anyway, and that it is an all-too-easily made assumption that someone with formal education would automatically no longer be "self-taught" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1; Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15). Thus, even though they have both been academically trained on paper, they still declare themselves 'self-taught'.

9 The extent to which art universities marginalise under normative paradigms is often missed by students with a privileged standing. Perry, for example, clings on to a very romantic notion of art academia, stating that "for young people who feel a bad fit with their families or with wider society, to come within the tolerant and accepting embrace of the art college is a profound experience. The acceptance and tolerance of their difference and their imagination is an important thing" (2016, p. 121f). Creative 'eccentrics' may well be a minority in wider society, yet only if they are willing and able to conform to art world standards are they also embraced by the latter, with the ascribed tolerance of art academia remaining rather selective, as I would like to argue. Based on the data collected it seems feasible to conclude that it is only a limited and very specific set of differences and deviances which is accepted and can be digested by the frameworks of the art academy.

Considering that 'Self-Taught Art' is often used as a synonym for 'Outsider Art' and an antonym of the trained academic artist, how may such contradictory statements be explained? How does one draw a line between the trained and the self-taught?

Being Self-Taught vs. Trained: Barriers and Assets

Considering that art education is compulsory for every child in the UK and that no one can shield themselves from cultural influences, the label 'self-taught'—which is often applied to those artists who did not pursue art at university level—stands on shaky ground. This observation has also been made by Fine (2004) and Elkins (2001), who claim that art cannot be taught anyway, but at best only ever nourished, fostered and helped along. Nevertheless, even those artists who exhibit and sell their work, collaborate with other artists and extend their knowledge and skills continuously by attending evening classes, workshops or art clubs will have difficulty casting off the 'untrained' tag. Graduates from art universities, on the other hand, are automatically considered 'trained' in the arts, even though the academic focus seems to lie more and more on proficiently modelling careers than on the act of creating as such. However, this may only appear contradictory if one adheres to a traditional, skill- and techniques-based understanding of the labels 'untrained' and 'self-taught'. As Pete remarked, "you don't have to be skilled or professional to express yourself" (Int., 2017, December 18), yet you do have to know which discursive levers to pull for your productions to be considered art under the conventions of the wider art world. In other words: one may not need be professional in expressing oneself artistically, but skilled in representing oneself as an artist worth acknowledging.

With the changes in art education, the anything goes approach in the art world and the increasingly commercial orientation of many degrees, what graduates are supposedly trained in is how to behave like an artist and how to navigate the art world successfully. With reference to these circumstances, Elkins ironically suggests renaming art schools "Center[s] for Artworld Networking" (2001, p. 107) adding that, perhaps against the anticipation of many prospective art students, they will be effectively much less trained "in the arts" than taught "a description of their prison bars" (Elkins, 2001, p. 45). As the empirical data informing this chapter confirms, to succeed, the work and persona of an artist must indeed pass the critical eye of those forming the current consensus and having the authority to designate quality, with the acquisition of further networking skills being necessary to fulfil the requirements of the art world. Several sociologists, most prominently Becker (1982), Zolberg (2010) and Finney (1997), have pointed out that it is the combination of these two prerequisites that will make artistic success feasible in the first place—although other social factors may coincidently raise or lower the possibility of the latter. Being 'trained' or 'self-taught' may thus be understood as predominately referring to the social status, cultural capital and (non-)conformity of an artist, rather than to their practical, artistic skills and the artworks they produce. As Fine (2004)—with reference to art historian Barbara Bloemink—has exemplified, all the dichotomy does is to privilege Western academic training over other types of learning. While it does raise one's symbolic capital, both terms remain inherently meaningless, since "we learn from a variety of

other people in our lives and from experiences over which neither we nor any teacher has much control" (Patterson as cited in Fine, 2004, p. 33). Thus, labels such as 'self-taught' and 'trained' may be understood as independent of an artist's oeuvre or the actual experience of learning. They rather act as door openers, or vice versa, as instruments of exclusion in the particular context of an art world, as will be demonstrated subsequently.

Of those artists participating in my study, the number of academically 'trained' and 'self-taught' individuals, is evenly spread. Considering the importance of artists' CVs and the quality seal function of universities as described above, not being "educated formally" (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13) and "not having an art degree" (Int. Joanne, 2017, June 28) are consequently seen as the major barriers to success in the art world by those who did not attend university. However, and this is of profound importance for the study at hand, even those who have been to university struggle to progress in the established art world. Considering the fierce competition resulting from a market capable of absorbing only a small proportion of qualified candidates, this is of course true for most art graduates. Yet belonging to a socially marginalised group can systematically reduce, or in certain cases even entirely prevent, access to options and career paths altogether. Hence, having an art degree can open doors and yield opportunities, but only for those who

- are capable and willing to adapt to the requirements of the art world, and who are
- acknowledged by the latter as suitable candidates fitting within its narrow frameworks.

While much has been done since the 1960s to open up the arts to include previously marginalised groups, such as women, 'black artists' and artists from ethnic minorities, those classed as 'disabled' or 'mentally ill' still often remain underrepresented, if not excluded by default. This seems to be due to the circumstance that, even if individuals belonging to these groups are granted access on paper, as in the second bullet point, they will still struggle with the first requirement, since established art world settings thus far largely do not cater for non-normative communicators, also seldomly acknowledging the experiences and worldviews of, for instance, people with disabilities, as valuable knowledge or enrichment for the arts. This certainly reflects the macrosocial stigma still connected to these labels, but in the narrow realms of the art world and education, one does not even have to carry such a tag to fall through the cracks. As indicated above, doing things according to one's own rather than a teacher's or a curriculum's rule, being indifferent to art world trends and fashions, refraining from networking and the inability or unwillingness "to play the game" (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13) may yield similar results. Chloe, who declares herself a "self-taught artist", has strong feelings when it comes to the topic of art academia. Even though she did not study art at university, she is sure she "would rebel" in any such context (Int., 2017, July 13). She confidently sums up what many artists participating in this study, whether 'self-taught' or 'trained', would perhaps wholeheartedly agree on:

> Any sort of education is a box, you do learn, and it does make you more acceptable, but it makes you think along certain lines, and I don't. I think outside the box. And it is probably my biggest talent. (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

The consequence of such a firm standpoint will, in many cases, mean going it alone. Lacking a network and legitimacy in a field of cultural production such as the art world necessarily lowers the chances of gaining recognition as an artist from or a reputable position within or outside the latter. Even artists such as Chloe, who fiercely disagree with its standards as incorporated into art education, have at one point or another tried to gain recognition, testing the boundaries of the art world and seeking loopholes in its fabric to access opportunities and funding.

While many insiders well-adapted to the frameworks would interject that 'the art world' as a closed entity does not exist and that it rather consists of an array of open-minded institutions with blurry and permeable outlines, as proclaimed by Becker (1982), the reality often looks different to those who are unable or unwilling to follow the often-invisible statutes and expectations. On the individual level of the artist, boundaries—even if not as clear-cut as imagined—are reportedly experienced and interpreted as thoroughly excluding. These barriers may indeed be malleable and their constitution depending on a multiplicity of contextual factors and interactions, yet by artists they often tend to be understood as the distinct outlines of an entire art world they are outside of. A focus on the experiences of these 'Outsiders' thus holds the potential to make visible the existence and power of a centre whose authority otherwise often remains hidden and unchallenged.

Following sociologist Shyon Baumann (2007), the value of certain cultural goods as well as the legitimacy of an artist is defined and negotiated by a conglomerate of pre-authorised professionals in the field, such as critics, scholars, dealers, gallerists, collectors and curators—but also well-established artists. The consensus they reach will define not only the boundaries of a given art world at a given time, but also provide those upcoming artists who fit well within the framework with prestige, opportunities and resources such as invites to exhibitions, funding or residencies. With regards to Ferguson's explications, this consensus may be understood as mostly operating in disguise—its ideological function in determining the normative understanding of art is seldomly dismantled in its constructedness. Rather, the consensus is implemented and transmits a 'natural', seemingly universal and self-evident meaning of art in institutions such as art education. It is only those who differ from this consensual norm who will reveal and implicitly challenge the make-up and boundaries of the latter. The contours of the reigning art world and ruling paradigm in the UK are thus highlighted and defined by the barriers certain artists face when seeking recognition. In turn, the constitution of these barriers and the reaction of gatekeepers will differ depending on which educational or non-educational route an individual artist has taken, as Figure 24 illustrates.

The diagram shows three possible routes into artmaking and the respective barriers mentioned and experienced most frequently by artists participating in this study when seeking recognition in established art worlds. Depending on the individual jour-

ney taken, specific conglomerates of barriers are more likely to arise, yet in many cases intersections occur, as indicated by the 'x's depicted on the right.

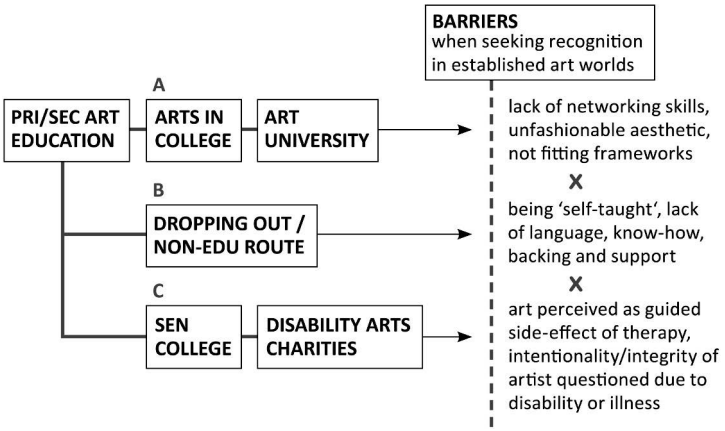

Figure 24. Chart of Non-/Educational Routes Taken by this Study's Sample of Artists (Own Depiction).

Members of Group A, who have been 'professionally' trained and thereby have already passed the initial process of legitimation in which their products have qualified as 'art' via being granted access to an exclusive art university setting, seem to face the highest stakes. However, as demonstrated above, the magical qualities of an art degree may vanish into thin air if one lacks the confidence, social and networking skills to distinguish oneself in the field. Trained artist Carlo Keshishian, for example, states that he has been making work "for over a decade", but because of his "insular nature, rarely do I reach out and show it to people" (Outside In, n.d.). And while Sarah loves exhibiting her work, she describes the pressure to stand up and talk in front of people as "one of my absolute dreads" (Int., 2017, June 15). Rob likewise declares that he's "not much of a people person" and that "while I have faith in my artwork, I'm not much of a salesman" (Int., 2017, July 6). He attributes that he had no luck being represented by a gallery so far to his unwillingness to calculatingly "convince" someone to include his work in their collection (Int. Rob, 2017, July 6). Even if an artist might master these marketing skills, producing 'unfashionable' art, lacking interest in providing sophisticated concepts or not fitting into certain aesthetic frameworks may likewise become an obstacle. Marc, for example, states that galleries will not show his work because of his chosen subjects, concepts and contents, and that this had already presented a challenge during his time at university, during which he "lost faith in becoming an artist" long before graduating (Int. Marc, 2017, May 29). However, barriers may also appear retrospectively and force artists from already established positions in the art world. Chloe's sister Lydia has been a renowned and successful artist, but after her mental breakdown things markedly changed:

> Schmoozing the gallery, you know, the ends of talking to people. She [Lydia] drank and it was perfectly acceptable to be drunk and sort of artistic temperament. But [once] she had mental health issues, she just couldn't do it [anymore]. She couldn't play the game, she couldn't produce to order. She really couldn't play the game. She couldn't follow the rules and she was an artist! It's just devastating. […] It is a tragedy when someone has a talent and has the ability to use it beaten out of them. […] Someone has a gift, and it gets stomped out of them. (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

Lydia's case exemplifies the fine lines of acceptable behaviour, the apparent need to follow certain rules to maintain one's contested position in the field and the consequences that falling ill (i.e. out of the framework), can yield for an individual artist. The problematic interplay of art world recognition and experiences of mental illness will be discussed in further detail in section 6.4—the examples given thus far illustrate the obvious fact that being 'trained' and having an art degree does not in itself assure legitimacy and recognition. It is down to a set of continuously changing yet interrelated factors which determine who is perceived as inside, included, or excluded from a field in any particular moment, without sparing the fate of already established artists from this process.

Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly considering the prestige that art degrees from renowned universities hold, Group B consists of artists who dropped out of university or who have chosen a non-educational route, insisting that it is their lack of an art degree with its related know-how and assumed backing and support that predominately hinders them from accessing the art world. Artist Anna Berry ascribes the barriers she is facing to her shortness of a "cognitive script" (2019), she is convinced every art student holds even if they do not realise it. According to her, art graduates have a "sense of how to walk the walk and talk the talk"—they know how to play "buzzword bingo" to get their proposals and applications accepted, while she has difficulty explaining ideas "in a way that makes sense to others" (Berry, 2019). Berry reasons that this may not only be due to her non-academic background but also to her being "non-neurotypical" (2019). Joanna correspondingly asserts that, for similar reasons, she has "always struggled to communicate and network with people" and present her work in a public sphere, nevertheless feeling it is her lack of academic language and know-how that prevents her from properly marketing herself (Int. 2017, June 28). She states: "I do think that I am excluded from the mainstream because I have not studied formally" (Int. Joanna, 2017, June 28), while Chloe asserts she is vulnerable to exploitation because: "I'm not educated. I'm clever, I'm well-read, I've taught myself a lot. […] But I'm not technically educated. I've got a shit job so in many ways I could be seen at the lowerish end of society" (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13).

It is up for speculation whether Berry and Joanna, if given the opportunity to study at university, would have indeed overcome their stated communication difficulties, or if Chloe, just by holding an art degree, would have evaded her experiences of being exploited by certain actors in the field. Considering that some artists belonging to Group A face similar barriers after graduation suggests otherwise. However, in her statement, Chloe hints at the issue of class, which may indeed play a decisive role in lowering the chances of an artist proceeding well in higher art education, or

accessing and succeeding in the art world at large. Even though Finney indicates that, among modern established artists, all social classes are represented and that features such as "professional attitude", "network centrality" and "marketing strategies" are much more decisive for achieving success than economic capital (1997, pp. 74–78), many artists still believe that money can go a long way. Alec, for example, cynically remarks that "someone could have no talent at all as an artist but have money to produce things", thus raising attention with marketing stunts (Int. 2017, July 24). On a more general level, those who have financial assets and economic resources that enable them to survive setbacks and dry spells may indeed be considered as having an advantage in their pursuit of becoming established artists. Having grown up in a middle- and upper-class environment will most likely also have made them acquainted with the refined language of the art discourse which may thus come to them more naturally than to an artist with a working-class background, as Bourdieu (1984) has most prominently demonstrated.

While financial hardships may be an issue of great concern for many aspiring artists, and the art world in the UK may indeed be "still very class based" (Int. Dan, 2017, August 2), I argue that categories such as class, but also gender and ethnicity may nevertheless be considered second-grade barriers. Although discrimination along these lines is far from overcome, a 'black', female artist from a working-class background will most likely face little or no institutional obstacles when applying for art university in the UK, *as long as* her approach to artmaking fits the required framework and she has a 'sound mind'. An assortment of student loans, bursaries, quotas, policies and anti-discrimination laws may be considered rather successful instruments to ensure that categories such as class, gender and ethnicity mostly do not feature (anymore) in the selection processes at universities, although they may still prevent an individual from applying in the first place or turn into either barriers or assets throughout an artist's studies or in the art world afterwards. By contrast, even though some universities do provide disability services and offer individual support, having a cognitive disability, communicational difficulties or mental illnesses still seems to be a non-identified no-go in both worlds, at all stages concerned.

Consequently, Group C, consisting of artists who attend workshops or studio programmes provided by disability arts charities, seem to have the least chances of being recognised by the established art world. Often their art is perceived as a guided side-effect of therapy, as sociologist Per Koren Solvang (2018) has demonstrated, and their intentionality and integrity of being 'real' and 'proper' artists is questioned due to their disability, mental illness or other communication difficulties—if indeed their artworks are seen at all.

Many of those artistically inclined individuals who have attended special schools or college will eventually move on to work in studios, workshops and atelier spaces provided by charities. Often deemed unfit for work, they 'enjoy' the privilege of being able to put their entire focus onto artmaking. However, what is produced and how much freedom participants have in expressing themselves is often regulated by and depends upon the mindset of the respective studio lead. Even in those cases in which artists are left to their own devices, can choose freely and are assisted only in technical terms, it is often the charity staff deciding what happens to finished art-

works. The possibilities in practice reach from one extreme of discarding the artworks produced or "recycling them into paper mâché" as Steene recalls (Field Notes EOA, 2018, May 6), to the other extreme, in which everything created is archived and further selected to be sold on the market. In my experience, most charities will operate somewhere in-between these extremes, possibly tending towards the latter. Over the last few decades awareness has risen considering the artistic value of works created in such settings. This has inspired some charity personnel or entire organisations to welcome collectors and seek recognition in the art world on behalf of participating artists, with such intermediary positions adding another level of ethical complexity to the question. When charities are only partly funded by the government and rely on private investors, art sales and other sources of funding, it seems inevitable that conflicts of interest will arise. Person-centred approaches characterising the social sector will then easily clash with the outcome- and result-centred orientation in the arts sector, sometimes resulting in the adoption of subtle manipulative practices by studio mentors, as will be discussed in further detail later on. Under these circumstances, the critical proclamation that some of these works may have been 'guided' can perhaps not be entirely dismissed. However, the much more frequently encountered barrier is the claim that these artists do not know what they do and create unintentionally. Although these assumptions may be safely expelled to the realm of myths they remain steadfast in the established art world still, turning Group C into the least likely to achieve recognition in and admission to the latter.

To conclude, the barriers encountered by artists participating in this study give hints on the make-up and boundaries of a particular and established art world framework. These barriers define the insides of a fairly closed system operating according to specific rules by means of their exclusionary practices. Core art world criteria and the ever-changing consensus also represent a firm part of art education and ensure that emerging artists are socialised into such frameworks, thereby securing the reproduction of the field while constraining its innovation to a certain extent.

As exemplified, the barriers and obstacles throughout art education and thereafter can be manifold. For some, the type of art produced, the approach to making as well as their intentionality or directionality can present an obstacle that is difficult to overcome. Others will feel that their perceived lack of social and networking skills or language and know-how prevent them from pursuing a career in the arts. The lack of an art degree, financial hardships and missing backing support may further enhance experiences of exclusion, making some artists prone to exploitation. All these factors can intersect, independent of the educational or non-educational route chosen, yet seem to be multiplied in their ability to enforce barriers once an individual artist is also stigmatised as 'disabled' or 'mentally ill'. These ascribed classifications, in turn, may result from the initial unwillingness or inability to conform to those educational or artistic standards required by the framework, or to fit into society's expectations at large. Much less are they inherent or natural features of individuals than signposts of a social, educational or art world system's failure to acknowledge difference and accommodate for diversity in subjective experiences and realities.

Considering the numerous barriers 'non-normative' artists face when encountering the tightly knit frameworks of the art world, many have become disillusioned. Rob

describes the art world as "snobby" and "elitist" and reports that "if your art doesn't come from the right stock or bloodline and has the right paperwork it's deemed as something less" (Int., 2017, July 3). This can result in an identity crisis, as Brian Gibson indicates: "for a long time the thought of being an artist felt very alien to me", since "artists were clever, confident, sophisticated, and well-educated people. That was not how I saw myself" (2014, August 13). Being averse to "the endless self-promotion of what one is up to and into" in a tone "so bright, so positive, so eager and so enthusiastic", Gibson consequently does declare himself as an artist, yet "one who is fed up with art" (2015, August 25). Likewise expressing frustration and attesting a certain inauthenticity to the art world, Andy goes one step further, making clear his suggested notion of 'real' art:

> Artists in England who are successful, they don't produce much work, but they spend a lot of time promoting themselves and that seems to be how you do well. But I just think my time should be spent making the work, cos we've only got so long. […] People like Damien Hirst and all those people who have ideas, and then get other people to make it for them. […] I am SO against all this bloody conceptual art and these clever ideas because it's working on a different level. It's brain rather than heart and I think, art should be more heart. (Int., 2017, July 3)

Andy's critique addresses the core of the matter. Not only does it express the frustration of many artists, it also resembles the pessimistic tone of several historical and currently active art world players like Dubuffet, Thévoz or Maizels. Hailing the romantic notion of the Expressionist and self-absorbed artist even inspired Cardinal to proclaim that the work of academic artists is "nothing more than a mummified version of art" (1979, p. 10). Certainly, the frameworks of globally intersecting art worlds constantly evolve and today differ in constitution to those referred to by Cardinal in the 1970s. Yet, what seems to be relevant in both cases is the effect of an ever-growing tendency towards the 'cerebral' and conceptual in established art worlds and their markets since the 1960s. According to Cultural Studies theorists Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, postmodern artistic makers increasingly push back the Expressionist credo, instead impressing with "disjunction, irony, reflexivity, deliberate confusion" and "a kind of cool apathy", and in doing so, speak to an upper-class, "overeducated" elite who "get the joke" (2003, p. 131).

Such a limited focus on the sophisticated and conceptual, along with the restrictive and normative character of British art education, necessarily creates a vacuum in which a sentimental longing for an unprescribed, self-expressive and authentic Other begins—or rather continues—to thrive. As demonstrated in the historical overview, as a genre, 'Outsider Art' became increasingly popular in taking this place and counterbalancing the attested rigid neatness of the 'insider' art world. Yet its intriguing demeanour and mythological construction not only fascinates established art world professionals bored with the acclaimed and on the hunt for the rare and new—upon initial encounter, 'Outsider Art' also provides a refuge for many non-normative artmakers who have thus far found themselves on the losing ends of the art world and education, but now realise that, under certain circumstances, the grounds upon which they experience barriers may turn into assets.

6.3 Identification with 'Outsider Art' and Self-Labelling Practice

Most artists participating in this study clearly remember the moment they first found out about the existence of 'Outsider Art'. Considering the frequently preceding disillusionment with art education and negative experiences with the established art world, this experience is, by many, interpreted as a turning point in their lives.[10] Artists who have encountered the genre on their own terms, before or independently of being labelled externally, most strongly identify with 'Outsider Art' and feel a certain sense of empowerment, at least initially.

Unlike perhaps 50 years ago, the chances of coming across 'Outsider Art' today are certainly much higher, considering the rising popularity of the genre, the often inflationary use of the term[11] and the omnipresence of the internet, easing access to non-normative perspectives. Consequently, artists recollect various initiation points, ranging from being introduced to the field via a collector, charity or psychiatric personnel, as was the case traditionally, to coming across the genre in the academic context, exhibitions, on the internet, broadcast media, specialised books or *Raw Vision* magazine.

Dan recalls, how important the discovery of 'Outsider Art' was to him. He states that, suddenly, an alternative field of possibilities opened up, making him realise "that ART was not just a singular sacred thing" but that "there were other forms of art, that have as much validity as the great canon of European/Western art" (Int. Dan, 2017, August 28). And these other forms of art may have a luring effect.

Generally, the attraction of the genre to thus far marginalised artists is comparable to what dealers, collectors, curators and other art world 'insiders' seem to feel most fascinated by: the myth of the authentic, honest, uncorrupted, pure, innocent but often tortured and suffering artist, who produces idiosyncratic artworks seemingly uninfluenced by or actively rejecting artistic standards. Yet in most cases, for artists the task does not lie in attempting to externally match this concept to a particular artist, but in figuring out how it may be aligned with their very Selves. This identification process, however, necessarily remains fragmentary due to the mythic constitution of the 'Outsider Artist' as a pure unity, and the in turn fractured identity of the artist, which may, with Deleuze (2004), be understood a continuous multiplicity in constant metamorphosis. Consequently, individual artists often tend to identify only with certain elements of the 'Outsider Art' construct, and do so most commonly either on the socio-cultural, personal-emotional or aesthetic level.

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10 All information featuring in this chapter derives from interviews conducted with verbal speakers who are knowledgeable about the 'Outsider Art' discourse and its history to a certain extent. Reflections on terminology and Self/Other-labelling of non-verbal speakers are not included at this stage due to methodological limitations. These voices, as tracked in field reports produced during participant observations, will be re-introduced in section 6.4, dealing with ascribed identities and recognition.

11 As of late, even established artist David Hockney has been called an 'Outsider Artist' (*The Guardian*, 2011, August 26), the drawings of actor Jim Carrey have been shown at the Outsider Art Fair in 2019 and in *The Huffington Post*, ex-US-president George W. Bush's paintings are declared 'Outsider Art' (2014, February 25).

Pete recalls being curious about the genre, "because growing up I had always been an outsider of sorts. I thought this could be for me" (Int., 2017, December 11), and Rob states that he "felt very much a part of this [Outsider Art] club from the beginning" (Int., 2017, June 30). According to him, the art world is "very much about if your face fits" (Int. Rob, 2017, June 30), and 'Outsider Art' would encompass all those who fall out of this frame, portraying the genre as a safe haven, giving new hope or even providing a countercultural direction to follow. This effect can also hold for established and rather successful artists like Bobby Baker, whose work mainly deals with her long periods of mental illness and who "got almost tearful with relief" and "felt a rare sense of belonging" when she was invited to give the keynote speech at the annual conference of the European Outsider Art Association (Field Notes EOA, 2018, May 4). The genre can thus provide an identification point and sense of community for all those who have experienced being marginalised on a broader *socio-cultural* level, independent of their artistic work or art world standing.

Many artists also distinctly identify with 'Outsider Art' on a *personal-emotional* level. This again is not uncommon, and is perhaps the case for most enthusiasts of 'Outsider Art' who I have heard many times proclaim that, upon encountering 'Outsider Art' for the first time, the artworks made them "really feel something". Josh, for example, states that he "felt connected to a lot of the work in ways a lot of other art doesn't speak to me" (Int., 2017, June 19). This form of emotional identification seems heightened especially in those individuals who share certain experiences such as mental illness, disability or isolation with a particular artist, and who may therefore feel a personal connection to the latter. If an individual also engages in the very act of artmaking themselves, this effect seems to be further elevated if the person also identifies with 'Outsider Art' on an *aesthetic* level. This is particularly true for individuals who produce work that is considered unfashionable and non-normative, and for whom it presents a rare occasion to come across works that seemingly align with one's own aesthetic standards. Josh recalls how much of a surprise and curiously "compelling" it was when Thévoz' book *Art Brut* fell into his hands and he saw Carlo Zinelli's artwork for the first time, which strongly reminded him of his own work (Int., 2017, June 19). Chloe felt similarly excited about her initial encounter with 'Outsider Art':

> I've been making the things I make for many years […]. I wasn't what other people were doing. […] I just felt, what the hell was I doing you know and then someone gave me a copy of Raw Vision magazine and it was like WOW! This is sort of like ME! It's the sort of stuff I do! (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

When I spoke to her, she enthusiastically showcased some of her artwork with the accompanying statement: "it's almost stereotypical of your proverbial Outsider Artist. You know, like lots and lots of little bits and getting lost in the world" (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13).

The excitement resulting from the initial encounter with 'Outsider Art', and the different levels of identification the genre seems to invite, may be partly explained by a simple mechanism of inversion. Especially for those who have been rejected from the established art world and education, or who despise these institutions for various reasons, 'Outsider Art' is often initially perceived as a place in which they see their

work, ideas and themselves fit. In this process, a negative artist identity (not being part of *x*) may turn into a positive artist identity (being part of *y*), mostly through experiencing a revalidation of one's work, personality and experiences, which thus far marginalised and often presenting a *barrier*, may now move to the very centre and become an *asset*.

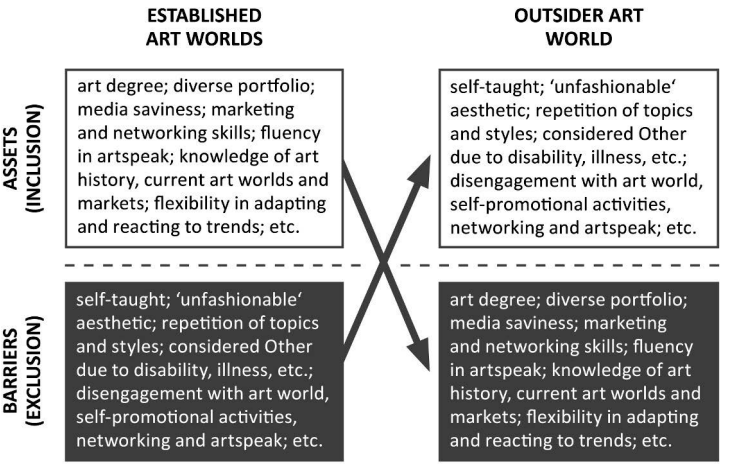

Figure 25. Inverted Criteria for Inclusion/Exclusion in Established vs. 'Outsider Art' Worlds (Own Depiction).

At the initial stage of contact with the genre, many artists were reportedly unaware that 'Outsider Art' served as the flipside of the established art world as depicted in Figure 25—or as an art world in its own right. Many rather recall a dissolvement of barriers, declaring 'Outsider Art' an open, horizonless field, devoid of the restrictive boundaries experienced before; a realm in which their 'disability' or 'lack of networking skills' now seemingly does not matter anymore and in which their personalities and artworks fit just as they are. With 'Outsider Art' often representing a valve of freedom, the genre thus holds the capacity for some artists to restore their faith in art as a whole and rebuild confidence in their own practice. Alec, for example, describes an 'Outsider Artist' as

> someone who is inspired to create exactly what they want to create, without any restrictions, without any sort of other purposes, interpretations, no other kind of influences, 'oh, that's wrong, you shouldn't do that'. I met someone from Camberwell [University of the Arts London], who said, 'oh I don't wanna submit my work cos the tutors are gonna slam it again, they say this, they say that'. And that affects someone who's young, 18, 19. They get a bit bewildered, they get disenchanted, disenfranchised. FUCK all that, you know. To explore yourself as an artist, you have to have the freedom to do that. […] You are expressing yourself as an artist, you know. So, the Outsider Art

> term I think, is just someone who's just producing what they wanna produce as an artist. (Int. Alec, 2017, July 24)

The ascribed freedom of being an 'Outsider Artist' may, however, quickly turn into a negative experience of imprisonment, if marginality is not self-chosen but externally ascribed or, alternatively, if one is not granted the title 'Outsider Artist' in the first place and rejected by gatekeepers regulating access to the field. Either way, many artists sooner or later realise that the genre just as well represents a closed-circuit system in which categories such as 'mental illness' or 'unusual' approaches to artmaking *do* matter, and effectively act as the defining boundaries and assets for inclusion in the 'Outsider Art' world. This will often alter their initial feeling of relief of having found a free place where they belong, making many careful to pronounce self-identification with the genre or refrain from any kind of self-labelling altogether.

Considering the inherent complexity of these identification processes, the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to unearthing the basis upon which the act of labelling oneself or others as 'Outsider Artists' is decided. In this regard, valuable insights may be gained by investigating further how artists affiliated with the field define the term, and what consequences their differing positions can yield when it comes to elaborating on their performance of self-labelling.

Defining 'Outsider Art': Myth-Bearing and Deconstructionist Approaches

When inquiring about the definition of 'Outsider Art', one is confronted with a scale of positionings and different alignments by artists. They generally divert from 'neutral' referrals to the historical discourse either into the direction of an exclusive or expanding understanding of 'Outsider Art' with what I would like to call the *myth-bearing* positioning on one end and its *deconstructionist* pendant on the other.

