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National College of Art and Design

Fine Art: Painting

Title:

**'A Critical Analysis of Jean Dubuffet's
Theories on 'Art Brut' and the
Subsequent Emergence of an Outsider
Art Ideology'**

By: Emily Strange.

**Submitted To The Faculty of History
Of Art and Design and Complementary
Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of
B.A.Honors 1n Fine Art.**

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Introduction.

Jean Dubuffet believed that history and culture, 'asphyxiated' the production of 'true' art. In this sense he understood 'history' as being the traditional school and framework of art, and 'culture' as the intellectual, bourgeois construction whereby conventional values were accepted, and historical traditions were respected.

His passion revolved around the banal and unimpressive forces of nature and human nature alike. In nature he sought out expansive areas of apparent nothingness, (especially the desert) and elements such as rock, earth and soil that were to be found in abandoned rural areas, and would then incorporate these properties into his work. He once maintained that he was a *glutton for banality* (M.Glimcher. 1987. p167) and his paintings were descriptive of this. When seeking an alternative to traditional mainstream art practice, Dubuffet was drawn to the forgotten members of society, for whom the alternative life-style, was often not a chosen path. He sought the work of subcultural 'deviants', for whom a psychiatric asylum was 'home' and would remain so for the rest of their lives, street dwellers and victims of poverty. The art of such people materialised in many different forms, the most notorious of which was urban graffiti. Dubuffet found such lifestyles attractive, and believed that the subsequent production of art was true, intuitive, 'Raw Art'. It seems doubtful, however, that he would have continued to see the appeal of such lifestyles, if he had experienced them first-hand.

In his somewhat privileged position, Dubuffet dedicated most of his professional life to seeking out these art works, and what began as an individual quest for examples of 'otherness', developed into a wider international obsession, and one which remains potent to this day.

Two seemingly disparate art practices that can be adopted here to explain and investigate, the 'language' of Art Brut, are urban graffiti art and Palaeolithic rock art. The term 'language' is a relatively unrestricted one as it can refer, not only to direct verbal communication, but also to the exchange of meaning and interpretation of a message (whether visual, symbolic or textural). It is the latter definition that will be employed throughout this paper.

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Two seemingly disparate art practices that can be adopted here to explain and investigate the 'language' of Art Brut, are urban graffiti art and Paleolithic rock art. The term 'language' is a relatively untested one as it can refer not only to direct verbal communication, but also to the exchange of meaning and interpretation of a message (whether visual, symbolic or textual). It is the latter definition that will be employed throughout this paper.

Graffiti art was a practice which, proved to be directly influential for Dubuffet and the production of his works. It was not only the physical components of graffiti that attracted the attention of Dubuffet, but also the social language adopted by graffiti artists, a language that conveyed potent anarchic messages. The messages were created with the knowledge that they would be viewed by opposing members of the same sub-culture. Palaeolithic rock art can be considered from a similar position. The interpretation of an art produced by a people whose culture, both historically and socially is entirely alien to the West, would be shrouded in ambiguity. Also, a complete and accurate assessment of such works would be somewhat painstaking and would require guess work, this is problematic, and thus, the ambiguity and 'otherness' of the rock art is only intensified

It was the 'otherness' of certain societies and the subsequent art, to which Dubuffet (and other ardent followers) was attracted. This paper is an investigation into the above mentioned art forms, and the relationship between Dubuffet's theories on Art Brut and the reality behind the origins of Raw Art.

Griffin art was a practice which proved to be directly influential for Dadaist and the production of his works. It was not only the physical components of Griffin that attracted the attention of Dadaist, but also the social language adopted by Griffin artists, a language that conveyed potent anarchic messages. The messages were created with the knowledge that they would be viewed by opposing members of the same sub-culture. Polaschko's rock art can be considered from a similar position. The interpretation of an art produced by a people whose culture, both historically and socially is entirely alien to the West, would be shrouded in ambiguity. Also, a complete and accurate assessment of such works would be somewhat painstaking and would require guess work, this is problematic, and thus, the ambiguity and 'otherness' of the rock art is only intensified.

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Chapter 1:

The Climate Surrounding The Conception of Art Brut

Only art that embodies an authentic purete brute (raw purity) can be expected to convey any thing like a true dynamism...All other kinds of art are so to speak 'cooked' according to the fastidious recipes drawn up by the 'chefs' of culture. (M.D.Hall. 1994. p. 64.)

Throughout his life Jean Dubuffet made frequent and often-impudent vocal attacks aimed at the supporters of 'culture'. His intent was to destabilise the foundations of the western mainstream and to introduce and address a variety of 'subcultures' whose life style and artistic practices created an intense interest for the French artist.

Dubuffet was not the first to seek confirmation that a different cultural identity and lifestyle existed and could be explored. In 1916 shortly after the outbreak of the first world war, writer and philosopher Hugo Ball entered Switzerland and founded the 'Cabaret Voltaire', to re-establish a 'new-order' within Western European society that the anxieties of the war had diminished. This became the catalyst around which Ball united all the elements that finally produced the 'Dada' movement.

The ambiguity and confusion that surrounded Dada during those years was not altogether unintended. The term 'Dada' itself is French for 'Wooden horse' which is connotative of the notion of the Trojan horse, 'launching the attack from within' the cultural field. This idea would have concurred with Dubuffet's anti-cultural stance, seeing himself as the "enemy from within" (M.Thevoz 1994. p.63.) Other artists also adopted this position, such as Hans Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp who were all active participants of the Dada movement. To explain their intentions, its founder, Hugo Ball maintained that:

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It is intended to present to the public the activities and interests of the Cabaret Voltaire which has as its sole purpose to draw attention across the barriers of war and nationalism to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals.

(H. Richter. 1965. p 14.)

The Dadaists' maintained that the Western intellectual tradition had gone sorely astray and that to live in, and be subservient to the dominant cultural community was no longer a valid lifestyle. Thus, as Tristan Tzara maintained in his 1918 Dada Manifesto: *Dada was born, out of need for independence, out of mistrust for the community.* (S.C.Foster. 1996 p. 59-60.)

Jean Dubuffet also aspired to an art, which occupied anti-cultural positions, though this time in reaction to the psychologically and physically devastated cultural landscape of post-world war two. He endeavoured to expose the true implications, and what he considered the hypocrisies, of western culture and the artistic mainstream. Dubuffet believed that the defenders of 'culture' were a militant group of people whose aim was to establish an order where by tradition and history were respected. He also maintained that this ideal paralysed and restricted true creativity and that the artistic mainstream was a victim of the confined belief in culture.

In 1918, after six months studying art Dubuffet left the Academie Julian in Paris and never returned to the traditional art education system. This experience left him with a passionate contempt for cultural art institutions, which perhaps explains his relatively late entrance, at 40 years of age, into the literary and artistic avant-garde. Believing that these institutions were organised by intellectuals, he explained his standpoint as follows:

Intellectuals are recruited from the ranks of the dominant class or from among those who aspire to fit in with this class. The title given the intellectual or the artist puts him on equal terms with the members of the dominant caste.

