

JEAN DUBUFFET:  
A STUDY OF HIS CONCEPTS PERTAINING TO THE  
ALIENATION OF THE ARTIST.

by

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## INTRODUCTION

I decided on an investigation into the nature of Dubuffet's remarks concerning the plight of the artist in modern societies, believing that the difficulties facing the artist are, at the time of this writing, still in force, and perhaps even more so now than they were in his day. These difficulties I believe, arise in the form of curtailments on personal and aesthetic freedoms brought about as the result of the artist's position in, and conformity to, the norms and values of his society. The problem is I believe, that these value systems not only censor or curb artistic freedom but actually restrict all individual enterprises by demanding that the individual conform to the greater wish of the group, at the expense of his own creative and individual potential.

For me, a possible solution lies in the fact that the artist / individual's placement and degree of conformity within his group can be examined on two different levels, and need not therefore be seen as a static relationship. Firstly, we can conceive the situation more in its immediate sense. On this level, we acknowledge ourselves as being members of a particular social group within a larger social structure and secondly, we can conceive ourselves as being but one small part of a greater scheme by acknowledging the universal and ignoring the particular. On the first level, our identity and behavioural patterns are in keeping with those of the group's and, in fact, are both, to some degree, afforded to us by the group. We familiarize ourselves with these given qualities by adjusting our behaviour to suit our image as it is projected to us from the group. Large parts of our identity make-up are moulded for us by the group and, by accepting them, we subscribe to its norms and values which may, however, not necessarily be in our best

interests. On this first level of existence, we are, therefore, an entity within a particular group within a particular local terrain, affected by developments within our immediate vicinity.

It was against this 'localized' or 'particular' group conformity that I believe Dubuffet reacted. He believed that it was possible to free himself from the conformity and demands of social order which he saw as an enemy of true creative ability. He believed that such a position within the group created an "antagonism" which "... confounds the artist; he refuses to assume the position of 'alienation' implied by the creative activity, and vainly attempts to reconcile his work with a desire to be integrated into society and receive ... [its] ... honors and awards ...." he said. (Rowell; 1973, p.22.)

It was this reaction against what I call the 'particular', and the implied acknowledgement here of a less self conscious level (in terms of group image), attainable through the rejection of the local, which interested me. Only on this second level is it possible to view ourselves not as a group-inspired entity, but as one unique spark of consciousness resident in the greater scheme of human intelligence. By setting aside our cultural, racial or ethnic ('particular') differences, we can, I believe, concentrate purely on the truly individual characteristics which become visible at the second level, after the particulars of the local fall away.

The major problem facing the individual is therefore, to maintain his / her levels of original independence in the face of inhibiting agents (the 'particular') that impinge on their rights to free expression. At

this level then, it does not matter how or when or where we live, as essentially, we all face the same problem - the attainment of a level of independence even if its form appears unsuitable to the group.

Dubuffet also encouraged an attack on set mental or social attitudes by declaring these invalid and therefore open to re-definition. In this instance therefore, we must not apply our own 'particular' group conceptions to the terms 'freedom', 'individuality' or 'objectivity', but should try to embrace all possible fields of action implied. Anti-social, barbaric or degenerate behaviours are only valid in terms of our own socialization process, which, as I mentioned, is adopted because it works within our particular group setting. Removed from the group, we might find that these standards allow for a re-interpretation into a manner more suited to our personal needs. All values, moral codes or codes of ethics are thus relative only to our communal or 'particular' setting and can be viewed as restraining or censoring agents by individual perceptions. Above all, they can be seen to act as an enemy to all true creative ability.

It was in this context that I chose to investigate Dubuffet's anticultural positions and, in particular, his belief in what he called "... the superiority of the anti-social alienated artist who creates for his own personal satisfaction." (Rowell; 1973, p.21.)

Another field of interest I wish to address in this essay was the issue of our society's present lack of a spiritual base, and how this in itself has affected the very course and nature of art. The loss of a religious or spiritual base has largely been responsible for the adoption

of many of the value systems that I have alluded to. (These will be elaborated on in the course of this discussion). I do not however propagate a return to the Pre-Renaissance religious codes which were, in fact, more freedom curtailing than any group-pressure we feel today, but acknowledge that, with little or no uniform or personal spiritual substance, our lives are empty. The gradual emptying of our lives in the face of science and religious skepticism has resulted in the present set attitudes and standards which have their counterpart in the aesthetic sensibilities of our age, both of which demand a degree of conformity from the artist / individual. To obtain any degree of freedom, however, does not mean the loss of responsibility but, I believe, an increase in personal responsibility. Without any system of personal belief, freedom will lead to boredom and even nothingness. In such an instance, the confines of the social group will always appear more attractive.

By way of a solution, Dubuffet has much to offer in that his propagation of a value system closer to that which inspired the primitive, can be seen in the context of Dr. Carl Jung's ideas on what I would like to call the 'universality of man'. In other terms it can be expressed as a shared psychic heritage common to humanity, which provides us with access to the world of myth and symbol as explored by our ancestors through their art and magic. It can, likewise, provide us with the necessary substance on which to rebuild our own personal (yet shared) spiritual mode, replacing what is lacking in our lives, while at the same time, providing the artist with an appropriate field of exploration.

A careful study of Dubuffet's concepts will, I hope, highlight these shortcomings and inadequacies in our present Western societies. I also

hope to show how twentieth century arts accurately mirror these shortcomings which have ultimately led to a curtailment of the artistic freedoms of our generation. This predicament, together with the factors that have contributed to its present state, will therefore be discussed in more detail. The alternatives that Dubuffet has offered will also be looked at more closely.

"But the world was no longer open to a transcendent God. It had become a closed box, and man was caught in that box."

(Rookmaaker; 1970, p.47.)

For many, the world they live in has lost its meaning. Their relation to their universe and their participation in it, are experienced as being without thread or foundation in that, they no longer perceive the links that bind them to God and to the world around them. (Those which gave their existence meaning.) Their world has in fact become a chequer-board on which they are moved involuntarily through the game called life. The moves to which they feel they are entitled are, birth, procreation, and death, all else seems to make little sense. They therefore make the best of their situation by making their lives as comfortable as possible, by amusing themselves with all our technological age has to offer.

These feelings, attitudes, and experiences of emptiness, are generally most prevalent amongst the large middle class societies of the Western World. It was they, that in the eighteenth century, were the most threatened by the advent of the Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>. They felt a dismay, and more importantly, feelings of insecurity and futility when faced with the new principles of the coming scientific age which stood to challenge their established ways. In defense, they began to cement for themselves a new and more tangible reality based in materialism and the power of acquisition. Their procurement of status through wealth provided them with a

1. "The Enlightenment was a movement of thought and belief concerned with the interrelated concepts of God, reason, nature and man that claimed wide assent among European intellectuals in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. Although diverse in emphasis and interests, the Enlightenment attacked the established ways of European life ...." (Britannica; 1986, p.755.)



renewed<sup>1</sup> sense of importance, albeit only in the eyes of their fellow men.

Their reaction has culminated in today's consumer generation who have, unwittingly, placed themselves in the hands of a system which they initially created to curb their sense of futility and uprootedness from their older, more established order. What has actually happened, is that modern man now finds himself at the mercy of a system which confines him, in that it curbs the individuals freedom of choice. John Berger recognized this fact when he spoke of our society's propensity to, "... recognise nothing except the power to acquire. All other human faculties or needs are made subsidiary to this power,..." he said. "All hopes are gathered together, made homogeneous, simplified.... No other kind of hope or satisfaction or pleasure can any longer be envisaged with the culture of capitalism." (Berger; 1972, p.153.) He saw our capitalist society as therefore guilty of restricting freedom of choice by forcing the majority, whom it exploits, into narrowing their interests and choices to the limitations of publicity images.

What of the individuals need to recognise the uniqueness, and strength, of his own separate identity, apart from the large collectivism which provide 'identities' through membership of clubs, organizations, and even philosophies, religions and ideologies? These collective identities interfere with the process of individuation, according to Jung, who says membership of these should be seen only as an intermediary stage on the

1. "The transformation of a merchant estate into a capitalist class capable of imagining itself as a political and not just an economic force required centuries to complete and was not, in fact legitimated until the English revolution of the Seventeenth century and the French revolution of the Eighteenth century." (Parlgrave; 1987, p.348.)

way to individuation. He warns however, "... it would be wrong to regard this intermediary stage as a trap; on the contrary, for a long time to come it will represent the only possible form of existence for the individual, who nowadays seems more than ever threatened by anonymity. Collective organization is still so essential to-day that many consider it, with some justification to be the final goal." (Jung; 1985, p.375.)