Artists with profound knowledge about the history of the 'Outsider Art' field tend to be careful about—or avoid providing—definitions in their own words. Instead, key figures such as Prinzhorn, Dubuffet or Cardinal are frequently referenced, although many make sure to somewhat dissociate themselves from these viewpoints. Josh defines 'Outsider Artists' in hindsight of these positions and alongside the biographical strand as "artists who are mentally divergent, unconnected, or unaware of the 'art world', possibly simply decidedly reclusive and cut off from society", yet he is quick to add that this would be "the authentic model for the term which 'purists' adhere to" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 17). Lilly likewise refrains from making any personal statements initially, instead sighing out loud when asked how she would explain 'Outsider Art' to someone who has never heard of it: "Honestly, I would just say, look at the Google Images pages. […] This is what people will consider Outsider Art" (Int., 2017, July 17).

These, as well as most definitions along the spectrum collected, align in concept with the idea of a framework that someone either fits in or falls out of. Whether it is the social (Josh) or aesthetic (Lilly) framework weighing more, seems to depend on the preference of the individual artist and their personal experiences. Most artists do however agree that both can matter distinctly depending on the context. Ryan perhaps

sums up most concisely the main points of a neutrally tempered effort in defining 'Outsider Art':

> I think that it's whether an artist fits into certain categories that makes the artist an outsider artist. These categories might be that the artist is self-taught, they might suffer from mental illness, they use techniques with unusual mediums, they might live in isolated locations that make it difficult for them to become a part of the art world. Also, it's the artist's style as well as the biography that makes some artists 'outsider artists'. (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 8)

Considering the attributions made during longer conversations and upon further reflection, such an initially careful stance is often abandoned in favour of either proclaiming an exclusive or expansive understanding of the genre, thus providing a more personal definition of 'Outsider Art' with regards to an artist's individual positioning.

When leaving 'neutral' terrain, artists then tend to either reproduce the historical discourse, with its romantic notions of the Other, or attempt to deconstruct the genre, uncovering its inherent ambiguity. Those taking a myth-bearing position resonate purist definitions and believe in the existence of an authentic and true 'Outsider Artist', thereby holding oppositional stances firm. Those aligning with the deconstructionist perspective, on the other hand, will dissociate themselves from such definitions and point out that the term can have different and shifting meanings depending on context. According to them, the genre is effectively so heterogeneous and diverse that the term 'Outsider Art' is at best generalising, but practically invalid, meaningless and devoid of any content or essence.

Position A (as in Figure 26) virtually resembles the ascriptions delineated in the media analysis and throughout the historical discourse even, if in this instance, with an exclusive focus on romantic Othering.[12] Artist Jan Arden idealises the 'Outsider Artist' as "one of a kind, a unique artist and human being", with the 'Outsider Art' term "allowing artist and artistic talent to shine through into the art world [… providing a form of art which is] raw, real/authentic and challenging, emotional, sexual and liberating, insightful and in your face" (2014, August 26). Rob, borrowing warlike metaphors, goes one step further, moving from the individual to the societal level and declaring that the "Outsider Art movement is a rebel force" (Int., 2017, July 1). According to him, 'Outsider Art' is "free of the shackles of current trends" and "represents a brave new world, art's final frontier"—an anti-commercial, anti-elitist art for all, that "doesn't have its heart in its wallet" and is "honest, less pretentious, and more accessible […] to the man on the street" (Int. Rob, 2017, July 4). He attributes the rising popularity of 'Outsider Art' to its greater accessibility to the "everyman":

> In my experience a lot of people find art intimidating and inaccessible, very much for the elite rather than everyman. […] I find the culinary analogy helps: If modern art is a small dish of food in towers with a zigzag of sauce, Outsider Art is a good old-fashioned pub grub. (Int. Rob, 2017, July 1)

12 So far, I have not met an artist affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field who would have engaged in derogatory Othering.

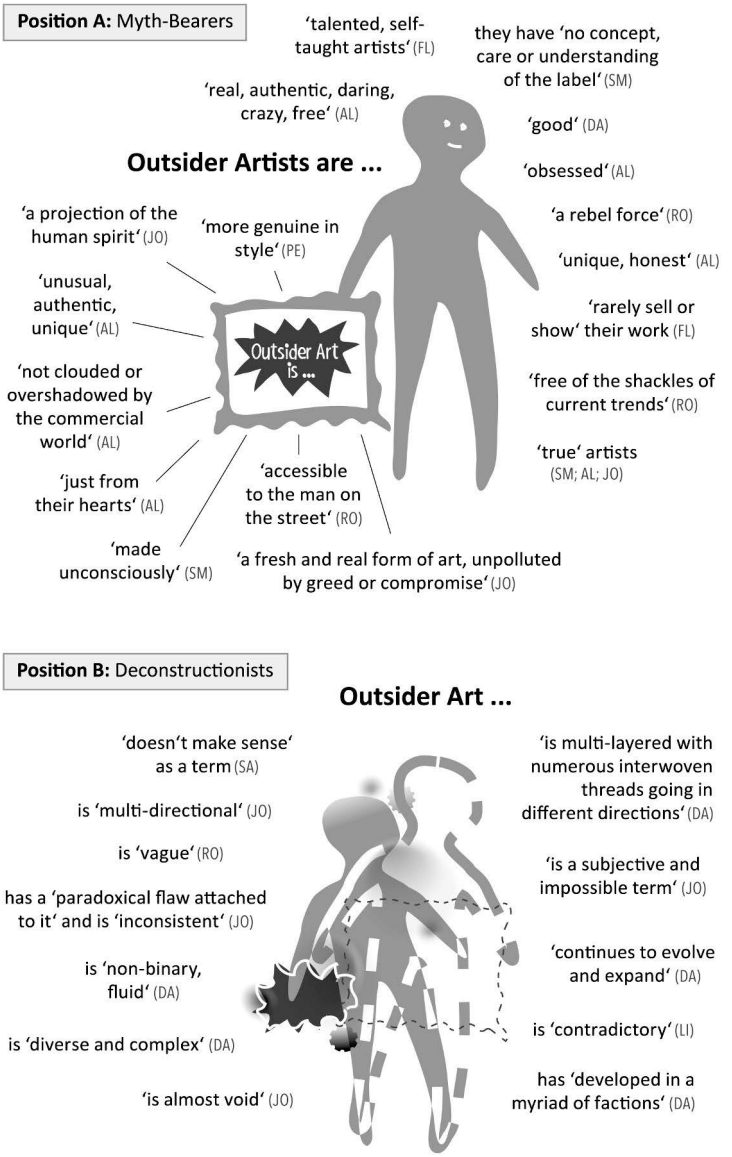

Figure 26. Adopted Positions by Artists when Defining 'Outsider Art'. Abbreviations in brackets refer to the first two letters of the artist's pseudonym as used in the text (Own Depiction).

Andy is likewise convinced that "strangely enough, what we call Outsider Art [...] the normal public can relate to it much better. [...] Whether you know about art history or not you can appreciate it." "Contemporary art" on the other hand, would not appeal to the "general public" because "you just need such a big bit of text just to explain this sort of cold object, that no one knows what on earth is this. And it

intimates people, including myself. […] It's elitist" (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3).[13] Although Rob, Andy and Arden represent rather extreme examples, their cases demonstrate that the practice of employing 'Outsider Art' as a projection surface and appropriating its mythical backpack to advance one's own spiritual, political, etc. ideals is not reserved to art world professionals. Thoroughly incorporating the genre's discursive features the 'Outsider' is turned into an empowering hero and any affiliation of one's own work with the genre consequently perceived as a "badge of honour" (Int. Rob, 2017, June 29).

Position B follows a different approach. Rather than idealising an Other as delivered via the discourse, affiliates proclaim that either 'Outsider Art' does not exist as such due to the heterogeneity of its members, or that the concept is fluid, non-binary and ever-changing—and can thus mean everything and nothing at all. With its sole dependency on contextual settings, 'Outsider Art' would be lacking inherent substance or coming, at best, with an "inescapable paradoxical flaw attached to it" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 19). Individuals aligned with this position therefore advocate for an expansive rather than exclusive definition of the term, if one is to be attempted at all.

Josh highlights the "inconsistencies and near-impossibility" of the label, pointing to the amount of "division and different interpretations hovering around the term" (Int., 2017, June 26). He reasons that "Outsider Art can be a very subjective term, which sort of makes it an impossible term" due to its signifying "different things for different people, for different reasons, and can be seen from different angles and be allied in different ways" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 19). He consequently declares the label "almost void" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 23).

Dan likewise believes that 'Outsider Art' is not "any one thing" but "something multilayered with numerous interwoven threads going in different directions" (Int., 2017, August 6). He grants that 'Outsider Art' may be "traced to certain roots" but that it has "developed in a myriad of factions", reaching a level of complexity that turns "the desire to define Outsider Art as this or that […] into a branding issue [that] is always going to be flawed" (Int. Dan, 2017, August 6). He therefore concludes, that "it might even be easier to define what it is not" (Int. Dan, 2017, July 16), with Lilly likewise warning that 'Outsider Art' is a "HUGE generalisation" (Int., 2017, July 17). According to her "you can't just say it, you need to explain it at the same time cos probably everyone uses it in a different way" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17). Hence, just like Dan, she proposes the use of a negative identification marker: "instead of saying it's

13 These juxtapositions remind strongly of Dubuffet's initial promotion of 'Art Brut' as an art produced by and for the 'common man'. Dubuffet, however, was soon to be disillusioned by the 'incomprehensibility' displayed by the 'general public' when encountering artworks in his collection. A quick survey I have taken a few years ago confirms what Dubuffet may have referred to and what has also been attended to on a broader scale by Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of The Judgment of Taste* (1984). The appreciation of 'Outsider Art', thus far still not part of the mainstream, tends to align with class and level of education. Those who may be considered belonging to the lower or working classes often tend to either reject or ridicule the non-representational art, doodles or 'imperfect' figurative renderings often related to 'Outsider Art' as the 'unskilled' workings of a 3-year-old.

something, maybe it's saying it's NOT this ['sort of fine arty artist'] thing" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17).

It seems as if oppositional constitutions are left intact, with generalisations simply switching sides: the 'Outsiders' are too diverse and heterogeneous to be classified, while the 'insiders' seem to be imagined as a clear-cut and homogenous group of artists that one is *not*.[14] Perhaps shifting ascriptions in this game of continuous reversal are inevitable, evoked by a genre classification that, by dint of the word 'Outsider', requires an opposite to be identified before any attempt to define it can be made. The personal experience of exclusion and marginalisation that all artists participating in this study have experienced might further enhance the *feeling* of an indeed oppositional setting, even if an artist consciously rejects such claims on the grounds of theoretical reflections.

Thus, although positions A and B may appear as extremes, in most cases clear lines of demarcation cannot be drawn that easily. Many of the artists I have spoken to were flexible in aligning with either position depending on the context. This can often yield contradictory and confusing results, as already indicated. Josh delineates 'Outsider Art' as a "a fresh and real form of Art, unpolluted by greed or compromise", which "separates itself cleanly" from what he calls "sterile and uninspired", "pretentious, empty, and clinical [...] high art" (Int., 2017, June 23). Yet at the same time he rejects the genre on the grounds that "you are categorising something that by definition implies it is uncategorisable" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 19). Dan, who is convinced of the existence of a true and genuine 'Outsider Artist', dismissively states at the same time: "I imagine a lot of people have very romantic notions about the genius of the outsider. I find it very camp" (Int., 2017, September 1). Even artists like Rob, who, as shown above, strongly believes in 'Outsider Art' as a united rebel force, indicates that 'Outsider Art' has numerous internal divisions, encompassing individuals who should and cannot be simplified. He concludes that the term 'Outsider Art' may therefore be "catchy" but, effectively, also "very vague", and that any reductive association of "loners and rebels" with the genre would be a "misinterpretation" (Int., 2017, July 3).

It might appear difficult to ascertain any artist's particular standpoint, considering these frequent fluctuations. Yet in many cases a somewhat diachronic movement can be observed, with Position A characterising the result of the identification process described earlier and Position B representing the conclusions of an, at times, more critical stance taken upon further reflections on the term and experiences made in the field. Josh, for example, states that while in the beginning he was "quite accepting", he has become "ambivalent about this ambiguous term" and has "no concrete opinion"

14 Another inversion I have encountered frequently over the years is swapping 'insider' for 'outsider' or vice versa, building on the idea of expressing a "true inner self" and reattributing mythic ascriptions of superficiality (i.e. 'outside') and depth (i.e. 'inside') respectively. Take the following statement by Josh: "What I feel connects a lot of work and artists considered 'Outsider' is simply the projection of the human spirit. [...] I find there is an irony in this, as it is referred to as Outsider, but I can see it as the qualities that depict a true artist, to bring out what is 'inside', and that it is that 'art' which feels more clinically made and detached from what really happens 'inside' of a person, which is created 'Outside'. It so happens that the majority of 'art' being made or exposed in the 'art world' corresponds to this sensibility, of being 'Outside'" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 25).

anymore (Int., 2017, June 24). It is this ambivalence that informs many of the above-mentioned examples, especially when Position B coincides with Position A. Nevertheless, most ambiguities concerning an individual artist's definitory understanding of 'Outsider Art' tend to be cleared up at the latest when it comes to the question of Self/Other labelling. It is at this stage that the hegemonic character of the 'Outsider Art' discourse reveals itself, since what follows from the initial identification process and the delineation of one's own favoured understanding of the genre are two, seemingly inevitable, questions: Do *I* qualify as an 'Outsider Artist'? and, *who* decides?

Owning 'Outsider Art' and Implicit Censorship

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this study concerns the problematic act of self-labelling: the majority of artists I have encountered in the field will feel a certain unease or hesitancy when confronted with this possibility. In many cases this reluctance does not result from a fear of negative discrimination due to being labelled an 'Outsider', but may be attributed to a lingering feeling of not being 'Outsider' *enough* to qualify.

To put the wariness of some artists with the label into relative perspective, I will refer to the two groups introduced in the previous section—the myth-bearers and the deconstructionists—even if, as demonstrated, in most cases individual alignments overlap and cannot be distinguished from one another in such a clear-cut manner. I aim to show, however, that such schematic differentiations still prove useful in revealing particular standpoints and the reasoning of an individual artist to (dis)engage with the act of self-labelling. Figure 27 outlines the three most commonly detected positions and frequency in which they were encountered.

Deconstructionist Stance	**NO,** I am not an 'Outsider Artist', and no one else is either.	No use of label; rejection of ascribed OA identity.	Tendency: very rare.
Myth-Bearing Stance	**YES,** I am an 'Outsider Artist'.	Use of label for self-empowerment; or, no use of label due to marginalising implications.	Tendency: rare.
	NO, I am not an 'Outsider Artist'; I am not disabled, ill, isolated, uneducated, unconventional, etc. enough to qualify.	Use of label but denial of self-labelling practice; welcoming of ascribed OA identity.	Tendency: frequent.

Figure 27. Positioning when Defining 'Outsider Art', Self-Identification and Labelling Practice.

As indicated, those aligned with a deconstructionist stance are most averse to the genre and to using the term since, according to their logic, there cannot be any such thing as an 'Outsider Artist'. Hence, not only do they refrain from self-labelling but

also proclaim that no one else can rightly hold the title 'Outsider Artist' either. This critical disposition is the rarest one encountered and, as I have shown previously, does mostly not occur in such extreme states, but is often only a contextual and temporary choice. The fleetingness of this standpoint can possibly be attributed to the circumstance that—despite of 'Outsider Art' not bearing any essence—it does still 'exist', yielding distinct consequences to those affiliated with the field. As Fine said, there is a "need to believe that boundaries are real, even if we recognise that they are constructed" (2004, p. 40). This makes it effectively very difficult to dissociate oneself fully, especially if an artist otherwise remains part of the field at the same time.

The myth-bearers—who tend to assert that there *is* such a thing as a true 'Outsider Artist'—can be split into two groups: a minority, which comfortably labels themselves 'Outsider Artists' or declines its usage for various reasons, while still feeling entitled to it, and a majority reluctant to self-apply the label, instead redirecting it once again to the realms of the 'Others', distinguishing the 'genuine' from the 'fake' from afar.

As already mentioned, artists like Rob and Jan Arden, who confidently use the label in a self-empowering manner and belong to the first group, are an infrequent occurrence. If a self-labelling practice does indeed occur, it can, however, be easily detected due to the hashtag culture of social media. Pete, for example, uses the tags "raw art", "outsider art", "punk art", "underground art", "originalist art", "art brut", "art now", "neo-expressionism", "indie art", "fine art", "trash art" and "contemporary art" for his artworks presented online. The direction taken is clear, and obviously targeted to a counter/sub-cultural audience, considering that of 12 tags, only 2 ("fine art", "contemporary art") refer to what Pete considers the "establishment". Alec's tagging practice seems to follow similar lines: he labels his work as "contemporary art", "outsider art", "art brut", "visionary art", "self-taught art", "folk art" and "tribal art", thus making use of a range of commonly encountered synonyms for 'Outsider Art' in his tagging practice, with only one referring to a mainstream positioning. Alec fondly remembers when he first discovered the term 'Outsider Art', while uploading his work on Outside In: "[I]t was the feeling of being a rebel, you know. We're doing what we feel on paper, we're not tied to draw the world, the external so much. I'm drawing my internal world, my internal journey" (Int. Alec, 2017, July 24). Note the idea of a collective "we" that also Rob makes use of. Just like Alec, he clings to an understanding of 'Outsider Art' as a space free of any constrictions and rules, but also distinctly emphasises its community ethos. On his website and on social media, Rob frequently declares his work to be "original Outsider Art", and when asked about his self-labelling practice he states the following:

> The phrase [Outsider Art] really chimed with me, because […] I have always considered myself on the outside of the art community and I have always insisted on painting what I like even if it is deeply unfashionable. As someone who has always been on the fringes of society […] I consider it a badge of honour to put myself under the umbrella of Outsider Art. It's been a long and painful journey of self discovery to file my work in a category but because Outsider Art has no rule book and openly encourages self-expression it is a community where I feel I truly belong. (Int. Rob, 2017, June 29)

The proclamation of 'Outsider Art' as a movement or community is a rather unusual notion—not only among art world professionals but also among other artists affiliated with the field. In the words of Maizels, the genre is generally considered "an art movement of one" (BBC 'Turning the Art World Inside Out', 2013) with one of its main features being its supposed idiosyncrasy and absence of group identity. Although many artists will affectionately recall a range of positive experiences when working with 'Outsider Art' charities and often emphasise that they felt very welcomed and appreciated when taking part in group exhibitions, meeting or even collaborating with other artists classed 'Outsiders', the idea of a movement is still largely absent among artists. This may be due to the specific constitution of the discourse and structural forces of the field: any kind of self-empowering, collective activity effectively goes against the purist rules of 'Outsider Art'. Even though artists like Rob might deny them, most artists will consciously or subconsciously be aware of these rules and implicitly express them by disengaging with the practice of self-labelling. Should they not refrain from using the label but dare to do so anyway, this will often be accompanied by the feeling that this is not 'quite right' and that they, personally, are not *really* entitled to be an 'Outsider Artist'.

This subset of the myth-bearers, who, just as the deconstructionist group, are reluctant to use the term for themselves but do so for different reasons, is indeed the most frequent positioning I have encountered among artists. The majority of this group will state that they are not 'Outsider Artists' because they are either not 'isolated', 'disabled', 'mentally ill' or 'uneducated' *enough* to qualify as such, hence performing a peculiar act of self-censorship which seems to be most pronounced in direct confrontation and conversation with another person aware of the field (in this case myself). In such settings, many artists appeared anxious to dissociate themselves from or even deny their self-labelling practice, or at least try to deflect from the question by remaining intentionally vague. Josh, perhaps the most successful artist featuring in my study, has taken part in many exhibitions clearly associated with 'Outsider Art', has appeared in *Raw Vision* magazine several times and has been personally embraced by key players like Cardinal. There are numerous entries on Google in which his name flags up in conjunction with the term 'Outsider Artist', and even on his own website he tags his work as "contemporary" as well as "outsider art". Yet in the interview, he diverts from his acclaimed status, announcing instead:

> I can't actually think of any time my work has straight up been called 'Outsider'. It's been included in exhibitions and conversations that have taken place around the term, but not necessarily had the term directly applied to it, or perhaps it has but I honestly can't think of a particular occasion where that has been the case. (Int. Josh, 2017, June 25)

He suspects that association to the field happened due to his affiliation with certain charities and key players and because the "obsessiveness" that is characteristic for his work "lends itself to outsider connotations" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 25). While Josh remains vague and careful in making any statements about his ascribed status or self-labelling as an 'Outsider Artist'—without completely rejecting any such practice—other artists are much bolder in their dissociation.

Over the last 10 years I have encountered many artists affiliated with the field who have explained to me in rich detail why they are *not* 'Outsider Artists'. As indicated above, this is often not due to not wanting this label but instead, resulting from the feeling of not properly qualifying for inclusion. Perhaps also indistinctly expressing the fear of one's own 'impurities' being exposed upon critical inspection, most commonly artists did not perceive themselves as 'pure' enough to qualify on the grounds that they either knew 'too much', were not ill/disabled/isolated or 'Other' enough, or because they perceived their own aesthetic style as too conventional.

When aligning oneself with the image of the 'Outsider Artist' as occurring fragmentarily during the identification process described in the beginning of the chapter, many artists seem to follow a tick-box strategy[15] by which they attempt to determine in an almost quantitative manner their own legitimacy for inclusion. Since the required credentials are measured in absolutes and individuals are mostly aware of their own complexities and—by definition—too familiar with themselves to be an 'Other', self-labelling as an 'Outsider Artist' can thereby turn into an impossible affair.

Sarah, an academically trained artist who produces rather meticulous and technically refined paintings, has a psychiatric background and is associated with several disability arts charities. She has expressed her "sense of not quite fitting" in this respect as follows: "I don't know you see. If it's style, then I think I don't fit in. If it's biography I think I do fit. […] I sort of perhaps see myself more there in my narrative" (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15). Yet she is quick to add that some of the most well-known European 'masters' of modern art have been mentally unstable, thus relativising this feature as being not enough for full qualification as an 'Outsider'. When asked if she would consider calling herself an 'Outsider Artist', she consequently replied that she finds it "problematic" and "difficult", preferring terms like "feminist or female artist" to account for her feeling of being marginalised (Int., 2017, June 15). She states that she would align herself with 'Outsider Art' in experience, but that she is "interested in that history and the academy" and thus effectively 'knows too much' (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15).

Ryan voices similar concerns. Like Sarah, he ticks the illness box, additionally working in a style considered unconventional by many. Consequently, he has frequently been called an 'Outsider Artist' by others, had an entire documentary dedicated to him and is part of collections all over the world. He also tags his work "outsider art", "original art" and "grotesque art" on social media and describes himself as an

15 By this I mean the endeavour of matching one's own identity to the list of exactly those criteria which, then as now, constitute the mythic image of the 'Outsider Artist'. Features such as being uneducated, unaware, uninfluenced, isolated or uncorrupted thereby tend to be considered by many artists as *boxes* needing to be ticked to fulfil the requirements of being a proper 'Outsider'. Dan, especially, made frequent use of this metaphor. While he speaks about his experiences of "being an Outsider Artist" online, as many others, he declines when I directly ask him if he would call himself an 'Outsider Artist': "No, […] I entertain myself with the thought that I am somehow in tune with certain aspects of those on the 'Outside'", but, he goes on, "I am tethered to a mortgage, have a part-time job, a partner, two children, a chicken and a cat, with an average IQ. Not quite on the Outside of society. On the other hand […] I could tick several boxes, including childhood trauma, mental health and disability" (Int. Dan, 2017, August 28).

"outsider artist" on his website. Yet in the interview, he relativises this practice, telling me that he does not really consider himself an 'Outsider' because he "had a very good art teacher", who taught him a lot, or rather 'too much' for him to comfortably claim a status of innocence (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 2).

The same goes for Andy. Unlike Sarah and Ryan, he does not so much align in biographical background story but in canonical aesthetic with 'Outsider Art'. In what he calls a "compulsive" manner, he makes use of found objects and has turned his whole property into a 'visionary environment'. Even though he acknowledges that certain galleries represent him as an 'Outsider Artist'—with many sources attesting his venturing "within outsider art circuits"—he tells me that "it is not technically correct that I should be called an Outsider Artist, because it does have to be people who are unaware of art" further adding, that also, "as far as I know, I'm not mentally ill ((laughs))" (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3). He admits that at times he feels honoured to be called an 'Outsider Artist', but "I know that I really can't be categorised like that" (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3). Still, on social media he tags his work "outsider art", "art brut", "art singular" and "primitive art", yet when I ask him if he would ever consider his own artwork to be 'Outsider Art' or represent it as such, he replies:

> Never. […] I sort of got linked to it because I always admired that work. […] I said that I was influenced by this kind of work, because I always found it much more interesting than contemporary art. […] But I'm NOT an outsider artist, because I'm educated in art history. […] I read a lot about it. (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3)

All the examples given relate to the issue of being 'too aware' of the field and 'contaminated' by knowledge, thereby failing the purist standards of being 'innocent' and 'unfettered by culture'. Like many who subscribe to these mythical requirements, which must pale in any comparison with the actual Self, artist Steve Murison reminds about the moral standards to be upheld: "A true Outsider Artist would have no concept, care or understanding of the label" (2014, August 26). Any declaration of oneself as an 'Outsider Artist', despite knowing about this dogma, can therefore only ever be 'untrue', resulting in feeling a certain sense of guilt or, more generally, turning the label into something that no one can ever really fit in. This does not only refer to the level of knowledge, but may similarly be experienced if an individual considers themselves (or is considered as) not ill or disabled 'enough', i.e. in a perverse twist, not having suffered enough to carry the title 'Outsider Artist'. Likewise, one may just not be isolated enough and, by the very act of considering self-labelling, express a wish for communication and social contact that would immediately corrupt any such state in the first place.

I have already thoroughly depicted the paradoxical implications of the term and genre in the historical section and media analysis, but what seems striking at this point and puzzled me very much in the beginning of my research was the fervent denial of self-labelling and dissociation of many artists with the genre while leaving its mythical constituencies intact. Even though most of these artists were/are called 'Outsider Artists' by others, and apparently have no reservations when self-labelling as such online, many do renounce this practice in direct conversation. The furthest many seem to be willing to go is to proclaim that they *feel* like an 'Outsider Artist' or

that they would instead prefer another label, bearing similar connotations.[16] How can this be explained?

I suspect that the willingness to self-label as an 'Outsider Artist' on the internet is related to the relative safety the media provides via the temporal and spatial distance created between participants, reducing the chances of ad hoc confrontation and the necessity to justify oneself for being/not being 'Other' enough. On the other hand, the tick-box mentality and fear that seems to inform the self-performed exclusion from 'Outsider Art' carried out by so many artists points to a much deeper problematic with the label: not only does it come with a lot of connotational and historical baggage, it also implies an imbalance of power. Effectively, it can be a dire realisation for many artists that the label is and never has been 'up for grabs', that the field, quite contrary to its presupposed freedom, is tightly guarded, and the 'outside' an exclusive, fenced-off area with strict access restrictions.

Liminal States and being Outside of 'Outsider Art'

As already indicated, following the initiation, identification with and at times romantic idealisation of 'Outsider Art', most artists sooner or later realise that the genre comes with its own rules, frameworks and rigid boundaries. They will discover, often with dismay, that 'Outsider Art' does not provide the freedom they had hoped for and that its respective canon resembles the flipside of the established art world, as depicted in Figure 25. When barriers turn into assets, one framework of legitimacy is replaced by another. New barriers arise once an individual is introduced to the rules or confronted with stringent gatekeepers, who—just as much as in any other art world—follow the consensus of this particular field when deciding if an individual is to be granted access or not (or in this case, if an artist is excluded enough to be included). More so than elsewhere, in this field of what Fine called "identity art"[17],

16 Such diversions seem less dangerous: while one might be closely scrutinised when saying "I *am* an Outsider Artist", *feeling* like an 'Outsider Artist' defies contestation. Likewise, labelling one's own work with a less heavily regulated and therefore seemingly more fitting synonym is also a frequent practice. Andy states that "the best term I thought was singular art […] THAT is more correct I think, because what I'm doing is sort of my own vision" (Int., 2017, July 3). Other artists opt for "dark surreal art", "visionary art", "intuitive art" or "grassroots art". Art historian Melissa Westbrook even invented the label "Neo-Outsiders" to embrace all those 'Outsiders' not 'Outsider enough', due to their "cultural/intellectual/social awareness", somewhat resembling Dubuffet's '*Neuve Invention*'. Having worked with "Neo-Outsiders" before becoming frustrated with their self-promotional activities, Dan introduced the label "No-Sider" in response, to vent his "discontent with the way I saw particular 'Outsider groups' becoming vehicles for the equivalent of what can be termed the 'Worried Well'" (Int., 2017, July 26). This terminological spiral, elongated by the polarising ideas of contamination vs. purity, may be reproduced indefinitely.

17 Fine uses the term "identity art" to refer to those fields of art which are "primarily defined through the characteristics of its producers" rather than through aesthetics, listing as further examples "women's art" or "African American art" (2004, p. 277f). Fine's terminology is perhaps slightly misleading, considering that there is indeed also an aesthetic framework involved: being a social 'Outsider' alone is not enough, just as—historically speaking—being a psychiatric patient does not guarantee that any artistic produce will necessarily be considered outstanding, with only a

the hegemonic framework and canon operates in disguise, since the genre's existence rests on the myth of the supposedly free, uncorrupted and authentic 'Outsider' genius who seems to defy any straightforward testing. Perhaps to avoid being denounced politically incorrect for selling, collecting or exhibiting artists because of their story of being 'Other' due to a disability, illness, etc. several key players, such as Phyllis Kind or Johann Feilacher (as seen in Chapter 4), will instead proclaim that they have no interest in an 'Outsider Artists" biographies, hiding their judging criteria behind a veil of mystery. That it always comes down to social *as well as* aesthetic aspects when authenticating an artwork or individual as 'Outsider' with a particular set of criteria needing to be fulfilled in order to belong, will again become most obvious and is felt distinctly by those who do not fit and meet them.

With reference to the data collected, I have already demonstrated the concrete nature of these new barriers and obstacles arising, and the standards upon which the legitimacy of 'Outsider Art' is ultimately measured by: they are implied in the answers given by artists when asked about their self-labelling practices and their often displayed reluctance to self-define as 'Outsider Artists'.

To summarise again, these new barriers involve: being too educated/knowing too much, being too aware of the field/interested in one's own status as an artist or making work that appears to be too conventional. This is the barrier-skeleton, providing a scale. Where exactly a particular line is crossed and at what point someone is considered too aware, how much influence and education is tolerable and what currently counts as conventional is flexible, under constant negotiation and depending on a variety of contextual factors. This can produce the strange effect that an individual artist might perceive themselves as inside and outside, included and excluded from a particular art world *at the same time*, since, as Alec surmised it: "it all depends on the flavour of the day" (Int., 2017, July 24). However, even though positionalities change, experiences of inclusion/exclusion intersect, and the conditions for access to opportunities depend on individual decision makers rather than clear-cut doctrines, a consensus still exists. It is there and ruling, and questions revealing the 'barrier-skeleton' will inevitably be asked, either during the process of an artist's self-reflection, as depicted, or at the latest when an artist seeks admission by certain gatekeepers, as illustrated below.

Since this operation happens in disguise, it often sounds absurd at first if an artist says they feel 'outside' of 'Outsider Art'. However, such feelings seem comprehensible when considering that the 'Outsider Art' world operates in much the same way as any other art world. This can be a particularly harsh experience for artists who are pigeonholed as 'self-taught' or 'disabled'—categories which do indeed often act as authenticity markers but nevertheless do not necessarily grant access to the field. Artists who have experienced exclusion in mainstream art world settings because they are 'too disabled', for example, may now find themselves being likewise rejected from the 'Outsider Art' world for 'not being disabled enough' under this new framework.

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small percentage of patients having engaged with creative activities in the first place, as already Prinzhorn (1922) remarked.