(J.Dubuffet. 1986. p.9)

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In the aftermath of Hitler's occupation of Paris, during the Second World War, the rehabilitation of Western Europe's cultural landscape began. This took on a number of forms, one of which was a renewed interest in the 'Primitive' arts. Primitivism was a conception which had coincided with the beginning of an unprecedented period of Western European colonial expansion. From the seventeenth-century onwards the primitivist ideology was nurtured and fuelled by the discovery of certain artefacts created by 'primitive man'. Geographically and historically, 'primitive man' was located in central and Southern Africa, the Americas and Oceania. Consequent debates about culture throughout the world have been conducted from the position of colonial superiority.

Indeed, the geography of the world was, and still is, described from the same position: the Middle East, the Far East and the West Indies are spatial adjectives perceived from the standpoint of the main metropolitan centres. Extensive fields of knowledge were also constructed from this perspective.

The imposition of foreign (i.e., British, Spanish, French) rule made fundamental alterations to the cultures of the colonised countries. Thus, the social, economic, political, educational and commercial ideologies of the people within those societies (both as individuals and group members) would have been based on, or at least fundamentally influenced by, a consciousness which originated on the other side of the globe. And by a power whose political and financial priorities did not always coincide with those of the people of the colonised community.

It is to such ideologies that Dubuffet was fiercely opposed, and to detract the notion of a 'dominant ideology' was one of his principle objectives:

Even as the Bourgeois caste seeks to convince itself and others that its so called culture (the cheap finery it gives this name) legitimises its preservation, so the Western world also legitimises its imperialist appetite by the urgent need to introduce Africans to Shakespeare and Moliere. (J.Dubuffet. 1986. p.10)

Freedom for Paris (and its artists) came with the liberation of the city in August 1944, thus, after four years of German occupation came peace. As the

in the aftermath of Hitler's occupation of Paris, during the Second World War, the rehabilitation of Western Europe's cultural landscape began. This took on a number of forms, one of which was a renewed interest in the 'Primitive', and Primitivism was a conception which had coincided with the beginning of an unprecedented period of Western European colonial expansion. From the seventeenth-century onwards the primitivist ideology was nurtured and fuelled by the discovery of certain artefacts created by 'primitive man'. Geographically and historically, 'primitive man' was located in central and Southern Africa, the Americas and Oceania. Constant debates about culture throughout the world have been conducted from the position of colonial superiority.

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occupying forces retreated, in their wake came revelations of Nazi atrocities which along with the atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, introduced a devastating new consciousness individually and culturally throughout the Western world. Not surprisingly, the post-war anxiety and subsequent rehabilitation of Western Europe's psychologically and physically damaged landscape opened new doors and created fresh but sombre opportunities for artists, writers, theorists, philosophers and other members of the cultural avant- garde. As an influential member of the above mentioned group, Simone de Beauvoir commented: *The war was over, it remained on our hands like a great unwanted corps, and there was no place on earth to bury it* (F.Morris. pg.15)

Although Dubuffet only emerged as a professional painter in 1942, by 1946 not only had he coined the term 'Art-Brut' but also his work had been the focus of interest by writers, Jean Paulhan, Georges Limbour and Michel Tapie. Also, a significant contributor to the post-war artistic climate, the philosopher and playwright, Jean-Paul Sartre was said to have been an early admirer of Dubuffet's works. Sartre was the author of the influential philosophical publication 'Being and Nothingness' which was initially published in occupied Paris in 1943. He offered a new angle regarding mainstream art and culture and called upon artists, such as Dubuffet and Alfred Wolfgang Schulze, to make art 'without preconceptions'. Dubuffet immersed himself in the post-war surge of creative activity but at the same time actively rejected the ideals of mainstream art, later stating that:

Soon the emptiness of (these) professional academic works, the inappropriateness of the commercial activity to which they give rise, the absurdity of the commentaries surrounding them and the overall lack of true creativity will become apparent. True art in our opinion lies elsewhere. (J.Dubuffet 1986. p.110)

Dubuffet believed that the creators of 'professional academic works', were heavily reliant upon the history of painting, and were reluctant to venture outside the perimeters of mainstream art culture. He regarded these works with the belief that 'true' creativity had been suffocated, and that external cultural influences had

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resulted in a 'preconceived' art that did not deserve to be categorised as 'true art'. Of course this notion was purely subjective, as Dubuffet himself, being an impulsive writer, employed the term 'true art' which fell within his own subjective ideology and relied upon his own preconceptions.

One of the artists with whom Dubuffet empathised, was Alfred Schulze (or 'Wols'). Wols spent much of the war in internment and his dramatic and dissolute lifestyle as well as his subsequent obsessive art, stemming from his first hand experiences of Nazi war crimes, fascinated Dubuffet (and others, such as Sartre). Dubuffet's primary interest was concerned with the 'language' of works by artists such as 'Wols'. To categorise or 'name' the works of such artists, within the perimeters of the cultural mainstream would, according to Dubuffet, eradicate it and render its message and intent meaningless. Thus, an alternative language had to be employed when referring to such works that had been executed in an abnormally traumatic environment.

The significance of 'language' perhaps explains why partnerships between established writers and obscure artists were not unusual Dubuffet himself frequently attracted the attention of writers. One of the most significant of these was Jean Paulhan whose relationship with Dubuffet later developed into the formation of, the 'Compagnie de l'Art Brut' (Company of Raw Art) in 1948.

Dubuffet's initial interest in categories of art and culture which flourished outside the academic mainstream was encouraged by a trip he undertook to Switzerland in 1923, where he received Dr Hans Prinzhorn's influential book, Artistry of the Mentally ill. Long before Dubuffet turned to painting as a profession he was intensely fascinated by the art and culture of social misfits, anarchists, marginals and any people propelled by deviant impulses. He sought an art that was liberated from social compromise, and the social and cultural destabilisation of Western Europe as a result of the Second World War only heightened and intensified this drive.

In 1945, Jean Dubuffet again made frequent visits to Switzerland, this time in the company of Jean Paulhan. These visits to psychiatric hospitals cemented his interest in what he was later to describe as 'Art Brut'. When translated into English

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this term is self-explanatory providing a clear indication of the aims and intentions of the 'Art Brut' Society.

During his visits to Swiss psychiatric hospitals Dubuffet had been assiduously collecting material consisting of drawings and paintings produced by the patients. By 1947 the size of his collection was substantial enough to open a small institute in Paris known as the 'Foyer de l'Art Brut'.