Dubuffet, it will be seen, came to distrust all collective identities and to regard them as mere tools of our present day culture which he equates with indoctrination, in that he sees it acting like a filter. It sifts out and discards anything, or anyone, opposed to the norm. Its main function, he says, is to make uniform in order that it preserve the status quo.

Dubuffet, as a result, felt that a degree of isolation was necessary to curb the inhibiting effect our culture has on the process of individuation, as he experienced it.

But why we may ask has this trend towards collectivity become so marked in our society, and should it be seen as a trap for the individual? The answer to the first part of the question is that society, as we know it, is losing its unifying threads, resulting in a degree of diversification and disharmony. "Man today is in revolt against the world in which he lives," says Rookmaaker, "against its dehumanizing tendencies, against slavery under the bosses of the new Galbraith elite, under a computerized bureaucracy, against alienation and the loneliness of the mass man. He searches frantically for a new world. He is willing to risk the hardship of revolution. The tragedy is that man has no new principles to offer.

All his endeavours result only in a world which is even more consistent with the principles of the Enlightenment, of autonomous man." (Rookmaaker; 1970, p.196.) An autonomous man, yet one who is alone, afraid, and isolated from the natural world around him, and even more importantly, isolated from himself.

The revolt leads man therefore not to greater unity, but as in the great Revolutions of our time, to greater entrapment than before. It leaves man with the feeling that he is losing his humanity, that is, his personality and individuality. The result is the neurotic modern man. The neurosis Dubuffet believes, is the result of the annihilation of man's primal unity with his universe "... by the artificial conventions and repressions of his so-called civilization...." (Rowell; 1973, p.17.)

But how may we ask could it have been any different? How could we have made it possible to make the transition into the 'new age' whilst still retaining, what many consider to be old world beliefs, that is, religion, spirituality, or any form of connectedness with the natural world around us. Jung believes that this could have been, and is still possible, if we recognize the thread inherent in all of us which links us "... by myth with the world of the ancestors, and thus with nature truly experienced and not merely seen from the outside, ...." (Jung; 1985, p.166.) The world as experienced from the outside, is one that has become dehumanized, one in which man no longer feels involved in, one with which he has lost his "emotional" and "unconscious identity" with. (Jung; 1978, p.85.) The natural world and its phenomena e.g. thunder, lightning, no longer have any symbolic significance to him. He therefore experiences himself to be isolated from the cosmos.

Dubuffet was to a large extent influenced in this regard by the work of Dr. Hans Prinzhorn, whose book, "Artistry of the Mentally Ill," he received as a gift in 1923. Prinzhorn's theories were, in turn, influenced by the philosopher and psychologist Ludwig Klages<sup>1</sup> who viewed man from the perspective of his inescapable links with, as well as his dependence on, his animal self and its surroundings. Prinzhorn held the view however, that man, through his use of language, abstract thought and reason, had destroyed any links with his animal self. This had resulted in an imbalance which held man poised between the role of his assertive conscious life, and that of his deeper inner self. This imbalance, he said, had caused a state of psychic weakness in man which, ultimately, could be seen as the cause of his neurosis.

This neurosis, stemming from feelings of alienation, leads him therefore toward collectivisms, with whose help he at least feels a sense of community and security. In this instance, collectivisms can be regarded as a trap as they merely provide the illusion of that which is truly lacking, and so, can be seen as what Jung so aptly calls, "... crutches for the lame, shields for the timid, beds for the lazy ... [and] ...nurseries for the irresponsible;...." (Jung; 1985, p.375.)

In terms of this discussion then, and in particular, in keeping with the relevancy of Dubuffet's ideas on the present position of the artist in society, we may ask (if this general summation of the present condition

1. "Human life for Klages differed from animal life in general by virtue of the emergence in man of spirit (Geist); man's capacity to think and to will provided the source of his estrangement from the world and the cause of his particular psychic illness." (Collier-Macmillan; 1967, p.344.)

of Western societies is correct) how this effects the position of the artist, and are these shortcomings reflected in our arts?

Firstly though, let us consider this statement by Verstraëte, who believes that; "In a sense a relationship of tension exists. The artist does not work in a vacuum: if he depends on society for his livelihood he is obliged to some extent to cater to its tastes. On the other hand, the greatest art is generally the creation of individuals and thus stands in psychological opposition to the crowd, to the people in all their aspects of normality and mass action." (Verstraëte; n.d., p.1.)

It will be seen that this statement pertains directly to Dubuffet's views on alienation, in that, if the observations regarding the artist's position in society are correct, then, his response can be interpreted as legitimate and even necessary.

So, do the arts accurately reflect the current state of our society and its culture? The answer to this question must always be yes, in that, an artists work is always part product of his own individuality, and part product of his age, to which he reacts either consciously or unconsciously. His "personal psychology" allows him therefore to "... give form to the nature and values of his time, which in their turn, form him." (Jaffé; 1978, p.285,286.) The artist is therefore, the representative, as well as the "victim", of what Jung calls, "... a collective spirit whose years are counted in centuries." (Jung; 1985, p.111.)

How then has the artist mirrored the disharmony inherent in our culture in the arts? To answer we need to look at modern art in general and to



examine two of its most evident characteristics, namely,

- i) it's abstraction, and
- ii) it's great stylistic variation.

It's abstraction can be explained by virtue of the fact that it was an intellectually conceived approach, that is, it is a cerebral search for a new order often based in geometric form. In this respect, it was in keeping with the Western rationalist tradition which has been used as a defense against the "superstitions" of primitive and medieval man. It has also resulted in the loss of our ability "... to respond to numinous symbols and ideas,..." which has caused the total disintegration of our spiritual beliefs. (Jung; 1978, p.84.)

The loss of spiritual values as a result of rationalisms or intellectualisms, together with its consequences, can perhaps be more readily observed in a primitive society whose members become exposed to modern civilization. The results are that; "Its people lose the meaning of their lives, their social organization disintegrates, and they themselves morally decay." (Jung; 1978, p.84.) Intellectualisms, or logical explanations by way of reason, allow no room for the metaphysical vision. They impose an inflexible grid on reality in order to explain it in a rational way. Abstraction, similarly, was a logical attempt to find a hidden order behind the real world, for example, Cézanne's cones, cylinders and spheres.

Regarding the tremendous stylistic confusion it has been suggested that this "... reflects the lack of any broad unified outlook or widely accepted system of values in modern Western societies." (Verstraëte, n.d., p.12.) The beginnings of this diversity inherent to twentieth century

arts can be traced back to the post war period of 1946 - 1949. A new generation of American artists led by exiled European artists, among them Marchel Duchamp, started filling the vacuum Europe was experiencing as a result of post-war disruption and feelings of disillusionment. The American avante-garde exported the trends, ism's, and overnight success stories with which we have by now all become familiar, and which in themselves, were and still are, a true reflection of the society they were born in.

Both the qualities of abstraction and stylistic diversity born in the eruptions of the first half of our century, are therefore evident in the art of our century. Both therefore, can be seen as a direct expression of the anxiety of our age brought about as a result of upheaval and the subsequent loss of spiritual values.

It has been suggested however that; "Man's spiritual needs are as basic to humanity as his creativity. If society does not satisfy both the artist is forced to withdraw into himself, ...." (Verstraëte; n.d., abstract.) It will be seen that this premise pertains directly to Dubuffet's views on alienation, it is why he propogated a state of self-imposed isolation for himself, and also as a pre-requisite for any 'true' creative action. It was proposed also as the result of a critical evaluation of current norms and values in an attempt, on his behalf, to interpret his world into a more personal and meaningful way. For a model he looked back to a time when man, that is, society, existed in a state of unity with the cosmos, a union that was sustained at its centre by deep religious and spiritual values. A union to which the artist was deeply committed and subsequently played an integral part in. The model

he looked to was that of primitive societies.

"In primitive and archaic societies the question of responsibility and even of art itself was not consciously posed. The artist assumed his role in society quite naturally, because art and society worked hand in hand. Art was not peripheral to life, but an intensification of it.... It was a vital activity and an embodiment of the tribal spirit and communal soul. The primal man and artist was hardly conscious of individuality. He existed in a state of communion with the cosmos, his gods and his fellowmen. Artistic creation, like magic, was a path towards unity, a ritual by which myths were given concrete meaning." (Verstraëte; n.d., p.2,3.)

By comparison, Dubuffet highlighted the disparity between our Western Culture and that of a primitive society. In Position One<sup>1</sup> of his anti-cultural stance, he alludes to the degree of discontinuity which he feels exists between Western man and his environment, as opposed to the unity that existed between primitive man and his surroundings.