Other artists, intrinsically aware of the expectations of the canon, might even transpose the term 'disabled' to the aesthetic realm. I once had a conversation with Ricky, a non-UK artist, who lived in a renowned 'Art Brut' centre and created most of his work in the on-site art studio. However, none of his artworks were displayed in the adjacent gallery, nor were they included in the catalogue or up for sale. When I asked him why that was, he simply replied: "I do not draw disabled enough" (Field Notes Non-UK, 2017, June). Upon looking at his work it became clear to me what this meant. Ricky's art bore obvious influences from hip hop, graffiti culture and street art, therefore evidently not matching the canonical expectations held by the centre. Although these expectations were not verbally spelled out by staff, it was implicitly clear that the myth of the authentic 'Outsider' genius could not be upheld in this case: Ricky's work lacked the required aesthetic 'rawness' and idiosyncrasy. He had the right story when it came to his disability, but he was 'too aware' of his cultural and social surroundings and simply produced the 'wrong' kind of art.

The inclination of producing the wrong kind of art is perhaps as common as the feeling of having the wrong kind of biography, especially when it comes to education. Many artists, like Dan, have told me that they did not have any luck with galleries, because they "have a foot in both camps, outsider and former Fine Art student. So maybe not outsider enough for dealers" (Int., 2017, August 2). On the other hand, the example of Josh proves that an artist may well have considerable success in the 'Outsider Art' world even if they hold an art degree, yet one should perhaps refrain from making overt reference to it. Likewise, the often-voiced claim of having been rejected by art world professionals due to one's illness or disability—when effectively their work has been turned away by said actors because it did not pass the aesthetic quality control test—must be evaluated in an equally critical manner. In these cases, an artist's ascribed Otherness may be modified by the artist to a moral instrument to press charges of discrimination and injustice—a projection which may render it cognitively easier to deal with negative experiences such as artistic rejection. These counter-examples are important, as they put the believed reasons for exclusion given by many artists into relative perspective and demonstrate that they do not necessarily have to match with the actual reason for exclusion and decision-making processes performed by certain key players. These small snippets also indicate the multilayered workings behind the experience of feeling outside of 'Outsider Art', as predominately deriving from those who have been excluded on the onset due to a 'wrong' story or aesthetic.

The implications of such experiences can, however, be even more drastic for those who do tick all the required boxes initially, will gain reputation in the field, sell substantial amounts of work and become relatively famous, but are then retrospectively shunned from the field for these very reasons. If an 'Outsider Artist' does not die in time, thus sealing off the myth of their authenticity, there appears to be a fine line not to be crossed, requiring the artist to disengage with and display constant disinterest in their achievements in order not to lose status. I have already described the consequences of crossing this line in the historical chapter, when Dubuffet downgraded Chaissac from 'Art Brut' to 'Neuve Invention' for being too recognised and too eager to network. There are, of course, also more recent examples. The work of

well-known 'Outsider Artist' Joe Coleman, for instance, was not allowed to be shown at the 2002 New York Outsider Art Fair anymore, because he was "too aware of the whole business process of selling" (Coleman as cited by Walker, 2002, December 19). Also UK-based artist Albert Louden's destiny is noteworthy in this respect. Louden approached curator and collector Victor Musgrave after the seminal *Outsiders* show in 1979 and was embraced by the latter, who turned out to be enthusiastic about Louden's artwork. The artist subsequently gained prominence, culminating in a solo show at the Serpentine Gallery in 1985 with major commercial galleries subsequently representing his work. These events marked the end of his career: Louden did not find the hoped-for acceptance in the mainstream art world and, due to trying 'too hard', was also shunned from the 'Outsider Art' world, consequently remaining outside of both worlds. Influential collector Monika Kinley, who inherited Musgrave's archive, takes full responsibility for dropping Louden, stating: "We need to know that artists are working by themselves for themselves. If an artist communicates with other artists on the cultural roundabout, then he's not an outsider" (*The Independent*, 1995, October 1). Louden reacted to such statements with resentment: "I refuse to play the purity game" he tells *The Independent*; "I won't play the piano to Monika or anyone else. She dropped me because her driving force was the museum and mine was making a living. It's as simple as that" (1995, October 1).

Of this conglomerate—being too famous, too successful, too educated, too engaged, too ambitious, too aware—the most detrimental 'mistake' one can make—yet the easiest one to avoid—is self-labelling. Taking all other reasons for exclusion aside, calling oneself an 'Outsider Artist' appears to be the most unforgiving, engraving offence in the field, breaking with the rule of authenticity and resulting in the exact opposite of what an artist may have desired. As Maizels, editor of *Raw Vision* magazine and thus one of the most powerful gatekeepers in the field, states:

> it is almost axiomatic that those who claim to us that they are outsiders are not. They have too much nous: they know about art. We get letters every week that begin 'although I've been to art school' … my heart sinks. Such people have been rejected by galleries and are isolated, hurt and bitter. They really do believe they're outsiders. [… By contrast] the genuine outsiders are usually brought to our attention by intermediaries. They have about them almost a nobility, an inner pride. (*The Independent*, 1995, October 1)

The credo that an artist can only ever be a true 'Outsider Artist' if they are unaware of it is resonated unisono by key players adhering to purist standards. The emotional disdain displayed when an artist introduces themselves as an 'Outsider' may thereby not only result from a conflict in their ideological beliefs. Perhaps such forms of agency also represent a threat to the colonial enterprise of the field, undermining the authority of gatekeepers who, after all, want to *discover* rather than be approached. Maizel's statement demonstrates that the boundaries of the field are far from blurry, as often attested (e.g. Landert, 2011; Rhodes, 2000; Maclagan, 2009), but to the contrary enforced and tightly guarded, revealing the intrinsic mechanisms and power imbalances involved in keeping it alive and thriving. While for a long time the issue of self-labelling did not present itself as problematic or a particular threat, the rising

popularity of 'Outsider Art' seems to have increased the likelihood of artists wanting to be associated with the field. Confronted with a rush of admission seekers, the field consequently had to react: to retain the supposed purity of the genre and its credentials of authenticity and rawness while indeed gradually becoming part or even assimilating with the 'inside', a new opponent and enemy had to be introduced: the 'faker'. To understand the constitution of this new entity, it is worthwhile to briefly reconsider the cornerstones of the field's attraction.

Rising Popularity, Admission Seekers and 'Fakers'

As mentioned on several occasions throughout this text, the popularity of 'Outsider Art' has continuously risen over the last 50 years, and with it the legitimacy of the field within the broader art world and, to a certain extent, public realm. Of a myriad of factors involved, the capitalist recuperation of the 'deviant', state regulations and diversity policies as well as the internet, seem to have been of crucial importance for this increase in recognition. The previous sections have very much focused on how 'Outsider Art' was formed to fill a vacuum created by or rather within the established art world, antagonising the latter's increasing commercial interests, market orientation, focus on sophisticated yet constricting concepts and calculated framing of the artist persona. However, the idea of the 'Outsider Artist' has also become relevant on a much broader societal scale.

Surpassing the limited realms of art world circles, the growing public interest in the genre can perhaps be understood as a form of "premature nostalgia" (Maclagan, 1987, p. 10) aligning with a generally rising affection for handmade objects, as well as vintage and retro styles which are often perceived as transmitting devices of the authentic. The thrill of discovery and desire to unearth "hidden gems" (Int. Josh, 2017, June 22), goes along with a preoccupation with the 'imperfect' and 'unique' which may be felt at risk in a world overladen with industrially fabricated, mass-produced items which, to some, appear as factory-made assemblages of cold and dead material, bearing no 'soul'. Indeed, Maclagan attributes this premature nostalgia and attraction to the 'original' to the "feeling of being satiated with the sophistications of civilization", claiming that "industrialization and the empire of mass media are eroding the local and eccentric" (1987, p. 10). However, in my understanding, these two entities are very much involved in *creating*, rather than eroding, the myth of the local and eccentric in their appearance as seemingly vanishing counterparts in the first place. As Ferguson points out contrary to Maclagan, "counternarratives" are not only constantly entering and being absorbed in consumer societies, but the survival of the system *depends* on the 'eccentric' as a "continual novelty", even if it is "drained of any elements which might challenge the system as a whole" at the same time (1990, p. 11). With any such system based on consumption requiring a continuous flow of the new, the facilitation of ever-greater extremes, the overexposure of difference and recreation of 'freaks' in the mass media appear to be an almost necessary requirement to stand out and capture a consumer's fleeting attention. Hevey has called this phenomenon "Enfreakment" (2006), referring to the constructed and mediated gap between the 'normal' and 'abnormal' by which difference is stylised as the absolute Other. Inevitably catching

the attention of audience members by addressing common fears and curiosities like 'insanity' as "fascinat[ing] and frighten[ing] all at once" (Scull, 2015, p. 10), this process at the same time discriminates, marginalises and reduces the exposed individual in question to serve as a projection surface and 'freak' to capitalise on.

The 'Outsider Artist' can be a story well sold in both instances: not only do they ostensibly come with an aura of the 'true' and 'authentic', which many times is believed to be in retreat, but also they are often a bearer of some 'monstrosity', or at least display a sufficient amount of 'deviant' behaviour to be entertaining from a voyeuristic perspective. While many, as indicated, will deny that the latter will play any significant role in their interest in 'Outsider Art', the former reason perhaps works well enough on its own to account for the increasing commercialisation and recuperation of 'Outsider Art', as the Other within.[18]

On a different level, state regulations, the introduction of quotas and anti-discrimination laws more so than ever address the topic of diversity. At least in theory, their respective policies acknowledge difference, vouch for equality and invite the participation of minorities. Although stigmatisation is far from being eradicated and much could be said about the flaws of certain attempts under these banners, I suspect that awareness concerning topics such as ethnicity, mental illness, disability, sexual orientation, etc. is nevertheless greater than ever. Furthermore, the internet has most definitely played a substantial role in making 'Outsider Art' and non-normative voices in general not only more visible, but also enhancing participation and inviting self-representation by its relative ease of access and promising opportunities.

Resulting from the increased acknowledgement of difference, the visibility of diversity and with it, the growing popularity of the 'Outsider Art' field, is a change from predominately negative to positive connotations attributed to the genre, which in an individual artist's case may also signify an experienced transition from negative to positive discrimination. As Pete recalls, for a long time, 'Outsider Art' has just been understood as "unprofessional" art, "not up to gallery standards" (Int., 2017, December 18). It was used "more as a negative label", whereas "these days, you hear the term outsider art used more frequently and it's becoming more and more accepted. […] Today there is just a lot more open-mindedness and greater acceptance for almost

18 As indicated above and further illustrated by Hall (albeit with reference to subcultures) in 1997, the media situates and incorporates resistance and deviant groups within the dominant framework of meanings in form of the spectacle. By this process of recuperation, subcultural signs are turned into mass-produced commodities and fashions, thereby decontextualising and "freezing" (Hebdige, 2006, p. 155) their original innovations, resulting in a loss of 'edge'. Although many artists like Pete, Josh or Dan liken 'Outsider Art' to now "gentrified" (Int. Dan, 2017, July 25) genres like Punk or Indie, and fear that the same fate (i.e. turning the outrageous into a 'safe' consumer product) will befall the 'Outsider Art' genre, there is a distinct difference between said genres. 'Outsider Art' has been decontextualised from the beginning—being constructed from above, it lacks any sub- or countercultural group identity or the political force of grassroots movements. Since it is not based on any original innovation either, but perhaps rather on an original invention by certain art world professionals, recuperation seems to be a second-level repetition at best. In a twisted way, the genre can thus be understood as having been "gentrified" from the beginning.

anything" (Int. Pete, 2917, December 18). In a similar manner, Dan has observed a much more personal transition of viewpoints:

> My own views have changed along with other people's perspectives. My opinion is, that change was certainly aided by the advent of the internet, which enabled people to share their work, thoughts, etc. with other people. Very few people that I knew were talking about Outsider Art and almost no one accepted it as being comparable with say contemporary art, at least in the UK. […] I think that today there is a greater awareness of marginalised, outsider, hidden communities, disabilities art. And maybe more opportunities. (Int. Dan, 2017, July 12)

It seems feasible to assume that these changes—the greater awareness and attested open-mindedness in the public realm, more funding and possibilities for those marginalised as well as the current popularity of the field—have markedly influenced and raised the likelihood of artists longing for association with 'Outsider Art'. Not only does the by now validated genre seem to provide prestige (or at least positive stigmatisation), but also on a more tangible scale, more opportunities, as indicated by Dan. If one has struggled thus far to gain a foothold in the established art world, or has been rejected by the mainstream all along, the genre can become especially alluring; something that said artists may *want* to be part of and benefit from, even if this is often not a conscious, strategic consideration. Understandably, a great many artists who have experienced exclusion and marginalisation in one way or another thus claim a piece of the 'Outsider Art' pie, be it exhibition space, funding, or residencies—an attempt, which after all mostly translates into the legitimate wish of sustaining one's own artistic passion and being seen, heard, and recognised as human beings and artists. As seen above, expressing this wish alone, however, can lead to instant disqualification and exclusion from the field for being 'corrupt', and in the worst-case scenario to an omnipresent stigmatisation of being a 'faker'.

It has perhaps become obvious by now that, in the 'Outsider Art' world, a 'fake' does—in most cases and in this context in particular—not relate to the imitation or copying of another artist's artwork, nor does it relate to appropriating an established artist's identity (e.g. by using their signature) for financial gain. Much to the contrary, it is the 'authenticity' of an individual artist and the presupposed purity of their motives that are doubted and under constant suspicion.

Generally, a 'faker' is believed to be someone who is a calculated, corrupted villain—an artist, who "abuse[s]" 'Outsider Art' "after their own fashion" (Maclagan, 2009, p. 23) and who "emulate[s]" and "cultivate[s] the appearance of insanity" (MacGregor, 1989, p. 9) for their own benefit. Be it to raise attention, reputation or financial gain, yet in any case to advance an otherwise perhaps struggling career. In light of these developments, Maclagan speaks of "ersatz Outsider Art" (2009, p. 23), yet where do these actors draw the line? What does *genuine* 'insanity' look like, and why does it necessarily have to be anti-commercial or linked to economic struggle? How is marginalisation *properly* articulated, and why is it only then considered authentic, when a desire for recognition and attention is lacking? And, to take the predominate line of the argument further: who or what really needs protecting and justifies this fervent condem-

nation of 'abusers', if those who are the 'real deal' do supposedly not even know or care about their status?

Effectively, statements such as those echoed by Maclagan and MacGregor put *any* 'Outsider Artist' into an impossible position and run the risk of further denying and determining a state of inferiority back-to-front. They imply that, to be recognised, these artists must necessarily remain passive and ignorant of the art world, making it obligatory for the latter to do 'authenticity work' instead. Exaggerating, but nevertheless getting to the heart of the matter, art journalist John Windsor has summarised the paradoxical requirements faced by 'Outsider Artists' as follows:

> It isn't easy, being an outsider. Once elected, there are appearances to be kept up: the solitary lifestyle, the nutty habits, the freedom from artistic influences. Above all, indifference to earning money. Scrounging for canvas and paint, going without luxuries such as food and socks, are all part of the life of austerity that one's public demands. In the end, the outsider's surest way of proving his integrity is to be dead. (Windsor, 1997, p. 50)

How can these stringent desiderata be explained? As in many other realms of the arts, but perhaps especially so in the case of 'Outsider Art', the field does not only have limited resources, but also a pronounced interest to remain exclusive, since its existence economically and ideologically depends on the rare, unique and supposedly authentic. With the field's legitimacy and validation resting on mythic constituencies which essentially lack substance, a continuous fear of contamination is perhaps a natural consequence. I would even claim that this fear, as expressed by many key players, is not irrational but adequate, given that one cannot simply discriminate between the eternally impure and truly authentic, yet one's investments still depend on it. Even, or perhaps especially, with those 'Outsider Artists' admitted to the field and already under one's patronage, one has to stay alert at all times and closely oversee their moves, since their ascribed purity (i.e. value and status in the field) can shatter in an instant if the artist dares to speak up for themselves. With the self-promotional opportunities provided by the internet and the rising popularity of the genre somewhat turning 'Outsider Art' into a trend, this threat is indeed very real, and the fears of purist key players and gatekeepers—often the main beneficiaries—co-increasing as a result. Since the field finds itself under constant danger of being dismantled, diluted and potentially infected by parasitical 'fakers', the tendency to draw clear-cut borders, although perhaps ultimately doomed, seems to be on the rise and fostered by the actors for whom the stakes are highest. This group is indeed eager to keep the 'Outsider' allocation pure, since by becoming too popular and too accessible the field would inevitably lose its validity and currency, and thus void their investments. These investments, or the interests of certain individuals in the sustenance of the field, can come in various forms, but largely circle around the socio-economic and ideological sphere.

As indicated above, being affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field can present itself as a great risk for the careers of individual artists who must constantly watch their step and, as Lilly subsumes, "can't ever really win with that at all" (Int., 2017, July 17). Art world professionals who represent living artists also fear the consequences of its rising

popularity: they are confronted with the constant danger of having the latter's 'cultural contamination' exposed. Here, as much as in other art markets, prices go up when an artist has died, but in this instance not only because their artistic output is thus limited, but also due to their 'impurity' (i.e. humanness) not being at risk of being exposed anymore. A lot of institutions directly or implicitly benefit from stringent criteria and tight boundaries, retaining an image of the Other: museums, galleries, art fairs, dealers and the media all tend to make their money with the distinct and special, rather than the common and everyday. 'Fakers' must be singled out and the weeds removed, so to speak, in order not to harm the field's legitimacy upon which not only the financial value of certain artworks in one's collection, but also the status of a great many art world professionals, depends. Promoting an artist whose 'cultural contamination' is later on exposed can, after all, not only result in great financial loss and substantially harm an actor's reputation in the field; it may also be simply embarrassing, especially when the artist persona and their biography turn out to be hoax. Most recently the Russian 'Outsider Artist' Foma Jaremtschuk, said to have been an isolated psychiatric patient and gulag prisoner in the 1940s and whose work has been part of the renowned Henry Boxer collection, for instance, turned out to be a scam made up by a dealer (*The Telegraph*, 2019, October 10). Being a victim of such a trick, unable to detect its fraudulence and buying into a story that has been entirely fabricated can make a collector's, critic's or curator's respectability in the field dwindle significantly.

Even though economic interest is often deliberately downplayed, I suspect it is still fair to assume that most of those involved in the field may not be in it for the money in the first place. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the ideological construct of the Other acts as a projection surface and escapist fantasy, and therefore holds a spiritual value for many art world professionals. Effectively, it often takes the likings of an almost religious realm, reflecting a peculiar form of anti-market mentality in which certain 'Outsider Artists' tend to be canonised as 'holy' and from which the corrupted 'infidels' and those engaging in 'heretic practice' must be expelled. The 'Outsider Artist' is thereby perhaps not consciously constructed as a category to benefit from, but often truly believed in, resembling the postmodern 'noble savage' to be admired from a distance. They are modelled to represent the antithesis to capitalism, with the artist's work deriving its value from supposedly having been produced without a strategic market orientation—it is thus 'divine' and, the artist one of the chosen few. This scarcity is necessary to uphold the ideology: after all, if everyone can be an 'Outsider Artist', it follows that no one is. And if the majority, underlying commercial forces, claims to be the Other, the Other necessarily becomes diluted in the Self.

Many of those engaged in the field, however, also follow altruistic motives and argue that an absence of strict boundaries around 'Outsider Art' would make artworks under this banner vanish, and 'vulnerable' individuals invisible once again. While I agree that the genre may indeed 'protect' many artists who would otherwise not survive in the established art world and mainstream, it nevertheless seems to exclude just as many. It further raises questions about the way 'Outsider Artists' effectively benefit from being labelled or included in a field so tightly guarded by patrons—an issue I will investigate in detail in section 6.4. At this point, one may argue, that resources

are limited and the field of 'Outsider Art' must therefore, for better or for worse, be regulated by stringent criteria so as not to be taken over once again by the already 'privileged'. This view, however, rests on the abstract idea of splitting society into two extremes—the privileged vs. the marginalised—and forgets the intersectional character of identity and grey area in-between these poles by an all-too-eager subdivision. Real progressive movements vouching for diversity, participation and equal opportunities for everyone then risk being submerged and stifled under such polarities, as anthropologist Asma Mansoor, among others, indicated in 2016.

Since the survival of the field depends on it, the 'fakers' do not only have to be exposed; they had to be invented in the first place as a counterpart to the 'authentic Outsider'. This invention of the 'faker' ultimately seems to cause the above-described effect that artists tend to self-censor and refrain from self-labelling out of fear for their 'impurities' being exposed, hence eradicating the possibility of self-empowerment within the field. Being implicitly aware of one's own complexities, one can never fit the purist requirements of the generalised ideal of the 'Outsider Artist'; the Self is always *more*. In this framework, the answer to the question "Am I a faker?" can only ever be "Yes". Hence, if artists do indeed decide to use the label for themselves, this will be, in many cases, accompanied by a feeling of guilt, resulting in what comes close to "impostor syndrome", in the words of Tovey (BBC Radio 4 'Outsiders', 2018) or at least evoking a certain feeling of unease. After all, anyone in the restricted field of 'Outsider Art' can potentially be uncovered as a 'faker', including historical 'masters' such as Wölfli, Schröder-Sonnenstern or Lee Godie, above whom the suspicion of being a 'faker' would nowadays possibly likewise hover, were they not already deceased.

This seems to be the crux of the hegemonic patterns inscribed and reproduced by the 'Outsider Art' discourse. Many artists do not gain admittance to the field for being 'not Outsider enough' or are pushed out of it again for having displayed 'contaminated' behaviour and just as many seem to have performed a peculiar form of self-exclusion long before having made any of these experiences, hence pre-marginalising themselves. Therefore, a relationship of inequality and imbalance of power is expressed and reproduced by the usage *as well as* non-usage of the label. In either case, the mechanism of self-empowerment is disrupted, systems of oppression are maintained and the hegemonic structure of the discourse, as well as the mythical constitution of the Other, left intact. This leads to a continuation of practices that might have harmful effects on artists, yet benefit their patrons, with access to the field seemingly almost regulating itself. This is, however, far from being a mere, passive side-effect.

In my understanding, one of the most crucial aspects of this phenomenon is that both artists *and* art world professionals are equally involved in reproducing the purist and exclusive demeanour of the 'Outsider Art' field. Many artists will not only engage in the self-performed exclusion illustrated above; they will also be on the lookout for 'fakers', actively engaging in discriminating between 'genuine Outsiders' and those 'jumping on the bandwagon'. Effectively, when it comes to singling out the 'fakers', it sometimes appears as if the myth-bearers among the artists act as the most eager border control, with the at times additional ingredient of bitterness and (more so) feeling of injustice to one's own morals or experiences not to be underestimated.

After having predominately focused on the perspective of art world professionals, I would now also like to add examples of gatekeeping executed by the artists themselves.

Practices of Scapegoating Among Artists

During interviews and informal conversations, many artists have expressed a certain sense of worry concerning the loss of the idealised, pure 'Outsider Artist', echoing the fears voiced by Cardinal (1979), MacGregor (1989) and Thévoz (1995). While most artists appreciate the growing popularity of the field and welcome the opportunities the internet offers, many are in two minds about the consequences of these 'improvements'. Artist Brian Gibson speaks about a "seismic transformation" of 'Outsider Art' and cherishes the freedom and possibilities provided by recently introduced amenities such as social media (2014, August 13). According to him, this new level of connectivity means, that "creative people working outside the mainstream are no longer so dependent on the nod of the well informed to decide whether this or that piece is an actual work of art" (Gibson, 2014, August 13). Yet he also cautions that being an 'Outsider Artist' has become "incredibly fashionable of late", that it is "easy to fake Outsider Art" and that "anyone can get in on the act" (Gibson, 2014, August 13).

Apart from stylistic appropriations of the canonical 'Outsider' aesthetic, among artists, the greatest sin committed by said 'fakers' appears to be the practice of 'cashing in' on their own confessions, seemingly turning the experience of suffering into a business model. In the eyes of many, this not only waters down the 'authenticity' of such artists, exposing them as 'fakers', but can appear unjust or even undermining of one's own experience of suffering. Referring to this trend of confessional art, Gibson states that he has the "greatest respect" for those artists who not only "have the ability to write down, draw and paint to reveal a deeply personal, integral part of themselves" but also the "courage" to make these personal externalisations public (2014, November 19). Yet, at the same time, he denounces now successful artists such as James Rhodes or Tracey Emin because they "seem[] to know how to profit from fessing up [their] past, whilst remaining in the driving seat" (Gibson, 2014, November 19). He realises the danger involved in this critique, namely that it may be read as advocating for further censorship of individuals who suffer, adding that he "fundamentally believe[s] that people should not be silenced for what they have experienced" (Gibson, 2014, November 19). He still, however, concludes with a warning, that "a lot of confessional art will over time be reduced to the status of another form of 'the selfie'", and further, that marginalised artists "may once again find themselves out of the picture" (Gibson, 2014, November 19). Now not only due to being overshadowed by more PR- and media-savvy artists who turn their own suffering into symbolic and economic capital, but also due to "unscrupulous figures waiting in the wings who are only too willing to put their profit and their own prestige way before the people they purport to represent" (Gibson, 2014, November 19).

The suspicion concerning intermediaries and the loss of integrity via turning the experience of suffering into financial gain is also resonated by Chloe. She engaged in correspondence with an 'Outsider Art' collective consisting of artists with HIV for

over a decade. When she finally met them in person, she recollects having felt sorely disappointed:

> I went to see them. And they are a business. And that blew me away. Cos I said, yeah, it must be difficult, because you know, you're working with artists, and as I said, most of them are not trained, some of them like me, are HCV positive or HIV positive, and you know they might die. And I talked a bit about politics, and he said: 'No, no! We're not a charity! We're a business! We're professional!' It was horrible. (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

Having such a critical stance towards the believed increment of a 'business of suffering' can, for many artists, turn into a seemingly unsolvable conflict and sometimes add yet another level of self-censorship. After all, how can a critically oriented artist sustain their self-integrity if they suddenly achieve a certain level of success based on an artistic practice focusing on the processing of traumatic experiences? Perhaps only by counteracting one's own career interests or by further dissociation from a field that to many artists seems to be saturated more and more by 'fakers', forfeiting its original appeal.

Lilly's case is a good example to illustrate this conflict. She states: "I don't wanna be part of that, like the whole idea of what I do is just sitting and doodling, so I'm not gonna be doing it for selling" (Int., 2017, July 17). She decries that the field has become too "trendy", "booming" and all about "hot selling things" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17), and to retain her integrity and 'authenticity' is moved to stifle her own career ambitions, rejecting financial success. That Lilly seems to do so out of moral conviction rather than actual economic disinterest is indicated by the fact that, much to the contrary of the latter, the idea of selling and receiving attention still appears to form an integral part of her practice. She does, for example, state that she feels "happy" if someone expresses the wish to buy her work, "because it shows that I'm not wasting my time" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17). At the same time, she condemns artists who articulate a similar external directionality as 'fakers', or in her words, "abusers" of 'Outsider Art', who are "just trying to use that [label] just to be able to get those people looking for their stuff. That sucks." According to her, only those who "do it straight [for and] from [them]selves" are real 'Outsiders', whereas those who "latch" onto a certain style or spruce up their story for marketing purposes, "just trying to get them likes" on social media, are "abusing it" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17). Realising her own conflictual positioning, she closes her argument with a slight shrug and chuckles: "I hashtag. I use tags on the bottom of my photo. I'm a complete hypocrite!" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17).

The self-attestation as a hypocrite reveals Lilly's belief in the existence of an authentic 'Outsider Artist' as the ultimate measure, and perhaps carries with it a slight sense of guilt due to her being welcoming and receptive to an audience and not as isolated as she 'should' be.

Also acting as part of what one might be inclined to call the 'grassroots police' is Andy. As demonstrated above, he dissociates himself from self-labelling as an 'Outsider Artist', therefore evading the conflict Lilly is confronted with, instead being able to enjoy his financial success and reputation. Other than Lilly and Gibson, who are

engaged with singling out the 'fakers', Andy focuses on diverting from himself to those who are 'the real deal'. He advises me that, instead of talking to him, I should rather look for artist Ewan, who lives nearby and is "a real Outsider Artist" (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3). As if to consolidate his statement, he opens *Raw Vision* magazine, pointing to an extensive article about said artist. Needless to say, if you then seek out Ewan, the whole scenario of diversion will repeat, covering the range of being labelled yet not *really* understanding oneself as an 'Outsider Artist' to rejecting the term, displaying initial indifference or reproducing its mythical connotation by engaging with the idea of an Other that is not the Self. How integral the belief in the existence of the 'Outsider Artist' as Other can still be for artists affiliated with the field is brought up yet again by Andy. He was once invited to take part in a show with, as he was told, several other 'Outsider Artists', and tells me about his first impressions upon encountering them:

> When I was there at, waiting to meet these people, I thought, god, I'm gonna be really normal compared to them. [… but] honestly, all the artists in this, they were COMPLETELY normal […] and yet, they're all doing this obsessive stuff! […] These people are lovely; they're all trying to help each other. […] You assume that they'll be bonkers, but they're not at all! […] It was just such a surprise because I thought, oh why am I here with these people? Cos I don't-… we're all very similar, which was really nice. […] It was a great honour for me. (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3)

Note the deep-seated idea of the Other expressed by Andy's statement and his subsequent surprise when realising that all these 'Outsider Artists', including him, stand on pretty much similar ground, diluting the us/them boundary and revealing the insubstantiality characterising conceptual fluctuations between the 'fake' and 'genuine'. It is crucial encounters such as these that eventually make many initial myth-bearers aware that the idea of the 'genuine Outsider Artist' is indeed not much more than this: an idealised concept that effectively finds no resemblance in the disordered complexities of 'real life'. Resulting from direct and personal interaction, many realise that it is not only themselves who do not fit the 'Outsider Art' label but that also those formerly Othered effectively fall out of these stereotypical frames previously held onto so dearly. At this stage, it dawns on some that no artist can ever truly fulfil the required purity to be an 'Outsider Artist', and that the label is not only largely inadequate for themselves or anyone else, but also an expression of unequally distributed power.

Regardless of whether they self-label, and no matter if they align in theory with myth-bearing or deconstructionist positions, all artists will sooner or later find that the issue of labelling in the field of 'Outsider Art' is very much out of their hands. Dan consequently advocates that, rather than inquiring about 'who are the outsiders', we should ask "who are the people defining certain people as Outsiders and why?" (Int., 2017, August 6). Josh likewise boils the relevancy of the issue of labelling down to a question of power:

> I think how comfortable I am with [the label Outsider Art] depends on who is using it and in what context. […] Who gets to apply this term to whom? […] who has the power to throw words like 'Outsider' around […] and so who owns it? (Int. Josh, 2017, June 24)

As of now, the answer seems to be: anyone *but* the 'Outsider Artist'—inevitably raising a range of ethical questions. Who has the right and disposition of power to mark another as an 'Outsider Artist' or implicitly deny the practice of self-labelling? What if the artist is averse to their ascribed identity? Are they granted a voice to reject or resist it? And if their status is unknown to the artist: who benefits from their positioning in the field?

It does indeed appear necessary to raise and address these questions in any critical consideration of the paradoxical nature of the genre, and to account for this requirement I have already dedicated the entire first part of this study to the attempt to uncover the Othering practices underlying the 'Outsider Art' discourse. However, I do understand it as a matter of great importance to not stop there, and to resist the constant temptation (also expressed by some artists) to find someone or something to blame for their marginalisation. This would, effectively, act as a self-induced reinscription of victimisation and disproportionally exaggerate the relative power of key players and gatekeepers in the field, which may lead to a certain fetishisation of who- or whatever is to be perceived the 'oppressor'.

