

CHAPTER THREE

Hallucinated bodies: art and its alphabets in psychosis

“Who, if I cried, would hear me among the Angelic Orders? And even if one of them suddenly took me to its heart, I would fade in the strength of its stronger existence. For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror we are just still able to bear . . . Every single Angel is terrible”

(Rilke, First Elegy, *Duino Elegies*, 1939)

I have drawn since I was a child: my baseball mitt, the sycamore trees behind our apartment, my cat, my own hands, and maps, make-believe ideas of place. Near the end of high school, following nine months in a psychiatric hospital and a diagnosis of schizophrenia, I found that I could not draw in perspective; something was “off” in my seeing that inhabited my drawing. The St Louis Cathedral did not resemble my memory of it from outside, so I drew the architecture of its vastness as though I could see through it, into its interior workings. In my first year college drawing class, I discovered an incomprehensible gap between the nude bodies of our models and what I started to draw on paper, a body I can only call terrible. I was filled with

dread, and dropped the class. Four months later I was back in a psychiatric hospital.

As I turn to writing about the art of psychotic patients I cannot go about it any other way but in pieces, gathered to evoke rather than to explain. I veer from the vertigo of looking at images to writing about my experience of seeing and wondering. What is the body inhabited by and taken over by something strange, filled with dread? The body: a terrifying beauty.

Each day, I study images of the body made by psychotic artists. I begin with a collection made by Hans Prinzhorn, a German psychiatrist who also trained as an art historian and archived works made by patients living in the early twentieth century. I know little about many of the artists. My purpose here is not to review the work of Prinzhorn, its scope and reach, nor its controversy. I am not seeking biographical particularities or interpretations so much as psychotic signatures in art, incandescent alphabets of the body—what it is, how it works—as I view and respond to these stunning images.

Whatever we can name and recognise of ourselves in language becomes a precursor for what we see and experience about our bodies.

When language itself comes from voices imposed, the body becomes marked by the problematic of an invasion. The artist makes an expanding projection of unspeakable experience. As we look, the horizon between the image created and the world experienced comes towards us. The artists portray what we have not seen before. The body becomes fragmented; it has too many organs or has lost vital organs; it is made transparent; foreign objects control the body; the body is reinscribed to support a new universe, a new humanity.

The artists present singular works that speak to anyone who wonders about psychosis as a lived experience, anyone who believes in the power of art. As I write this chapter and choose these images, I am constructing a series of visual moments. Intentionally, I keep my responses brief, and intersperse them with quotations that adumbrate what I am seeing and seeking. This is a poetics I am making in relation to the images, a layer of impressions.

The images are beyond interpretation; they live on the page in the way they affect us, disturb us, and render us as children, small and unknowing.

The body: a terrifying beauty

I begin with a picture by Joseph Forster (Image 1).



Image 1. Joseph Forster, *Untitled*, 1916–1921, Inv. No. 4494.
© Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

Forster was a paper-hanger, diagnosed schizophrenic. I know almost nothing about him. Yet, his image speaks to me beyond his life and across a century of time.

Forster's body floats, grounded only by his hands holding on to long poles, his mouth invisible and muffled with a scarf. The blue of the scarf repeats in the blue of one sock. The body moves through space, over a field. It seems to walk on air, while the poles walk on the ground, a paradox. Is it there, this paradox, or do I project it into the space of looking?

The next image is by Paul Goesch, an architect, diagnosed schizophrenic, who was killed by the Nazis in 1940 (Image 2).

Can a body, dismembered, float or swim? Impossible. There are two small figures standing on the water in the upper right corner. They are intact, but faded, and do not take up much space in the picture frame. Whatever it is that has intervened with the body has made crude cuts that mark the neck, the torso's arm and leg sockets, and one of the arms. The body parts still work; they seem to float in opposite directions within the multiple shapes of an "O". Each "O"

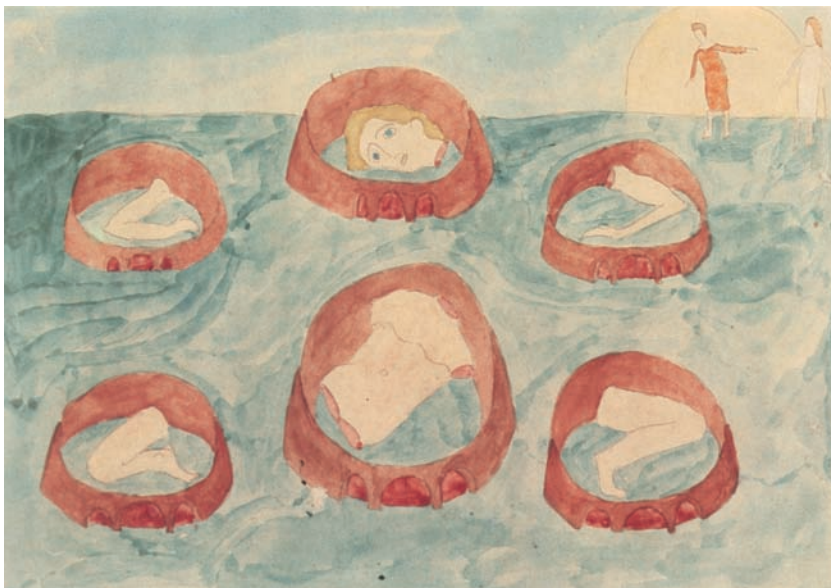


Image 2. Paul Goesch, *Horus dismembered*, undated, Inv. No. 881.
© Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

has three arches, surely not an accident for a trained architect? I think of this letter and what it contains as an incandescent alphabet for what is unspeakable.