In an attempt to reach a similar position of cohesion, Dubuffet, in his painting, removes man from his elevated lodgings and depicts him as almost indistinguishable from his surroundings. Consequently, in his portraits, Dubuffet robs man of his personality thereby affording him a greater degree of anonymity. "He proceeds in the same way as those naive draftsmen ...[children]..." says Cordier, "... who only represent individuals by generalized signs in which they alone can detect any resem-

1. See Appendix.



blance." (Cordier; 1960, n.p.) Dubuffet believed that by stripping a person of his individuality, he could eliminate such categories as appearance, and position, thereby placing man in a position of similtude with his surroundings; more akin to the position a primitive would afford him.

It must be noted here however, that the 'personality' or 'individualness' that Dubuffet attempts to strip from modern man, is that identity which has been afforded him by the larger collective organization of his society or culture. It is therefore not one that he has truly experienced as his own. In contrast, if we examine the unity that existed between primitive man and his tribe, we know that it was far more restrictive or binding, in the sense that the individuality of tribal members were collectivized to a far greater extent than anything we could experience today. But, if one looks (as Dubuffet does) at the collective identity or communal soul of a tribe and its relation to its world around it, we witness by contrast, exactly what is lacking and therefore at the root of our feelings of disorientation with our world.

Dubuffet tried to adopt a similar approach in his thinking by attempting to disband the categories and classifications, inherent to our way of thinking. He explains; "What man calls his intelligence, which he's so proud of, does not seem to me to be such a precious privilege as he believes. Man has his own special ways of facing up to the world and representing it to himself, ways that are clearly very different from those of a frog or a herring: but I don't see anything which proves that they are better. Besides, the very idea of better, superior or inferior only has foundation in man's way of looking at things, and he will nat-

urally consider superior that which is similar to himself.... We rebel against any attempt to compare the form that the human mind has taken on, and which we think of as intelligence, to the form that might exist in the mind of a gas, or of sulphur. But we are forced to admit that there is the same flux in all different kinds of beings, including man, the frog and sulphur." (Novarina; 1983, p.22.)

Dubuffet's ideal can thus be seen to be indicative of a state of equality between man and nature, whatever its substance. This anti-humanist, 'anthropomorphic' state, could only exist by acknowledging the idea, that we (man) are of equal privilege and importance amongst the other inhabitants of our world. By attempting to destroy the myth of man's supreme importance, and re-establishing a communion between man and nature, Dubuffet hoped to arrive at a situation which was more akin with the "... religious manifestations of the primitive people,..." as expressed through their art and customs. (Cordier; 1960, n.p.)

Ironically though, he realized that to establish any degree of continuity between himself, society and nature, he firstly had to withdraw from society in order to reach his objective. Society was not satisfying his needs, nor as the evidence put forward suggests, was it satisfying humanity's needs, so the only alternative left was to distance himself from it, in order to set about establishing a new order.

Dubuffet formulated his anticultural positions in 1951 with the aim to providing an alternative value system to the Humanist<sup>1</sup> tradition, which

1. "The age-old quest of religion and philosophy is the search for a

has been fundamental to our culture since the Renaissance. Dubuffet believed that it was an opportune time for a movement away from Humanist ideology (which it will be seen has largely been responsible for the present state of our Western societies) toward a new system of values, more akin to those of primitive cultures.

The reliance on, and belief in our intellectual powers, reached a high-point during the Renaissance when man, once and for all, usurped the power of the church and assumed his place at the centre of the universe. Now, "... the laws of mechanics and causality became the foundations of science. The world of religious feeling, of the irrational, and of mysticism, which had played so great a part in medieval times, was more and more submerged by the triumphs of logical thought." (Jaffé; 1978, p. 274.) "The age of scientific enquiry overcame the medieval heritage of mysticism and faith." (Verstraëte; n.d., p.6.)

It can therefore be seen that Art became less religious, and more occupied with the visible, that is, the tangible. Aestheticism replaced the religious as the new emphasis fell on representational form. Only that which was immediately detectable to the senses was afforded a reality in the new scope of things. These two opposing forms of representation have been described as being, "the imaginative" and the "sensory" style. (Jaffé; 1978, p.278.) The sensory style we can ally with realism as it concentrates only on that which is immediately visible, while the ima-

centre from which we can look at the world and relate ourselves to our total environment. Religion places God at the centre; Humanism places Man ... [at the centre] ." (Hawton; 1963, p.68.) Humanism is "aimed at directing attention away from theoretical speculation about God to the study of works of man as revealed in history, literature and art." (Quinton; 1983, p.292.)

ginative style allies itself to the conceptual, or that which the artist conceives of through his senses, dreams, visions etc. Its form or representations, are therefore not reliant on 'realistic' renditions, but open to the artist's own personal interpretation.

A good example of what is meant by "imaginable", would be the representation of angels, which lost their place in painting (and also in the new rational world) after the adoption of linear perspective by Alberti in 1435. Linear perspective, which it has been suggested, was the artist's preparation for the coming scientific age, has become for modern man what is termed "... a cultural style of living ... [that is a]... linear perspective vision." (Romanyshyn; n.d., p.2.) This is especially true when one considers how much it changed man's perception of his world. In the construction of linear perspective, Alberti always drew a rectangle which he "... regard[ed] as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen;...." (Romanyshyn; n.d., p.4.) Into this rectangle he then always placed the figure of a man which he divided in three equal parts. The base line of his "window" was then divided into as many of these parts as it could hold. From these marks, convergent lines were then drawn to a vanishing point situated on the horizon line, which was always placed at the same height as the top of the figure's head.

This construction can be said to have altered our vision of our world in that,

- i) it firstly assumes that we the viewers look out onto our world as if through a window. This single point perspective (apart from its brief attack during cubism) has become entrenched as the manner in which we now perceive our world.

- ii) The construction of the vanishing point provided for a horizontal depth, that is, a horizontal recession away from the viewer. Together with the viewer therefore, all objects which were to be represented in the painting were placed on this plane. This allowed for only one "... level or plane of existence. Things, or beings, which belong to different levels of existence ... like angels in Medieval landscapes ...[would]... progressively lose their place in the space of this world."  
(Romanyshyn; n.d., p.6.)
- iii) The size of objects are therefore measured according to their distance away from us, and no longer as an indication of their importance.
- iv) We the viewer, are immobile, we are fixed in a position from which we gaze out onto the world unlike the earlier artist, prior to the invention of linear perspective, who painted the experience of what it was like to walk about through his world. The opposite of linear perspective which has been referred to as "... reverse perspective ... in which the sides of objects diverge rather than converge toward the vanishing point,..." is used by primitive artists, Eastern cultures, Medieval art and children, whose example Dubuffet followed and propagated, as an alternative to our "way of seeing," (that is, our linear perspective vision.) (Romanyshyn; n.d., p.15.)

The Renaissance therefore brought about radical changes in firstly, man's view of reality, and secondly, in his society. The religious and mystical base of his existence fell away as his art was no longer bound by religious values. The humanism and empiricism started by the Greeks had



now gained a firm foothold in the West. The artist now explored his own individual caprice within the context of his patronage by the Church and the rich. His position in society was now changing in that, he was now being accorded a different status from other men. He was, as Verstraëte puts it, now "... no longer responsible for upholding the transcendental values of society because these were on the wane: he responded to the tastes of small groups." (Verstraëte; n.d., p.6.)

These developments set the stage for the situations of elitism and care-erism which have reached their climax in the arts of the twentieth century. Art today, it has been suggested, has become "... the monopoly of the privileged ... [and of a system which] ... is sustained at the centre by a cultural ideal that is untouchable and inalterable, based as it is on the unshakeable belief in such things as 'our cultural heri-itage', 'the legacy of the past' and the fetish of the 'great master-piece'." (Cardinal; 1972, p.9.)

These conditions have also made it inconceivable that art can exist any-where else but in galleries, museums and private collections. It can also be said that art today has become accessible only to the initiated few, in that, alongside each movement and its art works, resides the artistic conventions necessary for an understanding of those works. A person can therefore make assumptions regarding a work of art only as the result of his or her particular cultural education. Furthermore, cultural conditioning is such, that nobody disputes its decisions and value judgements. Works like Mark Rothko's Orange Yellow Orange (1969) or Jackson Pollock's Lavender Mist (1950) can only be understood by per-sons of trained sensibilities, persons who have been taught to appreciate

the conventions of such works.

In this way art in the twentieth century is no longer the expression of a shared mode of being but, rather the domain of the individual and the result of

- i) our society losing its co-ordinated structure and
- ii) the arts becoming the retreat of the individual as well as a marketable commodity, whose creator is accorded an enviable position of high status.