In this section I have predominately dealt with the issues faced and consequences feared by those artists who consider the practice of self-labelling as 'Outsider Artists', revealing the label's inherent mechanisms restricting its use for self-empowerment. Building on these findings, the next section will investigate the experiences of those artists who do not find themselves outside of 'Outsider Art', but to the contrary, have been admitted to the field, often by being *involuntarily* labelled 'Outsider Artists' without their knowing or consent. Subsequently, issues such as misrecognition, mistreatment and exploitation will be investigated, as well as recollections of feeling overshadowed. Yet to account for what has just been said, rather than ending with an indictment of the 'powerful', on a more constructive note, the final analytical section will focus on the agency of individual artists and explore their strategies in dealing with or overcoming the difficulties resulting from affiliation with the 'Outsider Art' field.

6.4 Recognition as 'Outsider Artists' and Ethical Consequences of Affiliation

Thus far I have dealt with the exclusionary practices of the 'Outsider Art' world, the fragility of one's own status even after admission and the mechanisms of self-censorship preventing many artists from self-labelling. I would now like to turn to those artists who have been granted access to the field and investigate the problems arising in coalignment with their being labelled and receiving recognition. This section deals with the direct and indirect effects of the artists' *ascribed*, rather than chosen identity, and therefore also embraces those who have been involuntarily labelled, do not want to be part of the field or are unaware of their inclusion.[19]

19 Most artists introduced in previous chapters will reappear again in this section, exposing the intersectional character of experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the 'Outsider Art' world. This indicates the complex structure of the field which effectively defies systematic reductions. Likewise,

Most artists who have been admitted to the field and are consequently recognised by key players, first and foremost tend to experience this in a positive manner. Some artists have displayed a certain sense of relief upon being labelled an 'Outsider Artist', mostly resulting from the problematics of self-labelling as a non-legitimate act and the dependency on patrons for being granted a placement in the field. Consequently, those artists who are thoroughly aware of the discourse tend to experience feelings of pride that co-align with the respective art world standing of those actors they are recognised by [Tendency A]. The feeling of pride experienced by artists who do not know or care much about the 'Outsider Art' discourse seems to be linked more to close-social-circle appreciation, with recognition by family members and friends outweighing interest displayed by art world professionals [Tendency B].

Aligning towards the former, Josh tells me that he recently learned that Michel Thévoz, former director of the Collection de l'Art Brut, "was impressed by my work upon seeing it first-hand" and points out that some of his drawings have not only been shown at the Outsider Art Fair, but also sold to important collections (Int., 2017, June 19). Andy, likewise, recalls feeling "really pleased" (Int., 2017, July 3) when influential French critic Laurent Danchin praised his work, and Alec is awed, having his work on show at the Outsider Art Museum in Amsterdam, which according to him "is like the V&A Museum in London. It's THAT kind of museum! […] They really loved it [his work], they liked it you know. […] It's just nice to be valued, being in an exhibition like the most prestigious one in Holland" (Int., 2017, July 24). Above all, however, *Raw Vision* magazine still seems to hold the highest prestige. Many artists, including Alec, agree that "if you're very fortunate and you get an article in Raw Vision, then that's it. The whole of the Outsider Art world would know about you", because "it's the critics that make the artists. You have to have good critique" (Int. Alec, 2017, July 24).

Even though many artists also distinctly value the recognition received by charities, these seem to be appreciated more for being a supporting network to reach 'beyond'. They tend to hold less prestige in their own terms in comparison to large collections, specialist media and museums in the field. Furthermore, I have come across many artists who value being appreciated for their work by family members or closer social environment little. Lilly states:

> I feel like I can sort of see through it. It's nice that they enjoy-I think they're enjoying the fact that I'm enjoying what I'm doing rather than liking what I do. Whether or not that's true or not I'm not too sure, but it does kind of seem like they're kind of 'aw yeah, it's nice isn't it!' and I don't know. You just hear it over and over again and it's the same thing. It doesn't really have any substance, I guess. […] I want someone to look at it [her artwork] and say, what can you see in it, because there's so many different things going on you can't just say it's lovely as a picture. It's not just one picture, you know, it's five or six. (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17)

Joanna likewise asserts: "I'd love to have some constructive criticism […] but the majority of feedback is that it is very nice, or at most, that it is strong, but not much

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the conceptual diagrams provided in this study shall be read as facilitators of a better understanding of the matters at hand only, and their schematic separations not be taken at face value.

about what I am actually trying to talk about" (Int., 2017, July 9). Artists like Joanna and Lilly feel misunderstood to a certain extent by their less artistically inclined social environment, and orient themselves towards key players who perform rigorous quality control.

Those artists aligning with Tendency B and who do not know or care much about the field and their art world standing, on the other hand, tend to value appreciation more in direct communication with their closest social circle. Emily and Bobby, for example, regularly attend sessions in a disability arts charity and are both artists I have worked with. As with many of their peers, they are usually enthusiastic to present their work at the end of each day to other artists in the studio, support workers and, especially, friends and family. Emily in particular likes to give away her drawings as a gift to people she cares about, and the most satisfied I have seen Bobby was when his mum came for a visit and he was able to share with her what he was working on. However, on those rather rare occasions when a stranger would visit—be it from the council, another charity or indeed an art world professional—and express their appreciation for the artworks encountered, the mood in the room would often change very distinctly. Largely depending on the social skills of the new person and the personalities of the artists present, some of the latter may openly approach the visitor. Others, like Bobby and Emily would rather shy away than welcome being complimented. At times I had the feeling that the tension and pressure experienced by some artists in these contexts puts the atmosphere of trust and safety a charity normally provides somewhat at risk. This may perhaps explain the 'shielding off' as a form of safeguarding many charities perform, but also be an indication why many collectors stay away from the studio space and negotiate any dealings concerning an artist's work above their heads and via intermediaries. Consequently, to receive recognition from these abstract characters who praise their work from afar, seems to account for the lower emotional response I have observed in artists of Tendency B. They may or may not positively respond to seeing their own work printed in *Raw Vision*, yet ultimately many times evaluate their achievements against a different yardstick. This is not to say that external recognition does not influence said artists; it does, even if indirectly.

External recognition often effectively comes full circle, since social workers and others close to the artist frequently *do* know and care about the 'Outsider Art' field and therefore tend to transform the abstract attention an artist may receive into personal appreciation that is immediately accessible to the artist. It is, for example, a common occurrence that family members who may have previously disregarded the art produced by their relative as meaningless, turn to honour and value it once these works have been exhibited in a renowned gallery or sold to a collector for a considerable price. Likewise, a charity may receive more funding when embraced by key players in the 'Outsider Art' field, which can then feed back into and prompt a more positive everyday life experience for artists in such programmes, by being provided with more resources, equipment, opportunities, assistance, care and support.

It thus seems fair to conclude that both groups—artists for whom the 'Outsider Art' field holds an obvious attraction as well as those who are labelled 'Outsider Artists' without their knowledge or interest—may benefit from affiliation with the field. For

reasons explicated throughout this study, the genre classification 'Outsider Art' raises visibility and "grabs attention" (Int. Rob, 2017, July 3), and recognition can in a great many cases advance an individual artist's placement in the field and thus, even if indirectly, their social and economic capital. However, due to the particularities of the field outlined previously and the delicate role of intermediaries, the 'Outsider Art' world also seems to invite exploitive practices, disrespectful treatment and "less than savoury activity" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 1) probably more so than other art fields. Considering these circumstances, I argue that such activities are interlinked with the practice of labelling and reproduction of the ideological concept of the Other.

Of pressing concern and particular interest to this study are the negative side-effects of being designated an 'Outsider Artist', and these seem to affect both artists who have extensive as well as those who have little knowledge of the field. As I have shown, the label carries a capacious amount of historical and mythic baggage and, at the most basic level, implies that the story is valued more than the art. Even though certain aesthetic requirements must also be met, as exemplified previously, it is effectively the biography of the artist that validates their 'authenticity' and legitimises their position in the field. Consequently, many artists do not only undergo the experience that some of their work is meeting aesthetic expectations and is thus celebrated while other parts of their oeuvre may be neglected and ignored. They will first and foremost realise that, when being represented by art world professionals, certain parts of their biography are carefully selected, coming to define their official artist persona. The crucial point is that these elements do not necessarily match those the artist may choose to identify or represent with if given the chance to, yet they do often come to weigh substantially more than their actual artworks. Early in the interview, Josh explains to me that in the 'Outsider Art' world "the work [is] instantly being valued for the story or biography that goes with it, rather than the quality of the work itself" (Int., 2017, June 23) and Lilly likewise states that it seems to be all about "the artist rather than the art" (Int., 2017, July 17). Some artists observe their artwork being reduced to a symptomatic by-product of their biography, with the latter systematically overshadowing the former. Curator Matthew Higgs has singled this characteristic out as standing in sharp contrast to mainstream contemporary art worlds in which an artist's biography is often "suppressed" (2012, p. 205) and tends not to feature in the evaluation and discussion of their artworks to such heightened extents.

As I have shown, the 'Outsider Art' world requires a distinct artist persona, discriminating between and selecting certain individual aspects which come to the fore, while others move to the back or disappear. Following philosopher Thomas Bedorf (2010), this selective process is inevitable in any representational practice, and inherent to the concept of recognition, since a 'true' Self cannot ever be fully on show, identities are fractured and the idea of a subject's united Self perhaps at best a modern myth. Yet in the case of 'Outsider Art' one is still confronted with an additional problematic of ethical concern, not only because many artists are mis/recognised as such without their knowing, but also due to the very nature of those aspects selected for representation: they largely tend towards the negative, i.e. areas which are romanticised by a niche audience and key players in the field, but which often carry derogatory connotations when looked at from a broader societal perspective.

Othered Representation and Negative Stigmatisation

Most artists interviewed suspect that it makes a difference in the perception of the audience if the background of an artist is known. Many further assume that, especially in the case of 'Outsider Art', perceptions venture towards the negative or stereotypical if given additional information or via the very act of labelling. Rob assures me that "there are definitely negative connotations about referring to artwork crafted by an 'Outsider'" (Int., 2017, July 3)—a statement I have found resonating with many artists in the field and a circumstance often worried about. Chloe further points to the issue of visual representation in the media, stating that if you "look at photos of Outsider Artists, genuinely they look a bit dilapidated. I mean, their hairs are out there and well, stereotypically, they have no education, they've got mental health issues and yeah it's not flattering" (Int., 2017, July 13). Josh has likewise observed that artists under the label tend to be "sensationalised and fetishised as the Others" to an at times "uncomfortable degree" (Int., 2017, June 22).

This effect seems to result from the markers used to identify and stigmatise the 'Outsider Artist': apparent misfortunes, 'bad fate' and stories of traumatic experiences move to the fore, while positive aspects like recovery stories, community involvement and personal achievements in the life of an artist move to the back. For example, an artist may be proud of having achieved an art degree, yet the 'Outsider Art' world may require them to deny or even suppress this feeling of gratification and keep a low profile so as not to risk their or the artist's position in the field.[20] At the same time, said artist may have a disability which they perhaps consider to be relatively insignificant and irrelevant to their artmaking, but which is now blown out of all proportion.

As I have been told by a number of artists, and has been further raised by authors in the Disability Studies field, while having a particular impairment frequently does not present much of a difficulty for an individual, being pigeonholed as 'disabled' and 'ill' and treated as such by society often does (e.g. Wendell 2006; Davis 2017). Experiences tend to align when being called an 'Outsider Artist': the label may invite viewers to engage with stereotypical notions diluting the appreciation of the art and, as Ryan says, "create all sorts of negative or biased thoughts" (Int., 2017, July 5). Not only does it enforce Otherness, turning the artist into a detached, otherworldly being (as shown in the media analysis), it also homogenises at the same time, effectively preventing the chance to differentiate and acknowledge diversity among artists. Lilly therefore condemns the label 'Outsider Art' for being "a HUGE generalisation", "an easy way of getting some sort of uniform term" when "basically it's just saying 'people'

20 As indicated, the label 'Outsider Art' is not exclusively reserved for 'untrained' artists, although being 'self-taught' still acts as an authenticity marker. Thus, if a trained artist is admitted to the field, their training will most likely be downplayed by purists. However, under the pressure of losing their narrowly defined subjects which have been deconstructed one after the other, delineations of authenticity in the 'Outsider Art' discourse seem to have become more elastic as of recent, with Stone (2012, p. 32) and Kallir (2012, p. 27) indicating that what matters now is not whether an artist has gone to art school or not, but that they have remained "disinterested" and "disengaged" throughout their studies, if they have done so.

right?" (Int., 2017, July 17). After telling me about his diagnosis, Alec concludes by asking "what does that really mean? […] There are varying degrees. […] It doesn't mean you can't function as a human being! […] People have a misunderstanding about mental health. Mental health is a wide spectrum" (Int., 2017, July 24).

These misunderstandings can lead to "misinterpretation" (Int. Rob, 2017, July 3) of 'Outsider' artworks and consequently often result in what I would like to call *fastened misrecognition*. The artist becomes known for a set of ascribed identity markers that they would not necessarily consider central or even averse to their understanding of Self. Perhaps worse, these markers also tend to *stick* and convey the message to the individual that the reception of recognition is linked to traumatic experiences, isolation, exclusion or a certain sense of suffering, and dwindling the better they feel and the more their social connectivity increases. Thus, many 'Outsider Artists' find themselves in a paradoxical deadlock situation once again. The following examples shall illustrate the emotional impacts this process of misrecognition can cause in individual artists and the implications of their stigmatisation as 'Outsiders'.

During my time in the field I have noticed that, among artists who have negatively experienced stigmatisation, the latter's impact is expressed twofold and seems to depend on their *current* mental health. Those who are in severe crisis or suffer from a particular condition or event at present tend to feel their vulnerability being exposed and privacy comprised—an effect also described by Goffman (1963). They often feel negatively impacted by their respective conditions *as well as* the coaligned stigma and are conceptualised as Group A in Figure 28. Those belonging to Group B, on the other hand, who have overcome a crisis or simply do not suffer from a condition society expects them to suffer from, tend to be first and foremost negatively affected by the stigma and not the condition. They thus experience a sense of 'mismatch' as a result and, after Disability Studies theorist Susan Wendell, predominately "feel wronged by being labelled" (2006, p. 245).

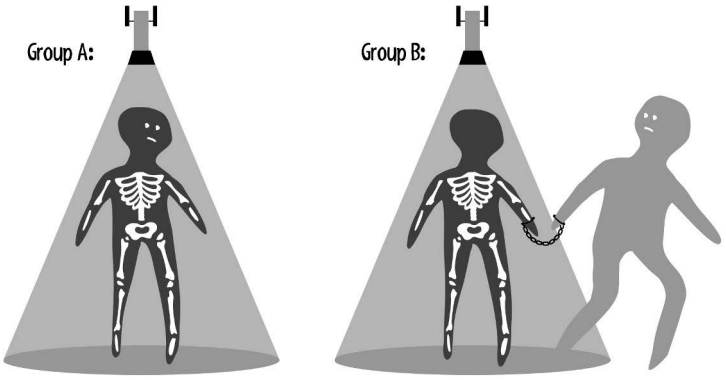

Figure 28. Two Most Commonly Experienced Effects of Stigmatisation When Being Labelled an 'Outsider Artist' (Own Depiction).

Among individuals belonging to Group A, feelings of embarrassment and the fear of being judged when being put in the spotlight or simply *looked* at in the 'Outsider Art' context, are most frequent. Alec tells me he "hates" art shows and finds them "really uncomfortable", because his artwork is "very personal. […] I might just take my clothes off and stand there naked, you know. I'm naked. Leave me alone. Especially because these pieces of work were quite a tough journey for me" (Int., 2017, July 24). Chloe describes this effect in further detail, explaining "when you exhibit your work, […] it comes alive. When people, other people, look at it. But if you were very, very sick or tortured at the time of creation and people look at that, it almost animates that particular time for you" (Int., 2017, July 13). Bringing up her sister again, Chloe says: "Lydia painted those holes in her paintings. So, there would be pockets in her artwork, that actually led you to dark, dark places. […] She would open gateways with her art" (Int., 2017, July 13). Chloe refers to an important aspect that is often overlooked in the 'Outsider Art' world: creating and exhibiting art as well as being critiqued for it does not necessarily have a positive effect on the artist but may also present itself as a great risk for the individual. In addition to the possibly perturbing effects of exposure, being put in the spotlight while dealing with a difficult condition, circumstance or crisis can be deeply upsetting. Ryan tells me: "if I was given a choice again there is no way that I would have wanted a documentary to be made about me. At the time of filming, I was off medication and sort of out of my mind! I do regret the film" (Int., 2017, July 5). Even though he acknowledges that it helped him to sell more paintings, he says "I don't really like strangers coming up to me saying that they saw me on TV. It's disconcerting" (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 5). In a similar manner, Sarah reports that her online representation is making her "anxious": "the fact that people are SEEING and KNOWING" (Int., 2017, June 15). She tells me about a commission she did a while ago and that her clients

> had looked me up online, lovely people, but it was quite weird because they knew my history as well. So, it's like 'oh and you had these problems!' it was quite weird, because I don't come across-I'm quite happy saying about [past illness A] and [past disorder B], no problem with that. But what I don't mention is [current syndrome C] at all. […] I don't know if it's the fact that it's in the past more so that I don't mind it, because I feel less judged. Whereas if I mention [current syndrome C] I feel judged, and I feel people will think I'm just lazy. […] I think people will think I'm incapable of doing stuff. (Int., 2017, June 15)

Sarah further recalls how some people would stand in front of her paintings stating "she's clearly got problems", which she considers "really rude" (Int., 2017, June 15). In addition to these judgemental confrontations, she has found the effect of *overshadowing* to be the most problematic issue when work is labelled 'Outsider Art': "it becomes the be-all and end-all of your work. Having had the mental health problems, I don't want to dictate how you read my work. And I think it does" (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15). Sarah mentions two important aspects here, bridging the gap between groups A and B. In the first paragraph she indicates her experience of having had different illnesses, feeling confident talking about the ones already dealt with while still vulnerable about her present condition. In the follow-up she surmises these experiences in interlinkage

with audience reactions, resuming that, in either case, the 'Outsider Art' label makes these conditions stick and dictates how the audience reads her work.

Evidently, the determining workings of the 'Outsider Art' stigma rest on snapshots of biographical histories with a focus on an individual's 'worst' stages of life, not discriminating between individuals whose health conditions are temporary or permanent. It matters little if an artist has a visible disability, and might therefore be confronted with a lifelong stigma of Otherness based on phenomenological grounds in other societal realms (Coleman, 2006), or if an individual artist has an illness which cannot be seen or has been overcome.

Nevertheless, the already mentioned mismatch feeling does seem to particularly occupy Group B, members of which may have dealt with certain issues and conditions in the past, yet are still being reduced to them. Feelings of being misrecognised or stuck and overshadowed by stigma frequently occur in these cases.

Chloe's story is a good example for the above-mentioned transitory process from Group A to B, stretching from identifying with 'Outsider Art' to perceiving it as a limitation she has grown out of. To her, the 'Outsider Art' world initially looked like a friendly place; a refuge in which she was neither discriminated against nor excluded due to her mental illnesses—quite to the contrary. Soon, however, her attributed, if positively redefined illnesses grew in importance to others, eventually overshadowing other aspects of her identity. She then recollects having felt imprisoned yet again, this time by the 'Outsider Art' label itself:

> It's like any countercultural benefit, I think. Like Punk, in my early teens, you know. And suddenly you realise that you are still in a uniform, and you were still following rules. I think Outsider Art is a uniform, in many ways. Initially I felt confident because I thought there was a group of people and I had a lot of identification, even if it wasn't actual identification I necessarily wanted, like my mental health issues in the past. With [Outsider Art organisation xy] I tick all the boxes, but I did feel uncomfortable because I don't feel like their person. You know, on paper, I've had a hell of a life and I could still be seen as to have various mental health problems, but that's not me. My art is a process of a dealing with that and expressing that and walking away from there. I don't like the label, and I think the label is a limitation, and art shouldn't be about limitations. (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

Although Chloe has overcome some of her conditions, "walking away" and really letting them go while sailing under the banner of 'Outsider Art' seems almost impossible. This coincides with artist Bobby Baker's remark that "when you have labels such as psychosis attached to your notes in life, despite protestations of your recovery, society, systems and people are being led to believe you cannot change" (Field Notes EOA, 2018, May 4). Dan likewise states that his "difficulties are no longer a problem for me but may be an issue for others" (Int., 2017, August 24). Knowing of the adhesive strength of the stigma, he is thus "cautious of the confessional" and suspicious of the 'Outsider

Art' label[21] (Int. Dan, 2017, August 24), while Baker has become an activist, sharing her story unconcealed.

The limitations faced by artists like Sarah, Dan and Chloe—as well as the full extent of stigmatisation—become most obvious when recognition is sought after, outside of, and beyond the 'Outsider Art' world. As psychologist Lerita Coleman notes in relation to Goffman, the experience of stigma is "inextricably tied to social context" and its respective norms yield various consequences for individual artists when moving from a realm in which difference is "desired" to another denoting these attributes as "undesirable" (1963/2006, p. 142). Hence, emancipation from the 'Outsider Art' context and moving into mainstream art worlds can prove immensely difficult, yet many artists desire to do so nevertheless, especially because the overall recognition of the field is still low if seen from a wider art world perspective.

Breaking Out of 'Outsider Art'

In his book *Outsiders* (1963/1997), Becker demonstrates the difficulty of "revers[ing] a deviant cycle" (p. 37). He uses the example of recovering drug addicts who, even after they have successfully overcome their addictive habits, are treated by their social environment as if they were still addicts in the manner of "once a junkie, always a junkie" (Becker, 1963/1997, p. 37). The same is also often experienced by ex-psychiatric patients who struggle to reintegrate into society, since the latter displays a tendency to continuously treat them as Other (Coleman, 2006). Similarly, it can present itself a matter of great difficulty for artists to shake off the stigma that comes with being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' as Colin Hambrook, founder of *Disability Arts Online*, has observed:

> Great art can become ghettoised by the disability / survivor / outsider labels […] Once you get labelled as an Outsider Artist, the label can stick in ways that create a narrow frame of reference—limiting the opportunities that can often mean truly great artists can easily get looked over. (2016, July 19)

This issue tends to materialise once an artist ventures towards, and seeks recognition from, mainstream art contexts, moving beyond the 'Outsider Art' field. Effectively, many 'Outsider Artists' just want to be known as 'artists', often having little interest in keeping up with a label that seems to marginalise them only further. The feeling of being held back by the label can perhaps be explained with the circumstance that, even though the popularity of 'Outsider Art' has been rising, overall, the legitimacy of the field is still small, and the genre often not taken seriously. As Ryan has observed:

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21 Both Dan and Chloe reject the label 'Outsider Art' even though they fulfil its categorical requirements. Having said that, Chloe's online presence is thriving with allusions to the genre, and she is also tagging her work "outsider art", "visionary art" and "untrained art". Artist Steve Murison is another contradictory example of the same kind. Murison proclaims, "I consider myself an artist, nothing more, nothing less" (2014, August 26) yet on his website he describes himself as a "comfortable outsider", also tagging himself as an "outsider artist" on social media. The statements quoted must thus be taken with a pinch of salt, since there can be a vast discrepancy between what an artist says and does, as demonstrated previously.

> lots of galleries in the art world don't like outsider art and they are very dismissive of it. They regard outsider as childish and mostly of a not very good standard. They also have a low opinion of outsider artists and might say that they are mostly uneducated, and that self-taught art is not real art. (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 7)

Alec agrees that "people tend to think less of you as an artist" (Int., 2017, July 24) if you are associated with 'Outsider Art' and consequently some artists also feel like they are producing 'lesser art'. Andy, for example, tells me that he is "intimidated" by the established arts: "I still see that as PROPER art. […] I don't work like that. […] I'm doing something else" (Int., 2017, July 3). Lilly likewise admits that the only art she has ever "considered art, is stuff in [established] galleries: the proper-proper art in inverted commas" (Int., 2017, July 17). Anna Berry, who is working under similar premises in the disability arts, indicates this hierarchical divide and summarises the problematics of stigmatisation as follows:

> There's no real cross over from the disability art sector into the mainstream art world, in visual arts. I might have got some cool sounding things to put on my CV, but the bottom line is there's still not a gallerist or a curator in the country who's aware of my work. I'm perpetually stuck in an invisible parallel place to that of the mainstream art world—it feels like this giant river that there's no way to cross. The problem for your CV mostly comprising disabled arts opportunities is that they have a sting in the tail. When it comes to planning for art world success, I am advised over and over not to mention disability because it consigns you to a disability-arts cul-de-sac. […] When it comes to disability the perception of mainstream curators is of art as a therapeutic activity rather than a rigorous and examined practice. So I've been told a lot that mentioning that I'm a disabled artist openly is massively unstrategic and actually holding my career back. (Berry, 2019, January 22)

The advice Berry has been given exemplifies what psychologists Carol Miller and Cheryl Kaiser have termed the "avoidance strategy" (2001) in resisting stigma, which is adopted by many artists in the field. This "dis-identification" (Jensen, 2011, p. 63) is characterised by the attempt to hide one's disability, illness, 'Otherness'—be it a matter of the present or past. Success rates of course vary, depending on the (in)visibility of a particular issue, yet a certain yearning for normalcy, as indicated by Coleman (2006), may almost always underpin the initial impulse.

Dan tells me about his friend James, who has secured "a prestigious place within regional arts" despite "some very difficult periods of instability in his life" (Int., 2017, August 24). James fiercely rejects the 'Outsider Art' label and any of its synonyms, which may shed light on the barriers and struggles he has experienced. To avoid association, he therefore chooses not to disclose his past. Artist and curator Aidan Moesby states the presumed reasoning behind such moves: "disabled artists are generally perceived to have little or no professional skill, no economic value in a societal or cultural context. Generalisations possibly but attitudes I have experienced. The context dictates value" (2017, November 9). As a result of this experience, Moesby remarks in light of his own career, that "there were times when I tried to keep a mainstream portfolio and disabled portfolio discrete from each other before becoming open and public about

my mental health condition" (2017, November 9). However, he "soon saw the futility and difficulty of this", as he was now paradoxically responsible for his "own stigmatisation and marginalisation" (Moesby, 2017, November 9). This corresponds with the observation made by Garland-Thomson who has pointed out that, by renouncing a disability identity, many individuals "save" themselves from "devaluation" but do so "by a complicity [with the hegemonic discourse] that perpetuates oppressive notions about ostensibly 'real' disabled people" (2006, p. 269). Confronted with this conflict and often inspired by an emancipatory incentive, some artists thus opt for an extreme, opposite strategy: bringing their 'Otherness' to the forefront of the debate, but this time, on their own terms. They thus adopt what Miller and Kaiser have called the "engagement strategy" (2001), aiming to gain control over stigmatisation or discriminatory events, possibly even "capitalis[ing] on [their] being positioned as the Other" (Jensen, 2011, p. 63).

> I don't take that advice [to hide] anymore—I try to be quite out-and-proud about my disabled identity now. The more I encounter people who want me to shut up about it, the more I feel a tremendous responsibility to do precisely the opposite. Because I'm someone with some profile (albeit negligible), and a voice, and an ability to sometimes use that voice, I must use what platform I have to try to get the art world to change its attitude towards disabled artists. I am the first to admit that I am thus far failing miserably to do that, because I'm so at the periphery that I can't yet engage them in a dialogue. But nevertheless, when I'm feeling resilient enough, I try consciously to put my disabled identity out there and hope that if I keep demanding that they take me seriously, eventually somebody will! (Berry, 2019, January 22)

Artist Tanya Raabe-Webber follows a similar direction. When asked if she considers herself an 'Outsider Artist' she answers with a definite "NO!", but then goes on: "I see myself as an artist/disabled artist. Both identities are as important as the other", declaring labels such as 'disability' as "a positive sign of ownership of [her] identity" (Raabe-Webber, 2014). Ryan likewise claims that he is "happy that the media often represents me as a schizophrenic artist, also I would prefer to be called a schizophrenic artist rather than just an artist. This is because schizophrenia now makes up almost entirely who I am" (Int., 2017, July 4). Note that, in both instances, the features 'disability'[22] and 'mental illness'—rather than the label 'Outsider Artist'—are used for self-empowerment. This effect may be partially explainable with the specific constitution of 'Outsider Art' already discussed: while few people would deny someone with a 'disability' or 'mental illness' their right to self-define as such, self-censorship is the order of the day when it comes to self-labelling as an 'Outsider Artist'. Due to the imbalanced power relationships ingrained in its discourse, the term 'Outsider Artist' remains someone else's, forfeiting the possibility for self-empowerment. By contrast,

22 It is important to note that the term 'Disability Arts' is not equivalent to 'Outsider Art'. Emerging out of the disability rights movement in the US and UK in the early 1980s, in contrast to 'Outsider Art', Disability Art is a politically motivated "collective activity" aiming to create "positive cultural conception[s] of disability", challenge discrimination and social oppression (Solvang, 2018, p. 243).

an 'illness' or 'disability' can be *owned* by the individual—even if these labels still inevitably come with their own hegemonic implications and restrictions.

Eventually, complications with both strategies outlined—full identification vs. rejection—may be destined to arise, especially when an artist questions the 'wholeness' of the Self and experiences the fractured constitution of their identity. This seems to be due to the circumstance that the main issues of the stigma, causing feelings of mismatch, being misrecognised or overshadowed, arise specifically in the *in-between* the hiding and exposing. As Moesby states:

> I would argue that my lived experience of disability allows me to bring more to my work, I am not a lesser being with less experiences. Disability is a part of me, it is not all of me. […] Yes, I make work which overtly references my experience of discrimination, but I also make work which has nothing at all to do with disability—and yet they are viewed rightly or wrongly through the same diminishing lens. (Moesby, 2017, November 9)

While Moesby takes a critical stance towards stigmatisation, pointing to the generalising effects of being overshadowed, I have also encountered other, perhaps more opportunistic artists, who—even if not welcoming them—agree with certain forms of derogation if they lead to increased visibility and recognition. These artists are often well informed about the mythic features associated with 'Outsider Art' and its strategic advances, and at times appear indifferent about being labelled or stigmatised. Ryan states, that he is "not bothered" about the framework under which his art is shown: "As long as my paintings are hanging on walls in different places so people can see them and hopefully enjoy looking at them and be inspired, then that is good and makes me happy" (Int., 2017, July 2). Alec proclaims: "if you want to call me an Outsider Artist and invite me to your museum, I go to your museum. If you say contemporary artist, I go exhibit there. No problem. Whatever, you know" (Int., 2017, July 24).

Here, as much as in those instances discussed in previous chapters, artists do not only take different stances towards the label 'Outsider Art' depending on the time, context and person they speak to. Specific parts of their identity may move to the fore in certain occasions, while others move to the back, possibly being pre-selected again for representation in yet another context. This multifaceted experience is met with the malleability of the label itself, which bears numerous meanings depending on where, when and by whom it is used. Consequently, most artists agree that being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' can simultaneously yield positive and negative effects, although Sarah still holds that it is "problematic" (Int., 2017, June 15) and, according to Andy, "a really confusing one" (Int., 2017, July 3). What self-labelling or being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' will lead to is effectively highly unpredictable, moving one artist participating in Raabe-Webber's research project to "advise caution",

> because there is a danger in personally investing in the Outsider label and saying, 'This is it; this is the ticket, this could take me quite far' then maybe three years down the line suddenly it's a wilderness; there's nothing there. So my instinct is to be cautious, but also optimism as well. It could go quite well, you know? (artist cited in Raabe-Webber, 2014)

As demonstrated above, the label might be helpful and beneficial to the artist in some ways, but it tends to stick almost irreversibly, with new barriers likely to arise. For stated reasons, recognition in the 'Outsider Art' world is double-edged, and it would seem appropriate to leave it up to the artist to weigh the positives and negatives and make an informed choice about their involvement on these grounds. However, this is the ethical crux in the case of 'Outsider Art'.

