



# MADNESS AND SEX: MEETINGS BETWEEN PSYCHIATRY AND ART

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<sup>1</sup> The fair was created in New York in 1993 with the aim of bringing together outsiders and self-taught artists. Twenty years later, the fair expanded to Paris. It currently takes place in both cities, on an annual basis.

<sup>2</sup> 'Known/unknown: private obsession and hidden desire in outsider art'. Museum of Sex. [https://www.museumofsex.com/portfolio\\_page/known-unknown/](https://www.museumofsex.com/portfolio_page/known-unknown/) (accessed 14 April 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Battersby, Matilda. 'The Museum of Sex: The show of outsider artists and sex is set to shock'. Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/the-museum-of-sex-manhattan-new-york-outsider-artists-a7529896.html> (accessed 14 April 2020).

In 2017, the Museum of Sex, in Manhattan, featured an exhibition titled *Known/Unknown: Private Obsession and Hidden Desire in Outsider Art*. In collaboration with the Outsider Art Fair<sup>1</sup>, it intended to show self-taught artists who expressed themselves somehow through erotic or sexual themes. It emphasized the meeting-point between the theme of eroticism, or sexuality, and artists who had somehow produced 'outside the continuum of art history'. As the summary on the museum page explains:

The art in *Known/Unknown* is a long way from the typical art world. Many of the artists in the exhibit are self-taught, with little formal education, and range from institutionalized mental patients, to intellectually disabled people, to untutored isolates and eccentrics. Their pieces were often created in seemingly unlikely places; ranging from the sanctuary of psychiatric hospitals to private realms hidden within the lonely, impersonal jungles of teeming cities.<sup>2</sup> As *The Independent* reported: 'It is believed to be the first time a collection of erotic artworks by outsider artists have been brought under one roof'<sup>3</sup>. It is possible that this was the first time a curatorship had been designed on this aspect of outsider art. While the close connection of outsider art, or art brut, with the themes of sexuality, pornography and eroticism is already well-known among scholars and art brut specialized collectors, it is not so well known outside this inner circle. If we attempt to tie these themes together, a link emerges the fact that most outsiders come from backgrounds with a psychiatric history, which in turn carries with it a history of confinement of the attitudes considered as 'sexual deviations'. Looking at it from another angle, these artists, sometimes called self-taught, would often have a propensity to expose their innermost thoughts in a way that could not be

vetoed by the ego or by social morality. In this sense, there are two basic principles that link outsider art and the themes of the exhibition; on one hand, it was brought about by the psychiatrization of those with a background of so-called sexual deviations and, on the other, by the sexual freedom these minds would be apt to.

One way or another, the central axis of this relationship is 'sexual deviance' as conduct. However, what is of artistic interest is precisely the possibility to deviate from the norm – both in the formal sense and in terms of ideas – by joining an 'outsider' existence and an 'eccentric' theme. Well known amongst art theorists, the German outsider Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern (1892-1982) is an example of this erotic manifestation:

...erotic compulsions erupt in a series of startling scenarios, polymorphous and spectacular. His creatures range from caricatural humans, including females with grotesquely exaggerated sexual attributes, to dragons and devils of weird shapes and colours.... (Cardinal 2012, 107).

The Schröder-Sonnenstern expression, along with other outsiders, as art subject and not just as delirium is part of a complex tangle of issues, involving nosographic criteria and the politics of art. To be more specific, the way art theorists present and conceptualize such artists contains, between the lines, a close and conflicting relationship between art theory and psychiatry.

In order to have a better understanding of this process, it is necessary to understand how 'sexual deviants' become psychiatric subjects. Or rather, one must understand why 'sexual deviance' and 'mental deviance' are intimately connected historically, and at which point it becomes possible to speak of an erotic aesthetics in outsider art or *art brut*.

This article proposes a contribution to this debate, connecting psychiatric and art issues, with an emphasis on themes of sexuality as topics of interest to *art brut* or outsider art. It is not the aim of this article to make an historical or bibliographic survey, but instead to raise some questions about such relations, which will certainly depend on the specific contexts and authors. This article develops in two ways, the first being the conceptual and theoretical recollection of some nosographic models that transform deviant sexualities into mental illness, and the second, a proposal to think about the ways in which art contacts with these expressions of madness and fits them into the world as *art brut* or outsider art.

