In this essay I want to argue that un(becoming) is a word much like Freud’s (1919) discussion of the word unheimlich (uncanny), which reveals a secretive and clandestine aspect of art that art educators must and should concern themselves with, since it identifies a “realm of the Real” whose abjection legitimates our very practice at its expense. It marks a return of the repressed. Un(becoming), like Freud’s uncanny is visual art’s non-reflected double as I attempt to show. This is the issue I wish to raise when it comes to the question of so-called “Outsider art,” sometimes referred to as l’art brut (raw art) in the French context singularly because of the influence of Jean Dubuffet, but this is a somewhat misleading representation. Roger Cardinal published a book in 1972 with this title. Cardinal struggled to find the “right” term for such art. Many terms alluded to the creator’s social or mental status such as isolate art, maverick art, folk art, visionary art, inspired art, and schizophrenic art; or to the eccentricity or oddness of the artist as being independently taught, hence, self-taught art, autodidact art, untutored art, idiosyncratic art, and original art. Other categorical candidates had been outlaw aesthetics, estranged art, anti-cultural art, unfettered art, the art of the artless, unmediated art, breakaway art, and art without precedent or tradition. All these labels give the reader a sense of what is at stake. Cardinal settled for Outsider art. The label stuck.
Dubuffet had an extensive collection of "anti-cultural art," as he called it, but he himself was mainstream. His art, which celebrated raw matter over form, was influenced by the creations of Art Brut he collected. But not all Art Brut should be considered Outsider art; what is and is not Outsider art always remains problematic. As the one element that cannot be incorporated into the artistic canon, yet remains paradoxically a part of it, it predicates the entire system. For example, Vincent van Gogh was not an Outsider artist. His psychological instability was not the basis for his creative expression; he always represented himself as a professional artist. The same made be said of Dali's paranoiac-critical method. Dali hoped to arrive at "a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the interpretative-critical association of delirious phenomena" (1935, p. 15). But, he too remained mainstream, notorious for his quip "The sole difference between myself and a madman is the fact that I am not mad!" These artists presented an art of sublimation. Their cultural objects remained within the accepted frame of society, although, of course, they may have been rejected at the time. Nevertheless, they still recognized an established canon if only to rebel against it.

It seems that many celebrated "insider" artists besides Dubuffet, such as Paul Klee, the surrealists Paul Eluard and André Breton, and a whole host of others were influenced by Outsider figurative art. They drew on what I shall identify later as the driving "synthia" (after Lacan S XXIII, Synthia) of those artists who were truly "outside" the social order, that is, artists who had an acultural relationship regarding their place within an established social order. Theirs was not a social alienation in the normative sense of many well-known artists, like Edvard Munch, Antonin Artaud, and Vincent van Gogh, for instance, whose art was shunted by the established artistic institution, rather their alienation was complete. Their existence was one of estrangement, isolation, and solitude. Desublimation, rather than sublimation,
characterizes their work. For Freud, the ego’s relative autonomy was based on its role as a mediator between the non-sublimated life-substance of the bodily drives (Id) and the Superego as the agency of social “repression,” the representative of the demands of society. Desublimation succeeds in getting rid of this autonomous mediating ego. It loses its relative autonomy and regresses towards the unconscious—what Lacan identified as the Real psychic register. Hence, the issue here is not that insider (established) and Outsider (non-established) art are simply binary opposites of each other; rather, the complication is that such Outsider art—desublimated “raw art” as identified by Dubuffet—is not simply just another kind of art, a supplement in the Derridean (1976) sense as to what falls under the category of art at any given time. Such an artistic supplement to the art of western history, for example, the non-Western areas of art historical study (African, Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Native North American, Oceanic, and so on), feminist art, or the art of the Diaspora, are eventually recognized, studied and incorporated into the curriculum. For example, Zolberg and Cherbo’s (1977) book on Outsider Art is precisely such a stance where traditional outsiders (asylum art, naive art, African art) are discussed along with forgotten artists who are eventually admitted into the grand narrative of art history. In distinction, Outsider art presents the art educator with an uncanny, unnamable kernel that perpetually remains outside established art by its very definition. Its existence is ghostly, haunting art and its “education” which normatively presupposes that “art” is learnable, a transferable skill, which will eventually become refined into some sort of expressive style, is strangely lacking. Outsider art presents “us” with a puzzling anti-pedagogical proposition. The visual and three-dimensional problems are often uniquely solved outside any accepted canon, not necessarily naively, but often with great sophistication. This is disturbing. Such artists do not need “us” teachers. Some critics have
argued that freedom from instruction should be the defining characteristic of Outsider art. This means we have to accept the possibility that art is unteachable, a proposition I will come to towards the end of the essay. But, what is even more disturbing, Outsider art points to the realm of the psychic Real—to the "other side" of the modernist/postmodernist agenda where the centrality of the ego and the narratological form remains of central interest. It points to what Bataille (1985, p.31) referred to as "scatology," namely "the science of the wholly other" where form and content collapse.