Generally, the power and agency of any artist to influence audience perception is very much limited. How an artwork is read and what happens to it after dissemination is literally out of their hands and dependent on a myriad of contextual factors. These issues are pronounced in the 'Outsider Art' world due to the importance of the biographical story being inextricably linked to the artwork. Many artists are explicit about how much they are willing to 'confess' and how much of their personal life they are comfortable with being on show. Others may not be in the position to make or communicate such informed choices, requiring what philosopher Rita Risser has called "hypothetical consent" by which those engaged in the artist's representation shall be "guided by an intent to respect and foster the dignity of the artist" (Risser, 2017, p. 87).

The key issue is that, in the 'Outsider Art' world, it is not up to the artist to decide where to draw this line, rather the latter is often eradicated or transgressed without or disregarding their hypothetical consent. Those artists who do perceive their story as an integral part of their artwork or who engage in self-labelling generally tend to have few concerns about being put in the 'Outsider Art' pigeonhole. However, those who do not wish for their story—or perhaps just a different version of their story—to be shared, may feel their privacy being infringed upon and their artworks overshadowed.

Either way, the stigma 'Outsider Art' often acts as the "master status, the attribute that colours the perception of the entire person" (Coleman, 2006, p. 145). In this way, "all other aspects of the person are ignored except those that fit the stereotype associated with the stigma" (Kantner as cited in Coleman, 2006, p. 145), or in the words of collector Randall Morris in critical reference to the 'Outsider' discourse: "it cuts off every limb that [doesn't] fit in the coffin" (2001, p. 120).

In some of these instances, the problematic is not limited to losing control and being removed from decision-making processes, but may also comprise a change in beneficiary. An artist's vulnerabilities may then become assets and capital for others, rendering it inevitable to ask: *who* is seeking recognition for *whom*, and to *what* end?

As Chloe has put it, the 'Outsider Art' label is a limitation, and "the limitation is to make other people feel comfortable, and a lot of these other people are moneymakers", further remarking that "some of the great Outsider Artists, they could be seen as exploited" (Int., 2017, July 13). Such statements call for a closer examination of the practical consequences of labelling in the currently reigning institutions of the field, of whom art world and charitable institutions will now be investigated.

Experiences with the 'Outsider Art' World and Its Key Players

Being represented as an 'Outsider Artist' is one thing; the practical experience of the treatment it can lead to yet another. Concerns may exceed experiences of being put in a box and stigmatised—especially in those circumstances where someone else feels entitled to not only label, but make decisions *for* the artist and, in the worst of cases, not even in hindsight of benefit to the latter. In these instances, the exercise of power surpasses the mere act of labelling, confirming Josh's statement that, ultimately, "it's not about representation, it's more just communication and strange sort of treatment" (Int., 2017, July 4). I would thus like to address some of the main issues raised by artists when interacting with key players in the 'Outsider Art' world or participating in associated charitable programmes.

As will be demonstrated, the most problematic issue resulting from the practice of labelling is that it crucially informs the thoughts and actions of individuals. Considering the negative connotations and partially generalising ascriptions of inferiority implied by the term 'Outsider Artist', unequal treatment is likely to result. I have observed in many key players an often subtly expressed attitude of 'standing above' the artist, which at times coincides with a presupposed sense of entitlement to speak for the latter. One may argue that the resulting dangers of mistreatment also lure in mainstream art worlds; yet again, they seem to be of heightened concern in the 'Outsider Art' field. This is because artists tend not only to be silenced via its discourse, but many times have insufficient knowledge about the art world, little interest in participating in the latter or are communicating in a language considered minor to the established *artspeak*. The ingrained imbalance of power in the field and the discursive features of the genre may thus be understood as facilitating exploitation, with the chances of an artist standing up for themselves—and being heard doing so—remaining comparatively low.

Apart from critical stances towards labelling, the two most frequently encountered issues in the field mentioned by artists have been deceptive and/or disrespectful communication and monetary and/or exploitation of personal circumstances. Subsequently, a selection of cases exemplifying these 'mistreatments' will be provided and counterweighted with more positive experiences.

Deceptive and Disrespectful Communication

Derogatory treatment on the communicative level is closely interlinked with the issues of representation already raised. As I have shown, some artists consider the classification of being an 'Outsider Artist' and its manifold connotations as insulting in their own right. Also under the banner of disrespectful communication falls being addressed a 'creator' rather than artist, being judged by and reduced to an illness or disability (i.e. 'Otherness') and with it, being pathologised, belittled, not listened to and, more generally, not taken seriously as an artist. Despite the effects of stigmatisation already described, one of the most pressing concerns characterising the field of 'Outsider Art' is that the artist is often not asked at all when it comes to deciding how their artwork is represented, if it is to be exhibited publicly or sold. As shown

in the historical chapter, examples of these instances are manifold and raise further ethical questions when the artist is dead and 'discovered' thereafter. Disrespectful representation and treatment are, however, not limited to the dead, as testified in the following example:

> Making my way through the [Outsider Art] Fair, I eventually end up in the booth of [Gallery xy]. The gallerist is in the middle of enthusiastically presenting the works hung on the wall to a flock of people, who follow him attentively. The moment I join them, he turns to a very detailed and intricate typographical work to his right and takes the picture from the wall. He reaches behind to open a catalogue, in which a similar image of the artist has been reproduced yet blown up and in an enlarged format enabling an easy dissection of each word. The gallerist hands out the catalogue and tells us, that 'the artist was very upset, when they did this—he doesn't want everyone to read what he writes.' Immediately after, he pulls a magnifying glass out of his pocket and turns towards me: 'Here, madam, take this and have a closer look at the work'. (Field Notes OAF, 2019, October 18)

This scenario indicates a range of problems. It seems particularly alarming that the gallerist is not only aware of but also explicitly repeats the wishes of the artist, only to disregard them in the next second. Handing out the magnifying glass further presses the audience to become accomplices to this ethically questionable practice. When I sought out the artist, he repeated to me that he disapproves of the blown-up reproduction of his work in said catalogue because "it makes it easier to read the thing and also gives a false sense of what is going on in them" (Field Notes INF, 2017). Yet even though he knows about the magnifying glass provided by his gallerist, he neither positively nor negatively refers to the latter, but instead states on a more general note that thus far he had "varying levels of input" when it comes to his representation, but that he "overall" feels that he is being respected (Field Notes INF, 2017). The same cannot be said for other artists, who have comparatively little control or input, and may even have been misled or had crucial information withheld from them. Joanna has experienced such deceptive communication, telling me how her first gallery had in her own words, "cheated" her:

> When the first gallery accepted to exhibit my work, I gave them the best pieces that I had […] which I was very proud off. I asked the gallery if they were insured and they assured me that they were. A month later as I hadn't heard from them I phoned only to find out that my two big pieces had been stolen. I asked about the insurance, but they told me it was only for fire. To cut a long story short, they gave me a token amount. I felt very depressed and let down by this as I didn't feel that I had been treated honestly. (Int. Joanna, 2017, August 1)

In his book *Everyday Genius* (2004), Fine provides a range of examples of the inequalities in dealer-artist relationships and almost every 'Outsider Artist' I have met during my time in the field will have a story to tell similar to the cases of miscommunication just indicated. Sometimes artists suspect that someone else might be benefiting from their work more than they do, other times they remain rather indifferent towards the actions of their representatives or welcome the attention they get from them in

exchange. Generally, most artists agree, that it depends on who you are dealing with, noting that key players are often highly unpredictable. Josh told me extensively about his experiences with several acclaimed professionals in the field who have expressed their appreciation towards him, inviting him to participate in events or exhibitions, or wanting to collaborate on book projects with him. Yet at some point, he tells me, some of them were "almost out of nowhere taking a turn" and changing their minds, not responding to his messages anymore or dropping him the moment he made too many suggestions of his own (Int. Josh, 2017, July 4). He further recalls his experiences with one key player particularly well-known in the field:

> He [the collector] is very multifaceted, cos when you meet him in person, he can be quite charming, and he is very well spoken. He can be quite friendly and then another time he will see you, ignore you, not even say hello and it really depends on who is in the room. (Int. Josh, 2017, July 4)

Experiences such as these not only demonstrate the tendency among key players to speak to artists whenever *they* feel like it, they also illustrate the artist's relatively low positioning in the field—granted attention depending on whoever *else* is in the room. Nevertheless, many artists I have spoken to feel they are respected by key players overall. The level of satisfaction, however, seems to be linked to their respective reputation in the field as well as depending on how well-versed the artists are in speaking the language of the discourse: the more proficiently and confidently an artist can converse in mainstream artspeak and business talk, the more they will be treated on eye-level by key players using the same language, yet risking their positioning as 'Outsiders' by doing so. Inversely, the bigger the communicated divide in intentionality, language and interests between artists and key players, the securer is the artist's position in the field, but also the greater the probability of being exploited on a personal or monetary level. Despite the previously described imbalances in communication, it is these dangers that ultimately characterise the problematic constitution of 'Outsider Art'—especially when seen from the perspective of the market.

Exploitation vs. Protection by Art World Professionals

Since 'Outsider Art', as any other art field, may effectively be understood as an economic system, one of the most grave ethical concerns surrounding the genre is monetary exploitation. I have already briefly indicated questionable practices of the MOEV in Chapter 5, reportedly expecting artists to donate work to their collection for free. Josh tells me about his experience after attending one of the events organised by the MOEV:

> [They] invited artists to bring their work, but then, it seems unbelievable to me now, you would have to leave the work with him afterwards. He keeps it. You donate. They didn't use the word donate. […] And they are only accepting original work. […] At the time, I was like, I don't know, I didn't really think about it. So, then they put all these works in their book, which you'd think they would give one to each artist, especially if you're giving your work to the collection which is essentially what was happening.

> But they give you a discount on the book. So that was a bit odd. […] I think they are doing this all the time. This guy, he's been everywhere. […] He's colonising. (Int. Josh, 2017, July 4)

Andy also tells me about a "dodgy" collector who is "properly exploiting. He goes to this sort of workshops […] with disabled people and says 'oh yes!' and he takes the work and pays a bit and then sells it off for more" (Int., 2017, July 3). This is a well-known narrative circulating among some of the artists I have spoken to. Historically, the procedure Andy refers to seems to have been a common occurrence indeed. To one of his visits to a psychiatric ward in the 1950s, Dubuffet for example, reportedly brought "some sweets, a little money and wool" to patient-artists "in return for a few works", which some of them "were rather reluctant to yield" (Gugging Exhibition Guide, Wildmann, 2017). In my experience, such easy transactions only seldomly occur nowadays. Most charities and institutions, which have replaced psychiatric confinement, are knowledgeable about the 'Outsider Art' discourse and the value of their participants' artworks, with artists' rights on the whole being better protected than perhaps a few decades ago. Nevertheless, if negotiating with an artist directly, many collectors and dealers still try to negotiate cheap deals, which is particularly concerning if they know that the artist is unaware of their artworks' financial value. Not being affiliated with an institution or charity and 'going it alone' thus leaves many artists prone to exploitation.

Josh recalls negotiating with a collector who would continuously "ask for discounts—he likes a bargain" (Int., 2017, July 4). Even when he gave in and considerably lowered his prices, the collector ignored his counterproposal and would instead come back a little while later, now asking if he would instead care to donate his work to the gallery for free, which Josh found most "unprofessional" and "disrespectful" (Int., 2017, July 4). The problematic extent of these negotiations is further heightened when artists deal not only with collectors, but dealers. In his study, Fine cites a few examples in which dealers have deliberately kept artists "in the dark", with the latter having sold their work "for twenty-five dollars while they're being sold in New York for twenty-five hundred" (2004, p. 204).

Despite these negative examples, being represented or contracted by a collector or gallery may also protect artists from being exploited in the first place. Since many 'Outsider Artists' do not know how to navigate the art world and market, their careers often depend on 'professionals' who take over business negotiations, give advice and raise prices and reputations. Ryan tells me about his gallerist being "a friendly nice man and also a very good salesman who sold lots of my paintings" (Int., 2017, July 9) and Josh likewise speaks fondly about the gallerist he is represented by. Apart from appreciating being included in the prestigious collection of the latter, he tells me that "they are managing to sell my work and put the prices up, it's good for me. And they're very fair, they ask me how much I want, and they put their thing on top of it" (Int., 2017, July 4). Still, Josh sometimes struggles with their approach and the choices made on behalf of him: "I spent so long on my work, I do want it to end up in the hands of people who really like it, not someone who just has lots of money" (Int., 2017, July 4). Those who may be the right buyers in Josh's mind can, however, often turn out to be

the wrong ones from the gallery's perspective. Josh recalls how he has been cautioned when engaging with such 'wrong' collectors, being warned by his gallerist that,

> 'oh you have to be careful, it may devalue your work for the collectors who are buying it!', because these guys who they've sold my work to are sort of purists. […] I find that very odd, because if you're interested in a piece of art, or an artist, why would you like it less after that? […] He was like, you know, 'if you wanna do it, do it, but I'm not sure if I would if I was you'. […] I didn't do it in the end. (Int. Josh, 2017, July 4)

Examples such as these indicate a conflict of interest which may, at times, result from the discrepancy between close/distant circles of recognition. In this particular case, the gallery is concerned about the reputation and art market value of the artist, while the artist himself feels inclined to follow the impetus to give his work to "someone who likes it", even if eventually following the gallery's advised direction. Josh's example seems rather unproblematic, as both parties reportedly benefit from their business deal. Ethical issues may be more pronounced in cases where artists are drawn into the market without their wanting or knowing, or after they have died. In these instances, the benefits resulting from art market integration are often reserved for dealers and collectors, and seldomly delivered to the artist or their descendants. Dan thus states: "what I think is dangerous, is that there are certain figures who wish to define Outsider Art for their own financial gain", citing a few contemporary collectors who hold prominent positions in the field and who, according to him, benefit from turning the artist and their story into a "commodity" (Int. Dan, 2017, August 6). Listing several artists who have been "exploited" and wound up "dying poor", Chloe further claims, that "the Outsider label didn't help them at all. What it did was it helped the art community!" (Int., 2017, July 13). In one of his critical reviews of the Outsider Art Fair in Paris, artist Carlo Keshishian states:

> One can't help but wonder, who are the people who come to see the fair, and how do they justify some of the more questionable aspects of relationship between artist and gallery. A considerable amount of the artists having died before their art was really even seen let alone sold; where does the money made from their work go? There are some murky, darker than grey areas to be aware of here. (Keshishian, n.d.)

On a more positive note, Keshishian adds that "some great art is on show and there are galleries that provide a positive channel for artists to get their work seen and sold" (Keshishian, n.d.). Yet, even if living artists may still be able to benefit from exposition, recognition remains double-edged. As TV producer and writer Richard Butchins put it: "there is a very fine line between 'expose' and 'exploit' and sometimes people can end up on the wrong side of that line without even knowing it" (2016, June 29). While an artist may receive a decent salary, exploitation can also occur on a much more personal rather than economic level, namely when it comes to the question of how and by what means money is made for/with them. In this realm, an artist's "bad fortune" often turns into a "good fortune" for the dealer as Fine has proclaimed (2004, p. 69), with the guiding principle being: the worse you feel, the better you sell.

Artist Alan Streets reminisces on his long association with a London gallery which left him "drained and wasted" with remorse:

> We work for them instead of them working for us. I'm not saying all galleries are bad. That's my experience. The gallery encouraged me down my negative way. They didn't care if I ended up in a mental hospital as long as their walls looked good. (2015, February 16)

Indeed, the issue of psychotropic medication and institutionalisation is still debated controversially in the field. As indicated above, the closure of psychiatric institutions, the introduction of art therapy programmes and the development of psychiatric drugs tend to be interpreted as negative influences on individuals' artmaking and a threat to 'Outsider Art' by many purists in the field. Often, sweeping statements are issued with disregard for the perhaps heightened sense of well-being and benefits an individual artist may experience under such circumstances. In a private conversation with a well-known 'Outsider Art' collector and gallerist, I was told, that "pharmaceuticals have ruined Art Brut in 1953" and that generally, "you have to find a balance with the medication. If you give them a little less medication, they draw much more interesting pieces. They need a little push" (Field Notes ANL, 2017). Another time, at a panel discussion at the Outsider Art Fair in Paris, collector Bruno Decharme praised workshops for "assisting unwell people" in creating "spontaneous productions". However, he also proclaimed that "on medication they won't do that", because "medication is muting the artist" (Field Notes OAF, 2019, October 19), leaving little room for interpretation when pondering his treatment of preference. While a number of artists agree with collectors proclaiming medication would negatively affect their creativity, medication may also create the calmness and stability required to engage with artistic practices in the first place. Again, both argumentative strands become problematic when professional actors abuse their respective positions of power, ignore or even deny the autonomy of the artist and deprive them of the right to receive the best care for the sake of the production of good 'Outsider Art'. Schüssler (2006) has written extensively about the ethical dimension of such exploitative practices in her study, yet what seems especially interesting at this point is that these can be encountered in particular pronunciation and frequency at the Outsider Art Fair—the commercial hotspot of the 'Outsider Art' world, following the rules of the competitive art market. Here, many dealers, collectors and buyers will drop a politically correct guard and display their interests in 'Outsider Art' in a much freer manner than they would perhaps dare to in the media. Steene, representing artist members of his charity in one booth at the fair, recalls his experience:

> I was struck by how the first question asked by many of the visitors to our stand, almost before looking at the work was whether the artist was in an asylum, had been in an asylum or was disabled. It was only when this first box was checked that they could let themselves look at the work or consider purchasing it. This attitude can seem quite shocking to the more informed; collectors seemingly looking to collect madness. (Steene, 2015, July 27)

Yet the demands for personal information and stories of an artist's 'Otherness' are not limited to the audience and potential buyers. In many cases, gallerists and dealers at the fair will wholeheartedly share these details before even being asked. When I

visited the fair in 2019, clearly business was being made with the backstory of the artist and at times even with the artist's 'Otherness' in full physical presence.

> I have been eavesdropping for the last three hours, in many cases involuntarily as the fair is busy, space is limited and business between customers and dealers made directly onsite and in their respective booths. On a great many occasions am I informed in detail about the diagnosis, illnesses or disabilities of the artist, with gross exaggerations taking place about their supposed 'Otherness' (e.g. "she never spoke to anyone", "he was totally isolated", "she didn't perceive the world as we do"). Even when eventually proceeding from the story to the actual artwork, the artistic process tends to be described by many representatives with terms like "raw", "primitive", "simplistic", "authentic", "innocent", "spontaneous", "expressing an urge", emphasising the biographical rather than aesthetical strand. […] Some studios and galleries have even brought the artists they represent along to the fair. I notice a frequent pattern: often, the artist is enthusiastically greeted by new visitors to the booth, until shortly after, networking and negotiations on a 'higher' level resume, leaving the artist unaddressed and standing disengaged by the side. […] Breaking with this pattern, I approach one of the artists, Elaine, and quiz her about her involvement in the fair and her practice. She tells me about the long journey she had to undertake together with one of the mentors and two other artists to get here. After chatting for a few minutes, I ask her, if she would care to show me some of her artwork. To my surprise she replies: "I can't. My work is not here." I am confused and ask for further clarification. Elaine explains to me, that her art is not presented at the fair "because [it] is too good". She invites me to look at the photo gallery on her phone instead, revealing a vast collection of anime drawings in near perfect technical execution. (Field Notes OAF, 2019, October 18)

It is likely that Elaine was artistically excluded from being shown by her studio's booth for similar reasons as Ricky, whose work was not considered "disabled enough" to be displayed, as demonstrated above. Interrupting the myth of the idiosyncratic and isolated artist genius by taking too close reference to pop culture, Elaine seems to be another exemplification of this phenomenon. Yet what is particularly striking in this case is that, while her artwork obviously did not fit the aesthetic requirements of the 'Outsider Art' world, her story and disability did, revealing a strategic move behind her invitation to the fair, *despite* her artistic omission. In this context, her physical presence in the booth may be understood as an instrument to legitimate the 'authenticity' of other artists represented by the studio who may not be here in person. Being denied any artistic significance, Elaine was effectively objectified and left to fulfil the role of a cardboard figure. Physically signifying 'disability' and not much else, this example heaves the matter of exploitation to a new level, on which the biography not only overshadows the artwork but becomes a means in itself.

In this section I have provided a few exemplary cases of artists' experiences within the 'Outsider Art' world setting. As indicated, these are manifold, depending on the positioning of the artist and their network, as well as on how well they fit the current framework and its requirements. The negatively perceived effect of an artist's biography overshadowing their artwork was mentioned most, followed by the feeling of

infringed privacy and exposed vulnerability. Many artists also recalled experiences of being treated disrespectfully by certain actors in the field, with some describing key players as "exploitive" and "colonising". At the same time, many also point out that they have been treated respectfully by professionals, who they feel are on their side, honestly believing in their work and taking them seriously. Often, they are also proud to be part of certain collections or appearing in *Raw Vision* magazine, further raising the reputation and value of their artwork and position in the field.

Overall, I have observed that—no matter how good or bad individual experiences may be—art world professionals and key players tend to be recognised in their position with their status going unchallenged and, indeed, confirmed by many artists. They are often recognised for their knowledge of the field, networking skills and the opportunities they provide. In many cases, the artists would perhaps indeed not have reached the same level of relative fame and success without these engagements, as in the words of Fine, art world professionals "establish connections between distinct social worlds that the artist could not achieve alone" (2004, p. 160). However, the concluding advice given by many artists is still that, while key players can be useful, you always have to be careful. Joanna tells me that she would like to be represented by an art dealer "who can navigate the art world for me", but at the same time she is "also a little wary" after the negative experiences she has had in the past (Int., 2017, July 18). Most of the artists I have spoken to over the course of the years would agree with this statement, but Josh has perhaps summarised the core of the matter best. According to him, the issues of recognition, exposure and exploitation are interlinked, with benefits always being relative to the circumstances. Key players can help gain recognition for artists who would otherwise remain beyond reach, but at the same time 'cash in' on an artist's vulnerabilities. He therefore advices that you must be "careful" with "people like that" because "it's a balancing act and I don't know which way the balance tips, you know. I think possibly the negative way" (Int. Josh, 2017, July 4).

Experiences with Charities and Supported Art Studios

One of the most positive aspects of being affiliated with a charitable institution is their provision of protection from the arbitrariness, possible exploitation and harsh conventions ruling the art market and the 'Outsider Art' world. As I have delineated in Chapter 5, charities tend to follow a person-centred approach, putting the care of the individual first and seldomly performing overt Othering in their exhibition practices. On the other hand, among art world professionals who predominately focus on an individual's artwork and their story as a product, ethical considerations remain scarce. This might explain why most artists I have encountered throughout the years will recall good as well as bad experiences with both art world professionals and charities, yet still view the art world as somewhat negative, while giving charities an overall positive appraisal.

Dan tells me about a charity he is collaborating with, describing the communication with their associated curators as a "very positive experience", listing as a further plus the opportunity to "meeting up with other artists who were also working in the margins and also coming across more artworks" (Int., 2017, July 12). Connecting

with like-minded people, reaching new audiences as well as being supported by a caring environment are indeed the most common reasons for seeking affiliation with a charity I have encountered among artists. Especially for those, whose confidence may have previously been knocked, charities can provide help and an atmosphere of trust—a safety net and springboard from which to access opportunities in the art world and regain self-esteem as an artist. Lilly appreciates the freedom and "hands-off management" yet individualised help her charity provides if needed (Int., 2017, July 17), and Alec talks in glowing terms about his first exhibition organised by a charity, which turned out to be "very successful" (Int., 2017, July 24). Initiating his career, he was consequently "really busy doing lots and lots of different small shows" (Int. Alec, 2017, July 24), with his work ending up being exhibited in a renowned institution for 'Outsider Art' in the Netherlands, as mentioned before. Moreover, charities can encourage and give hope, with many artists recollecting that they felt stronger, or even empowered, with their voices being amplified. Keshishian, for instance, writes with regards to the charity he is associated with, that it "can function as a mouthpiece to project the voices of quieter people" (*The Social Issue*, 2014, June 16). Artist Kate Sims likewise remarks that at the time of her first exhibition organised by a charity, "I was really ill, it sold, and it gave me a glimmer of hope that actually not only did I have a new career direction, but also that I could develop as an artist and use that artist ability to help me get better" (Field Notes EOA, 2018, May 6). Being involved with the charity in different roles, Sims states that this affiliation has "given me confidence that my voice as an artist with a disability is heard […] they listen to you. […] I do not feel that we are ever described as 'oh this is someone with a learning disability'. I am an artist!" (Field Notes EOA, 2018, May 6). Sarah similarly recalls the charities she has been working with as a "really supportive environment" which have "built my confidence", providing "really positive feedback" and helping to "put myself out a little bit", despite her social anxieties (Int., 2017, June 15). The uplifting effects of not only working with charities but especially having one's artwork exhibited, have further been testified to in numerous evaluation reports by charities.[23] Apart from their and my interviewing of individual participants of art studio programmes and their close social networks, I would also largely subscribe to this positive viewpoint from personal experience. This should not, however, distract from the fact that the everyday studio practice and negotiations conducted behind closed doors can at times be questionable, making certain charities' codes of ethics appear flexible, to say the least.

Since most charities affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field operate in the social and/or arts sectors and are dependent on funding and art sales, conflicts of interests

23 On many websites of charities affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field (e.g. Creative Future, Venture Arts, Project Artworks, Core Arts, Shapearts, Outside In), evaluation reports and annual reviews can be downloaded for free. These are valuable resources often containing direct quotes by artists, recalling their individual experiences with the charity, or more particularly with sponsored exhibitions and programmes. Since these reports can act as important instruments to secure further funding, they are understandably biased and largely leave out all too-critical considerations or negative experiences artists may have made.

between internal goals and external requirements are likely to arise. These conflicts seem heightened the more a charity or social project gets involved in the art world, yet the participants' ascribed difference may become exaggerated either way. One particular paradox I have encountered with many charities in the field is a discrepancy between what an organisation *says* and states as their aim and what the charity *does*, either in their everyday studio practice or when applying for funding. Many mission statements of charitable institutions call for inclusion, diversity and equality and proclaim to take active measures against discrimination and practices of Othering. However, to secure funding for projects and continue their work, many of these organisations are also forced to continuously stress the exclusion and inequality their participants supposedly experience and clearly delineate how 'different' and 'vulnerable' these individuals are. Vice versa, some gallerists and curators in the art world may likewise overstate the presumed social and psychological difference of certain artists they represent, thereby raising the chances of acquiring funding not only from the arts but also from the social sector. In his study, van Heddeghem quotes a number of art world professionals who have applied for grants and subsidies, with one gallerist stating that funding bodies "just love[] the idea of art and [the] handicapped and so on and want to give money for that" (2016, p. 52). Leaving the latter example aside, it seems particularly ironic that charitable programmes set out to eliminate exclusion are somewhat accomplices in reproducing the latter, with the envisioned inclusion always remaining a theoretical goal in the distance. Seen from this perspective, its accomplishment may even threaten a charity's existence, which is often legitimised by and thus dependent on a prevailing state of inequality. The spokesperson for Charity B explained this impasse to me, complaining how his organisation is required to "over-articulate difference" and incapability of their participants to stand out when applying for funding, even if this entails reproducing 'Otherness' (Field Notes CHB, 2017, August). Such practices often do not go unnoticed by participants with Lilly having observed a similar scenario in a charity she did eventually walk away from:

> The fundraiser there […] she runs EVERYTHING, she is absolutely amazing. But she used to have, for this lottery [fund] […] to really lean on the poverty-side of [place x] and say these children are deprived, there is no way that they've got anything else apart from selling drugs at the end of school. She REALLY had to pull on it. It's really wrong, you have to sort of do that. (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17)

Naturally, every charity decides for itself how far they are willing to engage with differentiation to acquire funding or gain visibility. More compromises affecting internal structures seem to be made if a charity does not survive on funding alone, for example generating revenue through sales and involvement in the 'Outsider Art' world. In these cases, it is most likely that not only the on-paper representation is affected, as is the case with applications for funding, but also activities in everyday studio practice. It seems that the closer a charitable institution ventures towards the art world, the trickier it gets to negotiate between economic and social considerations and weigh up the level of care with that of artistic success. Said conflicts of interests may arise, for example, when it comes to the question of which individuals gain admission to programmes and projects. Due to limited places and underfunding in the social sector,

selective measures are inevitable, yet if a charity is also involved in the art market, further restrictions apply. Depending on the capacity of the studio, certain applicants are then rejected while others may be invited on the grounds of their story/work meeting the requirements of the 'Outsider Art' world. Still, whenever I enquired about these selection processes and the obviously undertaken 'quality control' during my time in the field, I rarely received a straightforward answer from charity personnel. Often the topic was changed, or my question diverted, with the most concrete answer I ever received being that the selection procedure is "a slightly dramatic experience" (Field Notes CHB, 2017, August). That the issue of quality in 'Outsider Art' indeed remains the "elephant in the room" as Röske once described it (Field Notes EOA, 2019, May 24), is testified to by frequent comments from art world professionals who state that they 'know it when they see it', and the inconclusive outcome of discussing the topic at the EOA conference, which even operated under the banner *eQuality* in 2019. The selective and suggestive practices in the art studio may reveal these hidden agendas and the aesthetic motives informing staff to a certain extent, indicating unconscious expectations carried over to participating artists. These expectations are pronounced relative to the level of art world involvement of respective organisations and expressed in studio interactions, as the following example shows.