First, however, a brief appendix is necessary. The term outsider art emerged in the early 1970s, when it was coined by the critic and art theorist Roger Cardinal – partly in contrast and partly in addition to the term *art brut*. In short, the concept in the English language suggests it as being broader than in the French vernacular, by incorporating within its limits other forms of marginalized art, such as urban art itself, naive and folk art, as well as some (but not all) artists from art therapy studios: Now, it might well be objected that is not individual art works which change but rather people's perceptions of them, and what Dubuffet and Thèvoz have ended up doing is to mark out a defensive buffer zone around art brut (...) This, I submit, is as unsatisfactory in principle as it is in practice (Cardinal 1994, 27).

<sup>4</sup> Prinzhorn argued that between the mind of the sick and the minds of normal subjects, there was a very tenuous transition, and moreover, a continuity as far as creative impulses were concerned. His work is essentially a thesis on what drives men to impulse, and therefore, focuses heavily on a comparison between the aesthetics of the primitive, alienated, the children and the naive. Theoretically it departs from phenomenological and psychoanalytical readings, separating the objectivity of the form from the symbolic emblem, considering that to understand this creative impulse it was necessary to look at the expressiveness of the formal structure, which would lead us to the psychological processes.

<sup>5</sup> From a conversation between Jean Dubuffet and the researcher John MacGregor held in 1976. In MacGregor 1989, 358, note 4.

<sup>6</sup> I quote here the English edition *Artistry of the Mentally Ill: A Contribution to the Psychology and Psychopathology of Configuration* (1995).

<sup>7</sup> The collection, which still exists today at the Heidelberg Hospital, was founded by the director of the clinic, Dr Karl Wilmanns, who, given Prinzhorn's academic background and knowledge of the arts in general, supported him in expanding the collecting of works and writing about them. The Prinzhorn Collection can be visited at one of Heidelberg Hospital's pavilions.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Morgenthaler, a psychiatrist who was particularly influenced by the readings of Carl Jung, published a study of one of his patients, 'Ein Geisteskranken als Künstler: Adolf Wölfli' ([1921] 1992). This is the critical and psychological analysis of the artistic expressions of a patient at the Waldau Clinic, near Bern. An important issue to note is the identification of the patient by name, that is, a subject, rather than a diagnosis, is identified. Someone with an identity, life history and a large pictorial production that expresses itself through a peculiar language. Wölfli today is one of the most well-known representatives of *art brut*. In turn, Marcel Reja published the study 'L'art chez les fous: le dessin, la prose, la poesie' in 1907. There is no evidence that his

The concept of *art brut* was born in the 1940s, when Jean Dubuffet started an art collection – from drawings and sculptures, to paintings and writings – that had in their context the quality of not being produced as artistic expressions, that is, of being 'non-cultural' expressions. The main idea, then, was not only to collect artworks exclusively from psychiatric hospital patients, but also from subjects who were somehow inspired to create without considering the approval of, or exhibition by, art institutions as an end to their works, which were, in most cases, completed without formal training or technical knowledge. These were 'innate' creators, so to speak. However, it is well known that a large part of the works in his collection came from institutional psychiatric environments, in short, because it was in such places that a great number of asylum subjects, with their own original ideas and imaginations, lived and created.

The definition of the concept of *art brut* was in part inspired by the work of Hans Prinzhorn<sup>4</sup>:

Prinzhorn's book struck me very strongly when I was young. It showed me the way and was a liberating influence. I realized that all was permitted, all was possible. I wasn't the only one. Interest in the art of the insane and the rejection of established culture was very much 'in the air' in the 1920s. The book has an enormous influence on modern art (Dubuffet apud MacGregor 1989, 292)<sup>5</sup>. The book, *Bildneri der Geisteskranken* (1922)<sup>6</sup>, sought empirical proof that there was a basic impulse that somehow led individuals to expressive practices:

... *des productions de tout espèce – dessins, peintures, broderies, figures modelé ou sculptées, etc – présentant un caractère spontané et fortement inventif, aussi peu que possible débitrices de l'art costumier ou des poncifs culturels, et ayant pour auteurs des personnes obscures, étrangères aux milieux artistiques professionnels* (Dubuffet 1967, 175).