The body: a record of what it is, a series of impossibilities made Real.

The body: an intervention, what has intervened, and how it is working now.

The body: on which something was written, imposed as a new alphabet, enigmatic.

I am taking the bus home from a suburb of the city on a grey winter day. I look outside to see the street filled with water, churning. How will the bus go through it? It moves with seeming ease. I look again: legs, arms, heads, detached in the river of water, yet living, moving in the water. My body readjusts to *what it is*—it is outside the bus while inside the bus. Outside, in pieces in cold water, churning, and at the same time inside, a nineteen-year-old girl holding a stack of books on her lap going home to her dinner.

A particular time: in the late 1800s and into the first two decades of the 1900s. The time before antipsychotic medications and their effects (damping down both symptoms and a sense of being fully alive), when one might live in an asylum all one's life. A particular person: Hans Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist then working in Heidelberg, who begins to collect the art of the patients, and ask them about making it. In *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1972[1922]), he writes of a striking trend in art by schizophrenic patients: "Human figures are outlined by forceful and complicated looped strokes" (p. 63).

Now we have the image by Jacob Mohr (Image 3). Mohr was a farmer, a gardener, diagnosed paranoid.

The arrows of his image seem to move in one direction, towards the figure on the hill. Yet, the arrows infiltrate the ground and both bodies. The cursive script on the right side and the horizon writes on the sky, on the body.

What changes in the body in the face of an encounter, relentless, of an invasion of voices? Lacan called this experience Real *jouissance*, an energy running in the body, unbound. What breaks into the body is Other, strange; this Otherness, this strangeness *becomes* the body. I cannot read the words written around the drawing by Jacob Mohr. The drawing of electric currents rewrites the body and what it is; the body can be controlled and re-made. The forms of electricity repeat. Is

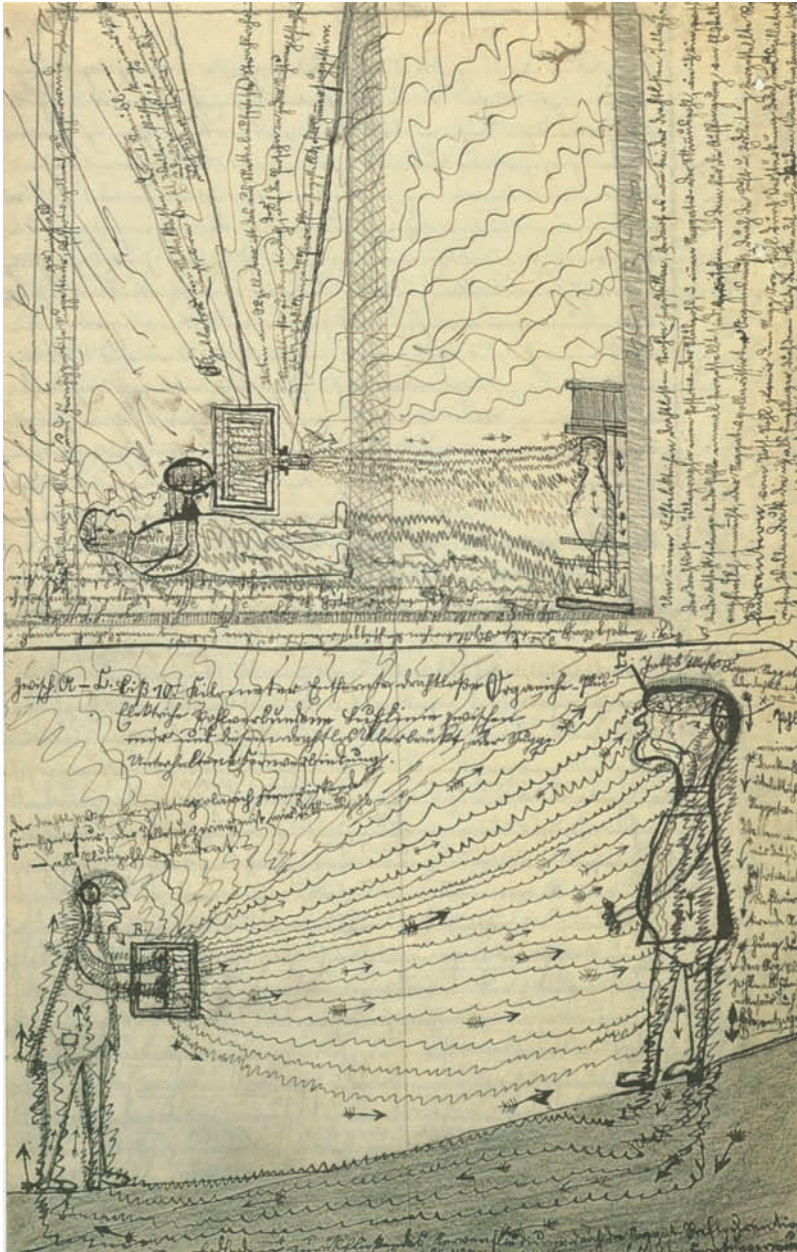


Image 3. Jacob Mohr, *Proofs*, 1910, Inv. No. 627/1 recto.
 © Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

it illogical, the iteration of marks to the point of no point at all, or another logic in which every mark counts?