> It is 8.30am on a Thursday. As usual, I meet the other staff and team leads for the briefing in the office before we get going. Alice, who will run the session, Jeff and Norah, as well as one more assistant and myself will be supporting a group of seven artists, which meet on a weekly basis. Alice has brought in some organic material, leaves, branches and wooden sticks to set up an "indoor forest" to loosely inspire those who might lack ideas. We begin hanging branches from the ceiling with clamps and set up a video recording of a forest to project onto the wall. Alice additionally arranges some decorative leaves on an overhead projector but changes her mind and replaces them with wooden sticks, worrying that they may be "too suggestive". I head to the large sink area to get the materials ready. The shelves are stacked with oil paints, pastels, pencils, pens and high-quality acrylic paint of all colours and shades. Also, the paper and canvasses which are prepared in bulk and had just been brought in by Norah, meet the highest gallery standards. […] As I finish laying out the brushes, water pots and an assortment of other tools, the first artists arrive, making their way to the office adjacent to the studio. As I come in, Evie, one of the artists, points her finger at me exclaiming "I want to work with you!". Alice is quick to respond: "Oh well, unfortunately you will have to work with me today." Nothing much is said until the rest of the group has arrived and slowly, we move to the studio together. Once everyone has settled in, Alice proposes a groupwork-drawing on the wall as a starter, responding to the forest projection. The participants hesitate, so she gives further hints on what they could do ("you could draw along the outlines of the trees!"). No one follows the hint and most artists turn away from the projection and start drawing and painting in apparent oblivion to the suggested topic. […] I remember Alice telling me before the session how much she likes the "awkwardness" in the beginning of each session, as this would be the "only time of the day" she can "formally teach". […] After helping some of the artists for a couple of hours, I eventually end up working with Evie. I lay out a choice

of materials in front of her. I am aware, that she will go with whatever I suggest, so I try to leave the possibilities as open as I can. […] It takes her a considerable amount of time to make a choice, yet eventually she decides. Looking around the room, I can understand this pronounced insecurity when presented with options: there are none. Leo is stuck with black and white charcoal which has been given to him without enquiring about his preference by his support worker in the beginning of the day. Also, the materials Evie normally works with are pre-selected for her. Already in the morning had I noticed that Alice and Norah limited the colour palette and material range for certain participants. Apparently unhappy with my time-consuming approach of giving choices, Alice re-allocates me to work with Ralf after a while, who is drawing quietly and with full concentration at the other end of the room. It is obvious that Ralf is in 'the zone' with no further need for assistance. So I get a piece of paper and start drawing myself. For a while we quietly work next to each other, at times checking what the other person is up to. Ralf carefully fills the page with coloured ink and occasionally draws outlines of objects with a sharpie onto the page. As the page is almost filled with intricate details, Jeff approaches us. "Ralf, this looks amazing! Don't you wanna try and use a little more white over here to highlight these sections? I am going to get you some white paint." Ralf looks puzzled but agrees with delay to Jeff's largely rhetorical question. […] Jeff returns with white acrylic paint, hands it over to Ralf and leaves again. Ralf looks at the pot of paint with confusion, hesitates but eventually grabs a big brush and with a few quick strokes covers his whole drawing in white acrylic paint. Jeff, rushing over as he sees this, pauses, sighs out loud and shrugs his shoulders turning towards me—apparently, he couldn't bring his message across. As Jeff removes the dripping wet painting from the table, putting it outside to dry, Ralf immediately gets started with another piece. He carefully draws the shape of a motorcycle and adds a few more details to the page. Shortly after, he asks me for some orange acrylic paint. Presented with it, he grabs a big paintbrush and covers the whole page in it, making the drawing underneath vanish completely again. He giggles with pleasure as the paint drips and mixes with the ink underneath, observing how it flows and dries. It is a joyful experience watching Ralf experimenting; he seems to have a good time. With a tap on my shoulder, Alice reminds me that we are approaching the end of today's session. As I tidy up Ralf's workspace and mine, I listen to a conversation between Olivia and Jeff on the adjacent table. Together they are looking through all the paintings Olivia has produced today. Jeff picks one and asks her what she likes most about it. Olivia points to a brightly painted spot on her painting, exclaiming "the colours!" Jeff subsequently turns towards her stating: "Do you know what I like best about it? Those areas, where you didn't paint over your original drawing." Olivia doesn't respond. They both sit there in silence for a moment, before Olivia starts scribbling seemingly absent-minded on another piece of paper. After a while she breaks the silence, asking Jeff: "How much money are you making with my pictures?" I catch a surprised look on Jeff's face. He replies: "What do you mean?" After a long pause, waiting in vain for more clarification on Olivia's side, he adds: "I don't think about these things". (Field Notes CHB, 2018, January)

The example given is a snapshot of interactions having taken place between facilitators and artists in one particular session, but it is worth pointing out that these are by no means extraordinary and have occurred in a similar fashion in many other sessions I have participated in. In comparison to other charities I have been involved with, however, the suggestive practices in this example are pronounced, perhaps due to the overt involvement of said charity in the art market, explained to me in rich detail by the charity's spokesman (Field Notes CHB, 2017, August). In other cases, art market involvement may remain implicit, yet still be sufficiently indicated by the provision and use of high-quality art materials, the handling and framing of the artwork, well-networked marketing departments and an acclaimed positioning in the field as demonstrated by appearances in 'Outsider Art' media.

I would now like to take a closer look at the implications and different layers of concern indicated by the example just given, following Figure 29 which indicates some of the most pressing ethical issues arising with increasing convergence of charitable institutions and the art world.

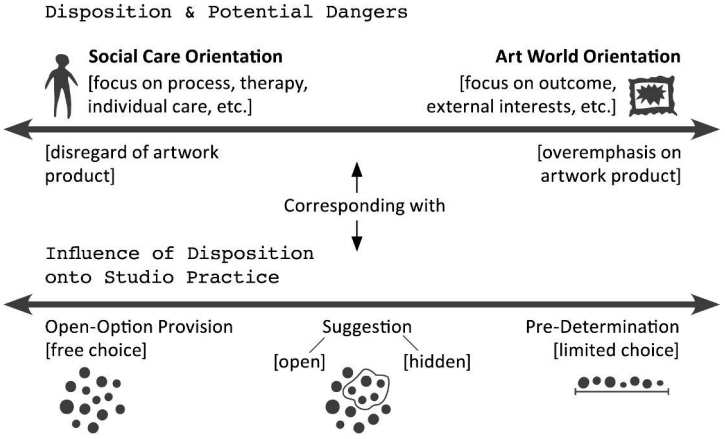

Figure 29. Alignment of Charities, Art Studios and Ateliers with Social Care/Art World Paradigms. Shifting Dispositions Between Open-Option Provision and Predetermination (Own Depiction).

Figure 29 shows a spectrum of possible dispositions among staff, either leaning towards social care or art world interests. Although schematically depicted on opposite ends of the scale, in many cases these tendencies and interests cannot be easily dissected, but converge. In most supported art studio sessions have I observed an assortment of open-option provision, suggestive practices and predetermined decision-making occur simultaneously and co-informing each other, always depending on the time and context of a particular interaction and actor disposition. Yet, even though all the points on the scale might be met, some of them may weigh more, making

Josh's question relevant once again: it is always a balancing act, but where does the balance tip?

In the example given above, all stages on the spectrum shown occur, with emphasis on practices leaning towards the right end of the scale, accounting for predetermination and limitation of options. Here, activities range from active decision-making *for* the artist with or without their consent (e.g. staff deciding when an artwork is finished, which materials are to be used, what happens with the artwork after the session, how it is marketed, framed and exhibited, if and to whom it is sold and for how much, etc.) to, at its most extreme, making decisions *against* explicit wishes expressed by an artist (e.g. "I want to work with *x*"—"No, you work with *y*"; "I want to take my work home"—"No, it will stay here", etc.).[24]

Much more commonly encountered in direct observation are suggestive practices ranging from subtle and hidden to open and advisory. One example of overt suggestion is the formal teaching approach applied by Alice in the beginning of the session, providing a pre-set task or painting instructions. These practices are met with disregard by the 'Outsider Art' world and diminish the value of pieces produced, as the artists supposedly have been too influenced in these circumstances (e.g. Maclagan, 2009). Hence, institutions engaging with the arts sector will normally limit such practices. Instead, helping along 'idiosyncratic' expression with hidden or subtle suggestive practices seems much more common, often occurring in the framing of semi-manipulative questions expressing an aesthetic dogma or expectation in disguise (e.g. "would you like to try this instead?"; "how about using that colour for a change?"; "don't you think your piece is finished now?"). Even if one subscribes to a rather therapeutic standpoint leaning towards the left of the scale and attempting to formulate open questions (e.g. "these are all the colours we have, which ones would you like?"; "when you feel like your painting is finished, give me a sign!"), subconscious approval or disapproval of certain artistic choices may still be expressed non-verbally via body language. This makes it effectively very difficult to circumvent suggestive or subliminal influences which can perhaps never be ruled out entirely.

Nevertheless, when engaging with charities it is of crucial importance to reflect on their overall motives and the goals of the art sessions provided, reviewing offi-

24 Ricky, who is part of a non-UK residential art centre, has frequently experienced these practices and expressed his distress to me in an informal conversation: "I have to get away from this place. […] You have to paint all the time. They want me to draw all the time. You get stupid. […] I'd rather do an apprenticeship as a carpenter. You can't do that here. The only thing you can do here is become an artist and I don't want that. […] I read in the newspaper that if you come here, you earn money with your drawings and you get your own TV. But then it wasn't like that at all. Mostly you get paid after a few years, or never, at all. And you have to draw all the time. And it's shit, because the carers are there all the time also. They work 24 hours and sit next to you." (Field Notes Non-UK, 2017, June). When I asked Ricky about the whereabouts of his artworks, he told me: "I don't get to keep my drawings. They keep it. They have a whole cupboard full of my drawings. If I go away, I'll take all those drawings and burn them" (Field Notes Non-UK, 2017, June). It is worth pointing out that the institution Ricky is part of makes it explicit that they have entirely left the social sector and solely produce for the 'Outsider Art' world. While Ricky's case is of extraordinary concern, I have not encountered such harsh environments in the British 'Outsider Art' field and have therefore decided to refer to this example only as a footnote in the present context.

cial statements with a critical eye. Is the artistic practice first and foremost aimed at the personal development of individual participants, following the social care or therapy paradigm, or is there also a pronounced interest in the finished product, with a particular audience in mind? Aesthetic dispositions of individual staff members and business interests of charities are normally disguised and not openly declared as they may appear contradictory to their official philosophy. They are, however, exposed in certain scenarios like the ones depicted with Ralf and Olivia above. Ralf obviously has great interest in and enjoys the dripping and feel of wet paint, yet his behaviour is handled as being destructive by charity staff. His respective support workers are tempted to take over and decide for Ralf as well as for Olivia, at what point their artworks are finished, thus attempting to 'save' valuable pieces of work before they are 'destroyed' by both artists' passion to overpaint them. In these instances, a charity's focus and interest in the final product, rather than the individual process of artmaking, is revealed. Although participants in such programmes are often told they can do whatever they feel like, in my experience, most support workers have a clear bias towards work that complies with the aesthetic framework of 'Outsider Art'. In many ways these expectations do not only consciously or subconsciously inform their interaction with artists in the studio practice, but are also expressed by decisions made afterwards concerning the handling or discarding of artworks in the absence of the artists:

> After all artists have left the studio, Alice, Jeff and Norah start labelling the artworks produced, taking photographs of some, while discarding others. Alice is left with 30–40 pieces of today's session, deciding in consultation with Jeff which works to keep, what to throw away, what is finished, what needs to be worked on more, what is of exhibition-quality and what should be transferred to the archive. I'm stunned watching her rigorous approach, with certain pieces being chucked into the bin instantly, not caring to give them a second thought or even pondering to ask the artist if they might want to have it. Other pieces are praised, with Alice carefully handling the paper and canvas, trying not to smudge the paint or charcoal and initiating further measures to conserve them. […] As we sort through the pile, Olivia enters the room unexpectedly, asking if she could take home one of the pictures she had been painting today. The piece she refers to has just been singled out by Alice and put on the 'keep' pile. Olivia spots it. For a short moment everyone in the room seems to be holding their breath. With great hesitation Alice eventually hands over the artwork to Olivia. As she leaves, Jeff, Norah and Alice sigh out loud and voice their regrets. The rest of Olivia's paintings had already been thrown into the bin before her re-arrival, as they had apparently not reached the standard of the one selected. I remember once again how Jeff remarked with concern a week ago, that Olivia tends to "destroy" the initial "pure expression" of her drawings, by wanting to colour them in. According to Jeff, she does so, even after him having explicitly "discouraged" her from using colour. I can't help but smile to myself: with Olivia eventually taking over their aesthetic framework, she now specifically asks for exactly those paintings of hers, the charity longs to keep. (Field Notes CHB, 2018, January)

Despite raising further concerns with regards to suggestive studio practices, this field note shall suffice to exemplify the severe selection processes taking place behind closed doors long before any of the work is released to the public. Generally, only artworks which confirm to the aesthetic framework an organisation has subscribed to are kept, revealing a particular atelier style[25] which is often met with suspicion by professionals in the 'Outsider Art' field. Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency to keep only those works confirming an artist's 'idiosyncrasy', with other works 'disturbing' their aesthetic 'purity' or revealing too many cultural references being rejected. Often, the audience is then left with a seemingly perfect image of the uninfluenced, otherworldly 'Outsider' genius—a natural, obsessive talent continuously producing outstanding and high-quality art. Yet what is exhibited as the signature work of a particular artist is often only a distorted version of their oeuvre, reflecting the atelier's aesthetic preference more so than their genuine practice or artistic message. One may argue that, due to spatial limitations and a curator's need to discriminate between artworks, selective procedures which may result in misrepresentation are inevitable. However, in the field of 'Outsider Art' they only constitute the tip of the ethical iceberg. Of much more pressing concern is the circumstance that, in some cases, artists are not even consulted before their work is binned, exhibited or sold. Sometimes they do not only remain uninvolved in decision-making processes regarding their artwork, but as Olivia's case demonstrates, information is even deliberately withheld when the artist gains awareness of business procedures and enquires about the sales value of their work. On the other hand, sole emphasis on the processual and therapeutic aspects of creating may also have negative impacts on studio participants, namely when their artistic competencies are underestimated. I have also been involved with charities which perceive artmaking as a form of occupational therapy, paying little attention to the outcome or even obliging participants to produce works they may have no emotional connection with or interest in. In these cases, their individual work may be left unnoticed and thrown away, or even entirely discouraged by the continuous delivery of pre-set tasks, like "copying art out of books" or "making Christmas cards", as Dan denounces in hindsight of the charity he has been working with:

> They enjoy making the cards etc. but have never been considered as individual artists […] Management see the workshop as it is called as a place for the clients to produce work that can effectively promote the charity, this is not out of malice just an inability to understand that certain individuals could develop their own creativity. The model is that work, which is pleasant, creative, colourful even varied, is a good thing, people are engaged, and they make lovely pictures. A good service is being provided. But this is not about the work of individuals, such work may be individualistic, but there is no

25 Röske has written about this effect, stating that most of the work produced in such studios is characterised by a set of formal and content-related similarities. According to him, the appearance of an "atelier style" (2011b, p. 23) can be explained through a range of indicators: the selected art materials, resources and working space that is provided, the general idea of what is 'good art' in a particular time in history, the staff, which transmits certain standards and performs artistic quality control as well as artists influencing each other in the group.

> emphasis about the individual, no development of them as artists. (Int. Dan, 2017, July 17)

Such issues characterise the other side of the spectrum, with perhaps a great many artists being overlooked and not recognised as artists at all. Either way, it seems fair to conclude that being involved with certain charities, much like with the 'Outsider Art' world more generally, can be a mixed blessing. Overall, I agree with Wexler and Derby's (2015) celebration of supported artist studios and charitable institutions in their importance for enhancing community involvement and contributing to an increase of equality, diversity and participation on a societal level. As shown above, many artists likewise report back positively about their charity involvement. However, it seems reasonable to also meet these institutions with caution because, as Andy says, "it's good that there's places like that, but they don't all have very good practice" (Int., 2017, July 3). Again, it depends on the setting and context, yet ethical issues are likely to arise when conflicts of interest occur, such as in the mixing of the arts and social sector, each following different purposes and aims. Working on the premise that being recognised by the 'Outsider Art' field and having one's work exhibited and sold is in the best interests of the artist, problems often arise when external interests overwrite an individual's well-being. In the worst cases, this can include overt abusive practices such as withholding medication. Much more frequently, however, artists seem to be 'guided' by mentors to produce certain outcomes or are 'advised' to donate their work to the charity. Especially in cases where the work of an artist is taken and sold without any further consultation, or the artist is placed in the field without their wanting or knowing, closer investigations are worthwhile to reveal the main beneficiaries accountable for such arrangements. However, to counterbalance an image of the artist 'Outsider' as powerless victim, I would now like to turn the focus on the individual agency of artists affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field.

6.5 Agency, Strategies and Self-Management

As I have shown, the imbalanced power relationships informing the 'Outsider Art' field can variously affect artists, be it via stigmatisation, exploitation or misrepresentation. Even though experiences with established art world institutions, professionals and charitable organisations range from positive to negative, the latter seem to outweigh an individual's associative benefits in some cases. As a result, many artists affiliated with the field turn their backs on the art world—if they had not done so from the beginning—taking matters into their own hands and yielding varying levels of success doing so. The end of this chapter will concentrate on how barriers are dealt with and some of the strategies developed by artists who feel excluded both from 'insider' and 'outsider' art world contexts, acting against their respective rules or attempting to leave classificatory restrictions behind.

One rather drastic reaction following the disillusionment with certain art worlds may be to resign from artmaking altogether. On his blog, Brian Gibson writes:

> Last year I gave up on art. I wasn't making any money and I wasn't enjoying making any art. Reading about art in Art Journals mostly frustrated me, Fine Art, Outsider Art, Contemporary Art, Political Art, Therapeutic Art, New Art and Future Art just made me feel … so futile. Perhaps I had become too intoxicated by that Happy Hour, heady cocktail mix of cynicism, envy and bitterness that we all feel from time to time that ensure that all avenues of creative salvation are forever closed to you. Basically, I gave up on art, because after all these years of devotion, it felt like 'ART' had given up on me. (Gibson, 2017, February 15)

Gibson is now employed as a support worker for a charity, effectively performing a role change, however still staying close to, if not within, the field. I have met several other artists who have gone into activism or taken on other roles adjacent to the field, refraining from putting their own artmaking first. Others have changed their artistic focus altogether to access more viable options, attempting to circumvent barriers encountered in the 'Outsider Art' sector. However, most artists I have met have only temporarily interrupted their practice if they have done so at all, eventually finding the way back to it. Chloe, for example, felt she had "left something behind" when she stopped making art and recalls that it "was like coming home" when she finally took up her artistic practice again (Int., 2017, July 13). Some artists, like Ryan or Alec, on the other hand, have remained relatively untouched by the negatives of the 'Outsider Art' world and are unbroken in their beliefs. Alec states: "I don't have any control over whether someone appreciates the work or if I get invited to exhibit. I just continue with my work." (Int., 2017, July 24) and Ryan declares: "I don't have much success as an Outsider Artist at all! I continue painting […] as much as I can and eventually, I believe that I will succeed" (Int., 2017, July 2).

While a great many artists in the field resiliently follow their own path, even if their artmaking is not appreciated, this cannot be equated with the frequent assumption that these individuals do therefore not care about recognition. While Maclagan claims that 'Outsider Artists' are discovered by art world professionals "almost by accident" and would otherwise stay "invisible" (2009, p. 158), Fine has observed that many artists do not remain as passive as is often believed, but instead take active measures in the "construction of their careers" and for their work to be seen (2004, p. 128). He cites examples of artists who attend symposia, are involved in curating their own shows, send works to galleries and museums or approach collectors directly, thereby raising the likelihood for being 'discovered'. While the artist thereby risks overstepping their predefined position and is likely to meet barriers or being denigrated a 'faker' as seen in section 6.3, Fine's statement co-aligns with observations I have made during my time in the field. Rather than the expected disinterest ascribed to many artists affiliated with 'Outsider Art', I have found their aspirations to be similar to other artists. Many do care about feedback, display a desire for recognition and like to share their work, even if their audience might not be limited to art world realms. Sarah, for example, states:

> I like to show it, because I feel, if you make work, it's contributing, it's giving something. So, I feel it's good to be in a dialogue rather than very insular. It gets slightly overwhelming just sitting in here with my work, talking to yourself almost. So, for me

> I find it really valuable, just to see yourself as part of something else rather than on your own. (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15)

In a similar manner, Daniel asserts that exhibiting

> really helps me with my self-esteem and helps me feel part of something larger than myself. And I like connecting with people, I like people to look at my art and go 'wow', get inspired, or taken somewhere else. So, it means a lot to me to sort of get my artwork out there and let people appreciate it. (Daniel in Lizatovic, 2015, November 14)

Ryan tells me "without being a show-off", that his artmaking is "a way to say to people 'look what I have done! Look what I can do!' I'm trying to leave something on the planet, so that in 100 or 200 or even 500 years everyone can think of me and what I did and say 'wow'!" (Int., 2017, July 2) He hopes that after his death, his relatives will "run a business selling my paintings", with them being shown in "reputable art galleries" and "accepted and displayed by art museums" (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 2). Andy expresses similar ambitions. Apart from organising more private views in his home "to show it off a bit more", he says

> I'd really like to have a place that people could visit […] I'd love to have a shop […]. I think it would become really famous, people would come and say, 'oh you gotta go and visit that place!'. I'd love to do that. […] I love all the Outsider Art environments. My biggest ambition is to get a church and just completely decorate it. (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3)

Many artists thrive on positive feedback and express feelings of pride when seeing their own work on show. Considering the largely positive attitude towards exhibiting, the myth of the disinterested and disengaged artist once again finds itself contested. I have encountered many artists who would like their artwork to be seen and sold and attempt to achieve these goals in various ways, stating that they would like to be actively involved in the representation and decision-making processes concerning their artwork. Due to the controversial nature of her work, Chloe realised that,

> the reaction of the audience depends on how I'm interacting with them. One of the ways I like to present my work in galleries is I like to be there. I like to interact, to explain. […] I need to be able to talk. On the whole, I had very good audience reaction, but I sort of trained myself. Initially I had speech impediment, shy, dududu, so I taught myself. Which was fascinating, speaking into a persona again. By large I get on well with the audience and if I can talk to them, they find it interesting, even people that are not like myself. Because I'm not with any uniform, I think people find that quite fascinating. I just don't wanna fit in that slot. […] I get different audiences and I can communicate with people pretty well. If I can talk to people, I have not been attacked. (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

Even though stating that "agency, the ability to self-determine to execute your own will, is incredibly important", Moesby has observed that, especially in 'Outsider Art' contexts, "the sense of agency can seem reduced or absent" (2017, November 9). This might explain why many artists who turn away from the art world seek backing from

independent artist collectives or grassroots arts communities, with opportunities for self-management reportedly on the rise. All artists I have spoken to agree that, in recent years, the possibilities for their art to being seen beyond the confined borders of established insider/outsider frameworks have increased. After having bad experiences with established galleries, Joanna now exhibits regularly at a community gallery "which is not much, but the environment is very friendly and supportive", enabling her to "usually manage to sell something" (Int., 2017, August 1). By the same token, Dan tells me about having a "really good relationship" with a non-profit gallery and "artist-run studio with associate membership" (Int., 2017, August 2), pointing out that "organisations evolving from grassroots level consider the ethics of the arts, especially if they are an artist group, rather than a group doing arts" (Int. Dan, 2017, July 23). These networks can provide a 'supplemental' art world, which may be more limited in reach but offer individual artists more say, choice and varying levels of support via their organisational structure. Such institutions, with a fairly prominent one being the *Living Museum*[26], follow a non-hierarchical and bottom-up approach, yet do require individual artists to be highly self-organised and self-reliant and thus again exclude artists who may need more support. Here, progressive charities which support and allow artists to become involved on different levels of their managerial structure can step in, encouraging artists to find their voice and regain confidence.

Some artists I have encountered do, for various reasons, nevertheless feel uncomfortable with any such network. Rob admits that he would like to "see my work in a gallery", but that he does not want to 'sell-out' and currently is "slowly making progress going it alone" (Int., 2017, July 6). He states that he does not "sell enough art to quit the day job any time soon, but one has to dream" (Int. Rob, 2017, July 6). Andy likewise values his independence and is glad not to be involved with any charities:

> I just do what I want to do. It's a struggle to live but there's no one saying 'what we really like is this style of work' […] they would say, 'we just want this kind of work from you' […] you got to do your own thing really. But it's a shame that they get all corrupted, yeah that's bad. (Int. Andy, 2017, July 3)

The 'going it alone' approach of making one's artwork visible yet circumventing official channels, charity support and so on, can be seen as one of the most traditional strategies adopted by 'Outsider Artists' in the field. While his work was exhibited at a Bond Street gallery for "suitably high prices", artist Scottie Wilson has reportedly "set himself up on the pavement outside, offering it to passers-by for a fiver or two" (Maclagan, 2009, p. 159). Another famous historical example is Bill Traylor, who is known for having run his own art stand on the streets of Montgomery, painting and selling his work without contractors to interested pedestrians in the 1940s (Umberger, 2018).

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26 The *Living Museum* is run for and by artists with mental illnesses, and has been established on the grounds of Creedmoor Psychiatric Center (NY) in 1983 yet remaining independent from the institution and by now having expanded to various locations around the world. Helen Roeten, representative of the Living Museum in Bennebroek, states that the idea behind the project is "that you have the space and the time to create whatever you want. […] There is no hierarchy […] there is no psychiatrist around" (Field Notes EOA, 2018, May 6).

Figure 30. Perry, H. (1946). Bill Traylor in Montgomery (Photograph). Collection of the Alabama State Council of the Arts.

Ryan is a contemporary practitioner of this approach. He has been painting and selling his art on the streets for many years—"hustling", as he calls it (Int., 2017, July 9). Ryan has done so "not out of choice but out of desperation", stating that in the beginning "it was very difficult and very nerve racking to paint in public" (Int., 2017, July 2). He only "scraped by earning a meagre living", but after some time received commissions and was able to negotiate higher prices for his work. He reports having "become more confident", even experiencing his public artmaking as "exciting" and "fun" (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 2). Ryan eventually ended up on TV and selling to collectors, yet still setting the prices for his work independently. "Being the salesman of my own artwork was a rewarding experience but also very difficult", he recollects, adding that he "would vary the prices of my paintings depending on how I was feeling. If I was in a good mood and the customer was polite then I might sell the painting for a reasonable price, other times I would sell the same painting for a much higher amount of money" (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 9). He distinctly remembers "one customer [who] would buy lots of my paintings from here and then sell them on to art galleries" (Int. Ryan, 2017, July 9)—in many cases for considerably higher prices. In these instances, conflicts are likely to arise and power imbalances tend to manifest, making artists selling on the street particularly prone for being exploited due to their lack of protection and pricing their work according to how they "feel". With the increasing popularity of 'Outsider Art', many artists do, however, also deliberately seek out the art world's hot spots, setting up shop in front of galleries or museums to cut out the middleman. In an ironic manner, they are thereby disrupting and hijacking the art market, turning the locational advantage to their own gain.

Figure 31. Cortes, R. (2010). Ionel Talpazan Outside the Outsider Art Fair New York (Photograph). Personal Collection of Photographer.

One exemplary case of this practice is the late Ionel Talpazan, who was known to sell his work on the streets outside the Outsider Art Fair in New York (Wojcik, 2016). According to collector Henry Boxer, Talpazan would have thereby "shot himself in the foot" (BBC 'Turning the Art World Inside Out', 2013) since his work would sell for a lot more inside the fair, than the artist himself was able or willing to negotiate for outside. Talpazan remained unconcerned about such warnings, stating in favour of his economic autonomy: "I like to sell direct. No consignments, no contract. No. I need money. I need to survive!" (BBC 'Turning the Art World Inside Out', 2013) Many art world professionals frown upon such practices, proclaiming that they damage an artist's career and devalue their work. However, the negative effects may in some of these cases turn out to be more profound for said professionals than the artists, who may not benefit greatly from or care about their respective art world reputation in the first place, but are merely trying to make a living instead.

Of all the strategies concerning independent representation thus far discussed, the fairly recent development of the internet and the manifold opportunities it provides is often highlighted by artists. Social media platforms such as Instagram are perceived by many as a way to circumvent restrictions and gatekeepers, reaching large audiences while remaining in control over one's own framing and representation. Josh points to the democratic potential and participatory advantages of the internet, allowing "everyone" to "access everything" (Int., 2017, June 22) and Pete praises the internet for enabling "outsider artists [to] connect with other outsider artists or find possible collectors and even online galleries to show their works in" (Int., 2017, December 19). Stating that "the internet and social media for sure has been a big open door to find

others with the same interests" he is convinced that it also helped to considerably raise the profile of marginalised groups (Int. Pete, 2017, December 19). Social media may indeed offer a good alternative to overcome barriers for those artists who are less inclined to sell in front of a gallery or fair, struggle with normative communication or approaching collectives. Lilly states that she will "upload work on Instagram to get past the fear of showing stuff to people and for people to like them" (Int., 2017, July 17) and Sarah declares that Instagram has "strangely" helped in building her confidence, "because I'm so used to just being on my own in my studio with my work without really an audience. It's really encouraging to have a bit of a dialogue going on" (Int., 2017, June 15). She praises Instagram for its ease of use "because it's just a picture and you can like pictures or not" (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15), making it easier for artists who face issues with verbal communication or are unable to go outside since, as Alec points out, it can all be "manage[d] from home" (Int., 2017, July 24). Andy recommends Instagram because "it's great to see other people's work", pointing out that, following his social media activity, he has now been contacted by galleries and collectors interested in showing and buying his work (Int., 2017, July 3).

In many of these instances, artists will choose to tag their work "outsider art" to raise visibility online—even if they might reject such practices in face-to-face conversations. Confronted with this paradox, Lilly shrugs, saying: "it just makes it easy for someone to look for stuff" (Int., 2017, July 17). According to her "it's exposure, some sort of tagline, something other than the picture" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17), with Rob elaborating that using the tag has "made me stand out on internet search engines, which like it or not offers the aspiring artist one could only dream about when I was in art school: to reach a global audience from the sanctuary of your own home" (Int., 2017, June 30). He states that it "opened me up to fellow Outsider Artists and galleries all over the world, which is a niche market that I would have previously been oblivious to" (Int. Rob, 2017, June 30). After tagging his work "outsider art", and due to his increased activity on social media, he tells me that he has now "sold more works than ever" (Int. Rob, 2017, June 30).

There are, however, also considerable downsides to social media. Lilly concedes that Instagram "likes are really nice and the comments and getting feedback from people. It's definitely allowed me to talk about stuff that I do and things like that, which I don't think I would have been able to before" (Int., 2017, July 17). Yet at the same time she admits getting anxious and sucked into a negative spiral when using social media. "I try and ignore the Instagram likes, because if one picture gets more likes and one picture doesn't, then does that then make me better if I do more pictures like the one that got loads of likes?" (Int. Lilly, 2017, July 17) Sarah likewise states that

> all this stuff makes me way more anxious. […] I used to be VERY anxious with online stuff. […] I'm also glad that we didn't have it [internet access]. Obviously, I had [condition A] when I was young, but oh my god imagine you've got evidence now! Imagine! Facebook and everything. Jesus, at least you know whatever happened I either don't know or it's like, it's gone. But nowadays, you just think it's so dangerous! Jesus! (Int. Sarah, 2017, June 15)

To know that the internet does not forget can heighten anxiety and strengthen the adhesion of certain stigmas especially when text, photo or video footage of oneself appears, as in Ryan's case, in which he was severely ill and, as he states, "out of control". Despite these dangers, social media may also be simply experienced as an overwhelming and exhausting, yet "necessary" task:

> all the promotion, the giving talks, all that bloody computer work. I don't do as much as I should. My website is just … but I MUST do. I suppose it's necessary that I do, I have to. It's just what you do, I have to do it. […] It can open doors for me. […] I'm never going to be big. I'm pretty sure. I've got my little countercultural following, but it's as much I think for the package. (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13)

The "package" Chloe refers to can be seen as a set of marketing strategies which may represent yet another problem for some artists affiliated with the 'Outsider Art' field. As in 'real life', certain rules must be obeyed online to create a following and raise attention. The implication is that those who market themselves well with their "uber uber upbeat presentation", as Gibson (2015, August 25) has called it, will overshadow quieter voices. With reference to these non-normative voices, Dan tones down the frequently celebrated idea of the internet's capacity to facilitate self-empowerment and autonomy, stating that those "savvy people" with their "slick websites and very competent at PR" once again preoccupy all spots, with those remaining on the losing end who have already found it "difficult to access the art world" in the first place (Int., 2017, July 12). This coincides with the political challenges outlined by Kahn and Kellner, who state that the internet "embod[ies] reconstructed models of citizenship", enabling "new forms of political activism", "important oppositional forms of agency" and "participatory democracy" (2006, p. 704). At the same time, it "reproduces logics of capital and is continually co-opted by hegemonic forces" (Kahn & Kellner, 2006, p. 704), co-evolving with "processes that promote and disseminate the capitalist consumer society, individual, and competition, and that have involved emergent modes of fetishism, alienation, and domination" (2006, p. 720). It still seems fair to conclude, however, that for an 'Outsider' it is easier now to be noticed by mainstream art worlds, with social media raising agency and providing a chance to connect beyond one's own immediate social environment. As exemplified by artist Helen Downie, whose Instagram profile "Unskilled Worker" has attracted more than 280,000 followers and has brought her to the attention of fashion labels and galleries, social media "can create a lot of luck, so the right person sees your work at the right time" (*The Guardian*, 2018, March 8). Likewise, there appears to be increased visibility of diversity, with individuals having more independence and control over their self-representation and marginalised groups undisputedly having gained more rights and participation in the UK in the last decades. The problems of 'going it alone' are still pronounced, since artists may face new barriers or the threat of sinking into oblivion yet again, due to social media demanding normative communication and the provision of little support and protection from being exploited, if the individual artist is unaffiliated with an or-

ganisation.[27] Furthermore, the internet has thus far not replaced the predominance of traditional art world arenas, and only a very limited range of artists tends to be accepted to the field as a result of their online endeavours. Even if it might appear so at first sight, the traditional gatekeeping system cannot be as easily circumvented. Some artists may tag themselves "outsider artists", but as long as they are not officially 'stamped' as such by a reputable art world professional, this—as it stands—may raise their visibility on the internet but not necessarily their recognition in the field. Gibson summarises the problem as follows:

> There are as we know plenty of hard working, talented artists who are producing work of quality, who despite having access to numerous art websites where they can upload their work are simply not getting their work shown in public spaces like galleries and art centres for the public to see and that is something that needs to change and change soon. (Gibson, 2015, August 25)

For many artists it may be enough to show their work online or to their immediate social circle. But to create a fairer art world for all, institutional discrimination will need to be contested and organisational structures changed, as the art world still operates rather traditionally via galleries, museums, education and—only to a certain extent—via online media. Indicating the most pressing concerns from the perspective of the artists, this, as well as preceding chapters, has exemplified the first steps of how such a directional change may be facilitated, and participation increased.