It is important to mention that Prinzhorn propagated the idea of the 'schizophrenic masters' starting with ten cases selected by him from his experience as a psychiatrist at Heidelberg Hospital. The rules for choosing the works analysed were based on well-established principles<sup>7</sup>:

We should say only this about the types and origins of our materials: it consists almost exclusively of works by inmates of institutions – by men and women whose mental illness is not in doubt. Second, the works are spontaneous and arose out of the patients' own inner needs without any kind of outside inspiration, third, we are dealing primarily with patients who were untrained in drawing and painting; that is, they had received no instruction except during their school years. To summarize, the collection consists mainly of spontaneous created pictures by untrained mental patients (Prinzhorn [1922] 1995, 3). In his view, the self-taught subjects would introduce into their expressions the most intimate elements, without worrying about the ideals imposed by art, or rather, the 'cultural' ideals of art. In short, theorists like Prinzhorn – such as Walter Morgenthaler and Marcel Reja<sup>8</sup> – cast an interested eye on the mentally ill and, in an inventive manner, helped develop art criticism of the insane.

However, it was thanks to Jean Dubuffet's concept that it became possible to give the 'schizophrenic masters' an identity that went beyond the scientific pragmatism of the psychiatric sciences and made possible their insertion in the universe of the arts, more specifically galleries, fairs and museums. Dubuffet proposed a notion to open up institutional spaces to 'non-cultural' art expressions outside psychiatric hospitals<sup>9</sup>. However, it should be clear that when we talk about *art brut*, we talk about a collection of specific characteristics, which can be appreciated from an aesthetical perspective. In other words, it is not any mental scrawl that will become an art object. In short, they are artists who generally construct a continuum in their works, with respect to the technical qualities or conceptual definitions. This is very close to what Prinzhorn observed.

On some occasions, the concepts of art brut and outsider art are merged, such as in the Outsider Art Fair, which considers one term a precursor of the other<sup>10</sup>. As defined, by the organization itself:

Dubuffet and Cardinal were writing primarily about extremely marginalized European artists: psychotics, mediums, and eccentrics. This has caused the common misconception that Outsider Art is essentially pathological, when in fact the central characteristic shared by Outsiders is simply their lack of conditioning by art history or art world trends. Over the years, the parameters of Outsider Art have expanded dramatically to include art made by a wide variety of art-makers who share this common denominator of raw creativity. Outsiders come from all walks of life, from all cultures, from all age groups<sup>11</sup>.

This idea that outsiders are, in general, the result of pathological or eccentric conditions is not necessarily a misunderstanding, instead it represents the course developed for constructing this idea further.

To begin with, at the turn of the twentieth century, all individuals who somehow corrupted good moral conduct, whether by physical or behavioural causality were rendered incapable of living within society and were placed in asylums. The theory of degeneration, which prevailed in the process of institutionalizing psychiatry as science, predicted that alienation was, in general, an organic type generated and transformed by successive hereditary reproductions. That is, the primary background of the degenerative disease was hereditary, so it was necessary to protect individuals of 'good genetic composition' so that humanity would not corrupt itself into degeneration. The theory of degeneration predicted that the excessive transmission of defective characters would lead mankind to be aborted – after all, 'idiotia' would be the last evolutionary stage of degeneracy, 'in which sterility comes to a happy conclusion to this degeneration of the race' (Bombarda 1896, 34). It was a civilizing project above all, which provided for educating society about marriages, hereditary processes, moral deficiencies and their physical defects. This scientific stance led to a clearly political and social position, after all, society had to be educated in order to recognize the danger before it became a disease.

Deviant sexuality – whether in the form of homosexuality, pederasty, paedophilia, impulsiveness or obsessive desire – was, in these terms, a degenerative symptom

book intends to produce a catalogue of illnesses from expressive forms, rather it is a study of the different ways people express their emotions, ideas and feelings. From his point of view, to arrive at the complexity of nature, every science must rather understand it in its simplest or most elementary forms. He applies the same analysis to art criticism, that is, to comprehend the purest forms of expression, and then to understand the more complex ways of manifesting 'the nature of the beautiful'. A biographical note is important: the playwright, essayist and art critic Marcel Reja is, in fact, the pseudonym of the psychiatrist Paul Gaston Meunier.