One of the ultimate myths perpetuated by our cultural education is the value the artist places on the recognition he may be able to achieve, says Dubuffet. The result is, that artists today have become more concerned with producing marketable commodities and are thereby negating the true function of art, (to give vent to, and lend expression to, the workings of the innermost self.) This could be said to be the result of an overcrowded, over-inflated art market. The overcrowding results in fierce competition which has resulted in "careerism", while an inflated market results in "fashion" and "... eye-catching stylistic device[s] .. .." (Hughes; 1985, p.63.)

Dubuffet therefore divides artworks into two distinct categories. Firstly he says, there is an artform which conforms and submits to the cultural norm, what he calls "social art". This art he believes conforms to, and is acted upon by the aesthetic criteria which the artist employs, so as to be able to evaluate his work in terms of its monetary worth. Secondly, Dubuffet lists those works that are created solely for the artists own ends, without him entertaining the least intention

that he be rewarded for them. Most of the artists represented in his collection of Art brut<sup>1</sup> fall into this category.

Dubuffet rejects the idea that an artist needs as a prerequisite, knowledge of art history and subsequently looks to artists who have had little or no schooling, who in cultural terms are uncultured. He repudiates the tendency by art historians to evaluate new works only in terms of what has gone before them. This deconstructionist approach builds a sequential advancement of styles each bearing an influence on, and eventually culminating in, the present. It also presupposes, says Dubuffet, that the artist is well versed in the history of art, and that he creates within the chronological framework of movements and styles. Works that a succession of art historians labelled as masterpieces and subsequently have come to be prized as amongst mans most important achievements, are merely the product of a 'particular' cultural, social and psychological prejudice. They therefore ignore and reject a host of configurations which at the time, did not conform to their prevailing, 'particular' aesthetic conventions. The result of such a system is that it deadens creative instinct, says Dubuffet, in that all creativity under the present system is channeled along set avenues, and always judged in accordance with what has gone before.

Thus aestheticism, professionalism and marketability, all with their roots in the Renaissance, have led to a situation today in which now more so than ever, the artist aims at an audience, albeit an elitist one, on which he must make an impression if he is to survive. What followed in

1. See pages 29 - 31.



the latter half of the eighteenth century however, increased and cemented the artists and his fellow mans sense of estrangement from his world. The artist, already aiming toward careerism, found himself reflecting on the world of reason, the natural sciences, and above all, a world from which myth, mysticisms and the metaphysical had been banished once and for all.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century has been described as, among other things, "... the resurgence of the principles of Humanism, ..." and; "The rise of rationalism or scientific enquiry into material reality." (Rookmaaker; 1970, p.43.) (Verstraëte; n.d., p.7.) It took the form of an investigation into the world around us using the principles of empirism. Its object was to understand nature and its governing principles. Based as it was on empirism, it therefore excluded from man's register anything other than what the senses could record, and that our intelligence (reason) could understand. Thus, everything from God's existence to moral codes were re-examined under that scrupulous arbitrator, scientific fact. Needless to say, God, whose experience is neither recorded by sense perception nor by reason, was not accorded any role of significance in this new age. To replace God and His word, Hobbes wrote his social contract while Diderot, and later Darwin, determined that man was subject to the same natural laws as all the other creatures on this planet which themselves, could be studied and understood with scientific methods.

Epistemology, the theory of the method of knowledge, came to replace ontology, a field of philosophy centred on "... the theory of being: how is the world structured, what is the place of man in it?" (Rookmaaker;

1970; p.45.) Epistemology was concerned with understanding our position in the universe by "... us[ing] our senses (seeing, hearing, weighing, measuring) and ... us[ing] our reason to coordinate the sensations or perceptions we have had." (Rookmaaker; 1970, p.45.)

Prior to the age of reason, man knew his place in the universe and understood the importance of his being. Now it was supposedly proved that man was merely an animal living in a world that like him, ran according to natural cycles of life and death, with nothing coming before, nothing more than instinctual behaviour during, and nothing after death. Man therefore became naturalized, a trait that continued on into the nineteenth century. What this means is that man had by now been reduced to instinct, survival of the fittest and a will to live. Science, which was responsible for his new position, was accorded almost religious status by the rationalists who regarded it as the source of all knowledge. The twentieth century saw further advances in the field of science in an effort to make the world a better place to live in, with technology the tool and man a technocratic consumer.

We now reach the point at which we started this discussion, that of man in the box, that is, man without meaning. All the events up to 1942, (the date at which Dubuffet, aged forty one, was financially secure enough to take up painting again and to commit himself entirely to art) played an important role in the moulding of his outlook, and in determining the stance he would take philosophically and artistically. Dubuffet echoed the feelings of disenchantment reflected in the writings of artists and philosophers of the time, a skepticism resulting from a general feeling of loss in meaning and purpose in life.

Born in Le Harve France in 1901, Dubuffet, along with many of his contemporaries felt that after the catastrophe of World War II, they needed to abandon the values of their present system, which had led their world along its path to almost ultimate destruction. They therefore declared the previous tendencies toward rationalism and empiricism inappropriate, and subsequently involved themselves in a search for new and radical alternatives. Their direction lay more toward the irrational, "... for ..." as Rookmaaker says "... rationalism is the main principle of the box - and irrationality means unreasonable, undiscussable, being understood neither by reason nor by science." (Rookmaaker; 1970, p.48.)

Existentialism in particular evolved as a reaction to the "... material and spiritual destruction ..." of Europe during the Second World War, and subsequently against what has been called the optimism of Romantic inspiration of the nineteenth century "... by which the destiny of man ...[was]... infallibly guaranteed by an infinite force (such as Reason, the Absolute, or Mind)." (Collier-Macmillan; 1967, p.264.)

Existentialism by contrast stressed "... the instability and the risk of all human reality, ...[and]... acknowledge[d]that man, ... his ... determinism ...[and]... his very freedom is conditioned and hampered by limitations that could at any moment render it empty." For the Existentialists therefore "... the projection of existence implie[d]risks, renunciation, and limitation. Among the risk, the most serious ... [was]... man's descent into authenticity, ... his degradation from a person into a thing<sup>1</sup>. If focuses therefore on the negative and "baf-

1. The situation reached in which your existence is no longer acknowledged by your fellow man.

fling" qualities of man's situation, that is, "... death, and the struggle and suffering inherent in every form of life ... the guilt inherent in the limitation of choices and in the responsibilities that derive from making them; the boredom from the repetition of situations; the absurdity of man's dangling between the infinity of his aspirations and the finitude of his possibilities." (Collier-Macmillan; 1967, p.264.)

The novels and plays of Jean-Paul Satre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus contained these theses, which had their analogies in Surrealism and Expressionism, both of which as movements, were more concerned with the expression of man's inner reality, as opposed to depictions of their outer external world. Although Dubuffet never aligned himself with the Surrealists, he was undoubtedly influenced by the movement, particularly one of its members, Max Jacob, with whom he became friendly in the 1920's.

The Surrealists, like Dubuffet, renounced categorical thought. In the Second Surrealist Manifesto of 1930 Andre Breton stated; "There is every reason to believe that there exists a point in the mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the non-communicable, the above and the below, cease to be perceived as contradictions." (Rowell; 1937, p.19.) The Surrealists sought to find and explore this site of non-contradiction through an induced state of consciousness which produced "... hallucinatory images of sur-reality ..." (Rowell; 1973, p.20.) For Dubuffet, the answer lay not in sur-reality, but in a position which surpassed subjectivity, that is, the visions and delusions of an ordinary un-selfconscious consciousness. What he was seeking was the opposite of heroic, a vision conceived of in

the terms of an average ordinary man, expressed in a language so direct that anyone could understand his message.

He therefore questioned the validity of our cultures emphasis on the rational and logical, and adopted his anticultural stance which he believed could be responsible for a re-generation of meaning, resulting in the re-establishment of a sense of purpose and belonging.

In his third anticultural position, Dubuffet questions the validity of the Western World's emphasis on reason and logic. He also displays a distrust for the notion that elaborate thought be exalted as the highest example of mental functioning. Roger Cardinal attributes to elaborate thought the patterns that have led to "... the vertical structure of culture ... [and] ... the hierarchical pyramid of official values ...." (Cardinal; 1972, p.27.) Dubuffet likens elaborate thought to a spiral ladder, in which, each rung corresponds to the progressive stages reached by an idea as it spirals upwards becoming weaker, and more impoverished, the higher it gets. By contrast though, he believed horizontal and 'lateral'<sup>1</sup> thought to be far richer, as it displayed more originality and a greater degree of the unexpected. He believed it contains greater freedoms, won as a result of the disintegration of categorical thought, together with more of the irrational and the illogical.