Here is August Natterer speaking about his art:

At first I saw a white spot in a cloud, very near by—the clouds all stood still—then the white spot withdrew and remained in the sky the whole time, like a board. On this board or screen or stage pictures followed one another like lightening . . . They are pictures like those of which Christ spoke. They are revealed to me by God for the completion of the redemption. (Prinzhorn, 1972[1922], pp. 159–160)

From the notes on Natterer's admission, Prinzhorn summarises:

It seemed as if a broom were sweeping inside his chest and stomach; his skin had turned into fur; his bones and throat were petrified; in his stomach he has a tree trunk; his blood consisted of water, animals came out of his nose. He sees the devil in the shape of a column of fire perform dances in front of him; poems about him appear in newspapers; he is the AntiChrist, the genuine one; he must live forever, he could not die. He no longer has a heart; his soul has been torn out. He explains the cracking in his knees as telephone calls by which the devil down below is always notified of his whereabouts. (Prinzhorn, 1972[1922], p. 160)

Signification passes to the psychotic subject through an Other as direct message, and even if that meaning is perplexing, it is directed and emanates *significance*. Natterer is eloquent about what he sees and hears, what he is subjected to, and what he experiences in his body: a fantastic and endless torment.

Who is this Other? Where is he, and what does he want from me?

What is the significance of what the Other imposes on me, beyond my control?

What speaks to me, taking over my thoughts, inhabiting my body?

"The subject's relation of exteriority to the signifier is so striking that all clinicians have emphasized it in one way or another" (Lacan, 1997[1981], p. 250).

"Marks are the alphabets that form the words that make the prose, and are the elements with which the drawing is made. It is the gestural language of drawing" (Maslen & Southern, 2011, p. 28).

"There is an invitation to make our own rebus from the elements, a narrative sentence from the different pieces" (Kentrledge, 2014, p. 134).

What were these men and women doing in the asylum? They were drawing, drawing and painting, making marks that carried their very gestures. They were making new visual alphabets, too. They drew, and left a rebus of works, the elements of psychosis portrayed as distinctive signatures.

Most surely, they were artists.

The sea, if it is the sea, this vast aqua blue? (Image 4).



Image 4. August Natterer (pseudonym Neter), *The Miraculous Shepherd*, 1911–1917, Inv. No. 176.
© Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

The sea. A shepherd stands holding a staff, looking out, accompanied by a little dog. The shepherd stands on a snake, or perhaps it is an arm of the figure that seems to rise out of the ocean, a fish head and a human head, hair flayed out wide. If it is human, it is also lying on top of the water, one leg a vertical in the air, the foot a little awning over the shepherd and the snake biting his hat. Or does its mouth simply define the shape of the hat? The other leg extends in a horizontal with an opening, vaginal perhaps, no, perhaps a bone, a spine, attached to a transparent foot that extends into the body of the head emerging. It is virtually impossible to describe this image in prose. It is a new alphabet of the body. Only poetry approximates this.

“Registers the murmurs of speed, the miniscule terror, searches under some cold cinders for the smallest birds, those which never close their wings, resist the wind” (Eluard, 1981, p. 3).

August Natterer, an electrician, married, without a diagnosis, dies in the Rottwell Asylum. Natterer also made art designed to reconfigure time and the cosmos.

Looking: the artist makes an expanding projection of unspeakable experience.

Looking: the horizon between the image created and the world experienced comes towards us.

HERE IT HAPPENED.

HERE IS THE POINT OF GREATEST PARADOX.

HERE A VOICE INVADED THE MIND AND REMOULDED THE BODY.

HERE IS HOW IT WORKS.

Image 5 is by Hyacinth Freiherr von Wieser.

Suddenly, there is this transparency of the head, of the mind. A baroque theatre of planes and angles, wound up with a little key extending from the left side, and a larger key from the left shoulder. An incomprehensible confusion; it erases him, his face, his thoughts. And then this dazed thing without armour. The man who drew this image had a doctorate in Law. In his youth he had written poems, plays, and short stories.

“We who draw do so not only to make something visible to others, but also to accompany something invisible to its incalculable destination” (Berger, 2011, p. 9).

August Natterer painted heads, too. Space flattens under the gaze of the head depicted in Image 6, the eye an orb, unseeing all-seeing



Image 5. Hyacinth Freiherr von Wieser (pseudonym Welz), *Power Idea View*, undated, Inv. No. 2457.
© Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.



Image 6. August Natterer (pseudonym Neter), *Witch's Head*, before 1920, Inv. No. 184.
© Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

void. The head dominates the entire world of the image, and the world, its buildings and streets, the surrounding woods, come into a strange, distorted perspective. It is hard to know if the head is dead or alive. The gaze is not just uncomfortable; it is uncanny, persecutory.

The body remakes the world; the eye opens on to a void and gives a glimpse of horror. The voices—sounding, resounding—speak over and remake the body. The head becomes a gateway to a new universe, its eyes and its ears open to vistas others do not see, cannot hear, and do not want to know.

Cosmic body

Image 7 is by Aloïse Corbaz, diagnosed schizophrenic.

This image of multiple women embedded in women, the largest lying down across two pages, several with halos and wings, is a re-envisioning of the Magi, the three kings who came to visit Christ. Aloïse Corbaz was a prolific artist at the La Rosiere asylum, where she died at age seventy-eight. Her psychiatrist, Dr Jacqueline Porret-Forel, spoke with Aloïse about her art.