27 Chloe, who is self-reportedly "not in the system" states: "I do try to have as much control as possible over my stuff", but "my ideas get taken a lot because I don't have any support network within the establishment, I get ripped off all the time and it's devastating. I have been exploited a lot. […] What do I do? Do I step back from involving myself with other people? […] Do you stop what feeds your soul? […] It's all pretty nasty. […] That being used. I think all artists to an extent have the excitement 'oh I want it!' or 'someone sees and appreciates my vision'—they shit on you! So, thinking people who are vulnerable, you know seriously vulnerable, that just must be hell" (Int. Chloe, 2017, July 13).

7. Conclusion

This study explored the historical development of the 'Outsider Art' discourse and the social construct of the 'Outsider Artist' in Western art history, further investigating its present role in British art worlds in light of the implications for and experiences of artists labelled as such.

Split into two parts, the guiding objective of the first section was to showcase the historical roots of the myths informing the 'Outsider Art' discourse, exemplifying a potential reading of the latter as a successor of genres such as 'Primitive Art' or 'Naïve Art'. Being critically investigated from the mid-20th century onwards by post-modern scholars, these label designations have been discarded by most established art world institutions in Western Europe for their Eurocentric implications and the Othering performed. The term 'Outsider Art', however, is still often used uncritically and as a genre gaining in popularity despite being constructed in a similar fashion to its ancestors. Once famously declared to be an art "without precedent or tradition" (Musgrave & Cardinal, 1979), these close relations tend to remain in disguise, and the colonial practices and discovery narratives informing the field largely uncontested.

It was one of the leading intentions of this study to demonstrate the historically grown interlinkage of the 'Outsider Art' discourse with the much grander construction of a Self/Other duality influencing the Western arts, sciences and philosophy since the Enlightenment. By embedding the genre in this larger socio-political context, I attempted to reveal the colonial heritage of 'Outsider Art', up to the present day reproducing societal hierarchies in which a select group of 'professionals' defines an Other group into existence and relegates it to a position of mythologised inferiority. Grasping the 'Outsider Artist' as a wilful act of social construction rather than a 'discovery' of inherently different human beings, I have discussed the genre as an *invention*—a projection surface and countercultural instrument through which art world insiders can express their disapproval of the status quo.

Arguing that the 'Outsider Artist' does not exist as such, the various acts of conceptualising and ascribing this very status *to* individuals have been retraced, revealing the ideological motives behind the genre's construction and thus building a foundation to contextualise the artists' experiences, introduced in the second part of the study.

From Clinical to Aesthetic Interest in the 'Art of the Insane'

In accordance with most historians attempting to pinpoint the onset of the phenomenon now called 'Outsider Art', my investigation started with the increasing interest in the 'Art of the Insane' in the leading industrial nations of 19th-century Europe. Most notably in the self-acclaimed art world centres of Germany, France and Great Britain, advocates of Romanticism and later members of several avant-garde movements were disavowing the increasing individualisation, alienation and mechanisation of society, dissatisfied with Western culture and the consequences of modern capitalism. The predominate focus on rationality, science and calculated progress-orientation was perceived as crushing creativity, destroying nature and oppressing spontaneous and pure expression (Maunder, 2010). In many artists, this evoked a form of cultural pessimism, which may be understood as one of the driving forces behind early European avant-garde movements, likewise inspiring explorations of the unconscious mind as introduced by Freud around the same time.

Idealising the 'authentic', the leading advocates of Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism put an emphasis on subjectivity and those aspects feared to become increasingly obsolete: the emotional, instinctual, imaginative, spiritual and immediate. Seen as the well-springs of true creativity, artists like Gaugin, Kandinsky, Klee and Picasso declared these features as occurring undiluted in certain groups of people due to their supposed primitivity, rawness or presumed closeness to nature. These 'Others'—including peasants and rural folk, 'tribal exotics', 'primitive savages', the 'insane', women and children—were celebrated as being on the opposite end of, or at least uncorrupted by, 'civilised culture'. Believed to enjoy uninhibited access to their sentiments, subconscious and inner depths, these groups were modelled to fuel escapist fantasies and positively reinvented as countercultural heroes, mysterious muses or mad geniuses (Beveridge, 2001). Thereby, as Landert (2011) and MacGregor (1989) have demonstrated, from the late 19th and early 20th century onwards, artistic productions once derogatorily represented as scientific evidence of their creator's barbaric nature, pathological mindset or socio-biological inferiority came to be admired for their 'innate' and 'pure' creativity and were attested artistic merit by artists, critics, historians and psychiatrists influenced by Romanticism.

Psychiatrist and art critic Marcel Réja (1907) was among the first to heave the discussion of the 'Art of the Insane' entirely out of the clinical context, declaring that 'savages', prisoners and 'madmen' share the same impulsivity and unique access to elementary sources of creativity. As delineated in section 4.3, however, it was psychiatrists Walter Morgenthaler (1921) and Hans Prinzhorn (1922) who brought these materials to the knowledge of a wider public, thus laying the oft-quoted groundworks of what was to become 'Outsider Art'. Like Réja, Morgenthaler and Prinzhorn rejected pathological readings of artworks, instead attempting to discuss the works of their 'mad' artists from psychological and aesthetic viewpoints only. Adhering to the Romantic and Expressionist credo of a universally shared creative urge inherent to all human beings, they declared this core feature as being visible in its purest and most uncorrupted form in the 'Art of the Insane'. The latter were idealised as unaware, uninfluenced and compulsively driven to express these creative impulses while being at

the mercy of their subconscious minds and having little or no choice to contest this process.

To strengthen the romantic ideal of the asylum artist thus instigated, Prinzhorn would largely ignore the context in which the works he so carefully selected had been created, presenting them as if having been produced in a vacuum and further downplaying the artists' education and socio-cultural background. Accentuating the character of a supposedly pure and uninterrupted flow, he even proclaimed that these individuals "know not what they do" (Prinzhorn, 1922/1972, p. 269), juxtaposing asylum with modern artists who would generally be 'too aware' and therefore, by definition, fail in their attempts to create 'real' art—a viewpoint largely congruent with Morgenthaler's (1921). Thus, Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler were declaring a shared common ground of creativity among all human beings and consequently contributing to a destigmatisation of the 'Art of the Insane'. At the same time, however, they reinforced their 'Otherness' by shifting the latter from the material-aesthetic level to metaphysical realms of the artist's personality and psychological constitution, pronouncing them to be far removed, yet at the top end of an artistic hierarchy.

Paradoxical as this may be, both Morgenthaler's and Prinzhorn's accounts may be considered radical humanistic moves since, at least in Germany, they were published at a time in which artists—especially those confined in psychiatric settings or sympathising with the concept of insanity—came under increasing attack from followers of the NSDAP, as exemplified in section 4.4. By the 1930s, several avant-garde artists had exhibited their work alongside artworks created by psychiatric patients, or portrayed themselves 'insane'—a link which conservative art historians and eventually Hitler himself came to interpret as evidence that both parties have 'sick' minds, threatening and contaminating German culture (e.g. Entartete Kunst Exhibition Guide, 1937). The exhibitions juxtaposing these artworks to 'healthy' German art in 1937 were followed by prohibitions and destructions of work, as well as prosecution and extermination of many 'insane' artists on the grounds of their declared 'degeneracy' (Gilman, 1985). Prinzhorn's and Morgenthaler's work stands in stark contrast to such readings, as they have grasped the artmaking of their patients not as a pathological symptom of their 'madness', but a positive, regenerate activity facilitating the reinstalment of stability. Even though this viewpoint would majorly influence the development of art therapy and is an interpretation still popular today, it was bound to be suppressed by the ruling Nazi ideology of their time. Thus, an abrupt hold was put on the collection and appreciation of the 'Art of the Insane' in Germany, which had already caught on with the Surrealists, consequently moving the discursive epicentre to France.

Shifting Perspectives on 'Madness': From Involuntary State of Mind to Wilful Act of Refusal

As I have shown in section 4.5, this contextual shift is crucial, with the discursive perception of 'insanity' now changing from imposition to deliberate disregard. Avant-garde movements such as Expressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism were characterised by the intention of revolutionising society with an intensifying focus on irrationality and fragmentary artistic practices. Several art historians, such as Harrison and Wood

(1999), have interpreted this as a symptom of the interwar period in which the traumatising effects of World War I resulted in a loss of faith in society and tradition, instead creating tension, chaos and anxiety and resulting in a collective yearning for purity and authenticity. Respectively, Prinzhorn's book became majorly influential for artists seeking a novel understanding of art and 'cultural renewal', as it furnished their sentimental longings with empirical material. While the concept of insanity played a central role for both Prinzhorn and his avant-garde audience, both have interpreted it rather differently. Prinzhorn, having extensive practical experience in the psychiatric context and a medical background, tended to portray his 'schizophrenic masters' as victims who are out of control and subject to their expressive urges. The Surrealists, on the other hand, idealised psychiatric patients as active refusers, having freely chosen the path of 'madness' and thus taken possession of their true Selves. Just like Prinzhorn and Morgenthaler, the Surrealists admired the 'Art of the Insane' and cherished the artists as role models whose 'madness' was believed to provide them uninhibited access to their inner world and primal creative forces. Perhaps due to their infrequent or non-existing contact with psychiatric patients, they did, however, entirely lift the connotative link between 'madness' and 'illness', instead utilising 'insanity' as an artistic method to free the culturally constrained individual. Just as the Dadaists, they further employed the idea of insanity as an instrument to attack established cultural norms, declaring society 'sick', with the asylum patient remaining the only 'normal' individual in the middle of all-encompassing 'madness'.

What may sound like an empowering move, crucially informing upcoming anti-psychiatric ideas after World War II and preparing the soil for 'Outsider Art' to flourish may, as I have suggested, also be interpreted as a marketing tool and projection surface. Dalí (1942) famously declared himself 'mad' to raise attention and Breton became notorious for exploiting mentally unstable individuals like Nadja, who he valued as long as they met his philosophical ideal of the 'in/sane' rebel yet rejected once they became too delusional or dependent (Conley, 2003). This highly selective and ethically questionable approach furnishing a particular ideology and generalising image of 'the insane', has been further solidified by Dubuffet and is, as demonstrated, still a central feature of the discourse today.

Reinforcement and Commodification of the 'Other' via Labelling: 'Art Brut' and 'Outsider Art'

As delineated in section 4.6, Jean Dubuffet, who coined the term 'Art Brut' in 1945, was the first to put a lasting stamp on the works of those 'Outsiders' collected by Prinzhorn and admired by members of the avant-garde since the late 19th century. As Röske (2005) suggests, in a similar manner to Prinzhorn, Dubuffet instrumentalised the concept of 'Art Brut' as a reaction to the devastation caused by World War II, being likewise inspired by romantic myths of the 'Other' and idealising the latter as prophetic instigators to revitalise culture. In his newly established genre, Dubuffet included untrained artists who lived on the margins of society, were supposedly unaware of art history and uninfluenced by culture. He would hence take over a niche already prepared for by Prinzhorn and Breton, but lifted the artists in question from

being mere reference material and exotic accessories by attributing to them an independent status. Further relinquishing the overt focus on psychiatric backgrounds, he diversified the group collated under the label 'Art Brut' to include social 'eccentrics', self-taught and mediumistic artists who were likewise believed to operate in utter isolation and disregard for society's conventions. By promotion and the very act of labelling, Dubuffet thereby heaved largely unknown and previously disregarded artists on an exclusive pedestal, making their experiences visible and vouching for the artistic value of their work to be recognised. As indicated, this endeavour may have fallen on fruitful ground due to the socio-political upheavals in the former colonial powers of the West from the 1960s onwards, characterised by the formation of the Civil Rights Movement, decolonisation, gay liberation and feminist movements, demanding rights and recognition for marginalised and neglected voices. In contrast to these acts of self-empowerment, the artists under the wing of Dubuffet did not, however, become visible on their own terms—rather, it was Dubuffet fighting for recognition on their behalf—often without their knowing, caring or despite intentions expressed by artists that were diametrical to his agenda. Effectively, he would even dismiss artists like Chaissac from the 'Art Brut' temple if they dared to speak up for themselves, since such expression of socio-cultural awareness was enough to spoil their attested rawness, innocence and purity, and thus their credentials to be considered authentic. Of course, no individual could ever fulfil these requirements, yet they could nevertheless be mythologised as such, if one does not look close enough, or rather, by adopting a very selective gaze, choosing to ignore all notions of socio-cultural involvement and awareness expressed. Thus, not only did Dubuffet solidify the criteria upon which 'Art Brut' artists would be systematically misrecognised, he would also inscribe the hierarchy and imbalance in power constitutional for what is now known as 'Outsider Art'.

On one hand, Dubuffet did bring unnoticed artists to the attention of a wider audience, destigmatising the 'insane' by declaring that "there is no more an art of the insane than there is an art of dyspeptics or of those with knee problems" (1949/1988, p. 33) and proclaiming to focus on the formal aesthetics of 'Art Brut' artworks only. On the other hand, he attested special abilities to the 'mad' and praised their distinct mindset and ease of access to inner depths, supposedly drawing from the wellsprings of creativity. He thereby created a clearly delineated gulf between 'professional' artists, who he denounced as calculated and artificial, and 'Outsiders', who he cherished as pure and uninfluenced, essentialising their supposed Otherness and re-stigmatising the individuals labelled 'Brut'. This unresolved contradiction lying at the heart of Dubuffet's writing still characterises the field, and would intensify with the inauguration of the term 'Outsider Art', increasing the commercialisation of those artworks and artists thus far under the protective patronage of Dubuffet.

As I have shown in section 4.8, when Roger Cardinal introduced the term 'Outsider Art' in 1972 as an English translation of 'Art Brut', he largely followed the Expressionist ideal of his predecessors, however broadening the criteria for inclusion and speaking from a slightly different standpoint. While Dubuffet's conceptualisation and hope to revive culture can be interpreted as a counter-reaction to the dismay stirred up by World War II, Cardinal's writings may be understood as addressing a generation per-

haps less affected by existential threats or concerned with society's renewal, but more inclined to explore their own psyche via therapy, drugs and music. In this "culture of introspection" (Röske, 2005, p. 57), the romantic notion of authentic expression and a pure inner vision as exemplified by the 'Outsider Artist' seems to have taken on new importance. In light of an intensifying consumer culture, capitalised markets and the increasing commodification of art, the ideal of the modern artist as society's outsider living according to their own rules and freely following their impulses, was perceived to be under threat, as Zolberg (1997) delineates. Following in the footsteps of Dubuffet, Cardinal's creation of the 'Outsider Artist' may thus be understood as an anti-capitalist move, also countering the rising popularity of conceptual art, interpreted by him and his followers as a cold, intellectual game; morally suspicious and market driven. To the contrary, the 'Outsider Artist' was portrayed as noble, oblivious to fame and, above all, uncorrupted by the market.

By using the term 'Outsider', Cardinal finally manifested what Dubuffet had been indicating all along: the supposed Otherness of the socio-psychological disposition of the artists, now cut off from the art world by definition. This seems to have further enhanced an interpretation of the works subsumed under the label as deeply personal and spontaneous expressions representing a form of authenticity which many enthusiasts perceived as bound to being lost. To the dismay of Cardinal and others, it was their exact proclamation of rarity and clinging to the conservative, romantic notion of the 'Outsiders' pronounced to be on the brink of extinction which would in turn raise their market value, fuel widespread interest in 'Outsider Art' and eventually turn their attested authenticity into a commodity (Fine, 2004). On these grounds, the popularity of 'Outsider Art' increased from the 1980s onwards, as did the number of specialised collections, exhibitions and the amount of media coverage about the genre, particularly in Western Europe and the US. At the same time, art therapy programmes and open ateliers began to flourish, bridging the arts and social sector and promoting diversity, the democratisation of art and the inclusion of those formerly marginalised as Other. These initiatives may have been prepared for by advocates of the anti-psychiatric movement as well as disability rights activists, often taking their theoretical incentives from post-structural and postcolonial theory. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, at least in the academic environment in the UK, it became increasingly difficult to justify the grouping of individuals on the grounds of a supposedly shared essence—be it race, gender or ethnicity. From Foucault onwards, categories like 'madness' and 'disability' also came under attack, being revealed as social constructs serving those occupying positions of power. In this light, the fear that the authentic 'Outsider Artist' was about to vanish, as voiced by many purists at the end of the 20th century, was undeniably appropriate. Key players such as Cardinal (1979), MacGregor (1989) and Thévoz (1995), blamed deinstitutionalisation, psychotropic medication and art therapy programmes for influencing and contaminating the pure 'Outsider Artist', destroying their 'authenticity', inhibiting free expression, and relieving the suffering thought necessary to produce truthful work. Leaving aside this ethically questionable stance, I have suggested that what was really under threat of extinction and need of protection, was not the 'Outsider Artist' per se, but the myth of their 'real' existence as 'Other'.

The 'Outsider Art' project—and with it the powerful positions of certain art world professionals who ideologically, economically or otherwise benefit from the genre's existence—was and is at risk from initiatives attempting to breach distinctions in the art world, diminish differentiation or vouch for inclusivity. This seems to have led to a paradoxical strengthening of exclusive criteria to be fulfilled by 'Outsider Artists', even though the boundaries of established art worlds are proclaimed to be softening and the term 'Outsider Art' broadening since Cardinal's introduction. As of now, to protect the image of the authentic 'Outsider' and ensure their longevity, artists overtly enjoying their success, addressing an audience, calculating their market value or directly benefiting from their artworks without a middleman tend to be treated with suspicion or are even entirely disregarded by purist key players. Instead, the unwritten rule of patronage informing the field of Othered art since the late 19th century is revitalised by the discourse, supposedly legitimising the need to only ever speak *about* the artist and thus facilitating systems easily tipping into exploitation.

By retracing the different stages and historical development of 'Outsider Art' I have attempted to delineate how these unequal relationships of power have been established and how the concept of the Other in Western Art history was invented and reproduced as a counter-narrative to established values and traditions. As an ideological construct, it may be understood as reflecting the cultural pessimism and needs of a number of avant-garde artists and art world professionals throughout the 19th and well into the 21st century, while providing only little insight into the actual experiences and thoughts of those labelled 'primitive', 'naïve', 'insane', 'Brut' or 'Outsider'. Instead, a variety of individuals were pressed into these Othered corsets and modelled according to the requirements of a particular group in the self-acclaimed centre. Like the 'primitives', the individuals classed 'mad' were thereby rendered into a fetish and the art of theirs just as much reduced to serve as an instrument in a countercultural battle. Largely reflecting "modernist projections" (Foster, 2001, p. 17), the self-fulfilling 'discovery' of the 'Outsider Artist' and its ancestors may thus be understood as guided by a direction already taken.

While the art historical practices of Othering seem to have remained largely identical at their core, the discourses accompanying these processes shifted in accordance with certain socio-political events, as I have tried to retrace throughout the text. Well into the 19th century, the 'mad' just as much as the 'primitives' were declared uncivilised and barbaric, irrational and without a sense of Self by advocates of the Enlightenment, while they were idealised as noble and pure on the grounds of the very same reasoning by followers of the Romantic movement. With the latter direction being refined in the early 20th century and especially from Prinzhorn onwards, the 'insane' were then either portrayed as being helplessly at the mercy of their creative urges, unintentionally expressing their subconscious or, following Breton, to be wilful refusers, rebelling against the constraining forces of society. This field of tension between victimisation and heroisation, the over- and underestimation of agency, intentionality and experiences of suffering, has informed the field ever since, with Dubuffet and Cardinal oscillating between both poles of interpretation. Either way, the voices of those artists declared Other under the respective labels chosen by Prinzhorn, Dubuffet and Cardinal were overshadowed and distorted, with certain aspects of the

artists' personal history being selected and simplified, and others, which may weaken the impact of the argument, being neglected and ignored.

Revision and Re-Evaluation of Historical Materials

Due to the enthusiastic promotion undertaken especially by Prinzhorn, Dubuffet and Cardinal, a great many artworks have been saved from destruction and made visible as meaningful creations, enriching the artistic landscape and contributing to the recognition of marginalised individuals. However, no real dialogue was sought by either of these historical figures, who—as their extensive writings reveal—showed little interest in enquiring about the intent or meaning of those artworks *to* those declared 'Outsiders'. They instead tended to remain in an inferior position throughout the history of 'Outsider Art', practically devoid of the chance to speak or participate in the discourse.

Since these practices of exclusion have not been fully researched yet, I have aimed to contribute at least a partial contextual framework to re-evaluate the adequacy of the term 'Outsider Art' from this slightly different perspective. The first part of this study may thus be understood as accompanying the most recent efforts undertaken in the field to tell the history of 'Outsider Art' in a new and critically reflective way. Considering the social constructedness of the image of the 'Outsider', institutions like the Prinzhorn Collection defy the convention of simply reproducing the romantic myths which characterise the genre. They rather attempt to show the heterogeneity of the artists in their collection, breaking with the innovative yet narrow bias once displayed by its founder (Röske, 2006b). In this regard, this Collection in particular holds unique potential to establish new readings of historical materials and diversify the history of 'Outsider Art', since Prinzhorn kept all the artworks that had been sent to him even though he disregarded most when composing his book. The selection process undertaken and the ideological preferences guiding his decision-making processes can therefore be made visible, and his proclamations put into relative perspective.[1]

1 While Prinzhorn did not include female artists in his book, nor those working conceptually, performative or with craft materials such as fabric, his collection nevertheless includes many of these examples which have been brought to public attention recently (e.g. in the exhibition *Irre ist weiblich: Künstlerische Interventionen von Frauen in der Psychiatrie*, 2004). Furthermore, the curators of the collection have researched poems, notes and letters accompanying or being implemented in many artworks, giving hints on the thoughts of patients who at times overtly expressed critique towards psychiatrists and raised issues of mistreatment (Röske, 2006b). In line with these findings, several authors, such as Plokker (1964), Jádi (in Beetz, 2007) and Maclagan (2009) indicate that what Prinzhorn proclaimed to be an expressive urge to create may have been triggered not by an artist's illness, but by the circumstance of being confined. Artmaking was thus recontextualized as a means to deal with incarceration and loss of freedom, with the individual actively seizing control over their Self and environment and thus countering Prinzhorn's argument of their uninfluenced innocence, unawareness or passive victim-status. In many of the exhibitions instigated by the collection, the influences of the social context and visual culture as well as the artist's conscious choice and intention to work in one style or another is credited by newly arranging historical materials and showcasing diverse portfolios, of which previously often only one piece was selected to confirm Prinzhorn's argument.

Also, Adolf Wölfli's 25,000-page oeuvre, currently located at the Kunstmuseum Bern and predominately consisting of written accounts drawn up by the artist himself, can be newly read in light of socio-cultural references and influences, the artist's intention and motives, thus rectifying limited readings performed by authors such as Morgenthaler.

I believe that such new readings of historical materials, further taking into account the thoughts and experiences expressed by artists in poems, notes and letters, hold the potential to exemplify the awareness and social embeddedness of 'Outsider Artists' and to counteract dehumanising, one-sided portrayals and the mythical construction of their being Other. I further consider it crucial to critically reflect on the unequal relationships of power informing this socially constructed imagery whenever exhibiting or writing about 'Outsider Art/ists', as authors like Maclagan (2009) and Foster (2001) have already set out to do. As indicated, even those critically inclined writers, however, tend to speak solely *about* the artists rather than *with* them, thus reproducing inequality while somewhat deflecting from the fact, that the very systems denounced are still in place. Aiming to address this concern, I have shifted the focus from art world professionals to the artists affiliated with the field in the second part of this study, following the objective to re-evaluate the adequacy, contemporary role and meaning of the term in consideration of their thoughts and individual experiences.

Contemporary Media Representations and Curatorial Framings of 'Outsider Art'

Building on the investigation of the development of the 'Outsider Art' discourse in an art historical context roughly stretching from 1850 until 2000 and referencing a geographically and theoretically widespread range of authors involved in its construction, the empirical section focused on the British art world only, covering material collected between 2000 and 2020. To contextualise the impact of the discourse on the self-perception of artists, I first addressed the question, if and how the myths and binary concepts connoting the genre in historical writings still inform the discourse today, further investigating if and when the artist's voice is present. This evaluation has been facilitated by a selective analysis of Othering practices currently performed by key players, gatekeepers, the media and in the curatorial frameworks chosen by small- and large-scale arts institutions and charities.

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, media reports referring to 'Outsider Art' in the UK have been on the rise from 2000 onwards in concurrence with an increasing number of exhibitions and events organised around the topic. My findings indicate that, among the currently most influential and frequently referenced key players, including John Maizels (*Raw Vision*) and James Brett (MOEV), the Othering as performed by historical figures such as Prinzhorn, Dubuffet and Cardinal, is almost seamlessly being reproduced. Still constitutional for the genre, this tendency is also reflected by the curatorial frameworks of most large-scale 'Outsider Art' exhibitions installed in the last two decades in the UK, which tend to focus on the mysterious persona of the 'Outsider Artist', exemplifying their presupposed Otherness either by biographical emphasis or by hanging artworks in a 'freak show' format. Like in the case of Prinzhorn, the artists are thereby often represented as forced to express their unconscious mind or rendered

to unintentional 'devices' from which unfiltered creative outpourings erupt. With press releases, catalogues and other marketing materials implying that these artists inhibit another world or even an entirely different universe, their artworks are often framed as 'windows' providing glimpses into these Other(ed) spheres and unimpeded insight into the artist's soul. These incentives, given by key players, curators and established art world institutions organising 'Outsider Art' shows tend to be further exaggerated by mass media channels as a result. Practising a form of Othering by which the supposedly estranged character of the artist is taken as objectively factual, newspaper coverage tends to emphasise the tragic life story of artists, their illnesses, disabilities or other 'eccentricities'. Either idealising them as pure, honest and truthful, or rejecting them as mad, undeveloped or disturbing, the range of Othering practices is most evenly spread in these sources. Mainstream art journals, addressing a much narrower audience, refrain from making overt use of demeaning labels but at times disguise negative discrimination behind a veil of sophisticated language, with many professionals still neglecting 'Outsider Art' on the grounds of it not being 'real' art, owing to the supposed unintentionality of the maker. In their vouching for the legitimacy of the field, proponents of 'Outsider Art', who often write for specialised media such as *Raw Vision* magazine, tend to counter that it is precisely because of this unintentionality that 'Outsider Art' is the most authentic art form. As I have shown, this debate in the British art world is sporadically reflected in exhibition reviews, yet appears to be a controversial phantom discussion at best, since both parties effectively agree on the assumption that 'Outsider Artists' lack consciousness, leaving the myth of their being Other not only uncontested but reproducing its existence.

An inclination towards keeping 'Outsider Art' a distinct category and the myth of their creators as Other alive can be observed in newspapers, mainstream art journals and specialised 'Outsider Art' media, as demonstrated in section 5.4. Like in large-scale shows such as the installation *Alternative Guide to the Universe* (2013) at the Hayward Gallery or the touring exhibitions of MOEV, in print-based media the artist's voice remains largely absent or is introduced only selectively, mostly to underline rather than question their ascribed Otherness. *Raw Vision* magazine addresses this gap to a certain extent by publishing artist interviews, however these encounters are often romantically framed and questions limited to enquiries about traumatising experiences, artistic practice and work content. Critical reflections, art world references, proclaimed intentionality or awareness of audiences expressed by artists are seldomly featured and, as I suspect, may at times be deliberately omitted so as not infringe the ascribed purity and authenticity of the 'Outsider'. That these voices do indeed exist becomes apparent in the sparsely available radio shows and TV documentaries about 'Outsider Art' in which the practice of Othering, if far from absent, occurs much more subtly, with representation of the artist as otherworldly perhaps being more difficult, since they can be seen and/or heard in communicative interaction with their surroundings. After all, selective perspectives and one-sided representational practices may still be most effectively counteracted by statements from artists provided on social media, private blogs and websites. Together with activist networks such as *Disability Arts Online* and charitable institutions following a person- rather than outcome-centred approach, many criticise and challenge Othering practices informing the field

in theory as well as in practice. Breaking with a top-down curatorial approach, initiatives like Outside In for example, take their commitment to equality, inclusion and diversity seriously, and promote participation and self-representation among artists, providing opportunities to become actively involved in workshops, their collections and curatorial projects. As I have suggested, in this manner, the supposed Otherness of 'Outsider Artists' evaporates, revealing a heterogeneous variety of individuals who express feelings, motivations, intentions and aspirations commonly shared by all human beings. By default, such representations have a deconstructive effect, exemplifying just how much force may be invested by media and art world professionals composing large-scale exhibitions in keeping up the mythic image of the 'Outsider'. Being considered social or community projects, these small-scale exhibitions organised by charities are, however, often deemed to lack artistic merit and as a result hardly ever recognised by the art world. With limited resources, refusing to employ Othering practices or the term 'Outsider Art' to raise attention, many achieve little visibility, are rarely reviewed in the media and relatively difficult to find. Likewise, the self-representational efforts undertaken by individuals classed as 'Outsiders' tend to remain rather invisible, considering the already indicated golden rule of the field stipulating that a true 'Outsider Artist' can only ever by discovered and represented by someone *else*, condemning the artist to a state of passivity. Instead, large-scale exhibitions and art world professionals (who are often less sensitive in their approach and favour sensationalist exaggerations) still appear to have the definitory power over 'Outsider Art', attracting most of the media's attention. Being much better equipped to promulgate a story of the exotic artist as objectified Other, the agency as well as the heterogeneous identities of the individuals behind the label tend to be denied, and the many initiatives attempting to counteract condescending representations rendered imperceptible.

The guiding aim of this study was to contribute to a disruption of these hegemonial constitutions of the 'Outsider Art' field in the UK, which—as it turned out—have been strengthened over the last two decades despite proclamations of expansion and softening of boundaries in the art world. I see my study in coalignment with the incentives of many charitable initiatives currently active, subscribing to address ethical issues increasingly debated in the field but also providing a "critique of asymmetries of power" which, in Ortner's understanding, may be considered the central concern of an "engaged ethnography" (2019). Attempting to counter the practice of Othering by showcasing diversity, the empirical section following the historical discourse and media analysis was thus entirely focused on placing the often overshadowed individual journeys and subjective experiences of artists into the centre, inductively working out what matters most to them.

Right at the beginning of the empirical data collection, it became clear that the foundations to become an 'Outsider Artist' are in many cases laid during the early years of compulsory art education. This inspired my decision to present the findings in the form of a chronological journey of inauguration into mainstream and/or 'Outsider Art' worlds and the issues arising when seeking recognition, as well as the barriers and obstacles faced thereafter.