1. Horizontal or "lateral thinking is quite distinct from vertical thinking which is the traditional type of thinking. In vertical thinking one moves forward by sequential steps each of which must be justified ... [as each step]... rises directly from the preceeding step to which it is firmly connected. With Lateral thinking the steps do not have to be sequential." (De Bono; 1977, p.39.) "Lateral thinking makes quite different use of information from logical (vertical thinking). For instance, the need to be right at every step is absolutely essential to logical thinking but quite unnecessary in lateral thinking.... With logical thinking one may delay judgements in order to allow information to interact and generate new ideas." (De Bono; 1977, p.258.)



Dubuffet also found comfort observing and listening to conversations of simple folk. For this reason he frequently visited the Paris flea market where he witnessed, what he believed were patterns of thought and behaviour closer to a grass roots level - closer to their source. These he termed examples of "true nature". (Cardinal; 1960, p.27.) He explains; "Personally I have no interest in the exceptional, whatever its field may be. My fare is the ordinary. The more trivial, the more I like it ... what I want to find in my pictures is the gaze of a completely average and ordinary man." (Franzke; 1976, p.156.)

In position three, Dubuffet offers us an alternative to the advancement of a system of hierarchical imperatives which govern our thought processes, and make up the structure of our official value systems. In so doing, he propagates the use of alternate channels, as a means to increase creativity and originality in the individual. As mentioned, his alternative was based largely on the model of primitive societies, whose members enjoyed the communion of a collective spirit sustained at its centre by ritual myth and symbolism.

Their existence, although strictly communal, was richly adorned by their sense of belonging, and interaction with, the cosmic forces of their numinous universe. Their art was vital to their community as through its graphic representation, rituals, hunts and magic were performed and symbolized. The primitive artist therefore, had no qualms about what to paint, or how to paint. He painted his world as he experienced it, without a thought for aesthetics (beauty) competition, or reward. When Dr. Hans Prinzhorn therefore made the assertion that artworks by children, the mentally ill and primitives, all conformed to the same "... elemen-

tary artistic process ..." which he believed was inherent to all men, Dubuffet began to ask why it was that twentieth century man seemed to lack such an instinct? (Cardinal; 1972, p.19.)

Dr. Prinzhorn's findings were the result of a three year study of artworks produced by the mentally ill, and were published under the title "Artistry of the Mentally Ill." Prinzhorn, who was appointed assistant to the chief psychiatrist of the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic in 1918, was encouraged by his senior to begin a research investigation of paintings and drawings executed by mental patients. Prinzhorn subsequently spent three years collecting artworks from psychiatric institutions in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and the Netherlands, before publishing his findings in 1922.

His findings convinced him of the artistic merits of these works, and led him to put forward the theory of an "... elementary artistic process ..." which he believed was inherent in all men. (Cardinal; 1972, p.19.) This process, he believed, came naturally to the fore in these patients, due to their solipsistic tendencies which shut out all outside interference, thus allowing for the spontaneous emergence of this creative mode. Prinzhorn believed that schizophrenia, in particular, erected a barrier between the sufferer and the world at large, resulting in a degree of isolation which allowed for the emergence of the sufferers creative urges. The only other instances of relatively spontaneous creation occurred, he thought, in children, and in some folk art traditions.

Prinzhorn further believed, that the only two real differences between a schizophrenic patient and a 'sane' artist were, firstly, that unlike the

'sane' artist, the schizophrenic worked from a position of autistic isolation, and secondly, that it was only as a result of what he called the fine art world's "... obsolete dogmatism ", that works by schizophrenic patients were not accepted as true works of art. (Prinzhorn; 1972, p.274.)

Both Dubuffet and Prinzhorn came to the belief that tradition and training acted therefore, only as external stimuli to man's creative urges, which, provided with the right conditions would emerge. Prinzhorn believed that the works he collected had been created under the right conditions which had subsequently allowed the "... primeval process, which incorporates the subconscious components in an almost pure form, ..." to come to the fore. (Prinzhorn; 1972, p.274.) Prinzhorn in fact, believed that the similarities between works in his collection and works by primitives, were so pronounced, that it was often difficult to tell the two apart. The similarities existed for him in their configurations and use of motifs, as well as similar formal arrangements.

A study, "Regarding Evolution Psychology<sup>1</sup>", published in 1915, provided Prinzhorn with further evidence to support his argument. It was concerned with the evolution of all psychic life, and in particular, the psychic life of children, primitives and the mentally ill. Its object was to prove that all psychic phenomenon are subject to uniform or common laws, which are constant and universal, that is, that similarities exist between all psychic development, no matter where or when it occurred. Prinzhorn believed that he could corroborate this theory by

1. Kreuger, K. Leipzig, 1915.





comparing works from his collection to the works of primitive cultures. His argument was that, "... when numerous sculptures by the mentally ill prove to have the closest formal and expressive resemblance to numerous sculptures by primitives, and neither used models, we see a strong argument favouring the idea that there are concepts common to humanity, and against the idea of wandering concepts spread between tribes and peoples by direct contact." (Prinzhorn; 1972, p.254.) He believed that this could explain how a mental patient working in total isolation from the outside world, and a primitive sculptor from Africa, could arrive at a similar formal arrangement when sculpting a human effigy.

The idea of concepts common to humanity can be more clearly understood by relating them to the instinctive behaviour (physiological urges) with which we are all familiar. These phenomenon, according to Jung, "... manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images." (Jung; 1978, p.58.) It is these symbols and fantasies, often produced by our unconscious that are called archetypes. "These are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world - even where transmission by direct descent or 'cross fertilization' through migration must be ruled out." (Jung; 1978, p.58.)

Our minds, like our bodies, have developed along an evolutionary path from archaic man (whose psyche was still close to that of the animal) to the present. It is therefore also still linked to the unconscious mind of our ancestors. For this reason, Jung believed that; "The experienced investigator of the mind can similarly see the analogies between the dream pictures of modern man and the products of the primitive

mind, its 'collective images', and its mythological motifs." (Jung; 1978, p.57.) These symbols, produced from our 'collective unconscious', are part of the same symbol making capacity inherent to the primitives which were given expression in their rituals, are also part of our "instinctual psyche", which has to be realized and embraced by our conscious minds.

To suppress such instincts can lead to the destruction of a psyche, for it is these very same; "Suppressed and wounded instincts ...[that]... are the dangers threatening civilized man; ..." says Aniela Jaffé<sup>1</sup>.

"The familiar dream in which the dreamer is pursued by an animal nearly always indicates that an instinct has been split off from the consciousness and ought to be (or is trying to be) readmitted and integrated into life. The more dangerous the behaviour of the animal in the dream, the more unconscious is the primitive and instinctual soul of the dreamer, and the more imperative is its integration into his life if some irreparable evil is to be forestalled." (Jaffé; 1978, p.266.)

Dubuffet no doubt recognized the need, and the urgency, with which these symbols need to find expression in our daily lives when he referred to, the annihilation of our primal unity "... by artificial conventions and repressions of so called civilisation...." (Rowell; 1973, p.17.) It is, as Jung puts it, "... precisely the loss of connection with the past, our uprootedness, which has given rise to the 'discontents' of civilisation and to such a flurry and haste that we live more in the future and its chimerical promises of a golden age than in the present, with which

1. Psychoanalyst and the late Dr. Jung's private secretary and biographer.

our whole evolutionary background has not yet caught up." (Jung; 1985, p.263.)

Dubuffet therefore looked to primitive man, who distrusted the states of reason and logic, qualities of ours which are largely responsible for our present situation. He looked at ways in which to re-experience the rich representational mode known to the primitives. As a result, he became extremely interested in Dr. Prinzhorn's belief that a similarity existed between the creative urge that drove a mentally ill person, and the creative instinct that fueled the primitive artist. He came to regard madness, implying as it does, a non-conformist individual attitude, as a barrier which protected against cultural conditioning, which he believes has progressively weakened Western man's creative instincts. In the mental patient, he found evidence of what he called the 'solid wall' of insanity, a condition which he felt had allowed these people the space to develop their own internal cosmos, unaffected by the outside worlds norms and values.

These conditions, Dubuffet believed, allowed the patient / artist to invent his own personal language of form, one that was as little indebted to cultural models as humanly possible. Dubuffet therefore proclaimed the advantages of working from a position of isolation, a position which he believed left the artist free to invent his own language, make up his own rules, and if necessary invent his own surrogate world. He stated therefore that the artists "... goal ... [should]... not be communication with an audience but a closed circuit dialogue with himself ...." (Rowell; 1973, p.21.)

Following Dr. Prinzhorn's example, Dubuffet decided to begin his own collection of nonconformist art in 1945. His intention was to collect works by the uneducated, the untrained and the insane. Also to be included in this collection were artists like the medium Madge Gill<sup>1</sup>, who believed that a spirit guided her in her work. This collection, which Dubuffet referred to as Art brut, led eventually to the establishment of the "Compagnie de l'Art brut" in 1948. Michel Tapie, Jean Paulhan and André Breton, corroborated with Dubuffet in this venture and the first exhibition of Art brut entitled "Art in the Raw Preferred to Cultural Art", was held at the Galerie Drouin in Paris the following year. The Compagnie's aims were, "... to seek out artistic productions from obscure people, which display a special character of personal invention, spontaneity and freedom with regard to conventions and accepted habits." (Maclagan; 1987, p.13.)