The concept of 'Art Brut' embraced not only the art of the clinically insane, but also any art of an 'untutored', spontaneous nature, such as the pictorial efforts of children, the automatic writings of mediums and clairvoyants, and the anonymous urban scrawlings of graffiti artists. Small exhibits of items from the 'Foyer de l'Art Brut' collection attracted enough general public interest for Dubuffet to expand, and in 1948 the 'Compagnie de l'Art Brut' was founded by Dubuffet himself in conjunction with friends and colleagues, Andre Breton, Charles Ratton, Henri-Pierre Roche, Michel Tapie and Jean Paulhan. Dubuffet's initial conception of 'Art Brut' had evolved into the substantial ideology of the 'Art Brut' society, the theories of which were becoming widely known and appreciated throughout Europe. This promoted a discourse within the mainstream art world in which Dubuffet was initially a reluctant participant.

The Compagnie de l'Art Brut was a vehicle for the dispersion of the theories of the Art Brut Society. In 1964, a series of richly illustrated publications appeared, many written by Dubuffet himself, comprising studies of all the significant artists of interest, such as Heinrich Anton Muller, Jeanne Tripiet and others. In writing of the work of one of the above-mentioned artists, Heinrich Anton Muller, Dubuffet claimed that:

"The creation of art is so worthless when it does not originate in a state of alienation and when it fails to offer a new conception of the world and new principles for living." (F.Morris. 1993. p.27).

Muller's state of 'alienation' presumably arose from the fact that he spent a significant part of his life, institutionalised, and contact with the outside world was

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During his visits to Swiss psychiatric hospitals Dabuloff had been assiduously collecting material consisting of drawings and paintings produced by the patients. By 1947 the size of his collection was substantial enough to open a small institute in Paris known as the 'Foyer de l'Art Brat'.

The concept of 'Art Brat' embraced not only the art of the clinically insane, but also any art of an 'unthought', spontaneous nature, such as the pictorial efforts of children, the automatic writings of mediums and clairvoyants, and the anonymous urban scrawlings of graffiti artists. Small exhibits of items from the 'Foyer de l'Art Brat' collection attracted enough general public interest for Dabuloff to expand, and in 1948 the 'Compagnie de l'Art Brat' was founded by Dabuloff himself in conjunction with friends and colleagues, Andre Breton, Charles Ranson, Henri-Pierre Kochet, Michel Tapié and Jean Paulhan. Dabuloff's initial conception of 'Art Brat' had evolved into the substantial ideology of the 'Art Brat' society, the theories of which were becoming widely known and appreciated throughout Europe. This promoted a discourse within the mainstream art world in which Dabuloff was initially a reluctant participant.

The 'Compagnie de l'Art Brat' was a vehicle for the dispersion of the theories of the 'Art Brat' Society. In 1961 a series of richly illustrated publications appeared, many written by Dabuloff himself, comprising studies of all the significant artists of interest, such as Heinrich Anton Müller, Jeanne Tapié and others. In writing of the work of one of the above-mentioned artists, Heinrich Anton Müller, Dabuloff claimed that

"The creation of art is so worthless when it does not originate in a state of alienation and when it fails to offer a new conception of the world and new principle of being." (Müller 1963, p.27)

Müller's state of 'alienation' presumably arose from the fact that he spent a significant part of his life institutionalised, and contact with the outside world was

fundamentally limited. There was ambiguity surrounding his clinical condition, however, as no diagnosis was ever given. The significance of the illness these patients suffered, may not have been the primary source of interest for Dubuffet, as Muller's work was significant to the Art Brut Society, regardless, it would seem, of diagnosis. The motive for his initial institutionalisation, remained unknown and perhaps being so dramatically cut off from the outside world was a sufficient enough reason to induce the artist to create Art Brut works, whether insane or not.

Dubuffet often wrote about artists such as Muller, and was in fact considered to be an unusually gifted writer, commanding considerable respect within literary circles. Jean-Jacques Gautier maintained that he considered Dubuffet to be "*one of the great writers of today*" (F.Morris. 1993. p79). Dubuffet's position in the literary field was not dissimilar to that which he held in the artistic field, as he viewed many academic writers with the same contempt as mainstream art and artists. It would seem to be the case that the members of the Art Brut Society enjoyed this apparent hypocrisy. For example, Dubuffet, an artist and writer whose work commanded respect within the academic perimeters of art and culture, was adamant to maintain a position that would attempt to break down those same perimeters.

Dubuffet however, invited us to consider himself from the point of view of an "Artist, not a writer." Maintaining that:

If I choose to paint to express my-self, it is because I do it better through painting than through writing. Trust my paintings, not my writings. (M.Glimcher. 1987. p 3.)

Dubuffet, although remaining throughout a subversive 'agent provocateur' within the cultural landscape of post-war Paris, maintained a wry humour when attempting to liberate the public as well as himself from intellectual oppression.

Art is, of course, essentially reprehensible! And useless! And anti social, subversive, and dangerous! And if it's not all these things, then it's counterfeit money, it's an empty mannequin, a sack of potatoes. (M.Glimcher. 1987 p 33)

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It was remarks such as these that cemented his reputation as an impulsive and subversive character, and although taking his work seriously, at the same time, through his work, he was able to address the irony and contradictory humor that he observed in his own culture and society.

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Chapter 2: The Influence of Graffiti

Although Jean Dubuffet's conception of 'Art Brut' and the formation of the Art Brut Society initiated from Dubuffet's encounter with the art of the insane, there were other sources and examples of 'Brut' material to which the society was attracted. One such source, which provided a suitably rich source of anarchic iconography, was modern urban graffiti.

Dubuffet began to utilise the language of such imagery, which provided a parallel to his exploration of 'matter' in painting. This interest was possibly initiated in 1944 when Dubuffet met the photographer, Gilberte Brassai. Brassai had been recording and mapping the imagery of contemporary urban Parisian graffiti since the 1930's and Dubuffet showed more than a passing interest.

The photographs by Brassai illustrated a kind of raw, spontaneous anti-cultural imagery (see fig. 1) and exposed the political language and the roots of graffiti to such an extent that Dubuffet was immediately fascinated. graffiti provided him with a range of imagery, which he considered to be the essence of urban life – downbeat and harsh - and which displayed its own anarchic language. It also provided an appropriate example of the underground activities of the 'common man', Dubuffet stated that he himself was: *Passionate to be the common man of the lowest level.* (M.D.Hall. 1994 p.60.) and sometime later, in 1973, he titled a collection of his own writings, 'L'homme du commun a L'ouvrage' (The common man at work).

For Dubuffet, graffiti not only illustrated the kind of brutality and raw, on-the-street activity that he embraced, but they also enhanced the physical qualities of the wall matter, damaged and battered by warfare as well as by the anonymous frenetic scrawlings of the mark-makers (fig.2). As far as the Art Brut Society was concerned, Parisian graffiti represented a sub-culture whose anti-cultural position and political message, was akin to that which the Art Brut Society sought out and embraced.