<sup>9</sup> There were already numerous collections of art in psychiatric hospitals at the time, as well as in the private collections of avant-garde modernist artists. In the I Congrès Mondial de Psychiatrie (1950), in Paris, collections from seventeen countries around the world were gathered in an exhibition titled *Art Psychopathologique*, including the *art brut* collection of Compagnie de L'Art Brut, created by Jean Dubuffet. On this, see the analysis made by Robert Volmat (1956).

<sup>10</sup> Hall and Metcalf indicate other differences: "In Europe much more of the debate on the artist outsider focuses on what was originally known as art brut, and more recently as outsider art – the art of obsessive visionaries or the patients of mental institutions. In the United States, outsider art has been understood more broadly than in Europe and has often been popularly conflated with folk art, ethnic art, and many other gestures produced by various outsider groups and individuals". (Hall and Metcalf 1994, xii).

<sup>11</sup> 'Outsider Art Fair'. <https://www.outsiderartfair.com/the-field> (accessed 14 April 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Atavism, an idea initially developed in Italy by psychiatrists Eugenio Tanzi and Gaetano Riva, presupposed that humanity evolved towards a decreasing subjectivism, in which the egocentric state, typical of childhood, was what combined degenerations as a deviation towards ancestry.

<sup>13</sup> In other words, if Lombroso regarded the criminal as the reflection or resurgence of a distant past, he also considered the expressions of the mentally ill as a return of savage scrawl. The Lombrosian atavism (1887) predicted that much of what was in the expressions of the 'geniuses' was no more than a reunion with the primitive ancestors, concluding that the genius seemed like a morbid condition of epileptic nature.

of atavistic and hereditary causality<sup>12</sup>. In short, deviant sexual behaviour was instituted as a disease. There is a social weight when one speaks of the acceptance of a scientific discourse as a social norm. In other words, from the moment psychiatric science proposed normative axes of sexuality, this created a tangible effect on people and society:

*C'est vers les années 1870 que les psychiatres ont commencé à en faire une analyse médicale: point de départ, c'est certain, pour toute une série d'interventions et de contrôles nouveaux. On commence soit à interner les homosexuels dans les asiles, soit à entreprendre de les soigner...* (Foucault 1996, 260).

All sexual behaviour comes to be understood, so to speak, within a key of observation of symptoms:

The sexual instinct toward the opposite sex may be strengthened by the exercise of will and self-control; by moral treatment, and possibly by hypnotic suggestion; by improvement of the constitution and the removal of neuroses (neurasthenia); but especially by abstinence from masturbation. However, there is always the danger that homo-sexual feelings, in that they are the most powerful, may become permanent, and lead to enduring and exclusive contrary sexual instinct. This is especially to be feared as a result of the influences of masturbation (just as in acquired inversion of the sexual instinct) and its neurasthenia and consequent exacerbations; and further, it is to be found as a consequence of unfavourable experiences in sexual intercourse with persons of the opposite sex (defective feeling of pleasure in coitus, failure in coitus on account of weakness of erection and premature ejaculation, infection). On the other hand, it is possible that aesthetic and ethical sympathy with persons of the opposite sex may favour the development of heterosexual desires. Thus, it happens that the individual, according to the predominance of favourable or unfavourable influences, experiences now hetero-sexual, now homo-sexual, feeling (Kraft-Ebing 1894, 231).

In this same way, the expressions of the alienated and degenerate have come to be read as a significant part of the symptomatic picture. And from expressions such as facial and bodily, which included the tattoos that were common in collections of photographs, as in plastic, artistic or literary expressions, that is, in drawings, paintings and texts. To express intimate feelings could ultimately serve as an alert of a mental condition.

Under the strong influence of degeneration theorists, more specifically August Morel and Césaire Lombroso, there was the idea of a close connection between the man of 'genius' and the 'madman', which led many physicians to seek concrete examples of this relationship in empirical research within hospitals and asylums<sup>13</sup>. Such investigations brought much more than illustrative examples to include not only nosographic pictures, but also a series of 'expressions' which denoted interesting aspects relating to formal and aesthetic characteristics. In other words, psychiatrists began taking interest over the expressions of the 'insane' with the purpose of grouping degenerate types into 'common motives'. In the same way

that skulls were collected for anthropometric analyses, drawings and paintings, tattoos and writings were collected in order to corroborate with mental evaluations.