The collection came to include drawings, paintings, embroideries etc., as well as three-dimensional modelled and sculpted figures, which, stipulated Dubuffet, differed from what is generally referred to as Naive painting or Surrealist art. Both of these he saw as mere derivatives of cultural art. Art brut on the other hand, he saw as, "... propositions of themselves unpredictable and wholly invented both in medium ... and in their inspiration." (Rowell; 1973, p.20.)

Once again Dubuffet felt that the most essential contributing factor

1. Following the birth of a still-born girl in 1919 during which she herself almost died, Madge Gill began to draw, embroider and to knit. She claimed she was guided in her work by a spirit called Myrninerest, and refused to sell her work, believing that it belonged to her spirit guide. When she died at the age of seventy seven, she left hundreds of drawings (some up to thirty-five feet long) in wardrobes and under beds.

in the creation of these works was that most of these artists had worked from isolated positions, be it the alienated existence of a patient in a mental asylum, or the self imposed isolation of an artist like Henry Darger. Darger lived and worked alone in the same room for some forty years, subsisting on social security until his death in 1972. Dubuffet believed that this alienation had allowed these artists the opportunity to recreate their world in a fashion more satisfying to their needs, that is, it allowed them to manipulate their world rather than visa versa.

Like Prinzhorn, Dubuffet was emphatic that these works were not to be referred to as psychopathic art but "... works done by people uncontaminated by artistic culture, works in which mimicry, ... plays little or no part, with the result that their makers draw all (subjects, choice of material used, means of transposition, rhythms, manner of writing, etc.) from their own being and not from hangovers of classical or fashionable art. We witness here the artistic process in all its purity, raw, re-invented on all levels by the maker, starting solely from his own impulses ...." (Fried; 1985, p.32.)

In order to more accurately define the nature of these works, let us list those which do not fall into the category of Art brut. Firstly, European Folk arts e.g. Sicilian cart painting, which submits to cultural standards rather than individual caprice. Secondly, all 'Naive' art, whose creators paint to order, in that, they display a specific social function and willingly, occupy a niche that art history has accorded them. Thirdly, the art of prisoners which may seem contradictory if one considers their condition, that is, one of internment, isolation

and anti-social attitudes. The prison however is experienced more as a physical restraint rather than as a psychic distance from the outside world. Its subculture and subsequently its art therefore, makes use of the stereotypes of a shared mode of life, and expresses the prisoners single most important collective desire, namely, to escape and rejoin the outside world. These common attributes exclude this work from Art brut.

In contrast to the above examples, Art brut has been described as the "pure in heart," especially when one compares it to qualities like ambition, careerism, commercialism and opportunism, which abound in the professional art world. (Willing; 1987, p.7.) Art brut is characterized by works which are borne out of the inner compulsions of artists who have had no formal art training, and who live in positions of complete or relative isolation. "Only what grows naturally and is projected spontaneously from within the psychic depths of the artist can be considered valid as original form: all else remains tainted or distorted by idées reçues." (Cardinal; 1972, p.29.)

Dubuffet therefore looked to artists who display a total disregard for any form of communication between themselves and the public. Such artists, said he, would by nature be anti-social and alienated, a condition which would afford them the freedom to invent their own language and to make up their own rules. Their "... goal," he said, "is not communication but a closed-circuit dialogue with ... [themselves] ... (or with an imaginary audience of ...[their]... own making),...." (Rowell; 1973, p.21.)



The question arises though, of whether then an artist should exhibit his works, once a position of isolation had been successfully reached and maintained? The problem concedes two alternatives, namely,

- i) the artist should exhibit his work so as to prove (or disprove) the advantages of self imposed alienation, or
- ii) the artist should refuse to show any of his work, and thereby cement his isolation officially.

Roger Cardinal suggested that the answer might lie in the creation of "... a mode of publication that stops short of publicity, a manner of communicating that does not utilize the insidious machinery of culture in order to reach an audience." (Cardinal; 1972, p.33.) As an example, he cites the case of artist Scottie Wilson, who sold his drawings in the street, two at a time, like kippers.

Dubuffet does not offer a solution, but regrets that his own success has placed him in contradiction to his own beliefs. "I've always thought that the most powerful and vital art-like Art brut - is the one that society has the most trouble accepting.", he said. "Well, my success has put me in an uncomfortable position. In fact, ever since my work started to get known, I've lived in contradiction with my own beliefs." (Peppiatt; 1977, p.68.) He reiterates however, that only when art ceases to be considered as an item of value through which the artist can gain reward, will art take on its true identity as the expression of the innermost self.

During his own life, Dubuffet avoided visiting galleries or attending exhibitions. He felt that it was unhealthy to keep looking at other

peoples work, in that, it could interfere with ones own. By contrast, he sought contact with unknowns, believing them to be the real innovators for they had turned their backs on the system, and devoted themselves to the process of self discovery, by remaining unaffected by any outside influences or ulterior motives.

Dubuffet concluded thus, that the only position from which an artist might create completely freely, that is, spontaneously and unaffected by cultural models, was, from a deconditioned and relatively isolated site: "... if" says Dubuffet, "we can free ourselves of the conditioning, the mind can get to work on the image that has come up, and make it not only realistic but even necessary and convincing, that is the painters job." (Novarina; 1983, p.22.) He was the first to admit that to decondition oneself entirely is impossible, however, he still believed that by isolating himself from the art world, he could rediscover what he called, "... a kind of innocent magical art ", examples of which he found in works by mentally disturbed patients. (Ragon; 1959, p.52.)

Dubuffet finally committed himself to painting at the age of forty one after abandoning two earlier attempts in 1918 and later in 1934. One of the reasons he gave for these delays was the need to "... wipe away the old before making the new ", that is, he felt the need to firstly purge himself of any influences present. (Grazioli; 1983, p.16.) It is true that there were other contributing factors such as his eventual financial security which meant that he did not have to entertain the notion of selling his work, but this alone does not explain the reason for his non-conformist attitudes. It serves rather to illustrate the point he was making, namely, that freedom obtained at any cost enhances ones cha-



ces at producing highly original works. He does not specify the means to freedom only that it is essential to the spirit of creativity.

Dubuffet's conclusion can be seen as a personal attempt to rebuild what Kandinsky called "... the life of the soul and the spirit of the twentieth century." (Rookmaaker; 1970, p.108.) It was an attempt to lift himself out of the technocratic and bureaucratic tangle that has become our modern world and to discover another world outside the one governed by naturalistic law and empiricism. Science as mentioned cannot deal with the immeasurable or the invisible, and states of mind or consciousnesses that cannot be proved.

It has been suggested that; "There ... [are] ..., however, ... strong empirical reason[s] why we should cultivate thoughts that can never be proved.... Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to his life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe." (Jung; 1978, p.76.) In the light of this statement, Dubuffet has left the "intermediary stage" of collectivisms, and struck out and involved himself with ideas and actions, which for the most part, seem irreconcilable with reality and riddled with conflict. But it is this very agent of conflict, says Jung, which "... always presupposes a higher sense of responsibility. It is this very quality which keeps its possessor from accepting the decision of a collectivity." (Jung; 1985, p.378.) Most of all though, Dubuffet through reform by regression hoped to find new meanings pertaining to his existence on earth.

One of the ways to find meaning, it is thought, is to embrace myth, not

the manufactured myth's of the collectivism's, but the myths resoundent in man himself, those that have always and will always be present in, and therefore accessible to, all mankind. This need for meaning and myth is crucial to modern man, and Jung understood this precisely when he wrote; "Meaningless inhibits fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness. Meaning makes a great many things endurable - perhaps everything. No science will ever replace myth, and a myth cannot be made out of science ... It is not we who invent myth ... it confronts us...." (Jung; 1985, p.373.)

To understand this point is to understand why Dubuffet became so interested in Dr. Prinzhorn's observations regarding what he referred to as, the "hieroglyphic character" of the works in his collection. (Prinzhorn; 1972, p.233.) The patient / artist invents a configuration, he said, which has special meaning for him, the key to which is in most cases derived from the patients "... own philosophical battles with instincts and cultural forces, ...." (Prinzhorn; 1972, p.237.) Dubuffet concluded from this that, these artist / patients were in touch with the same instinctual forces that are common to all men (except for their repression in modern times) and especially those which were known and expressed in the art of the primitive.