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Dubuffet's position with reference to graffiti differed somewhat to that of his stance regarding the art of the insane. For him the primary significance of graffiti

was drawn from the consideration of his own work, and how he could utilise the physical properties. From a technical aspect the process of excavating an image from a physically resistant surface owes much to graffiti, a process that appeared to be significant to Dubuffet, and the execution of his works. The overlaying of images and convoluted compositions are prime examples of how the influence of graffiti manifested itself in Dubuffet's works, an example of this is 'Paysage a Lauto' (1953). Tapie found in works such as this a sort of: *Living matter, working its perpetual magic*. (F.Morris.1993. p.79.) Other critics used language such as, 'excrement' and 'filth' to describe Dubuffet's works. For his part Dubuffet argued that art should be a 'battle', a competitive engagement between the artist and his/her medium and tools, and that the finished piece should retain the physical scars of that struggle.

There are a number of his paintings that illustrate this interest in the 'raw brutality' of graffiti, one of which being, Lecture au Sol, (1957). In this piece (as with many of his paintings) the traditional form has been almost entirely obliterated and the linear, rough scrawling is descriptive of the influential, physical qualities found in graffiti. Other examples of this influence are; Paysage a L'auto (Landscape with car) and, more typically, Mur aux Inscriptions (Wall with inscriptions). In both cases the artist has borrowed the symbolism and potent imagery, that is normally associated with graffiti (figs.3&4).

The materials and mediums employed in Dubuffet's paintings contributed significantly to the totality of his works. According to Michel Tapie, Dubuffet's works were:

Ranging from the substance of putty to the coloured liquid that he applies in 'streams'.... Dubuffet pours and blends with this sand, gravel, tar, heavy varnish, plaster mixed with water and oil, small stones... glass etc.

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...coming from the substance of putty to the coloured liquid that he applies in 'surrealism'... Dubuffet pours and bleeds with this sand, gravel, fat, heavy cream, plaster mixed with water and oil, sand, stones, glass, etc. (F. Morris, 1993, p.79).

Dubuffet's preoccupation with formal substances and anti-Western cultural positions prompted him to make three visits to the North African desert, between

1947 and 1949, learning Arabic between the first and second trips. His fascination with the texture and colour of the African landscape (especially the African desert) was complementary to his interest in graffiti, both interests stemming from a desire to return to the origins of art and shed cultural constraints.

As mentioned previously, the material or 'substance' as (it was referred to, by Dubuffet) was of primary significance for him. Indeed, preoccupation with surface and material was a common artistic concern for many post-war artists. But unlike Fautrier and Tapie for example, Dubuffet's works often consisted of materials not traditionally used for an artistic purpose. These banal materials such as tar, glass and sand and their manner of use challenged the traditional methods of painting and in using such material Dubuffet was thereby revealing how the 'common man' would utilise his or her environment without the funds nor the desire to use conventional materials. In 1945 Dubuffet stated that: *Art should be born from the material, spiritually should borrow the language of the material. Each material has its own language and is a language.* (M.Glimcher. 1987. p. 8.)

It was the textural qualities of the surface on which the graffiti artists worked, as well as the medium used that caught Dubuffet's eye.

Dubuffet was not the first to express fascination with scoring and scraping into heavy materials. Paulhan had introduced him to Jean Fautrier in 1943 and by this time Fautrier was already established in his career. Fautrier's thickly impastoed 'Otage' imagery presented a new relationship between the image and material, a relationship that Dubuffet was interested in conveying in his own paintings. Such a relationship was considered 'Primitive' by some commentators, Francis Ponge for example, who drew a parallel between Fautrier's 'Otage' paintings and African masks.

But for Dubuffet, the 'Primitive' was more of a 'state of consciousness' rather than a historical category. Those living on the margins of the prevailing culture were of particular interest to him, who once described himself as a, "Presentist, an ephemeralist" (M.Glimcher. 1987. p1.) and stated in 1963 that: *Art by its very essence is of the new... There is only one healthy diet for artistic creation, that of permanent revolution.* (F.Morris. 1993. p79.) Therefore the Art Brut

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Society's definition of the 'Primitive' differed from that given by the nineteenth century 'Primitivists'. The artists and writers working within this discourse, were influenced by many artefacts that were discovered by the early colonialists, which implied that, in many cases, these objects were over a hundred years old.

Unlike the art of the clinically insane, which is self-explanatory, the origins of graffiti art were much more ambiguous complicated by the fact that the artists themselves often remained anonymous. It was this anonymity which created the mysticism and 'Otherness' within graffiti. The limited accessibility due to the impermanence of the art, and anarchic nature of these art forms, are possible explanations, firstly as to why they were disregarded from consideration by the mainstream art world, and secondly the embrace of such works, by the Art brut Society.

The language and symbolism of graffiti, which adorned so many buildings and walls of post-war Paris, were of a nature that concurred with Dubuffet's theories. Although in many ways graffiti were arguably the essence of urban lifestyle and culture at that time, they also strongly represented a sub-culture as the work of the artists was considered by many to be mere vandalism. The language of graffiti also took on many different forms: an expression of protest, the establishment of boundary markers, the development of a language that sought to intimidate the ordinary citizen and the desire to create an identity for the individual or group making the graffiti. Whatever the case, the symbolism represented an anarchic ideology, which was alien to society. Furthermore an iconography was being developed which, according to the Art Brut Society, was a more valuable description of the times than that to be found in mainstream art. As Simone de Beauvoir asserted:

The category of the 'other' is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies one finds the expression of a duality – that of the self and the 'other'... No group ever sets itself up as the one without at once setting up the 'other' over and against itself. (S.Hiller. 1991. pg. 33).

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This also functions as an appropriate description of the correlation between, for example, the position of urban graffiti verses mainstream Western art. The same ideology can be employed to describe a similar duality between what the members of the Art brut Society originally represented and the significance they attributed to 'raw art'. Dubuffet was thus accurate in his description of himself as being one who "launches the attack from within".

The term 'Outsider art', now widely used to describe the work of social misfits, 'eccentrics', religious visionaries and the inmates of prisons, city slum dwellers and the streets was coined by British scholar, Roger Cardinal in the early 1970s. His writing, as well as much of the subsequent commentary in the field, was drawn from the inspiration of Dubuffet and his Art Brut ideology. The supporters of Art Brut or 'Outsider art' ideology, believed that they were opposing the tyranny of the established order and the system of 'official' culture which, as Dubuffet asserted, "asphyxiates" true creativity. This stance, however, was not unlike that of the Romantic ideology which also sought to distinguish itself from the mainstream, as Cardinal argues:

Outsider art is a force in motion which contests the authority of the central establishment and maintains a posture of dissidence in the face of the influences to which it is subject... Alienation represents a chosen path leading to a position of deliberate differentness and hence of creative originality.

(R.Cardinal. 1972. p 32)

This is problematic as, in this case, such a judgement is made from the consideration of Western mainstream culture and therefore evoking the position of 'us' and 'them'. To suggest that "Alienation represents a chosen path" in (reference to) the art of psychiatric patients is a presumptive position to adopt. To maintain that such a painful lifestyle was a deliberately 'chosen' path for these patients is clearly an assumption which cannot be substantiated.