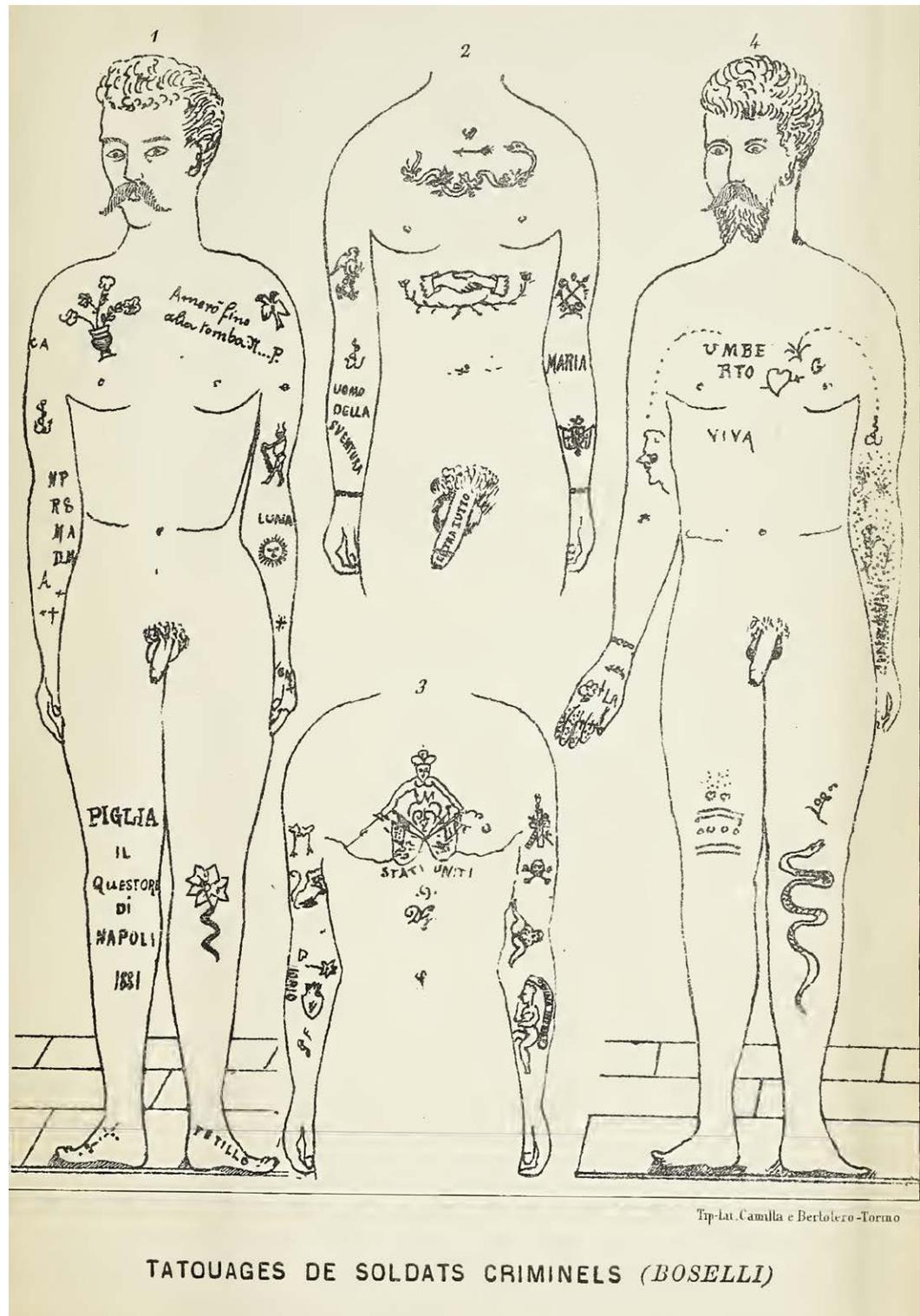
In this process of the delimitation of degenerative causalities 'deviant sexuality' represented one of the main sources of hospitalization and criminalization. Obscenity, above all, came to be understood as a behaviour to be prevented in society. Lombroso, in his book *L'uomo di genio* (1894), analysed cases of patients with artistic tendencies – based on the method prescribed by the theory of degeneration – in order to understand the qualities of subjects. From this starting point, his greatest certainty was that degenerate individuals could only translate into expressions what was the intrinsic representation of their degenerative state. The drawings, the paintings and the writings thus maintained a relation of coexistence with the psychic state of each individual. Lombroso witnessed a series of common characteristics among the analysed works, having as an analytical principle the triad: formal aspects, content or matter and the author's behavioural state. Among the identified characteristics, there is obscenity<sup>14</sup>, which he describes:

In some work done by erotomaniacs, paralytics, and demented patients, the salient characteristic, both of the drawings and of the verses, is the most shameless indecency. Thus, a cabinet-maker would carve virile members at every corner of a piece of furniture, or at the summits of trees. This, too, recalls many works of savages and of ancient races, in which the organs of sex are everywhere prominent. A captain at Genoa was fond of drawing scenes in a brothel. In many the obscene character is marked by the most singular pretexts, as though it were demanded by artistic requirements. A monomaniac priest used to sketch his figures nude, and then artfully drape them by means of lines which revealed the generative organs. He defended himself against criticism by saying that his figures could only appear indecent to those who were in search of evil (Lombroso 1917, 200).

It is important to point out this moment because, as stated above, it determines 'deviant sexuality' as a degenerate and, as such, criminal attitude. It must also be considered that while not every degenerate was a criminal, every criminal was, as a rule, a degenerate. Sexual deviations, including homosexuality, became criminal matters for Lombroso and his followers.

Psychiatry, independent of theoretical choices, was founded as a science from aspects that could be observed as 'symptoms', and it is from this analytic approach that the 'sexual' or 'erotic' characteristics in the artworks of asylum subjects emerged. In the words of Marcel Reja, in a reading as artistic as it is alienist: *La traduction de l'émotion sexuelle, si fréquente chez l'homme normal n'est pas indifférente au fou. Le nombre de dessins simplement obscènes confectionnés par des fous est prodigieux. Ici encore on retrouve tous les degrés, suivant l'habileté et le sens artistique de l'auteur, de la plus basse obscénité jusqu'à stylization la plus élégante.* (Reja 1907, 36)

<sup>14</sup> These include, among others: originality, eccentricity, symbolism, criminality and moral insanity, uselessness, insanity as a subject, absurdity, uniformity, summary, bizarre. These characteristics were largely in the works analysed by Lombroso, which for him confirm the thesis that in the mentality of degenerates they reproduced forms, colours and subjects in a constant way.



Anonymous. Tattoos of criminal soldiers observed by Boselli. In Lombroso, Cesare. Deuxième Édition. Bocca Frères Éditeurs, Rome, Turin, Florence, 1888, PL XXXII)



Anonymous. Drawing-type of megalomaniac creator of the world. In Lombroso, Cesare. *L'uomo di genio*. Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1894, Tv. XIV)

<sup>15</sup> Diseases were categorized and divided into two major groups: ‘Manic-depressive psychoses’, which included the types of melancholy and mania; and the ‘dementias praecox’, containing all the regressive frames such as catatonias, paralysis, dementias, and so on.

<sup>16</sup> Unlike Kraepelin, Bleuler considered that the mental illness disorder would be a disintegration of the associative capacities of thought, suggesting the term schizophrenia-like concept. Influenced by Freud’s theories, he did not see disease as a deterioration of the subject and therefore suggested a hypothesis based on the symbolic experience of the schizophrenic patient, something very close to what Carl Jung later called ‘archetypes of the collective unconscious’. With this association, Bleuler created the possibility of thinking a psychodynamic of the mental illnesses, as opposed to the classic, strictly biological vision of Kraepelin.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of ‘homosexuality’ actually became part of the CID in 1948: ‘from the 6th Revision (1948), in Category 320 Personality Pathology, as one of the inclusion terms of subcategory 320.6 Sexual Deviation. The 7th Revision (1955) was thus maintained, and in the 8th Revision (1965) homosexuality left the category ‘Pathological Personality’ was in the category ‘Sexual Deviance and Disorders’ (code 302), with the specific subcategory being 302.0 – Homosexuality. A 9a. Revision (1975), currently in force, maintained homosexuality in the same category and sub-category, but, considering divergent opinions from psychiatric schools, put the following orientation under the code: Code homosexuality here whether or not it is considered mental disorder. (Laurent 1984). In [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0034-89101984000500002](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0034-89101984000500002).