Outsider art hovers within the interstitial space of visibility and invisibility. Its invisibility outside the symbolic culture identifies it as a cauldron of creativity that cannot be "framed" in any normative sense to make it fit within the confines of a signifier (artistic movement, gallery, museum, genre), whereas its visibility as leading a perpetual Outsider existence influences and shapes the mainstream, not in the sense of being avant-garde, on the contrary, in the very sense that it decenters the very notion of an avant-garde by mitigating the idea that there is an advanced group of artists who are the harbingers of what has yet to come. As an eternally present phenomenon that is evident in each and every culture, Outsider art throws into question our understanding of the grand narrative of artistic progress. The paradox encountered here is that "progress" might mean the very death of Outsider status as there is a fall into mediocrity. The artistic idiosyncrasy disappears.

This kernel of un(becoming) identifies the place of the Freudian drives (Triebe), the place of the Lacanian Real, that is, a place of pre-signification, of "rawness," of un(becoming) that opposes the meaning of a signifier—the becoming of a refined aesthetic. And so, when a gallery exhibition opens up of Outsider art, much like the infamous "Primitivism in the Twentieth-Century Art" exhibition at MOMA in 1984, not only is there an obvious irony in the domestication of the
undomesticated through such a gesture, but there is obviously a conflicted assault at work also. How does one approach this Other art without once more appropriating it as simply just another art form? One argument is to say that the artist, and not the art object, is outside society, but that is too easy for it simply appropriates this art once again. Like the label the "art of the insane" (MacGregor, 1989), it represses the "truth" of Outsider art as the very enigma of what is socially acceptable (or unacceptable) art. In their book, *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997), Yes-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss try to present what they take to be the characterizations of such "truth" as theorized by Bataille's concept of the *informe*. Base materialism, horizontality, pulse and entropy (closer to negentropy when Bataille's term "expenditure" is taken into account) are the ensemble of four operations that reveal the *informe* (formless) that resides in the heart of modernist art narrative, which then works hard repress the excesses of the frame. Yet, this very same ensemble of operations defines the art of the Outsider, suggesting—I would even chance to say, confirming—that the border between the psychic Real and the Imaginary register of the ego is where the exchange or slippage takes place between what is becoming and un(becoming) art.

**Outsiders in Our Classrooms?**

In my own memories of visiting art classes as a consultant, university facilitator and liaison, I was struck how often art teachers pointed out to me drawings of what they referred to as "special needs" kids, especially in the junior high. Some where hard-of-seeing, others were autistic suffering from particular forms like Asperger's Disorder, still others were identified as anti-social, depressive and "slow," a descriptor that vivifies fully the value of speed associated with the technology of education. When it came to high school, at least in the art classes I have visited, by the time grade eleven rolled around many of these "special" students had been weaned out given the
instrumentalism of making the grade. They had been streamlined and enrolled in special ed-programs. Would such students be identified as Outsider artists? Difficult to say. There may have been some who developed a whole different iconography at home rather than in school. Dubuffet argued that Child Art should, by-and-large, be outlawed from Art Brut, for despite their spontaneity and ignorance of artistic canons, they lack the experimental momentum and depth that sustains Outsider artists (Cardinal, 1994, p. 29). The same applies to Folk Art and Naïve Art. Such artists do work within a canon of patterning and tradition, while children, after all, are still searching for reiterative signifiers that eventually change their pre-schemas into repeatable schemas to narrate with. In contrast, Outside art points to something much more allusive and mystical.