Dubuffet tried in his work therefore, to reach a similar vein of instinct by displaying a renewal of natural aesthetic sensibilities, similar to those which inspired the primitives. This he attempted by, firstly, declaring the Western notion of beauty invalid, and secondly, by using subject matter which in most instances is drawn from material so familiar, it has been passed over, but nevertheless exists in profusion all around

us, from ugly men and women, to unswept gutters in the street.

In 1950, Dubuffet completed a series of works entitled "Bodies of Ladies". These seemingly grotesque women were unlike anything seen before in the tradition of the nude. They displayed what was considered to some, a distressing eroticism, and seemingly exhibited a total lack of respect for the female form. They were to Dubuffet however, more naked than nature. "A man must be honest," he said, "No Veils! No Make-believe! Naked; all things at their worst." (Franzke; 1976, p.156.) He denied however, that there is anything out of the ordinary in his work, and admits to rigorously banning anything unusual from his register.

Dubuffet also not only chooses subject matter that may seem banal and crude, but also uses only the most common materials in his compositions. He has, for example, worked with materials such as gravel, cement, sand, leaves, bark, banana peels and butterfly wings at various stages. He explains; "I have always liked - it is a kind of vice - to make use only of the most common materials, those one does not think of at first because they are the commonplace and close to us and appear unsuitable for any use." (Ragon; 1959, p.43.)

To this end he also denied "... that there are beautiful colours and ugly colours, beautiful shapes and others that are not. I am convinced that any object, any place without distinction can become a key of enchantment for the mind according to the way one looks at it and the associations of ideas to which one links it." (Cardinal; 1972, p.34.)

By attempting to abolish all aesthetical distinctions, Dubuffet aligned himself to ancient Alchemical texts by acknowledging, and accepting,

what has been referred to as, the "secret soul of things" or, the "spirit in matter." (Jaffé; 1978, p.291.) His object was, to re-establish a common bond between man and his environment, that is, to recognize the value of all objects, persons, things etc., as well as their inter-dependence on each other.

He wished for man to be returned into a state of similtude with his environment. A position from which he could experience the life forces common to all that experience life on this earth, and which have manifested themselves in mans dreams since he first walked this planet.

He has attempted to portray this in his painting by trying to abolish all distinctions between an object and its surroundings, by eliminating pictorial interspacial relationships. His inclination is rather, to join together real, as well as invisible inventions, that is, objects of the imagination. He feels that by eliminating the pictorial and spacial categories so fundamental to Western art, he is able to create a continuous undifferentiated universe in which mobility (enhanced by horizontal as opposed to vertical movement) is greatly increased. His object is therefore, to present all inter-related parts which combine to form the whole, simultaneously.

So, unlike many of his contemporaries e.g. Pollock, Kline, Newman and Motherwell, Dubuffet did not discard the subject in its surroundings. His painting between 1943 and 1950 is therefore, mostly concerned with the human figure, and the interaction with its surrounding space. This 'space' he interprets by re-emphasizing the picture plane as a two-dimensional surface on which the figure exists either as a cut out (1944) or,

as incised into the background (1945 - 47). The result is, that in his "Corps de dames" series of 1950 - 51, the figure exists as an essentially flattened form, which at times is bled into the background, reaffirming his rejection of traditional space and perspective.

This trend became even more apparent in the 60's, during which phase, the human figure gave way to the illogical representation of "... four-legged, two-dimensional ..." tables. (Rowell; 1973, p.24.) The object is flattened here to the extreme, the table top tilts until it forms a uniform plane with that of the paintings surface, negating the existence of illusionistic space. Of these paintings he said, "... let the surface speak of its own language and not an artificial language of three-dimensional space which is not proper to it...." (Rowell; 1973, p.24.)

This cycle culminated with the "Hourloupe" paintings of 1969. With this series he felt he had succeeded in destroying all categories, that is, our mental classifications of objects or concepts into e.g. a tree, a figure, a cloud. What he felt he had achieved was the reduction of all things, be they visible or inventions of the imagination, to what he termed, the "... lowest common denominator and restitute[d] a continuous undifferentiated universe,...." (Rowell; 1973, p.25.)

With this cycle, Dubuffet concluded his search for a metaphysical realm behind the visible, a world of no distinctions, or as it has been called, a world of "primordial ambiguity". During 1969, he developed these paintings into a series of sculptures which he called simulacra's, and with which he built three-dimensional examples of what he had achieved in paint. It was into such worlds, that he believed man could successfully



be reintroduced.

The paradox though, is that Dubuffet's re-invented world, sparked off as it was by a reaction against the laws of empiricism and the states of reason and logic, has proved itself to be constant with the new concept of reality, as put forward by Nuclear physics. The reality of our 'real' world, as determined by Classical physics, has now given way to a new concept of reality which shows, it is said, that "... mass and energy, wave and particle, have proved to be interchangeable ...[and that]... the laws of cause and effect have become valid only up to a certain point", resulting in the realization of "... a new, totally different, and irrational reality ... behind the reality of our 'natural' world ...", of which, Dubuffet's simulacra are graphic representations. (Jaffé; 1978, p.303.) Their forms, are as meandering and as relative, equal and subject to change, as our new world has turned out to be, thereby fulfilling his initial intention that it be a world "... without categories ...[and]... without given values and hierarchies;...." (Rowell; 1973, p.19.) It therefore envelops man, and can in turn be experienced resplendent with the mysteries which were once so essential to the well being of our spirits. Those, which have long since been banished from conscious life to lie dormant and suppressed, emerging only as the anxieties of modern man.

Dubuffet's reaction to our modern society has, therefore, been to distance himself from it ("If society does not satisfy ... man's spiritual needs ... the artist is forced to withdraw into himself,... (Verstraëte; n.d., abstract.)) in order to escape from its inhibiting conformity, and so, to set about re-inventing an artform which could, once again, allow for



an interplay between our inner repressed psychic heritage and our outer world experiences, through the understanding and manipulation of its symbolic content.

This self-imposed alienation from society, can therefore, be regarded as a responsible act, in that, it entailed his correct identification of Western societies failure to meet the spiritual needs and aspirations of modern man. In particular, he recognized the plight of the artist whom he believed, had been put into a position whereby he was forced to conform to society's norms, and to cater to its taste if he was to survive.

If, on the evidence presented, we agree that this be the case, then his 'negative' response to society can be seen as a responsible one, in that, he chose to serve arts true function, which I believe (to answer Verstraëte) is, to serve man in all the complexity of his humanity, rather than to serve society in its 'particular'. (Verstraëte; n.d., p.2.)

**CONCLUSION**

Before attempting to reach any conclusion regarding the validity and appropriateness of Dubuffet's views, I think it is necessary to attempt to answer some of the criticisms which have been leveled against him.

The severeness of his ideas on alienation, as set out in his anticultural stance, seen in the context of his own subsequent lifestyle, have led many to brand him as a hypocrit for living in contradiction to his own beliefs, and therefore also unworthy of any serious consideration.

It is true, that during his lifetime, Dubuffet did indeed win much artistic recognition, not to mention substantial financial reward. He has, in fact, been labelled as one of the leaders of the new spirit in European painting from the 1940's until the present and, together with Giacometti, was seen as a leading influence in the revival of figurative art, in the face of the American trends of Abstract Expressionism.

His importance as an artist is therefore self evident, but, regarding the so-called contradictions, I believe them to exist only at the juncture where a vibrantly new, non-conformist approach, clashed headlong with established cultural procedures. The problem was, that not only did Dubuffet's approach entail a new normative code, but also, through a renewal and a re-discovery of a vibrantly original representational mode, contained a new exciting line of artistic development which itself, could not be ignored. It came therefore to the attention of the cultural arbitrators who slot artists, like Dubuffet, into a nook set aside for reactionists.

## II

In attempting to maintain its equilibrium, the system simultaneously subdues and absorbs the protagonist. An artist, like Dubuffet, who cannot be ignored, is thus slotted into a niche alongside the mainstream movements thereby according him the recognition of a place in history. The result is, that like many other non-conformist, anti-establishment movements from Romanticism to Dada, Dubuffet too, has been awarded an honorary position in the very museums and galleries that he sought to avoid from the outset.

The other great problem and paradox he was faced with, was, that having identified the fact that the Art brut artists degree of isolation from society freed him from inhibiting agents thereby stimulating a re-awakening of an inherent creative urge, closer to the artistic mode of a primitive, Dubuffet had to approach a similar position from the outside. This means, deliberately, for, he was neither mad nor uneducated. He therefore had to make use of his intellect, and especially his art, to distance himself from accepted values and aesthetic practises. This led to the criticism that he was "... able to decerebrate himself only to the point of using logic to transcend logic." (New International; 1967, p.1389.)