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Within other Art Brut sources, "Romantic" sentiments were being adopted also, invoking themes of "purity", "innocence" and "unselfconscious nature", again

restoring the 'Primitivist' ideology towards tribal cultures when discoveries were made during the time of European colonial expansion.

Certain aspects of a 1957 painting by Dubuffet entitled; 'Lecture au Sol' (Reading the soil – fig.5) illustrate influences both from graffiti and from the time he spent in North Africa, to explain some of the consequences of his trip he observed that:

Perhaps it was the time I spent in the deserts of white Africa that sharpened my taste...for the little, the almost nothing and especially in my art for the landscapes where one finds only the formless. (M.Glimcher. 1987.p.9)

It could be a safe assumption to suggest that the visual flattening caused by the intensity of the light and expansive desert affected his approach to landscape, in 'Lecture au Sol' this effect is illustrated in the fragmentation of form and loss of figuration.

At around the same time as 'Lecture au Sol' was completed Dubuffet's motivation by the natural environment intensified. In fact 'Lecture au Sol' was one of the early pieces in a series of large paintings executed with the intention of 'celebrating the soil'. For Dubuffet it was not the extra-ordinary or picturesque that attracted him, it was the banal and common place, abandoned pieces of earth, large or small, that would be found in the country and suburban areas of France.

Before 1958 he had been using collage in many of his 'Topographies' to elaborate the backgrounds of the works, but in 1958 he abandoned the use of collage in what was considered a significant departure. Shortly following this period of his career, as the decade drew to a close the series he entitled 'Barbes' (Beards), 'Elements Botaniques' (Botanical elements), and 'Materiologies' appeared as the culmination of seventeen years which were dominated by intense studies of the language between 'matter' and 'form'. The 'Barbe' paintings synthesised his interest in the grotesque and the ugly, as well as in texture. He once stated that: *Beauty is a pure secretion of culture as gall-stones are of the liver* (M.Glimcher 1987. p.9) He

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wished to challenge all the traditional ideologies surrounding landscape painting and portraiture.

The deviant and somewhat rebellious behaviour and use of language for which Dubuffet became renowned was also adopted by graffiti artists as was apparent through their use of an almost tribal language and iconography. Furthermore, not unlike Dubuffet himself, they attracted controversy wherever they appeared. The fundamental difference, however, between graffiti art and many other branches of the Art Brut category was the awareness of an artistic language and the use of imagery with an audience in mind.

The ambiguity surrounding the graffiti and the anonymity of its creators produced an enticing language and one, which Dubuffet was willing to adopt. As he once stated: *Art is a language, an instrument of cognition and communication.* (F.Morris. 1993. p.79.).

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Figure 1:

Photograph by Gilbert Brassai
'Birth of the Face, Belleville'. 1989.



Figure 2:

Photograph by R.Reynolds
Taken from 'Magic Symbols'. 1975.



Figure 3:

By Jean Dubuffet
'Paysage a L'auto'

August 1953. Oil on Canvas.



Figure 4:

By Jean Dubuffet
'Mur Aux Inscriptions'

April 1945. Oil on Canvas.



Figure 5:

By Jean Dubuffet
'Lecture au Sol'

July 1957. Oil on Canvas

Chapter 3: Palaeolithic Rock Art, as a Member of Art Brut

In 1967 an important exhibition of Art Brut was mounted at the 'Musée des Arts décoratifs', and the catalogue for this exhibition was prefaced by Dubuffet's text, 'Place à L'incivisme' (Make way for Barbarism) in which he explained his position as follows: *The aim of our enterprise is to seek out works that as far as possible escape cultural conditioning and proceed from truly original mental attitudes.* (J.Dubuffet. 1986. p.110)

This definition of Art Brut is a relatively ambiguous one as to substantiate that a, 'Truly original mental attitude' exists within many of the members of Art brut, would be difficult.

Folk art, children's art and graffiti art for example would not necessarily originate from a state that was free from some form of cultural conditioning. In fact graffiti art was created as a political or individual response in opposition to society, so a form of cultural conditioning must be present for this mentality to exist. Yet all the above mentioned art forms (folk art, children's art and graffiti) were indeed considered Art Brut. However, under certain conditions, the society rejected works that would normally have been included. For example, works by psychiatric patients who had received any form of guidance from doctors', were refused admission into the Art Brut category. For the Art Brut Society to establish and maintain a static definition of the art forms, which were considered 'Raw' would be almost a negation of the nature of Art Brut as being an unpredictable, changeable force.

As there were many different contributors to 'Art Brut', such as insanity, social reasons, emotional immaturity - it could be argued that art forms previously not considered could, in theory, be categorised as 'Brut'.

In 1940 a discovery of tremendous interest was made in France. The Cave paintings found at the prehistoric caves at Lascaux proved to be a significant catalyst for a renewed passion for prehistoric and Primitive art. Only a few years previously in 1933, some of the most successful exploration and research records to date, of the prehistoric cave paintings (or 'Rock' paintings) of North and Central Africa were catalogued and copied by French archaeologist, Henry Lhote. Following the

In 1907 an important exhibition of Art Brut was mounted at the Musée des Arts décoratifs, and the catalogue for this exhibition was prefaced by Dadaïst's text, *Place à l'Inconnu* (Make way for Barbarism) in which he explained his position as follows: The aim of our enterprise is to seek out works that as far as possible escape cultural conditioning and proceed from truly original mental attitudes. (Dadaïst 1986 p.110)

This definition of Art Brut is a relatively ambiguous one as to substantiate that a 'truly original mental attitude' exists within many of the members of Art Brut would be difficult.

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discovery of these paintings in the Sahara there was a surge of activity and many more were discovered in the Central and Southeast regions of the continent.

Subsequently the post-war years proved witness to a great expansion in Western societies' knowledge of prehistoric eras, both through fresh discoveries and through the later publications of much Palaeolithic painting, by (Western) anthropologists and archaeologists such as Lhote. Such art was considered, by the mainstream art world, to be 'Primitive'. Despite sociological, cultural and historical dissimilarities between this art and certain Western Modernist art forms, the language of the rock art and its purposes may not have differed to a huge extent, from that of the urban graffiti of Dubuffet's era. The potent iconography and symbolism in certain Southeast African rock paintings created by the 'San' (Bushmen), for example, represented mythical symbols, rituals designed to overcome danger, invoke fertility and depict aspects of the lifestyle of the society concerned.