Inclusion and Exclusion in Normative Art Education

The artists participating in this study, who all have been classified either as 'Outsider Artists' or label themselves as such, have taken different educational routes, ranging from mainstream primary and secondary school and sixth-form colleges, SEN schools and special colleges, to arts universities. All, however, have been involved in art education in their childhood or early teens, as the subject is compulsory and part of the national curriculum in the UK up until Key Stage 3. Based on the data gathered, in section 6.2 I have argued that this shared experience may not only drastically influence the self-perception of individuals in terms of their artistic practice, but that for many, the seeds of becoming an 'Outsider Artist' may have already been sown at this stage. This may be because of the normative paradigm followed by mainstream art education in the UK, which favours technical perfection, prescriptive teaching and the structured following of set tasks. In this regard, my observations largely confirm the critique voiced by the Art and Design Review Group of the University of London (2005): there is little time and tolerance for playful experiments and expression of personal inclinations, with the making of 'mistakes' likewise being discouraged—if not sanctioned by low grades. As indicated by de Waal (2006), this system is reinforced by rigorous quality control of external examination boards and Ofsted inspections, which put pressure on teachers to follow rigid standards and deliver predefined sets of results, thus stifling innovative teaching, creative learning and failing to account for diversity and out-of-the-box thinking. With students being rewarded for adaption and conformity, many artists consequently recall an atmosphere in which teachers continuously distinguished between 'good' and 'bad' art, and further, between 'strong' and 'weak' students.

As demonstrated, such restrictive approaches in art education may result in class-internal segregation and encourage hierarchical rankings among students, creating 'Outsiders' by default. The data collected during my involvement as a teaching assistant and arts social worker further indicates that non-normative voices or artistic practices challenging the established status quo are not only systematically discouraged, but tend to be neglected or ignored. In certain circumstances, these voices are even deliberately overwritten as exemplified by the practice of some teaching assistants painting *for* the students they assist, so they may 'achieve' the requirements and do not fail their course. Routines such as these, and as Wexler and Derby (2015) have indicated, the present shape of art education at large, may implicitly convey to students with disabilities that they are talentless and that their experience of reality, their voice, thoughts and feelings, are of little or no value for society and not desired in the arts either. This message is often further bolstered by teaching the traditional canon of Western art history only, which generally does not include reference to non-normative voices such as those subsumed under the category 'Outsider Art'.

Despite this, among the artists interviewed, experiences in primary and secondary art education vary: from some who were well-adapted or confidently refusing to adhere to the standards taught, to others who tried but had difficulties reaching the normative expectations required, consequently failing or even dropping out of education altogether. Among those who pursued arts at college, experiences fluctuate too,

mostly depending on which route in the arts was chosen. As shown, SEN colleges tend to be evaluated more positively than mainstream, 'inclusive' schools, due to their person- rather than outcome-centred approach, refraining from measuring students according to an average norm but individually, in relation to their personal development. In these less competitive environments, relatively free from the pressures affecting mainstream education, diverse artistic voices may blossom yet the qualifications earned tend to be less respected in society. In contrast, traditional A-Levels in the arts tend to be valued highly, however being viewed less favourably by artists participating in this study. The more experimentally inclined and coursework-based BTEC and foundation degrees, on the other hand, are described as being more welcoming by those struggling with the performance-based educational system, yet who were still adapted enough so as not to be segregated into the realms of SEN.

One of the most insightful findings of this study was that, while recollections from primary school up until college vary, the experiences of those participating artists who have attended arts university align towards the negative. As I have suggested, this may be explained by the layout, purpose and direction taken by different institutions. Colleges in general subscribe to inclusive principles and offer a supportive environment in most instances, with teachers being under the duty of care. Art universities, on the other hand, are more oriented towards the 'professional' realms of the art world, facilitating the onset of careers and socialising emerging artists into these larger frameworks. With the art world and market having only limited capacity to absorb new artists, competition at university is fierce, with the exclusive principle of the 'survival of the fittest' apparently reigning. The unwritten (yet guiding) rules to 'make it' in the established art world and thus also in arts universities in the UK, have been identified by study participants as verbalising sophisticated and witty concepts, the proficient use of self-representational, marketing and networking skills, and the confident intellectual framing of one's artwork and persona via artspeak. Considering these narrow guidelines, artists who refrain from referencing art history or trends, emphasise self-expression, autobiographical work or focus on the act of creating more than on the act of presenting, often experience these inclinations as obstacles, since they tend to be downgraded by professors and peers as self-absorbed, unfashionable or even conservative. In this environment, artists who do not only deviate from artistic norms but also from the social mainstream due to a disability, mental illness, etc., or who are disinterested or struggling with networking and verbal communication, tend to face additional, intersectional stigmas.

As a result, those who manage to hide their respective 'Otherness' and comply with the requirements tend to finish their degrees, yet often bitterly remember the journey. Others, whose disability can be seen or who communicate differently in an overt way, tend to be treated disrespectfully or are not taken seriously, many times dropping out of or not being admitted to university in the first place. As these findings indicate, despite their proclamations of being inclusive and diverse, art universities as well as the art world at large, at present do not seem to cater for these non-normative groups. Instead, they may be understood as rendering the emergence of a categorical 'Outsider Artist' inevitable, closing the circle by rekindling with the restrictive foundations already laid in early compulsory art education.

Considering the barriers faced when seeking recognition as artists, the chances of being included in the professional realms of the arts are closely interlinked with the educational background of an individual. Those who have attended SEN colleges, disability workshops or ateliers run by charities often have their intentionality and integrity as artists questioned by art world professionals, if they are reviewed at all. Consequently, they also have the least prospects of being recognised as 'proper' artists and gaining admission to the established art world. If attempting to do so, they face a number of barriers often closely connected with the overt stigma they carry from being officially stamped 'disabled' or 'ill'.

Among those artists who have dropped out of education prematurely, not studied art subjects at all and who may be categorised 'self-taught', the main barrier to access and progress in the art world is seen in the lack of an art degree, including the expected know-how and assumed backing and support, which are perceived integral to the latter. Considering that an art degree may indeed often function as a quality seal and 'ticket' to galleries, dealers and the market, this suspicion seems legitimate. However, as the group of graduates who still experience being rejected from the art world exemplify, a degree may be worth little if the artist lacks confidence, social and networking skills, produces the 'wrong' kind of art or disengages with the verbal production of intellectual concepts. Further belonging to a socially marginalised group can systematically reduce or even entirely prevent access to certain options and artistic career paths, as many artists and activists have indicated.

I have described the ruling mechanism behind these systems of inclusion/exclusion as reciprocal. Not only does an individual need to be willing and able to adapt to the requirements of the art world; they must also be acknowledged by the latter as a suitable candidate fitting in its narrow frameworks. Much has been done since the 1960s to extend these, and include previously marginalised groups such as women, artists from ethnic minorities or those from 'lower' classes. Artists with a disability or mental health issues, however, are still underrepresented and, due to their (at times) non-normative ways of communicating, often excluded by default, even if granted access on paper.

Barriers Turned Assets: Transitioning to the 'Outsider Art' World

Independent of the individual route taken, the obstacles an artist may face throughout art education or thereafter can be manifold. As shown in section 6.3, the majority of artists participating in this study share a certain frustration and disillusionment with the established art world and education, tending to result either from an unwillingness or inability to conform. I have suggested that this may explain the enthusiasm displayed by many upon encountering 'Outsider Art' for the first time, initially describing the genre as empowering for unprescribed, non-conceptual and self-expressive artists. Filling a vacuum and addressing a sentimental fascination co-created by normative art education, I have argued that 'Outsider Art' does not only attract established art world professionals but may exercise a similar lure over artists affiliated with the field. Thus far on the losing end of the art world and education, many have perceived the genre as a refuge, void of restrictions and welcoming them 'just as they are'. In this

process of revalidation, what was once experienced as a barrier—be it a disability, illness, or other type of 'eccentricity'—may now turn into an asset. However, with these now becoming the categorical requirements for inclusion, the initial positive response of many artists switches to the negative yet again, once they realise that the 'Outsider Art' world is the flipside of the established art world and just as restricting. This change of heart seems to be prompted either when an artist experiences being labelled and externally forced into the corset of the 'Outsider Artist' or, conversely, when being rejected by gatekeepers of the 'Outsider Art' world upon seeking recognition. In both cases the intrinsic mechanisms and structures of power underlying and the boundaries confining the field materialise distinctly to those involuntarily being drawn into or excluded from the latter. Hence, the experiences of artists are particularly valuable resources to make visible what otherwise remains in disguise, yet which builds the basis for the reproduction of Othering and ensures the survival of the field. As I have shown, the encounter with these historically grown power structures, placing the artist into a position of inferiority, yield a spectrum of consequences and reactions among artists.

Externally Ascribed Otherness and Self-Labelling Practice

Based on the data gathered, I have distilled three groups, whose dispositions concerning their relative agency and power in the field I have tried to illustrate in further detail: (A) those who are called 'Outsider Artists' by key players but refuse, do not care or dare to self-label; (B) those who are called 'Outsider Artists' by key players and engage in self-labelling practices at the same time; and (C) those who self-define as 'Outsider Artists', but who are not classified as such by key players.

Group A may be considered the traditional group of 'Outsider Artists', closely resembling the historical ideal, especially in those cases in which artists refrain from openly engaging with the discourse or the art world, are relatively unaware of it or display indifference towards the label. As indicated, this group is vanishingly small, if it exists at all. If one looks and asks closely enough, personal recollections of experiences with art world professionals as well as opinions about the genre will often replace an initially disengaged stance of the artist. As my observations have shown, this involvement, even if involuntary, also affects artists who communicate non-verbally and may indeed be unaware of the existence or constitution of the 'Outsider Art' discourse. By the sole circumstance of being labelled, these artists may likewise be understood as influenced by the discourse, since they are often confronted with certain expectations, pressure or appreciation expressed by their social environment or institution(s) they work with, as a result of their affiliation. In section 6.4 I have demonstrated the effects of such implications with reference to the suggestive practices performed by some charities, which may push their ethical boundaries when venturing from the social into the art world sector. Even though at times swapping a person-centred with a story/artwork-centred approach in the process, or even exaggerating the 'Otherness' of their participants to raise sales or funding, charities are nevertheless positively reviewed by most artists in the field, who acknowledge the support, encouragement and opportunities provided. Attitudes towards art world professionals, such as deal-

ers, collectors and curators on the other hand, remain ambivalent, with recognition as an 'Outsider Artist' likewise being described as double-edged. According to several artists affiliated with the field, being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' by a reputable key player or institution can yield a range of unpredictable outcomes, with positive as well as negative ones often being experienced simultaneously. Having a patron taking over representation, business affairs and networking, the social and economic capital as well as the visibility and reputation of a perhaps previously unknown artist may rise, and with it, the forthcoming attention the artist will receive from their environment. At the same time, said artists may find themselves in a deadlocked position of 'fastened misrecognition', with the presupposition of their unawareness inviting exploitative practices or a form of treatment in which key players may feel entitled not only to label, but also to make decisions *for* the artist—in the worst cases without even benefiting the latter. Acknowledging the help they may have received from certain professionals, the majority of artists I have spoken to over the years have put a distinct emphasis on these negative effects of being labelled an 'Outsider', which is why these issues have also featured more strongly in the presentation of the data analysis and results.

Confirming the suspicions raised throughout the historical chapter and in the media analysis, many 'Outsider Artists' have experienced that particular, often negatively connoted parts of their biography are selected by key players and come to define their official artist personas with relative disregard for and overshadowing other aspects of their identities. Several artists have indicated that they feel reduced to being bearers of misfortunes, illnesses or traumatic life experiences, with a disproportionate focus on the latter being experienced as especially stigmatising in those cases where the artist has already overcome a particular issue or not 'suffered' from it in the first place. Moreover, many have realised that their recognition as 'Outsider Artists' is linked to isolation, trauma and devastation and dwindling the better they feel and the more their social connectivity increases, prompting their declarations of the label being an "imprisoning box" or "limitation". With the general rule on the 'Outsider Art' market being that the bad fate of an artist is a good fortune for the dealer, as Fine (2004) has indicated, some artists have raised the suspicion that there may be an imbalance in beneficiaries when it comes to the selling and exhibiting of their works. Despite these issues of power, some have declared that their ascribed Otherness tends to stick once recognition is sought beyond the 'Outsider' or in mainstream art world contexts, thus distinctly limiting their room for manoeuvre also in future respects. As demonstrated in section 6.3, artists nevertheless dispose of a range of options to deal with these circumstances, with their chosen strategy often being located in-between the two following poles:

- the adaption to the hegemonial norm by a deliberate attempt to hide one's Othered features; or
- the attempt to put these features into the spotlight, in an act of self-empowerment.

While the first option may be understood as reproducing marginalisation, it was in particular the systematic prevention of the second, in the realms of 'Outsider Art',

that proved to be insightful and of crucial importance to the underlying study and research process.

As indicated in the historical chapter and once more confirmed by the empirical material at hand, the label 'Outsider Art' is—as much as the system of patronage informing the field—tightly guarded by 'professionals'. I have cited historical and contemporary examples of artists who have gained reputations in the field, sold substantial amounts of work and became relatively well known, yet were then shunned from the field for these very reasons. As long as an 'Outsider Artist' is alive and has thus not sealed off the myth of their authenticity, they will most likely be confronted with the pressures to disengage and display disinterest in their achievements, so as not to lose their position in the field or fail the investments of patrons having stakes in the latter. It follows that, even after admission, the position of an 'Outsider Artist' remains unstable, precarious and at risk. If an individual artist ignores these pressures or is oblivious to them, becomes 'too famous', 'too successful', 'too educated', 'too ambitious' or engages in any form of self-marketing or "impression management" (Fine, 2004, p. 151), their status and ascribed value will per definition decrease. In section 6.4 I have introduced exemplary cases, in which artists attempt to circumvent these restricting measures and undermine the powerful position of intermediaries and key players by taking measures to sell and show their work into their own hands. While opportunities of self-management and networking with other artists and collectives are on the rise—especially due to the new possibilities provided by the internet—a limited number of professionals still seems to rule the art world game. With recognition and success as an artist as of now being linked to a traditional network of select galleries, dealers, collectors, auction houses, fairs and regulated via museums, media and education, 'going it alone' as an artist reportedly proves difficult. In the 'Outsider Art' world even more so, since the most unforgiving mistake an artist currently can make, is to self-label as an 'Outsider Artist'. Hence, the occurrence of Group B, referring to 'Outsider Artists' who are recognised as such by key players *and* engage in self-labelling practices can only ever be temporary, as an artist's attempt to take over is usually punished with expulsion from the field, if they are not denied admission from the very beginning.

Group C, consisting of individuals who self-define as 'Outsider Artists' yet who are not recognised as such by key players, may be considered the most recent group in the history of the field. Considering the available material, up until the late 20th century, aspirations among artists to be classified as 'Art Brut' or 'Outsider Artists' seem to have been infrequent. Of course, they may have just not been documented, but as I suspect indeed been lower due to the popularity of the field being a relative recent phenomenon. As indicated on several occasions, it was during the last three decades that the 'Outsider Art' field's legitimacy in the wider art world as well as its market value have increased in concurrence with the rising attention the UK government and Arts Council pay towards inclusion, diversity and equality. With more and more opportunities, programmes and funding for marginalised groups being provided and with the higher reputation of 'Outsider Art' in general, the likelihood of artists seeking association with the field seems to be on the rise. The peculiar self-censorship performed by many artists may be interpreted as a direct consequence of the field's re-

action to this most recent circumstance. Confronted with a rush of admission seekers, gatekeepers of the 'Outsider Art' world seem to have been tightening the borders so often declared blurry, as the reported difficulties experienced by artists testify. Based on their information I have speculated, that the reason for the measures undertaken to protect 'Outsider Art' may lie in the attempt to retain its supposed purity and credentials of authenticity, uniqueness and rawness, as well as to ensure that established positions of power and investments of key players are not undermined. For the field not to lose its currency and for professionals to keep their privileges, a new opponent or rather, enemy, had to be introduced: the 'faker'. As demonstrated in section 6.3, the 'faker' is understood as a corrupted villain who abuses the term 'Outsider Art' to raise attention, likes and fame, and who is supposedly running a business—thus exemplifying the counterpart of the pure and uninfluenced 'Outsider Artist' and trying to cash in on the latter's 'authenticity'. Consequently, the 'faker' is often considered a parasite, potentially infecting and contaminating the field, who must be removed so as not to threaten the true 'Outsiders" position of purity. As I have argued, this fairly recent figure of the 'faker' is crucial for the current constitution of the field, and to my knowledge, has thus far not been given any critical attention in the literature elsewhere.

Considering the writings of key players up until the end of the 20th century, it was established art world insiders or those aspiring to belong to the latter, who were perceived corrupted, calculated and inauthentic and accordingly modelled as the opponents of 'Outsider Art'. Now, and perhaps in interlinkage with the increased popularity of the field and the booming of self-representational practices on social media, it seems as if key players and patrons have redirected their gaze, differentiating predominately *within* the genre. As the statements of artists participating in my study reveal, they tend to radically weed through those seeking admission and meet artists already included with increased suspicion. To uphold the idea of the pure 'Outsider Artists' and ensure the survival of the field, I have suggested, that the 'fakers' did not only have to be exposed, but they had to be invented in the first place. Even though, as I argue, neither the pure 'Outsider Artist' nor the 'faker' exist in essence but are to be grasped mythical constructs, it is the shared belief among art world professionals *and* many artists, that both entities do indeed exist, which yields myriad consequences, extrapolating the extent of the exclusive power network informing the field and discourse.

In summary, and leaving transitory Group B aside, it can be said that Group A tends to experience the power of key players predominately in the form of a negative imprisonment due to their being labelled 'Outsider Artists', feeling that they are *more* than the image they are reduced to and which is evoked by the term. Group C, on the other hand, first and foremost tends to experience the power of the discourse in the form of being rejected by gatekeepers, feeling that they are *not enough* to be legitimately included and recognised as 'Outsider Artists'.

As I have shown, some of the artists in Group A have expressed an initial feeling of relief upon admission, since they are aware that self-labelling is considered a non-legitimate act and their position depending on patrons and an upheld image of authenticity. Yet among artists belonging to Group C, the discursive power and

pressures of the field are, as I have suggested, implicitly expressed by the outright dismissal of a self-labelling practice, or much more frequently: by feeling guilty or denying having engaged in the latter. The ongoing unease and hesitancy when being confronted with the possibility of self-labelling expressed by most artists I have encountered in the field, as well as the many artists who have been at pains to explain to me in rich detail why they are *not* 'Outsider Artists', even if declaring themselves as such elsewhere, startled me in the beginning of my research. These feelings and reactions do, however, make sense if contextualised in the wider workings of the field, especially in hindsight of the newly constituted figure of the 'faker'.

Many artists I have spoken to and who are in one way or another affiliated with the field, adhere to the standards transmitted via the discourse when it comes to reasoning whether they may be considered an 'Outsider Artist' or not. Measuring their own character traits, personality and identity in absolutes and according to the purity ideal suggested by the discourse, most artists necessarily make the experience that they are just not disabled, isolated, mentally ill, unintentional and Other enough to qualify for inclusion. As I have argued, the mythical requirement of uninfluenced and pure authenticity may be understood as a construct which cannot ever be fully met by anyone and must fail in any comparison with the actual Self. Considering this framework, the answer to the question "Am I a faker?" can only ever be "Yes". Being implicitly aware of one's own fragmentary complexities, the Self may—by definition—always be too flawed to be an 'Other', turning the practice of self-labelling as an 'Outsider Artist' into an impossible affair, eradicating the possibility of self-empowerment and strengthening the position of those key players already holding the power to designate.

Subscribing to the implicit rule of the field which states that a self-declaration as 'Outsider Artist' is necessarily inauthentic seems to evoke in many self-labelling artists a form of impostor syndrome, making them live under the constant fear of their 'impurities' being exposed and perhaps also, of being revealed as a 'faker'. Even though there is a minority of artists who are confidently yet rather unsuccessfully labelling themselves 'Outsider Artists' or who are overtly critical about the latter, most artists I have encountered in the field, will perform a peculiar act of self-censorship and self-exclusion long before being officially rejected or admitted by gatekeepers. Considering this performance of pre-marginalisation, I have argued that the relationship of inequality and imbalance of power is expressed and reproduced by the usage *as well as* non-usage of the label. What is more, many of these artists will also be on the lookout for 'fakers', actively engaging in discriminating between 'genuine Outsiders', who tend to be romanticised, and condemning those 'jumping on the bandwagon'. Thus, by performing the discursive groundwork of the key players, hegemonic structures are strengthened, the mechanisms of self-empowerment disrupted and the mythical constitution of the Other reproduced not only explicitly by professionals, the media and in education—but also implicitly by the artists themselves.

Shifting Dispositions: Analytical Findings and Current Debates

As announced previously, the above listed groups A, B and C, have been created schematically for the sake of illustrating tendencies. By no means are they homogenous but rather intersect, with the extent of control and agency and experiences of inclusion/exclusion from the 'Outsider Art' world shifting or even being prevalent at the same time. Most artists I have encountered in the field have at one point or another had experiences characteristic for group A, B, as well as C, and depending on time, context and who they speak to, will take different stances towards the label and discourse of 'Outsider Art'. Likewise, specific aspects of their identities may move to the fore on certain occasions, while others remain hidden, with some artists recalling that, in particular art world contexts, are they considered 'too disabled' to be included, while in other frameworks they may not be 'disabled enough' to participate. Based on these findings, I have demonstrated that the constituency of the 'Outsider Art' world currently implies a wide range of consequences. Even though its consensus may appear static to some, I have suggested that it may be more applicable to perceive it as a scale. Where exactly a particular line is crossed—at what point an artist is considered too aware, how much 'influence' and education is tolerable, what counts as conventional at present, as well as the conditions for entry and access to opportunities—is flexible, under constant negotiation and dependent on a myriad of factors and individual decision makers. In light of the elasticity and hybridity of the field, the label may likewise be considered malleable, bearing numerous meanings and implications depending on where, when and by whom it is used. As shown in section 6.4, most artists consequently agree that being labelled an 'Outsider Artist' can simultaneously yield positive as well as negative effects, with recognition in the 'Outsider Art' world remaining a mixed blessing.

Despite the complexities, shifting positions of power and flexibility informing the constitution of the discourse and field, its actors and borders, the proclaimed opening up of many art worlds, as well as the increasing critique on essentialising Othering practices since the 1970s, it was the intention of my study to show that seemingly outdated structures of dominance with a distinct colonial tinge still prevail. Especially in British art worlds, a limited number of predominately male gatekeepers are invested in keeping up the boundaries between the 'insides' and 'outsides', dictating who is seen and whose voice is heard, with 'Outsider Art' sitting uneasily with policies of inclusion, equality and diversity otherwise propagated by cultural and educational institutions in the UK. Addressing this lack of democratic participation, I have attempted to give selective insight on the implications of the designation 'Outsider Artist' on the lived experience of artists labelled as such. In evaluating the (in)adequacy of the term, the spectrum of opinions among artists thereby largely reflects ongoing debates and controversies in the field. Critical proponents of the term currently argue that the existence of 'Outsider Art' as a distinct genre allows for works to be collected and voices to be heard which may otherwise be overwritten by hegemonial structures or remain invisible as they do not fit the consensus and restrictive meaning of 'art'. Following Röske (2018), Landert (2011), Beardsley (2003) and Russell (2011), 'Outsider Art' may thus challenge established paradigms and definitions of art, acknowledge difference

and contribute to diversifying the landscape of reigning art worlds and society at large. This perspective is echoed by many artists who have mentioned the potential of the term to increase visibility, adding that, despite its marketable usefulness, it may also offer an identification place for those falling out of normative frameworks or who otherwise feel marginalised. At the same time, this 'place' tends to be tightly guarded and defined by someone else, as shown throughout this study, with most artists not stepping into visibility on their own terms. The data collected exemplifies the extent of these unequally distributed positions of power in the 'Outsider Art' world, which limit the agency of artists, at times further resulting in privacy infringement, stigmatisation and exploitation, or even encouraging practices of self-censorship. With reference to these ethical concerns, adversaries of the term, like art critics Roberta Smith and Carter Foster (as cited in Smallwood, 2015), indicate that the classification 'Outsider Art' facilitates exclusion and segregation, and that the insider-outsider distinction is practically "void" (Smith, 2007, January 26). Considering its imposition of structures of power as indicated by Foucault, in his text *Against Outsider Art* (2017), Prinz even suggests dropping the term altogether.

Acknowledging both sides of the debate, I would like to refrain from settling with a particular position, but rather focus on the field of tension created between these polarising stances which indicate the complexity of the issue at hand, forfeiting the finding of simple solutions. Overall, I align myself with advocates of the Visual Cultures approach, and charity representatives such as Marc Steene, who vouch for an all-inclusive art world and expansive notion of the concept art, recognising all creative making as a meaningful and valuable contribution to society, thus rendering oppositional pairs such as 'professionals' and 'outsiders' obsolete. At the same time I am aware that this aim may be utopian, especially in light of Röske's frequently expressed concern that social inequalities are still prevalent in many Western societies, and that we need the genre classification 'Outsider Art' to ensure non-normative voices are seen at all, because we are just "not there yet" (Röske, Field Notes BG, 2018, December 7).

Leaving final conclusions on the adequacy of 'Outsider Art' aside, I argue that, independent of the direction taken, what is of crucial concern is not the *what* but the *who*. As I have demonstrated, debates about the usefulness of the term and appropriate representational practices are largely held above the heads of the artists. Attempting to challenge the power structures informing the field, I am convinced that the only expedient measure to dismantle the 'Outsider Artists' as Other is to finally detach questions about terminology, exhibition design, quality and so on, from the to-and-fro between professionals, and re-address them to artists, including them in the dialogue.

Contributions, Limitations and Incentives for Future Research

I consider this study as providing one fragment in the joint effort undertaken by artists and charities in the field of 'Outsider Art' to create a fairer and more heterogeneous art world in which a wider range of voices is not only visible but in which a spectrum of human experiences is valued and acknowledged, rather than split up, judged and exoticised. In this light, continuous inquiries about the artists' inclinations about how

they would like their works and lives to be represented to an audience seem a necessity in order to diversify the ownership of the term and discourse and with it, to break with top-down curatorial approaches. Even if underlying a set of restrictions, this thesis may be understood as an exemplary case of such an envisioned participatory approach, hoping to contribute to a democratisation of the field and raising new questions and directions to follow.

My analysis has focused on the implications of the label 'Outsider Artist', therefore restricting its findings to questions concerning terminology, only selectively referring to experiences made in art education, with curators, dealers, collectors or other 'professionals'. An in-depth investigation of these arenas and, especially, the fast-paced changes facilitated by social media, would have gone beyond the scope of this study, yet may represent possible directions for future research. As indicated in Chapter 2, the relatively small pool of participants, scarce resources and the difficulty in accessing certain institutions have further limited analytical possibilities. However, I am aware that perhaps the biggest constraint of this study may be the language I have used, attempting to meet the academic requirements of the social-scientific framework and thereby rendering the text inaccessible to many artists affiliated with the field. Surpassing academic limitations, one urgent avenue for further research may therefore be an investigation into the use of collaborative, experimental and mixed-method approaches which allow for greater attention to and participation of non-verbal communicators. Building on the critical accounts of Douglas Holmes and George Marcus (2008), Rabinow (2008) and Ingold (2008), Tomás Sánchez Criado and Adolfo Estalella have most recently exemplified how such a cooperative production of anthropological knowledge may be instigated. According to them, a range of creative interventions may be employed to bridge the gap between researcher and informant, thus turning the field into a "site for epistemic collaboration" (2018, p. 2). With particular concern to participatory ethics in the field of 'Outsider Art', such approaches may be worthwhile testing in a more extensive and large-scale study, but could not be facilitated by the project at hand.

In view of the restrictions outlined, in Chapter 1, I have listed three aims which may be considered the main contributions of this rather traditionally designed yet engaged ethnography. These have encompassed:

a) The documenting and making visible;
b) The challenging and deconstructing;
c) The transcending and surpassing of Othering practices thus far facilitating structural inequalities in the 'Outsider Art' field but also in the wider scope of the arts and society.

Following Kleinmann and Hall-Clifford (2009) with reference to the first objective, I regard the ethnographic methods employed as the most proficient tools to delineate otherwise disguised practices of Othering and discrimination. Focusing on the discursive construction of the 'Outsider Artist' and in particular on the impact of the latter on individuals labelled as such, this study has exceeded abstract discussions of ethical concerns in the field, enriching the debate with largely unheard-of perspectives and

demonstrating the problematic extent of hegemonial structures still informing many established art world institutions. This is of crucial importance since most of the latter subscribe to the UN Declaration of Human Rights and policies of equality, inclusion and diversity, which are often implemented only fragmentarily, as my research has shown. Throughout this text I have argued that this failure to cater for diverse voices may result from an adherence to a rather traditional Western arts canon as well as limiting conceptualisations of what is and is not considered 'art', in turn favouring inequalities, exclusion and the reproduction of artistic elites in co-creation of 'Outsiders'. Having delineated the discursive practice of Othering and its colonial motives as one of the driving forces behind these processes, I have not only attempted to make visible but, in a second step, also to counteract the myths facilitating its (re)production.

As exemplified, particularly in the case of 'Outsider Art', a demonstration of the spectrum of heterogeneous artist identities, their agency as well as different viewpoints may act as *the* crucial instrument to dismantle the discursive construction of their supposed Otherness. Countering popular notions of the latter as being otherworldly, uninfluenced by and disengaged with culture and unintentionally practising their art, I have introduced the individuals behind the label as active, multifaceted actors in continuous exchange with their respective socio-cultural environments. Grasping the artists' identities as hybrid and their Otherness as ascribed rather than immanent, it was my intention to overturn simplifying and dehumanising stereotypes and disrupt the one-sided narratives still informing the constitution of 'Outsider Art'. By so shifting the predominant perspective and providing alternative accounts, the overarching aim of this study was to contribute to a more inclusive and democratic art world in which demarcation lines between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' may perhaps become obsolete eventually. As an engaged ethnography, I also hope this project will strengthen and inspire the currently undertaken efforts and future incentives vouching for artist participation, driving forward the urgently called for deconstruction of the 'Outsider Artist' as Other and acknowledging with it the diversity of human expression and artistic voices.

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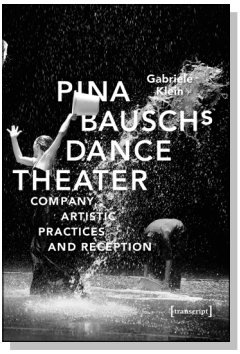

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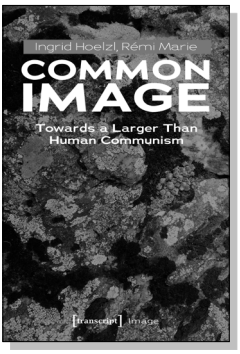

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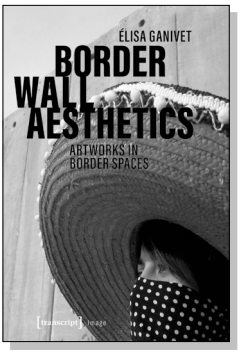

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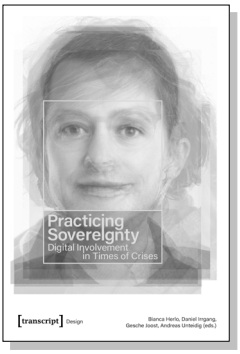

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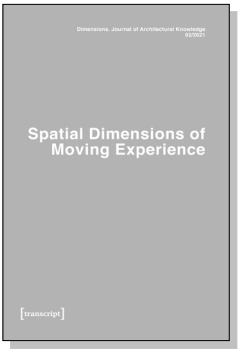

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