Aloïse's work is based on her own cosmic vision; the universe became her family; impregnated by the light of the sun, she was transmuted into a creator from whom any being might arise. She saw no inconsistency in remaining herself and at the same time becoming a ubiquitous, eternal other. She lived in a world turned upside down, propping the heavens with her feet and standing upright on a celestial carpet. She played with the stars, tossed the terrestrial globe into space and rejuvenated it. She never looked back. Her work is a cosmic theatre in which she saw herself as demiurge. (Ferrier, 1998, pp. 117–118)

Here, the human body reconfigures the cosmos. Whatever is wrong with the Other, a defect in the universe that has returned and imposed itself in the Real of the body, the subject of psychosis tries to fix that flaw. This is a bodily experience in which the "I" becomes vast, as the body is remoulded to support a new universe or a new humanity. Religious motifs put to some idiosyncratic use no longer belong to collective belief, but are part of the artist's singular vision.



Image 7. Aline Corbaz, *Adoration des Mages petit palais de Grenoble*, 1941, mine de plomb et crayon de couleur sur papier, 25 x 66 cm. Photo: Amélie Blanc, Atelier de numérisation, Ville de Lausanne. Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, no inv. cab-9396.

Body effaced

Else Blankenhorn made notebooks in the years following her diagnosis of catatonia (Image 8).

The figures, if they are human figures, have no features; any identifying detail has been effaced.

Just as the body becomes enlarged to fill the cosmos, so may it disappear into a schematic semblance of a human figure.

Foreign object in the body

Image 9 is by Robert Gie, diagnosed with persecution mania with hallucinations, who resided at Rosegg Hospital.

This image, translated *Circulation of Effluvia with Central Machine and Metric Scale*, portrays the Other in the body, the effects of something foreign imposed and working in the body. It is the visual counterpart to voices overwriting one's thoughts.

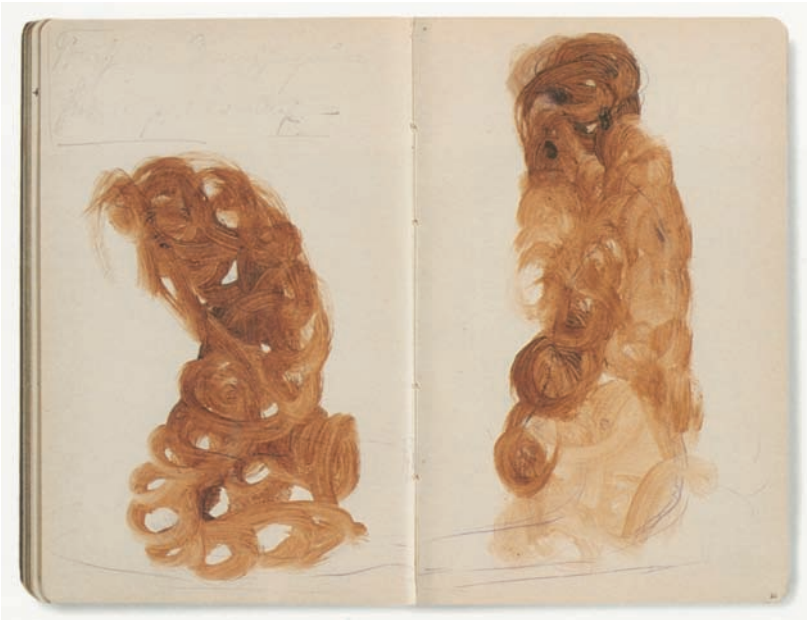


Image 8. Else Blankenhorn, *Poetry Album with Drawings and Texts*, Inv. No. 4318a. © Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