It seems ever since the case of Nadia (Selje, 1977), an autistic child whose drawings could not be categorized within the neat and orderly progressive developmental charts of Piaget’s intellectual contemporary, Victor Lowenfeld, art educators have been bewildered by the anomalies of “true” Outsiders. Nadia reiterates the paramount factor in the creative definition of the creative Outsider; that s/he “should be possessed of an expressive impulse and should then externalize that impulse in an unmonitored way which defies conventional art-historical contextualization” (Cardinal, 1994, p. 30, author’s italic). When her autism disappeared, so did her Outsider art. Outsiders as the abjected Other have had a democratic interest of inclusion by Social Caucus members. Doug Blandy (1991) wrote about the handmade books of Dennis Bye (fig. 1, next page taken from Blandy’s article as photographed by Russ McKnight), a middle-aged man who was living in Bowling Green, Ohio, in an apartment complex for people labeled mentally retarded.
Although Bye's speech was very difficult to understand—he primarily communicated through a few sign language gestures and pantomime—it was his books that presented an autobiographical account of his struggle with himself and his surroundings. The source of the books' materials was the debris of his daily life and what he found of interest in the waste collections of others. Such raw debris of matter speaks directly to his indeterminate ground of being—his un(becoming). This materialogical and scatological aesthetic recalls the psychoanalytic understanding about the origins of art. The matter that Bye works with is the chaotic and unorganized stuff of his existence and the existence of those around him. By ellipsis, this matter can signify fecal matter—the waste that he collects into his books. What must be understood is that Bye is not playing with matter as an artist would (as
Dubuffet did) to discover new effects—be they aesthetic or antiaesthetic. For him this debris (previously used cellophane tape, newspaper circulars, glossy magazine illustrations, mail advertisement catalog pictures, past calendars, Polaroid film packages and photographs, mattress tags, bumper stickers, school report cards, work reports, shopping bags, political buttons) hold a magical, even mystical quality. They are Bye’s “base materialism” in Bataille’s sense; that is, matter than an image cannot reabsorb, the place of the psychic Real where the distinction between form and matter collapses, This debris is immediate, unformed, and unnameable. Its symbolic identity becomes idiosyncratic to Bye alone, like an ill-formed indistinguishable letter of the alphabet by a child, or a pre-schematic symbol that holds a special unique meaning to that child alone. Bye is not “becoming” through these autobiographical books. He is not growing, nor is he interpreting the world around him through his art in the conventional understanding of that sublimated gesture. His narratives are not linear story lines. They meander alinearly in labyrinthian directions. He glues Polaroid pictures of himself throughout the books as a means of attaching himself to them and in them. His “inspiration” by such waste is to localize and particularize these aesthetic objects as his own double. Bye’s books are as close to him as he is to them. Although they are often stolen, he obsessively continues to make them. In the Lacanian sense, they are his “field of enjoyment” in that they are an attempt to recuperate his fragmentary ego over and over again through his libidinal body as manifested in his artistic practice. Each hand-made book is a repetitive “pulse” to draw again on Bois & Kraus’s (1997) important work. It is his sexual libidinal investment that makes up for his impotency—it is the way he “gets off.” Such “enjoyment,” or jouissance is characterized by painful pleasure. His bookmaking is as much a burden as it is a joyful necessity. They are his symptom (sinthome). As Blandy states (p. p.99), he had no conception how many
books Bye has made—some were stolen, others perhaps lost. Like Humpty Dumpty’s great fall, the fragments of Bye’s ego can never be put together [again]. There was never a moment before the “fall,” when his ego was whole, so that it could be restored [again]. These books are inseparable from his imaginary; their excessiveness illustrates what Bataille (1985, pp. 140-144) (along with Dubuffet) identified as a nondialectical materialism—a “desubliminatory heterology”—that is guided by the constant expenditure in the forms of transgression and excess. In this case such excess is fragiley held within the confines of the bound book. Bye’s self-made books, like his “Outsider’s face,” which appears jarring at first, presents a poetics of desublimation that Battaille and Dubuffet characterized as informe (formless). There is no one coherent and consistent narrative that runs throughout them; there is only Bye’s pantomiming gestures and isolated words as he tries to gather up the scattered images to say “something” to anyone who would listen.