These particular societies thrived around 13,000 years ago, and although descendants of the people are still living to this day, the makers of rock art vanished centuries ago. The imagery remaining however stands as strong testament to how these people lived, and is descriptive of their cultures and societies. Any correlation between rock art and the urban scrawlings of graffiti artists may appear to be a loose one, but the engravings and the surface upon which they worked, emit strong resemblances. Both cultures attempted to record and depict aspects of their society with no prior artistic teachings. In both cases the art produced by the artists was categorised as 'primitive', as Daniel Miller maintained:

Most of what is termed 'Primitive' is an equally contradictory construction, consisting of artefacts produced by peoples without a concept of 'Primitivism' for a peoples who utilise those artefacts to objectify this concept. (S.Hillar. 1991. p. 50)

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Dubuffet once claimed that he wished to 'draw the human image immediately into the range of effectiveness without passing through the

aesthetic. (R.Cardinal. 1972. p.12) In so doing he discarded all the traditional means such as perspective, proportion, as well as traditional concepts of beauty, and accepted artistic subjects in favour of simple frontal and profile views, when addressing portraiture. The simplification of form is a common feature of the symbols from rock paintings (fig. 6). An example of this in Dubuffet's work is 'Langage des Caves' (1958) where it is apparent that Dubuffet has scored into the medium, rejecting fine linear aspects in the drawing (fig. 7)

In his book, 'Primitivism and Modern art' Colin Rhodes commented that: *In images of this sort the artist seems to attack the painted surface with the aggression of one scoring marks into a wall.* (C.Rhodes. 1994. p. 52)

There is a distinct correlation made here between these works by Dubuffet and graffiti art, suggested by the language Rhodes employs, of 'aggression' and 'scoring'. This language is consistent with the common association between graffiti, and it representing aggressive gang behaviour, and an anti-social subculture.

Rock artists and graffiti artists seldom took any account of the textures, or even extreme changes in the colours of the rock or other surfaces on which they painted (fig.8). They painted over stains and across fresh exfoliation scars, and generally ignored humps or hollows, impurities or chance shapes created by colour or texture. Such a method is one that Dubuffet concurred with and often utilised in his own works. Dubuffet rejected a refined tentative methodology when approaching his work and when commenting on the validity of other works. For him the process of utilising banal objects as tools, and as part of the medium, was the essence of 'Raw Art'.

One of his aims was to discard the notion that art has to aspire to beauty as defined, of course, by the cultural mandarins. For pigments the rock artists dug out nodules of various ironstones or iron oxides such as 'hematite', and magnetite. These would have been pounded, crushed and rubbed to a fine powder using pestles and mortars. Iron oxides gave colours in every shade and intensity from the deepest reds, to browns, ochre's and yellows; as these were earth or mineral based the intensity of the colours that are seen today, are thought to have remained unchanged since the time the paintings were made. The artists chose their media to ensure that

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they produced a paint that did not discolour, remained dense was opaque and fluid and easily manipulated, clung to the rock surface and then dried rapidly.

There are various accounts of the descendants of the San people in Zimbabwe using brushes made from the hairs of animals, chewed sticks and almost anything that could be used to manipulate the paint. It would, therefore, be safe to assume that the original cave painters also worked with similar materials. Rock paintings have been found which incorporate handprints, also a recurrent theme in graffiti works. The artists in both cases not only painted on rough walls but also engraved symbols, icons of the time, and other images onto the surface. Furthermore, in the case of the rock artists, they used sticks, rock, bone and horn etc. as well as prehistoric equivalents of pieces of metal, knives and other sharp tools, as used by the modern graffiti artist.

It has been argued that one of the instigators of the fascination held by Europeans for Tribal cultures, was the eighteenth century philosopher, Montaigne. He was thought to have 'softened the ground' for writers and thinkers in the latter part of that century, (S.Hiller. 1991 p.137) through his essay on 'cannibalism' he maintained that:

Each man calls barbarism what ever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems that we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. (S.Hiller. 1991 p.138)

He acknowledged that difference is inherent in this concept, as did Simone de Beauvoir in the 1945 existentialist novel, 'Blood of others'. When she observed that the 'Primitive' viewed either positively or negatively is always a manifestation of the 'other'. Jean Dubuffet and his supporters, though not considered traditional 'Primitivists', would be included here as they were influenced by European and non-European Primitives.

Fairly recently in 1990, a similar ideology to that of de Beauvoir was highlighted when J. Rutherford, asserted that: *What is 'alien' represents otherness.* (J.Rutherford. 1990. p.4). This notion of the 'other' is one that has pervaded the

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centuries possibly originating with Montaigne, over two hundred years ago. Writers, theorists and artists have since that time, engaged with this concept, and in some cases, made it the central issue for their work.

Dubuffet's interest in 'Primitive' and conceptual connections between his work and Palaeolithic rock art, concurred with Adolph Gottlieb's explanation for the fascination with the Primitivist ideology, by modernist artists.

All Primitive expression reveals the constant awareness of powerful forces, the immediate presence of terror and fear, a recognition of the terror of the animal world as well as the eternal insecurities of life... to us an art that glosses over or evades these feelings is superficial and meaningless."

(S.Hiller. 1991. p.54)

The Art Brut Society would certainly have professed kinship to this attitude, believing as they did, that art should be instinctive and express spontaneous 'raw' values. The fact that mystification and ambiguity surrounded rock art was not surprising. The anonymity of the artists and lack of concrete evidence to substantiate claims regarding the culture, from which the works originated, created the mystification. And the intervening millennia between their creation and their discovery by westerners created the ambiguity. The language of works such as these and their contemporary urban counterpart, graffiti was perceived as strange, inaccessible and impenetrable by the modernist western culture. So, for Western artists such as Dubuffet to adopt and utilise aspects of this language into their work was almost expected.

Twentieth century researchers of the cultural 'individual' have been particularly fixated on the 'other' and in the interest of defining their own art, modern westerners unrelentingly studied and collected the work of 'others', Dubuffet being a prime example.

The Rock art seems now to represent the, *opposite of the great monuments and architecture of modern civilisations* (R.Layton.1991.p38) according to the anthropologist, P.Garlake. They have to be laboriously searched out and it is likely

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that there exist hundreds of caves containing these works which, as yet, lie undiscovered by anthropologists.

Dubuffet maintained that true Art Brut must be executed with little or no regard given to a potential viewer or audience. It was suspected that much of the symbolism within rock painting was considered and used as a type of 'spiritual barrier', to ward off certain spirits in which the people believed, or as a celebration of other spirits. Therefore it could be maintained that the primary significance of these works was not intended to be the analysis as works of art and viewing by other people. In addition, as there appears to be no evidence that much of the work was personalised (with the occasional exception of hand-prints) it can be deduced that the artists had little or no interest in personal commendation.

Palaeolithic rock art was the work of a people whose culture mystified Western societies. Unlike the works of many other 'Primitive' cultures, rock art could not be easily removed or placed in a Gallery or Museum. Access to such works was largely limited to (and regulated by) archaeologists who made the influential discoveries in the 1930s and 1940s, and to the media who published the photographs of the works. This is ironic as these works were exposed to Western Europe, precisely by the representatives of culture who were so bitterly despised by Dubuffet and the Art Brut Society.