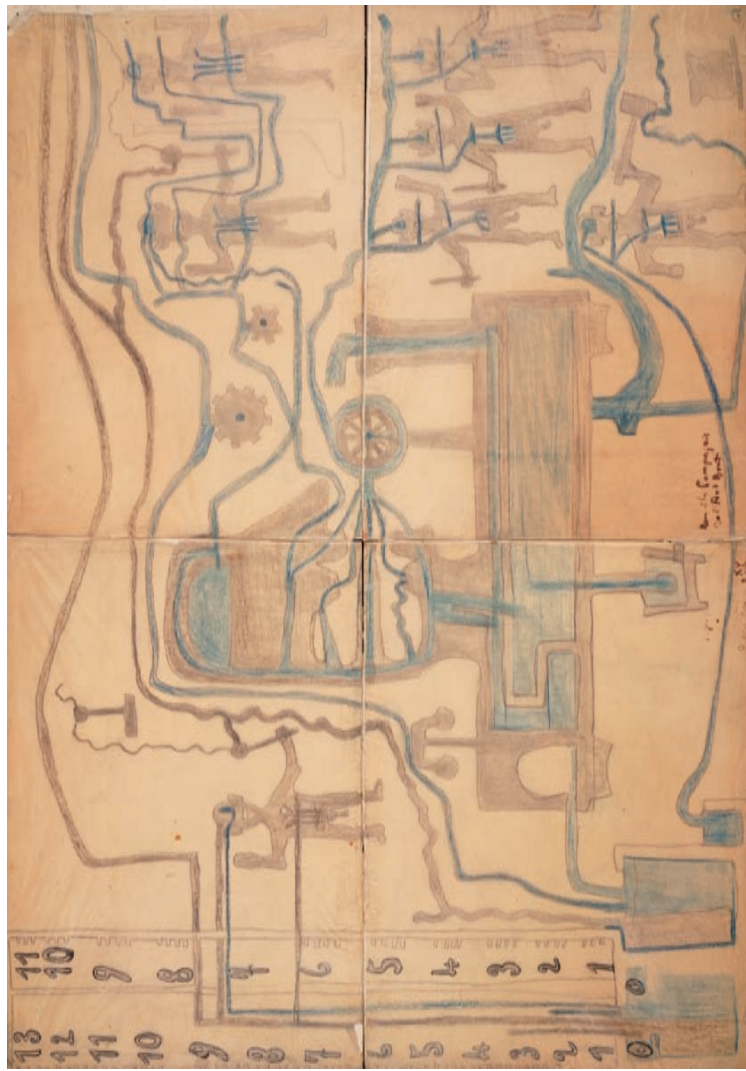


Image 9. Robert Gie, *Distribution d'effluves avec machine centrale et tableau métrique*, ca 1916, mine de plomb et crayon de couleur sur papier, 49 x 69 cm.
Photo: Arnaud Conne, Atelier de numérisation, Ville de Lausanne, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, no inv. cab-A419.

The body proliferates, dehumanised, automated, remote-controlled by means of a foreign object in the stomach or abdomen of each figure; the human traversed by mysterious fluids or currents.

The body as destiny

Camille Claudel exhibited the figure depicted in Image 10 at the Paris Salon in 1893. Clotho, the youngest of the Three Fates, was responsible for spinning the thread of human life, determining the fate of all humans.



Image 10. Camille Claudel, *Clotho*, numéro d'inventaire S.1379, Plâtre, 90 x 49.50 x 43.50 cm.
Photograph by Christian Baraja, Musée Rodin, Paris.

Along with her sisters and the god Hermes, Clotho created the Greek alphabet.

“I have fallen into an abyss. I live in a world so curious, so strange. Of the dream that was my life, this is my nightmare” (Claudel, quoted in Ayral-Clause, 2002, p. 9).

Following her father’s death, Claudel was committed to the mental asylum at Ville-Évrard. She accused Rodin of having had her committed so as to get his hands on her works, and became strikingly paranoid, even afraid to eat her food. During the Second World War, she was transferred to the asylum at Montdevergues, where she remained until her death in 1943 (Ayral-Clause, 2002).

“. . . his haggard, boney, bearded face, peering through diamond panes, cries out” (Joyce, 2010[1922], p. 472) (Image 11).



Image 11. Franz Karl Bühler, *Untitled*, 1909–1916, Inv. No. 2939.
© Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg,

I look at this face and marvel at its form and layers. A face with the ears of an animal, a third eye, a metal hat or a plate, perhaps—yet the face is recognisably human with its thin nose, intent eyes, and the hint of a smile. The throat seems open, raw and transparent, but perhaps it is only a scarf I am seeing.

Franz Bühler, a metalworker and lecturer diagnosed schizophrenic, was killed by the Nazis in 1940, his madness, whatever it was, overtaken by a collective madness.

The body in pieces: missing organs and disjointed parts

Antonin Artaud, 1896–1948, was a French poet, playwright, theorist, actor and theatre director, perhaps best known for his work, *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958). Diagnosed schizophrenic in May 1937, he spent nine years in mental institutions. He drew and wrote in notebooks, documented in *50 Drawings to Murder Magic*, translated into English in 2008 (Image 12).

“No mouth/no tongue/no teeth/no larynx/no esophagus/no stomach/no intestine/no anus” (Artaud, quoted in Deleuze, 1993 [1969], p. 101).

There are the trees peculiarly fixed here and there. And there are sudden forest fires. And on the summit of the mounts, there is the ozone of a digestive electricity, that was never anything for me but the stomach of all the pulverized, lost bodies. (Artaud in Heller-Roazen, 2007)

Artaud wrote the lines quoted above to his physician from the village of Espalion, twenty miles from the Rodez Hospital.

The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by gradients marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004[1972], p. 19)

“There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being” (Julia Kristeva, quoted in Olivier, 2009, p. 153).