<sup>18</sup> Homosexuality had already been excluded in 1973 from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) by the American Psychiatric Association.

At this point in time, different theories converge and diverge in the attempt to understand and to categorize the different forms of sexuality. One of the most important contributions, certainly, is Freud’s *Three Essays on Sexuality*. In Freud’s view, it is a serious error to consider the ‘sexual inversions’ – such as homosexuality or hermaphroditism – as, in essence, degenerations, and much less should they be thought of in the debate about whether they are ‘innate’ or ‘acquired’. Above all, Freud criticizes the positivism of Valentin Magnan and August Morel, for whom ‘sexual inversions’ were considered morbid ‘aberrations’, that is, essentially degenerative.

In contrast to the Freudian ideas, there was the taxonomy proposed by Emil Kraepelin – recognized as the ‘father of modern psychiatry’<sup>15</sup> –, which was based strictly on the terms of the natural sciences and whose main tool was the triad ‘observation-description-classification’. An important point in his studies is that the idea of subjectivity is practically annulled, as the description of the subject about himself and his psychic state was seen as counterproductive to the clinical diagnosis, since a large part of psychic illnesses made it impossible for the subjects to speak clearly or falsify incongruent ideas<sup>16</sup>.

Between one imperative and another, biological psychiatry has always predominated in terms of state policies or institutional practices. ‘Sexual deviations’ endured both medical and religious intolerance, culminating in various treatments such as hypnosis, lobotomy, and later psychotropic resources. To summarize, without trying to make a history of sexuality or of psychiatry, it is important to realize that if there is a relationship between erotic or sexualized expressions and outsider art, it begins at the moment of criminalization of ‘sexual deviations’. It becomes common in this context to seek symbolic meanings for such expressions; after all, they appeared as atavistic remnants that subjected the minds of the insane to certain forms and contents.

In the 1970s, three events converge in the same logic of sense. With the emergence of movements fighting for the recognition of sexual diversity, there began to appear a separation, in terms of deviant sexuality, in what should be considered either a pathological or criminal issue (such as paedophilia) or biological and / or identity issue (such as homosexuality). Concomitantly, there was the growth of anti-psychiatric and anti-asylum movements. And, thirdly, it was at the same stage that the term outsider art arose. As much as these may seem issues totally isolated from each other, they are in fact events that arise from the same historical context.

Some groups linked to homosexual movements, in as early as the 1980s, demanded that the World Health Organization (WHO) withdraw from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) the sub-category 302.0 referring to ‘homosexuality’ – included in Category 302 ‘Deviations and Sexual Disorders, Chapter V: Mental Disorders’<sup>17</sup>. Such a feat only came to pass in the 1990 revision, when the WHO effectively eliminated Homosexuality from the ICD classifications<sup>18</sup>. The action, in short, not only removed homosexuality as a mental disorder, but beyond that eliminated it

from the biological normalization that saw the inherent issues of sexual variability as 'pathological'. Being homosexual became, in the view of medical classifications, a variation of biological and / or psychological behaviour, but not a pathology: Nevertheless, the idea that one must indeed finally have a true sex is far from being completely dispelled. Whatever the opinion of biologists on this point, the idea that there exist complex, obscure, and essential relationships between sex and truth is to be found – at least in a diffused state – not only in psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychology, but also in current opinion. We are certainly more tolerant in regard to practices that break the law. But we continue to think that some of these are insulting to 'the truth': we may be prepared to admit that a 'passive' man, a 'virile' woman, people of the same sex who love one another, do not seriously impair the established order; but we are ready enough to believe that there is something like an 'error' involved in what they do. An 'error' as understood in the most traditionally philosophical sense: a manner of acting that is not adequate to reality. (Foucault 1980, X).<sup>19</sup>

Certainly, years of violence, exclusion and the pathologization of homosexuality as sexual deviance, instilled in social morality a series of judgments and values that would not be escaped from instantaneously following the change in definition. However, it was from this advance that there was a greater possibility of seeing eroticization in outsider art not as the result of a disease, or the representation of it, but, as an expressiveness similar to any other: 'from a few artists who have developed an obsession for sexual matters, it seems that there is no more sex in outsider or self-taught art than in any other artistic field; far less anyway the other prevalent themes' (Danchin 2012, 125). In other words, outsider art, as a concept within the artistic domain, enables these self-taught artists to represent their sexual and erotic imaginations without being interpreted through the lens of a pathological background.