Although there is no Outsider art that isn’t conditioned, influenced and impinged by the visual culture of our media society—Nadia drew farm animals that she saw in children books, Bye’s books use the western codex form drawing on magazine images and Polaroid snapshots and Darger, whom I discuss below, knew intimately the printed magazine images in early twentieth-century society—it is the case, however, that such art resists cultural stereotyping of any sort. This strangely enough means that an Outsider artist does no know that s/he is creating art! John MacGregor (1999), who must surely must be one of the most prominent commentators on Outsider artists says this explicitly of Judith Scott, a fiber “artist” who has received much acclaim thanks to the efforts of Sylvia Seventy, a fiber artist herself, and the support of California’s Creative Art Center. Scott’s deafness, undiagnosed until middle age, led to exaggerations concerning her retardation. A Down’s Syndrome child, she was classified as
"uneducable" in childhood and then confined to an Ohio asylum for some thirty-five years. Now, her amazing fiber sculptures have become an unprecedented event. Yet, according to Sylvia Seventy, she thinks that Scott is color-blind and never knows when her fiber sculpture is actually finished. As MacGregor remarks: "There is not the slightest possibility that Judith envisions the eventual outcome, the final form of her work (p. 33). "Judith was certainly not engaged in the production of works of art" (p. 72). She "is completely unaware of the existence of sculpture" (p. 92). "The notion of abstract, non-representational form [which her work exemplifies] is a complex idea totally outside Judith's ability to conceptualize" (p. 109). All of Scott's activity, says MacGregor, is best categorized as "unconscious," perhaps because she does not use language (p. 106, 111).

It is this last remark concerning language and the unconscious that provides a clue as to what might be happening. Like Bye, Scott works with the primacy of matter, the wound fiber leads to a formlessness (informe) that possibly has no ending. Recognition by an Other plays no merit when producing these "objects," which helps explain why language under normal circumstances identifies a belonging to the Symbolic Order plays such an insignificant role for an Outsider artist. There is no interference from the Other, no aesthetic standards of other people to live up to, no transfer of desire. Whereas the artist must face critics, commissions and pending subsidies—thereby often inhibiting the creative process—the Outsider artist copes only with the private fantasy within.

We are dealing with singularities, not styles. The edge between Outsider and Mainstream art is reached here at this junction, the junction between a pre-egoic realm—otherwise referred to as the Lacanian Real of the informe, and the psychic realm of the egoic Imaginary. The Outsider artist lives only in his or her imaginary, struggling to articulate the trauma of his or her ego. The Symbolic Order
of the Superego, of language, of the Other, of the social Order within which she or he lives simply drops out. This is illustrated magnificently in Leon A. Borensztein’s photo of Judith Scott hugging her fiber bundle (fig. 2, below).

The subject-object distance between her and her fiber sculpture, a biomorphically resonate shape of wound, wrapped and darned layers of multicolored yarn that resembles her own body, has totally disappeared. Much like Bye’s self-made books, her sculptural bundle embraces her as much as she embraces it. Both look at one another, as if she had just finished giving birth to her child but does not want ever to let it go, to give it up, but remains comforted by its presence. To cut it away from her body would mean to send it into the uncertainty of the Symbolic Order. This reminds me of the paintings of Edvard Munch, some of which he worked on for ten years, unwilling to part with them.
because of their close association with his personal traumas. Every artist knows that the recognition by the Symbolic Order is just that special moment when the Other (critic, public, buyer) identifies with an art piece which is then sold, cut loose from the artist’s body no matter how precious it may be; like the mother who must let go of her son (and now her daughter as well) to the call of war. The nation demands its pound of flesh and makes the transaction in the exchange of patriotic loyalty.

Slaying Monsters
What then does Outsider Art point to? What lessons can art education glean from its un(becoming) nature? And, does it teach us anything about creativity that mainstream artists in the past have tried to learn from? All, I hope are good questions to tackle. Let us take the intense and obsessional nature of this Outsider art first, its singularity. The thesis I would maintain is that Outsider art provides us with a glimpse of the unconscious Real as developed by Lacan (1977), that realm which is both beyond the visual and the linguistic. The Real identifies the very kernel of our “true” self, that is to say, it is the realm of our symptoms, of our drives, of our bodily pre-egoic dispositions. Such a psychic bodily dimension is the place of primordial fragmented being—a place of un(becoming), a “shadow self” to use Jungian language, where the traumas of our existence are lived out. To say this is where we slay our monsters (fears and anxieties) is no exaggeration. It is a cauldron of energies that are eventually harnessed through images and contained by the meanings of the linguistic signifiers that we use so that through our memory—as externalized through the use of mnemonic devices—we are able to stabilize and codify a system of cultural representation. We appear “sane” since there is a recognizable Other who shares the same codes and signifiers. The imagination becomes a “theatre of memory” that shares a world-view through language with the larger social order, or “big Other.” The singularity
of the unconscious Real, however, produces its own idiosyncratic “monsters.” They may defy categorization, have no signifier, and only imagined and then perhaps drawn, or rendered externally. Monsters, therefore, reveal the madness of the imagination. They point to the manifestations of alterity and difference in extremis, and symbolize the life of the drives, of “raw” being. We can identify this life as that of zoë—”naked life” as Agamben (1998) referred to it in distinction to bios—life that is already signified and politicized under the auspices of the Law of the state. The life of zoë, of the drives, is the place of un(becoming), the terrors of the soul, the regions beyond the thresholds of rationality—the place of non-sense, and the cauldron of creativity.