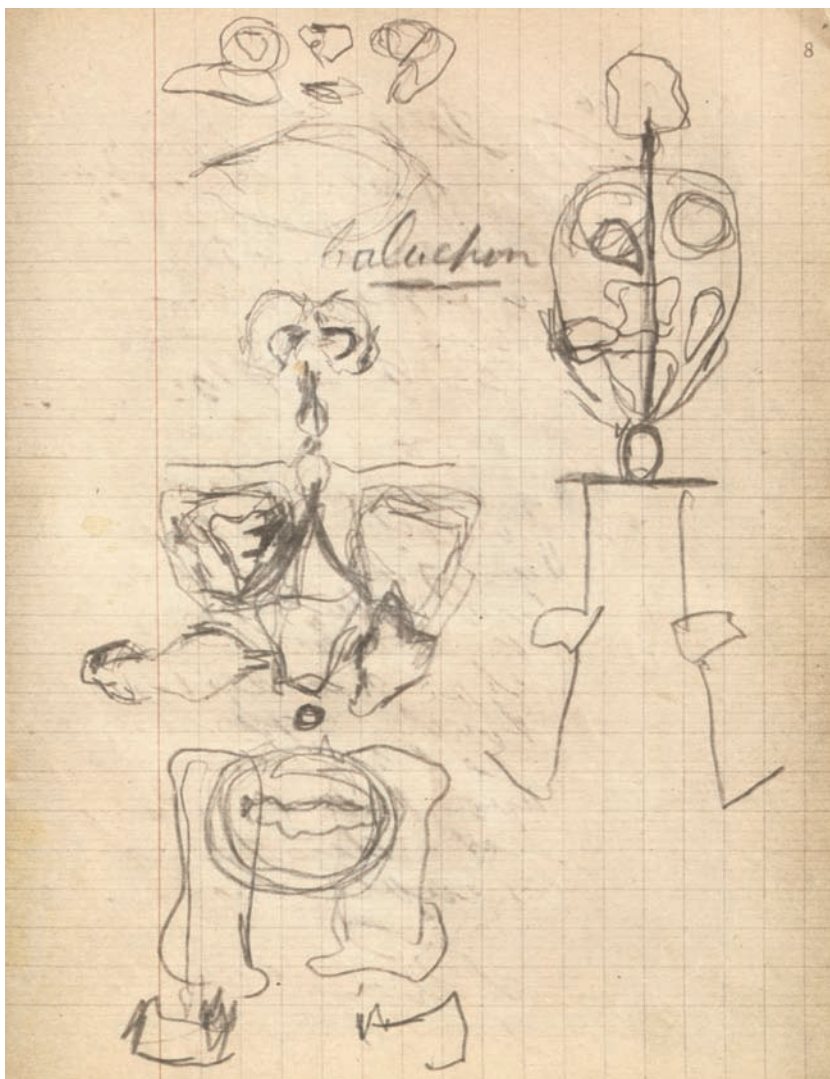


Image 12. Antonin Artaud, *Drawing #36*, Exercise book 351 (August, 1947).
© 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

What is it that carves out the very organs of the body and carries them off? The body is in exile, cut into pieces by language itself, as both Freud and Lacan recognised. "The body is contrasted from the organism insofar as it is the body that is spoken of (*un corps*

parlé), carved up and made visible by language” (Apollon et al., 2002, p. 36).

In psychosis, invented language re-carves a new body.

The heterogeneous body

The psychotic finds himself without organs, but also, at times, with too many.

The figures in Image 13 are by Karl Genzel.

Karl Genzel, once a bricklayer and ironworker, spoke about these figures to Hans Prinzhorn (1972[1922]): “One of them committed sin with Sabbedaus behind the altar” (p. 115). He described “. . . a whole radio station in his body . . . stabbing and tickling in his body, especially the genitals; his food tastes of all kinds of chemicals, mostly poisons” (p. 105). Genzel wrote hundreds of pages in his notebooks. He wrote the excerpt on the following page in June, 1912:



Image 13. Karl Genzel (pseudonym Brendel) *Three Head and Feet Figurines*: (a) Karl Genzel, “The Woman with the Stork” or “Jesin” (Cephalopod), undated, Inv. No. 122, (b) Karl Genzel, “Jesus on the Ship”, before 1920, Inv. No. 150/17, (c) Karl Genzel, “The Woman with the Elephant Feet” or “Jesus” (Cephalopod), Wood, undated, Inv. No. 123. © Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

Heavenhell in subterranean ground of deepfession. One pumps out the head through lightening thunder hail . . . whirl through howl over nut South East North West through ball snake sing in the visibility with that came Herscht Ahtrobant Light who heareth the groaning in the glow body . . . searchlight in syllables . . . (Prinzhorn, 1972[1922]), p. 99)

The body of the psychotic becomes open to every kind of fantasmic capture by the Other. He cannot identify as a man, she as a woman. The question of sexual existence meets an impossible Real that the artist renders in the Imaginary, making an image both animal and human, a human being with the organs of both sexes. This art repeats the structure of hallucination—an experience of enigma and strangeness that imposes a new order and an incandescent alphabet, a synthesis of hearing and seeing things that do not exist collectively: “searchlight in syllables”.

Henry Darger, born in 1892, lost his mother and his sister, and was taken from his father as a child. As a teenager, Darger ran away from a residential school for “feeble-minded” children, walking back to his native Chicago. He lived for decades in a small room on the north side of the city, working as a janitor. He did not speak to those who addressed him, but kept company (aloud) with voices in his room. Wandering the streets and alleyways of Chicago, he collected newspapers and magazines and saved his money for art supplies: children’s paints, glue, colouring books, and later, photographic copies of images. He drew and painted children, girls with testicles and penises, girls who are part animal, with wings and horns, in fantasmic landscapes, sometimes on panels twelve feet wide (MacGregor, 2002). Darger borrowed his images from colouring books and magazines from his time. Darger’s Vivian girls, girls at war and under threat of slavery and death, witness catastrophes at the hands of adults. On the next page they are tormented, bloodied, hanged (Image 14).

Only a few of us, amid the great fabrications of society, hang on to our really childish reactions, still wonder naively what we are doing on the earth and what sort of joke is being played on us. We want to decipher skies and paintings, go behind these starry backgrounds or these painted canvases and, like kids trying to find a gap in a fence, try to look through the cracks in the world. One of these cracks is the cruel custom of sacrifice. (Bataille, 1988[1949], p.2)



Image 14. Henry Darger, *At Norma Catherine via Jennie Richie*. *Vivian girls witness children's bowels and other entrails torn out by infuriated Glandelinians.* Left panel of three panel collage-drawing, watercolor, pencil, carbon on paper, 22 x 89 in. c 1988. Henry Darger: © 2015 Kiyoko Lerner/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Darger's art integrates a marvellous accumulation of images. His figures fill panels, some taped together in a continuous vision twelve to fifteen feet wide. His girls flock, run, and cluster together in fantastic panoramas (Image 15).

A great plane flew across the sun
 And the girls ran along the ground . . .
 Surging over her shoulder like a wave of energy, and then—
 It was gone. No one had witnessed it but herself.