For me, however, the strength of these ideas and attitudes lies in the fact that they are so idealistic. Any philosophy that propogates as its central theme, radical changes to, and departures from the present value systems which form the basic underlying structures of Western Societies, through a breakdown in communication between its members, can only be termed idealistic. This comes back to what I included on the

### III

subject of cultivating thoughts that can never be proved<sup>1</sup>. Dubuffet's ideas fall into this category, their one great advantage being therefore, that because of their idealism, it would be hard to turn them into a dogma, that is, we could never take them on for ourselves and make use of them, as we would another collective ideology. Their elusive nature prohibits this.

On the other hand though, this does not mean that we cannot learn from them. His ideas on a position of isolation can, in this instance, be regarded more in the metaphorical sense, than seen as a lonely outpost miles from anywhere. He himself warned that; "Art brut, savagery, freedom, these should not be conceived as places, nor above all as fixed places, but as directions, aspirations, tendencies." (Cardinal; 1972, p.32.)

He believed the ideal pole to reflect a situation in which we (the public) share nothing with the artist, nor can he offer us anything, for what is lacking is the basis of a dialogue between us. Such a position would, I admit, be virtually impossible for the ordinary socialized artist to reach, or even want to reach. Nevertheless, I believe that by initiating even the slightest degree of isolation from, or even by acknowledging the fact, that culture can and does act as an inhibiting agent, we could visualize and even actualize a greater degree of individuality and freedom.

To conclude then, I think that Dubuffet's ideas and concepts are valid

1. See page 34.

#### IV

and noteworthy, if only for the fact that they highlight some of the difficulties facing the artist in present day societies. For this reason Dubuffet's influence will, I believe, be an ongoing phenomena. His words and ideas will continue to stimulate and excite the passions in the face of restrictive orders. "The universe is a vast dance," he said, "and thought grasps nothing unless it dances, too. It gets lost when it tries to rely on fixed points: north, plus and minus, top and bottom. The fixed points are dancing; the north is dancing. Thought has no chance of learning anything until it learns how to join the dance." (Novarina; 1983, p.23.)

## APPENDIX

### THE ANTICULTURAL POSITIONS

These positions were compiled from Dubuffet's notes for a lecture, given by him, at the Arts Club of Chicago on December 20, 1951.

#### Position One

One of the principal characteristics of Western culture is the belief that the nature of man is very different from the nature of other beings of the world. Custom has it that man cannot be identified, or compared in the least, with elements such as winds, trees, rivers - except humorously, and for poetic rhetorical figures. The Western man has, at last, a great contempt, for trees and rivers, and hates to be like them. On the contrary, the so called primitive man loves and admires trees and rivers, and has a great pleasure to be like them. He believes in a real similitude between man and trees and rivers. He has a very strong sense of continuity of all things, and especially between man and the rest of the world. Those primitive societies have surely much more respect than Western man for every being of the world; they have a feeling that the man is not the owner of the beings, but only one of them among the others.



## Position Two

My second point of disagreement with occidental culture is the following one. 'Western man believes that the things he thinks exist outside exactly in the same way he thinks of them. He is convinced that the shape of the world is the same shape as his reason. He believes very strongly the basis of his reason is well founded, and especially the basis of his logic. But the primitive man has rather an idea of weakness of reason and logic, and believes rather in other ways of getting knowledge of things. That is why he has so much esteem and so much admiration for the states of mind which we call madness. I must declare I have a great interest for madness; and I am convinced art has much to do with madness.'

### Position Three

Now, third point. I want to talk about the great respect occidental culture has for elaborated ideas. I don't regard elaborated ideas as the best part of human function. I think ideas are rather a weakened rung in the ladder of mental process: something like a landing where the mental processes become impoverished, like an outside crust caused by cooling. Ideas are like steam condensed into water by touching the level of reason and logic. I don't think the greatest value of mental function is to be found at this landing of ideas; and it is not at this landing that it interests me. I aim rather to capture the thought at a point of its development prior to this landing of elaborated ideas. The whole art, the whole literature and the whole philosophy of Occident, rest on the landing of elaborated ideas. But my own art, and my own philosophy, lean entirely on stages more underground. I try always to catch the mental process at the deeper point of its roots, where, I am sure, the sap is much richer.

#### Position Four

Now, fourth. Occidental culture is very fond of analysis, and I have no taste for analysis, and no confidence in it. One thinks everything can be known by way of dismantling it or dissecting it into all its parts, and studying separately each of these parts. My own feeling is quite different. I am more disposed, on the contrary, to always recompose things. As soon as an object has been cut only into two parts, I have the impression it is lost for my study, I am further removed from this object instead of being nearer to it.

I have a very strong feeling that the sum of the parts does not equal the whole.

My inclination leads me, when I want to see something really well, to regard it with its surroundings, whole. If I want to know this pencil on the table, I don't look straight on the pencil, I look on the middle of the room, trying to include in my glance as many objects as possible.

If there is a tree in the country, I don't bring it into my laboratory to look at it under my microscope, because I think the wind which blows through its leaves is absolutely necessary for the knowledge of the tree and cannot be separated from it. Also the birds which are in the branches, and even the song of these birds. My turn of mind is to join always more things surrounding the tree, and

further, always more of the things which surround  
the things which surround the tree.

I have been a long time on this point, because  
I think this turn of mind is an important factor of the  
aspect of my art.

## Position Five

The fifth point, now, is that our culture is based on an enormous confidence in the language - and especially the written language; and belief in its ability to translate and elaborate thought. That appears to me a misapprehension. I have the impression, language is a rough, very rough stenography, a system of algebraic signs very rudimentary, which impairs thought instead of helping it.

Speech is more concrete, animated by the sound of the voice, intonations, a cough, and even making a face and mimicry, and it seems to me more effective. Written language seems to me a bad instrument. As an instrument of expression, it seems to deliver only a dead remnant of thought, more or less as clinkers from the fire. As an instrument of elaboration, it seems to overload thought and falsify it.

I believe (and here I am in accord with the so-called primitive civilizations) that painting is more concrete than the written words, and is a much more rich instrument than it for the expression and elaboration of thought.

I have just said, what interests me, in thought, is not the instant of transformation into formal ideas, but the moments preceding that.

My painting can be regarded as a tentative language fitting for these areas of thought.

## Position Six

I come to my sixth and last point, and I intend now to speak of the notion of beauty adopted by occidental culture.

I want to begin by telling you in which my own conception differs from the usual one. The latter believes that there are beautiful objects and ugly objects, beautiful persons and ugly persons, beautiful places and ugly places, and so forth.

Not I. I believe beauty is nowhere. I consider this notion of beauty as completely false. I refuse absolutely to assent to this idea that there are ugly persons and ugly objects. This idea is for me stifling and revolting.

I think the Greeks are the ones, first, to purport that certain objects are more beautiful than others. The so-called savage nations don't believe in that at all. They don't understand when you speak to them of beauty.

This is the reason one calls them savage. The Western man gives the name of savage to one who doesn't understand that beautiful things and ugly things exist, and who doesn't care for that at all. What is strange is that, for centuries and centuries, and still now more than ever, the men of occident dispute which are the beautiful things and which are the ugly ones. All are certain that beauty exists without doubt, but one cannot find two who



agree about the objects which are endowed.

And from one century to the next, it changes. The occidental culture declares beautiful, in each century, what is declared ugly in the preceding one.

The rationalization of that is that beauty exists surely, but it is hidden from view for many persons. To perceive beauty requires a certain special sense, and most people have not this sense.

One believes also it is possible to develop this sense, by doing exercises, and even to make it appear in persons who are not gifted with this sense. There are schools for that.

The teacher, in these schools, states to his pupils that there is, without doubt, a beauty of things, but he has to add that people dispute which things are endowed with that, and have so far never succeeded in establishing it firmly. He invites his pupils to examine the question in their turn, and so, from generation to generation, the dispute continues. This idea of beauty is however one of the things our culture prizes most, and it is customary to consider this belief in beauty, and the respect for this beauty, as the ultimate justification of Western civilization, and the principle of civilization itself is involved with this notion of beauty.

I find this idea of beauty a meager and not very ingenious invention, and especially not very encouraging for man. It is distressing to think about

people deprived of beauty because they have not a straight nose, or are too corpulent, or too old. I find even this idea that the world we live in is made up of ninety percent ugly things and ugly places, while things and places endowed with beauty are very rare and very difficult to meet, I must say, I find this idea not very exciting. It seems to me that the Western man will not suffer a great loss if it loses this idea. On the contrary, if he becomes aware that there is no ugly object nor ugly person in this world, and that any object of the world is able to become for any man a way of fascination and illumination, he will have made a good catch. I think such an idea will enrich life more than the Greek idea of beauty.

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