If the term 'style' can be used in a broad sense as the expression of an ideology or epoch, then the style of the rock art of South East Africa appears to be a single, unchanging whole. If the term is used in a restricted sense of an aggregate of ready made formal devices, there can be little doubt that the art witnessed many changes in style, both regional and temporal. It has been attempted to discern styles of painting and to place them in chronological sequences. Some have defined styles by colour or techniques (e.g. paintings in solid colour are assigned to a different category to those relying on pure line.) And then there are 'movements' assigned to the rock paintings which consist of, 'classical', 'geometric', 'naturalistic' or 'impressionistic' (fig.9). The source of such categorisation can only be of the authorities of Modernity, which is in itself problematic, as Lynne Cooke described in the 'Myth of Primitivism',

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Direct contact with tribal objects has not only been mediated and conditioned by Sunday supplements, television documentaries and advertising, it has almost been superseded by such intermediaries...

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Every culture has a 'language' which is peculiar to that society, Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist, dissected language through semiotics. But artists such as Dubuffet were interested in the interpretation of a message, whether textual, visual or symbolic and believed that through that interpretation an identity is produced by the culture concerned.

With the constant movement and contortion to identity, in the modern era, it is not surprising that ideologies have been affected by this. The Art Brut ideology, although an active contestant to the concept of a static European identity, at the same time, was inextricably intertwined within that identity as the conception of Art Brut was partly a reaction to cultural isolation and society's confusion following the second world war. As Roger Cardinal asked *Can art be conceived that is not cultural?* (R.Cardinal.1972 p.7) Dubuffet maintained that indeed it could, and although not originally named as an intrinsic member by the Art Brut Society, the Palaeolithic rock art of South East Africa did warrant inclusion as an assumed indigenous, non-academic, self taught art form.

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Figure 6:

Photograph, Taken From 'The Rock Art of Africa'
By A.R. Willcox. Bowman. Masange, Central Tanzania.



Figure 7:

By Jean Dubuffet:
'Langage des Caves X1'

October 1958. Oil on Canvas.



Figure 8:

Photograph Taken From 'Magic Symbols'
R.Reynolds 1975: Location Unknown.



Figure 9:

Photograph Taken From: 'The Rock Art of Africa'
A.R. Willcox. Group of Eland: Rhodes.
Petroglyph of Circle and Ray design: Redan.

Chapter 4: Soft-Primitivism and the Outsider

The British critic, Roger Cardinal, in his book, 'Outsider Art' cited that,

All avant-garde revolutions in art turn into history: the slap in the face of culture given by Dada has now been framed and hung on the museum wall.
(R.Cardinal 1972.pg. 9.)

It seems also that the Art Brut ideology suffered a similar fate, though the theories of the society continue to flow through the literary and artistic cultural mainstream to this day.

In the 1970s, Cardinal re-evaluated and popularised the Art Brut ideology, in the U.K. His intention was to broaden the categorisation of Art Brut and attempt to modify the definition to include a more extensive variety of artists working within that discourse. Cardinal re-named Art Brut as 'Outsider Art', maintaining that he proposed to,

Shift ground retaining those elements of Dubuffet's original thinking which still seem relevant in order to address Outsider Art in wider terms, both as a general concept and as an acknowledged international phenomenon.
(M.D.Hall 1994. pg. 21.)

He did indeed retain many of Dubuffet's original theories, stressing on several occasions that his more contemporary manifestation was merely an extension of the Art Brut ideology. His American colleague, Roger Manley, described Outsider Artists as being ordinary individuals who are not part of the art world and who have 'no conception of themselves as artists' (M.D.Hall. p22). Manley used language such as potent, evocative, provocative, intensely personal, unselfconscious, enigmatic, obsessive, brutal, exotic etc. to describe Outsider Art.

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the Outsider ideology rendered these theories more accessible and they subsequently emerged as being significant within the international Art framework. The notion of the 'Other' has been the subject of current debate within the boundaries of social theory, as well as art theory and practice, and is still the object of tireless fascination.

After centuries of circulation, from colonialism to art movements such as Primitivism, the continual fascination with 'Otherness' resulting in positive and negative categorisations, continues to thrive. The significant intellectual movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Romanticism, embraced an artistic philosophy of 'escape'. The Romantic ideology positioned the artist as a prophet and visionary responsible for the world's moral and spiritual enlightenment, certainly not the image that the Outsider Art foundation (or its predecessor) would wish to entertain. Joanne Cubbs wrote in the 'Artist Outsider' that the 'Other' debate is,

Central to a contest between Modern and Post-modern critical sensibilities, between those who affirm arts transcendent, universal nature and those who characterise those ideals as mythic and negligent of particular social and cultural realities (M.D.Hall 1994. pg.77)

It would be (on the surface) the latter position that was adopted by Dubuffet.

Within the Primitivist ideology there are also aspects of Romanticism, which are brought to mind. The so-called simplicity and naivete of certain cultures considered 'Primitive' by Western society were depicted and idealised through visual and literary mediums. An arrogant position to adopt, though one which has been adopted over the years.

The Post-modern stance regarding the theories of outsider art is now known as 'Soft primitivism' (as defined by Krauss) one of the artists working within this discourse shortly after the term 'outsider art' was coined, was Jean Michel Basquiat. Ironically it was he who was described as: *heir to Dubuffet's sophisticated assimilation's* (L.Cooke.1991.pg 147) and although he was no longer working within the discourse, by which Dubuffet was inspired, his later imagery was potent

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The Post-modern stance regarding the theories of outsider art is now known as 'Soft Primitivism' (as defined by Krauss) one of the artists working within this discourse shortly after the term 'outsider art' was coined, was Jean Michel Basquiat. Ironically it was he who was described as 'how to Dubuffet's *swastika*' (Greenwood, 1991, p. 147) and although he was no longer working within the discourse by which Dubuffet was inspired, his later imagery was potent

with primitivist symbolism. Basquiat began 'writing' his brand of graffiti throughout Manhattan, New York in 1976. Initially his work was produced under the 'sobriquet' 'SAMO', but he soon 'graduated' from the walls of subways to the canvases and galleries of Soho.

This progression, as seen through the eyes of the mainstream art world, would have meant immediate de-valuation in the eyes of Jean Dubuffet. Infact shortly before Basquiat aspired to artistic stardom Dubuffet went to America for his own 1973 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum. Whilst there an interviewer, knowing that a number of the French artists early works were inspired by street art and graffiti, asked for his opinion on the latter day graffiti covering the walls and subways of New York. Dubuffet complained that: *It's not so spontaneously savage not so.... criminal it's a little aesthetic.*(F.Morris. 1993 p78)

The symbolism used by Basquiat consisted of frequent use of the skull, bones, skeletonized figures, and arrows (fig 10). Not surprisingly there are strong iconographic resemblances between Basquiat's works and the crowded imagery and overlaying of aggressive scored symbols, and certain early works by Dubuffet. In 1983, when his career as a successful artist was established, Jean-Michel Basquiat agreed to sit for an interview, conducted by Henry Geldzahler. At one point Basquiat commented that he believed his work was about: *eighty percent anger* (H.Geldzahler. 1994 p205)

Paradoxically Basquiat, the former graffitist, was towards the end of his life situated comfortably in and cushioned by the mainstream art world. It would appear also that the later status of the Brooklyn born artist of Puerto Rican decent was the result of an exercise on the part of the art establishment in bringing the 'outsider' 'in'. Basquiat was in the end almost as far removed from the street artists and urban graffitist of New York, as the artists with whom he later associated. Although he maintained his reputation through his work and character of being, aggressive, abrupt and spontaneous, he was categorised as a 'Soft-primitivist', that is to say an artist who was influenced by such outsider works as graffiti, but not one who created outsider art works.