(Ashbery, 1999, pp. 3–4)

I read John Ashbery's long poem, *Girls on the Run* (1999), alongside *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal* (2002), a compilation of reproductions of Darger's art and writing, as well as research into his life by John MacGregor. I discovered the latter book in the north side of Chicago in the Intuit Museum, where I first encountered Darger's



Image 15. Henry Darger, *At Jennie Richie*. After being shown how to escape from Guern by their help, they ask the creatures to display their wings, which they do. Collage, watercolor, and carbon tracing on pieced paper. Private Collection. Henry Darger: © 2015 Kiyoko Lerner/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

work. I also travelled to New York, to see his larger paintings in the American Folk Museum, and to visit the Darger archive in Brooklyn to view the process he used to make his art.

Darger's life work had been private, entirely private. His landlord, also an artist, found a vast project in Darger's room shortly before his death in 1973. Darger had written the history of another world in fifteen volumes: *In the Realms of the Unreal*. The writing comprised 15,145 type written pages, and told the story of seven sisters, "the Vivian Girls", who were in a prolonged, violent conflict with adults over child enslavement on another planet. There were three huge volumes of coloured illustrations, many created as collages, and some painted on both sides. Some panels spanned more than twelve feet across, extraordinary when I consider the confines of his single small room. Henry Darger lived most of his life outside an asylum or hospital. Whether he was a visionary artist, or an undiagnosed psychotic, his art attests to a life-long commitment to a work that evokes an

Other of torment, catastrophe, and horror as well as great beauty and wonder.

I walk down the street from my office on the Austen Riggs campus, past cottages and out to Main Street in Stockbridge, past St Paul's church on my left and the Red Lion Inn on my right to "The Lavender Door", a space dedicated to art in an "interpretation free" zone for the Riggs patients. On the lintel over the door, I see Artaud's words. "No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell" (Artaud, 1976).

I go up to the second floor, through the theatre set, and find Mark Mulherrin in a spacious art studio flooded with light. He is alone and free to talk with me. He, too, has an interest in psychotic art. I tell him about my book and some of my impressions of the art. He lends me his copies of art books and a contemporary journal, *Raw Vision* (2012). Mark tells me that he does not collect art journals—but *this* kind of art, art of psychotics, or visionaries, or outsiders, whatever that means, speaks to him. The artists are daring; they make images others will not, perhaps cannot, make. As we sit and talk, I learn that the images I have been looking at and wondering about have infiltrated the art world, and now appear in auctions, galleries, and museums. Professional non-psychotic artists aspire to this art, and make art that is very like it, if not copies of it.

It was Jean Dubuffet, the creator of the term "art brut" in the mid-1940s, who created a cultural change in the way we read, receive, and value art from artists who are mentally ill or psychotic. He wrote, "Art does not come and lie in the beds we make for it. It slips away as soon as its name is uttered; it likes to preserve its incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets its name" (Thevoz, 1995, p. 11).

I wonder, in the present context, whether or not psychotics still make art that "forgets its name"—extending, illuminating elements of "delusion"—revealed to them through the "symptoms" of madness. Have antipsychotic medications damped down or changed the extraordinary art we saw from the time before these medications were introduced? As I search the web for art made by psychotics, I see that they inhabit a different world than their predecessors in asylums of the past century. Some artists call themselves visionary while others identify as schizophrenic. Some have attended art schools while others have not, and many are connected to galleries or art collectives. I am glad to see their work live in the world of artists.

I chose Dwight Mackintosh because his images spoke to me as singular and connected to writing, as if the body itself were inscribed with something new. His drawings opened up a contemporary counterpoint to the art made at the turn of the last century in this chapter.

Born in Haywood, California in 1906, at sixteen Mackintosh entered an institution for the mentally retarded. His records speculate about his diagnosis: post natal brain injury, mental retardation, and mental illness. After fifty-six years, in 1978, the deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill resulted in his release at the age of seventy-two. His brother Earl brought him to visit the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, California. Mackintosh was given drawing materials and immediately began drawing. Each day, this withdrawn, isolated, and almost non-verbal man spent hours absorbed in the process of drawing. From the beginning he approached each drawing with complete certainty. He drew for more than twenty years, and died in 1999 following a stroke (creativegrowth.org).

“Every production of an artist should be the expression of an adventure of his soul” (Maugham, 1992[1938] p. 310).

But what is art—and how do we read its “expression”—after decades in an institution?

What was Mackintosh thinking as he drew, as he wrote? And was he writing something to be read? I do not know. Throughout his twenty-year art-making career, two elements defined his work: powerful intertwining lines that formed figures and unintelligible writing. In the writing, fragments of words can sometimes be discerned, “i’s” are dotted, “t’s” are crossed. Text often begins with a capital “D” and ends with “ich”, suggestive of his name (Image 16). Is this a signature? Mackintosh was never willing or able to translate his writing (MacGregor, 1990).

Four figures float in space. Contour lines define the interior torus of bodies, faces, hands, feet, and large penises. Above these intricate figures the text floats, word-like and unreadable. In this image I read, again, the incandescent alphabets of an Imaginary body; a new language of seeing, drawing, and considering what it is to be human.

The body: a record of what it is, a series of impossibilities made Real.

The body: on which something was written, imposed as a new alphabet, enigmatic.

The body: an unnamed animal (Image 17).