In 2012<sup>20</sup>, *Raw Vision* published a special issue titled 'Raw Erotica', questioning, above all, the existence of a predisposition or a way of recognizing eroticism in outsider art. Colin Rhodes begins his introduction by distinguishing 'pornography' and 'erotica':

Pornography is produced in a disinterested way, to be consumed by strangers... Erotica, on the contrary, is engaged and connected. Audiences that are not the artist (who, of course, is also audience) join a continuum of reception and interaction with representations in which the artist is more centrally located. Moreover, it is much more likely that erotica can be regarded aesthetically without the central sexual demand in pornography that results either in a response of sexual arousal or revulsion. (Rhodes 2012, 5)

For Rhodes if there is a 'raw vision' in art, or rather an art that can be distinguished from others by its experience as outsider or *brut*, there is also a 'raw erotica', defined as a 'singular theory or science of love constructed without recourse to cultural convention' (idem, 1). In this sense, the idea is to construct a non-path-

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault became an important reference both in the discussions about madness and sexuality, his two most important subjects of study. He is cited here not only because of this, but to point out a moment when these themes, considered within biological psychiatry, begin to be faced also in a philosophical proposal of thought. It is important to remember that Michel Foucault was not only a philosopher, but he also held a diploma in pathological psychology (1952), proving a keen interest in the psychology of Merleau-Ponty, Freud and Lacan, among others. His thinking corroborates the history of psychiatric practices in order to question how madness becomes 'mental illness', with concrete and describable symptoms. The same can be thought about the subject of homosexuality (Bert and Basso 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Many of the artists mentioned in the magazine reappear in the exhibition of the Museum of Sex, such as Henry Darger or Eugene Von Bruenchenhein.

<sup>21</sup> Some of the names quoted in *Raw Erotica*: Josef Schneller, Oskar Deitmeyer e Heinrich Lutz, Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern, Henry Speller. And more contemporary: Gérard Sendrey, Johann Garber and Ota Keiti.

ological argument between the erotic expression and the outsider subject. From another point of view, if outsider art is dependent on the artists' life stories or trajectories, since they define the self-taught character of production, 'erotica' is in many cases a reflection of these trajectories. Specifically, 'sexual inversions', to retake the Freudian term, become significant parts of the life stories of many outsider artists.

The great inventive possibility of outsider art as a concept is to provide visibility to certain forms of expressiveness, often considered hermetic in the ideas they manifest. This ideal, 'is more complicated in the case of erotica, where art production as private or hermetic act is joined by visual and psychological content whose exposure has in general been regarded conventionally' (Rhodes 2012, 12). Following this idea, Roger Cardinal declares:

It is indeed the case that the erotic productions of outsiders tend to be outspoken and uncompromising, for this private art is also an art of self-assertion, one which entirely ignores the fact that an audience of other people might one day approve or disapprove of that is being shown. Private imagery is all the more satisfying to the artist who is his own first and potentially sole spectator (Cardinal 2012, 107-108).

Outsider art opens up the concepts of contemporary art and often projects this possibility as a narrative for scenes of eroticism or other customary themes in outsiders' expressions. In this way, it projects the signs of 'illness', 'symptom' or 'deviation' as particular characteristics of certain outsiders, or rather, as the concept or intentionality of the work and the artist, before being defined as 'outsiders'.

There are numerous examples of outsiders or *bruts* dialogues with the erotic themes, which is not for this article to explore<sup>21</sup>. The *Raw Erotica* magazine emerges, despite the title, from a stance of demystification of erotic themes in outsider art. To wit, eroticism or explicit sexuality in outsider art does not stand out from other subjects, but it is as subjective as it is. Finally, if outsider art is supported by the subjectivity of the expressions, the eroticism or the 'object of desire' also have singular meanings, intentions and intentionality and to seek an external explanation for such expressions can go into disagreement with the very meaning of outsider art:

The erotic impulse can achieve expression in many ways. Artistic statements fuelled by sexual desire typically veer between the poles of the explicit and the oblique, the outspoken and the discreet. some artists let loose a joyous flow of pointed references, unashamedly signalling sexual excitement in stark formations that require no caption: here a phallus, there a vulva, no explanation needed. (Cardinal 2012, 97)

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