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Dubuffet would consider this paradox merely another instance where mass-consumption in a capitalist economy expands into a taboo area in order to transform the private activities of certain young people, into a commodity. By becoming a member of the art establishment it would be reasonable to assume that a certain conditioning had taken place. In this sense, the former activities of the graffitist could no longer continue in the manner that elevated him/her to artistic importance in the first place.

Keith Haring, allegedly another 'soft-primitivist' would seem to have been an exception to this 'rule'. He effectively maintained a foothold in both worlds, as he was equally known for publicised works as well as his apparently anonymous chalk drawings on subway billboards in New York. Haring was an exception in another sense also; he did not slip comfortably into the stereotypical notion of the graffiti artist and the work he/she produced. It was a popular assumption that the urban graffiti artist's vocabulary and schooling was fundamentally limited and they were often assumed to have originated from a working class background. Haring eloquently spoke of his position and works, and was, in fact from a middle class family. When asked by Suzi Gablik if becoming famous in the art world had altered the thrust of his activities and whether he thought that working for gallery exhibitions conflicted with his more anonymous and illegal subway activities. He explained that:

Art is about something being seen, whether it is absorbed by the eyes of people in the subways or of people in galleries, in the subways one needs total abandon since the work only exists for a fleeting moment, it can and probably will be erased. (S.Gablick. 1984.p107)

And concluded by saying: *permanence and impermanence are both plausible outcomes to an activity.*(S.Gablick.p107)

Possibly due to his early death, Basquiat and his works are now imbued with ambiguity. Although during the last few years of his life he no longer worked within

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Possibly due to his early death, Basquiat and his works are now imbued with a mythology. Although during the last few years of his life he no longer worked within

the 'outsider' discourse, the language and symbolism of much of his work professed a kinship with the untutored and the primitive.

Jean Dubuffet recognised that it would be impossible for mainstream artists to de-condition themselves completely but he did maintain that these artists should strive for more independence from the imposed norm. Thus, Dubuffet would have interpreted Basquiat's stance as a complete acceptance of, and subservience to, cultural conditioning.

Dubuffet's conception of Art Brut has experienced many transitions over the years since its birth in 1946; namely the emergence of the more flexible and perhaps, sophisticated theory by Cardinal. The theories of 'outsider' art, although based predominately on the Art Brut ideology, are more tolerant of works from ambiguous origins. For example the contemporary ideology of 'outsider' art would potentially be receptive towards works such as the Palaeolithic rock paintings mentioned earlier. This entire ideology still, however, expressed those Romantic notions of idealising societies and lifestyles, which rendered the Primitivist ideology problematic. Lynne Cook argued that:

This idealising of societies (often more fictional than actual) in which communal values united the inhabitants in which there was no body/mind split and in which harmonious organic oneness with the natural world pertained resulted in work that was often nostalgic, escapist, and utopian:

(S.Hiller. 1991 p.140)

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Figure 10:

By Jean-Michel Basquiat
 'Aaron 1' 1981. Acrylic and Crayon on Canvas, 48x60 inches

Conclusion.

It is ironic that the makers of art long thought of as untrained and uninfluenced by mainstream art, culture or other external factors, now command six-figure prices and extensive gallery and museum exposure. Furthermore, can artists now very much part of the mainstream truly be called 'marginalized'? and how will cultural mainstream success affect their art?

The truth is, that in the Post-modern era, art and the artists who previously comfortably slotted into the Art Brut category, are now being snatched up by significant dealers and moulded into the 'art institution'. Jean Dubuffet would doubtless consider the affects of this 'conditioning' disastrous. Having maintained throughout his professional career that such an act would almost certainly render the art meaningless, due to the obliteration of it's 'raw' origins, Dubuffet's anarchic theories were almost sympathetic to the Marxist ideology. Ideology from a Marxist stand point was purely class based, in that a set of values were created by one class to impose power over another, as Dubuffet maintained in his book, 'Asphyxiating culture':

The myth of culture survived revolutions undoubtedly because it is so well accredited. The revolutionary states, whom we would have expected to denounce a myth so intimately associated with the bourgeois caste and Western imperialism, instead preserve it, and use it to their benefit.

(J.Dubuffet. 1973. Pg.10)

Dubuffet was also concerned with identity and the relationship between identity and the origins of Art Brut works. Representation and the notion of the 'other' stems from the concept of identity, and this touches all aspects of society. Marx believed ideology to be false 'consciousness' in that the subordinate classes were led to understand their social experience, their social relationships and therefore the structural fundamental base of their identity by a set of values that were not theirs. The values and ideals were believed to originate from a class whose

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economic, political and social interests not only differed from theirs, but also were actively opposed to them.

The adoption of this stance would coincide with the belief that de-conditioning is an impossibility as, according to this ideology, the structure of the identities of the subordinate class, was based on a lie. In Dubuffet's equation the 'subordinate' class of the art world, would be the makers of Art Brut, such as the art of subculture members, street and graffiti artists, art of the insane and other social misfits and 'degenerates'.

Relatively recently in 1993, Thornton Dial, a sixty-five year old self-taught African-American artist, was a member of a joint exhibition at the museum of American Folk Art in the US. He had remained anonymous to the art mainstream until 1987, when art critic, Thomas McEvilley, exposed his work. Dial's works now fetch in excess of \$30,000. He has been compared to Basquiat, in his rise to mainstream stardom from unusual artistic origins.

By taking artists such as this, and 'promoting' them to the gallery and museum walls, would this not fundamentally alter the nature and language of their work? It is this language, (that the artists' adopt to convey a message) which initially attracts the mainstream art culture, due to the artists' obscurity and 'otherness'. There is a paradox here, by placing graffiti artists' work in a gallery it would be stripped of the physical context of the culture and neighbourhood from which it originated. Once in the gallery, whether it is 'good' or 'bad' graffiti seems largely irrelevant and perhaps only a few of the people who see it will be equipped to discern the difference. The essence of graffiti is that of a spontaneously delivered, often anarchic message, whether political or social. To remove this form of communication from the streets and place it in a gallery would, according to Jean Dubuffet, surely detract from this position.

Graffiti and Palaeolithic rock art are forms of outsider art that can be used to illustrate and explain Dubuffet's extremist notion of art. He often acquired an ambiguous and individualistic stance. Although he has been accredited for his writings and theories on Art Brut, his position and statements were not unlike those of the earlier Primitivists, Romanticising cultures and societies for his own purpose.

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