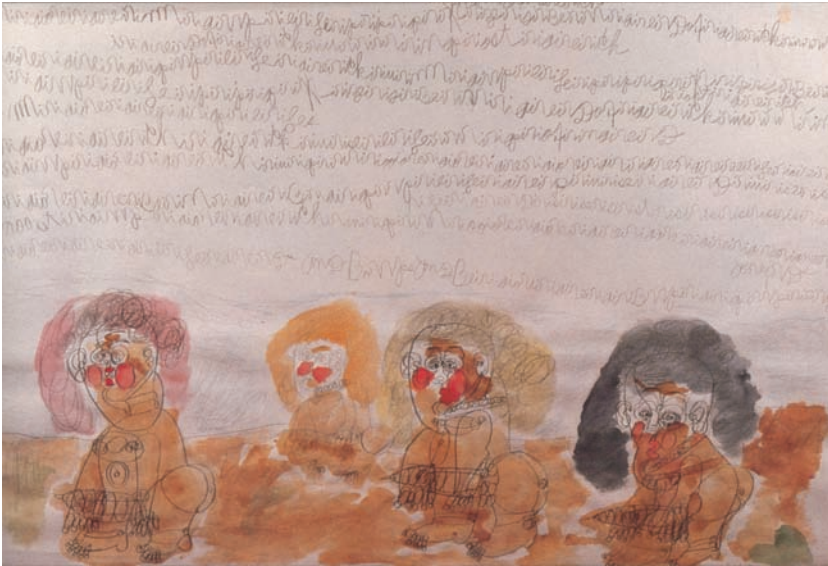


Image 16. Dwight Mackintosh, *Untitled (Four full-length male figures)*, 1983, Pencil, chalk and watercolour, 40 x 26 in. Permanent Collection, Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland. Image courtesy of Creative Growth Art Center.

The title “outsider artist” has made a space for artists to be taken seriously, exhibited, acknowledged in public spaces. I am glad of that. But it is much more difficult to identify the art of those who are psychotic, and have lived through that distinctive human experience.

As I read the images made by men and women in asylums, as well as those who created art and yet lived profoundly isolated lives (both Darger and Mackintosh), I wondered about the writing that so often accompanied these images. The writing appears to me as part of the drawings themselves. What is this writing?

Writing in and around images—what is it?

A new language for what has never been spoken, never been seen?

A script that has forgotten how to speak its own name?

A search for a missing code?

Spaces one cannot enter

Figures one cannot reconcile

Objects one cannot use

Text one cannot read



Image 17. Dwight Mackintosh, *Untitled (Animal)*, 1985, Felt pen, chalk and watercolour, 15 x 26 in. Permanent Collection, Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland. Image courtesy of Creative Growth Art Center.

Many of the artists in this chapter died in an asylum. We would not have their art but for the collections made by those who saw it, and knew it *was* art. None of these men and women, to my knowledge, had access to psychoanalysis, or made it back to lucidity and entered life again as full citizens of the world. Yet, their art is stunningly revelatory of an experience we still fail to grasp and to respect: the experience of invasion by a ghastly, perverse Other from which there is no escape. Their art is a testimony that this experience changes language and what it does, the body and what it is, into incandescent alphabets.

I am of this lineage. I lived in psychosis for almost two decades, and did not get the formal art training that I wanted. But I persisted in making images: sketches, paintings, and prints. Following psycho-

analysis, I do not have access to the visionary worlds of these artists; my words speak to other listeners, and it matters to me to be heard in a collective. I work at Zea Mays Printmaking, an artists' print studio in Western Massachusetts, where I play a part in conversations, decisions, ideas about shows and public events. In my notebooks, images unfold accompanied by phrases and lines of poetry, words that speak in relation to the images, a joyful rendering of whimsical impossibilities (Image 18).

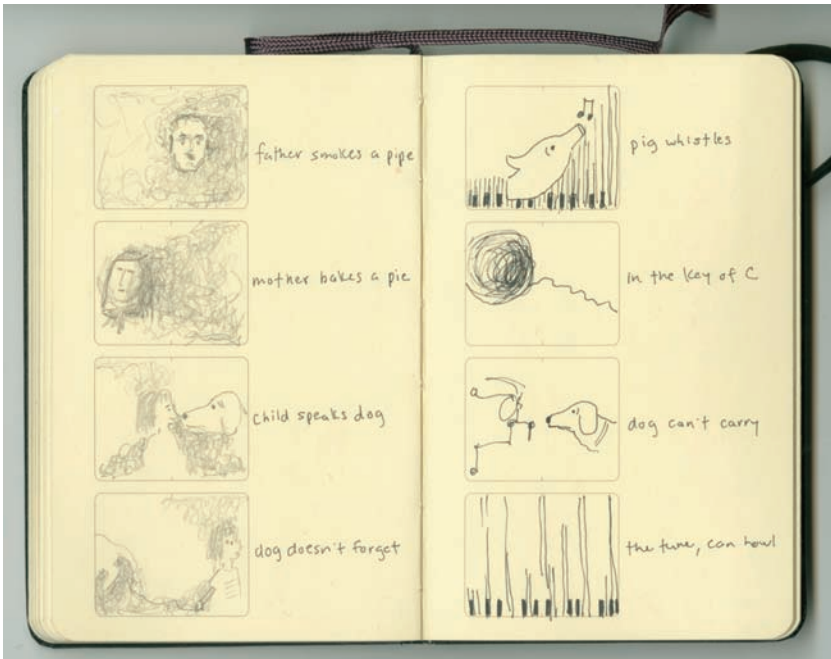


Image 18. Annie Rogers, *Untitled*, Pencil and pen, Moleskin Notebook, 2011.