To make an important distinction for art educators: For the Outsider artists these monsters are fought on the playing field of the imaginary—incessantly, obsessively, excessively—so that the semblance of a fragile ego can be maintained. Without their “art” there is a fall into the horrors of the Real. What little framing of a world is possible exists only at the level of their imagination. They are, as it were, caught in the battle between their unconscious Real self—their monstrous symptoms and traumas—and the playing field of the Imaginary, a field of “enjoyment” (jouissance), for there is no symbolic stable Order they can anchor themselves in. If they could, they would no longer have Outsider status. In this “Realm of the Real” a carnival of fragmented forms swirl, where the catastrophes of the flesh as a body in pieces circulate; the primeval horror of a world that is chaotic and threatening reveals itself; a fearful world of primal matter that is yet unformed (informe) and essentially uninhabitable. Every child has to pass through this “night of day,” and find framed images and a language to tame it. The dolls, blankies, and stuffed animals have to be hugged to weather the night when the eyes must close. Hieronymus Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights gives us a glimpse of the Realms of the Real as a desublimated living nightmare, while Goya’s famous The Sleep of Reason
Produce Monsters, gives us warning that reason alone cannot keep the menacing creatures that swarm the unconscious away while we sleep.

**Henry Darger’s Sinthome**

The fundamental question of existence for the obsessive individual, Lacan (S VIII, *Transference*) tells us, is whether s/he is “dead or alive.” The importance of this insight to the Outsider artist will soon become apparent. The obsessive Outsider artist is only “alive” when battling the monsters of his or her imagination. To stop would be to fall completely in the unconscious Real—to be “dead.” The sustainability of be(coming), no matter how tenuous, collapses. The field of the imaginary implodes into an abyss. The self’s shadow, still cast by light no matter how dim, would fade into the blackness of Night. Perhaps no better case to illustrate such a never-ending battle is the “artistic oeuvre” of Chicago Outsider artist Henry Darger (1892-1973) who posthumously left hand and typewritten 15,145 page illustrated epic called, The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion. Better known, *In the Realm of the Unreal* (fig. 3, next page), its running title indicates its non-narrative assemblage that would have never ended had Darger not been “discovered.”

The big Other found out his secret. Much like Bye’s books never stop being produced, and Scott’s fiber sculptures never entirely stop being wound with more and more “yarn,” Darger would have continued to illustrate and write. Illness, frailty, and a move to an old age home did him in. When his landlord discovered his life work in his apartment of thirty-three years, Darger initially was shocked, but then became indifferent, telling his landlord to “Throw it away” (MacGregor, 2002, p.19). Effectively his obsession had been “killed.” He had become totally unraveled. He died within a year of the discovery.
Darger had a deprived and tormented childhood. He never got over the trauma of the loss of his mother and his sister when he was four. His father basically abandoned him. "In a real sense, Henry Darger remained a child, not intellectually, but emotionally. There was an unmistakable failure to mature" (MacGregor, 2002, p.21). Much of his youth was spent in asylums unable to stay with his father who himself suffered from a debilitating illness. Darger had lived in a Boschian monstrous garden all those years, but in 1935 he started writing and illustrating it to face his demons. The epic tale begins on a far-away planet where a long and violent history of child slavery erupts into a war between the nations of Angelinia and Glandelina. Seven sister heroines lead the enslaved children against the adult male Glandelinians. The graphic battle scenes are a re-visitation of Bosch’s garden—a field of bodies in pieces. The young Christian Angelinian girls are eviscerated, beheaded, disemboweled, and strangled by the
evil and godless adversaries. The Vivian Sisters are victorious thanks to the support of a Christian Army and the help of fanciful winged creatures called Blengomenians. Darger incorporated popular imagery and knowledge of historical societal events as he wrote this epic.

Like Scott and Bye, his illustrative epic was composed of waste and debris. He rescued and transformed the bits and pieces of discarded Americana he found in the garbages of Chicago's North side to compose the several hundred illustrations for his epic novel. He picked up bottle caps and packaging while walking and talking to himself. Like Scott, he collected string and rolled it into balls throughout his life. His apartment was littered with stacks of newspapers and magazines bound with wire. What was waste for the affluent became treasure for Darger. The preciousness and investment in material can be read throughout his work. The several hundred collage-drawings were double-sided due to the scarcity of available materials. He made plastic devices that were attached to the end of the smaller stubs of pencil so that the entire graphite would be used up. Scrapbooks filled with traced figures and cutout images were kept. Above all he archived images of pubescent girls like the Coppertone Girl and Little Orphan Annie. One of his favorite figures—Little Annie Rooney, the heroine from Darrell McClure's comic strip with the same name, was a staple character that appeared often. These girl images haunted him, their eyes were entirely filled with lead pencil. In the dark of his apartment, passing light would reflect in the lead-filled eyes giving the impression that these pictures were alive and watching him (MacGregor, 2002). Darger's struggling alter ego, the fantasy image of the self that appears during the mirror stage of psychic development, was their Angelinian protector.

Darger, however, was "stuck" in this mirror stage—his tale is laden with brutality, violence, strangulation, and evisceration of nude and transsexual children. "These are images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open
of the body—in short, the imagos that I [Lacan] have grouped together under the apparently structural term *imagos of the fragmented body* (Lacan, 1977, p.11, author’s italic). There was no Other to confirm the gestalt of Darger’s alter ego in one way or another so as to legitimate his social role as to who he was within the Symbolic Order. He had to do this himself, as the protector in his epic. For the few that knew him he only spoke of the weather, and avoided contact as much as possible. For most of his life he remained a janitor and dishwasher at local hospitals. Hints of the absence of the social Other come from the fact that his illustrations were “collage-drawings,” as McGregor (2002) characterized them, and not sketches that directly engage with his environment—as if capturing some live event from observation. He dealt with “dead” matter in the sense that the visual images cut out from magazines, or traced from found pictures, had been stripped of their symbolism in the “real” world of their meaning, and appropriated into the imaginary world of his epic. They were re-signified into a Catholic epic battle between good and evil (Darger attended mass several times a day) through a colorful comic book aesthetic that influenced his visual sensibilities—simple lines and bright colors.

Darger’s fundamental fantasy, the nude children and girls with penises, who did battle with the violent adult men, the Glandelinians, articulates his own personal struggle with authority—the Law of the superego. Within the epic, Darger is in conflict with God. He couldn’t understand why God failed to answer his prayers to end the suffering of children and silence the face of evil. This was the reason why MacGregor (2002) argued that Darger had the mind of a serial killer since he was an outlaw of society. He had not internalized the superegoic Law. Not only had his father abandoned him, he had already showed signs of violence and aggressiveness as a young boy. At the age of 12 he was confined to an asylum as an inmate until he escaped at the age of nineteen. It was his art that staved off his total fall into
psychosis where voices inside the head would begin to dictate his behavior, as if language was a disembodied Thing. He may have talked to himself like a schizophrenic, but the illustrative epic was also his way of talking to himself, to instill “The–Law-of-the-Father” (authority) by taking on various guises of heroism as the protector of children, especially as Captain Henry Darger, head of the secret organization of men called “The Gemini,” devoted to protecting little girls from harm.

MacGregor attribute’s Darger’s fascination with little girls to the loss of his sister who was put up for adoption when his mother died in childbirth when Darger was four. This childhood trauma, coming at a time when the sexuality of the ego was still forming, provides the clue to Darger’s fundamental fantasy, his sinthome, which is so obviously displayed as a conflict between his angelic (Angelinnian) side and his glandular (Glandelinian) driven aggressive side. Self-therapy and self-theology seem to collapse on each other into a distilled hole out of which emerges a redemptive birth that is led only in the Imaginary psychic register. Lacan’s use of the word sinthome in his XXIII Seminar was in relation to James Joyce’s own psychic struggles, breaking with the old word symptom. The classical Freudian–Lacanian theory identified symptom as metaphor, that is, as a substitution of one term—the signifier of the symptom—for another, as the repressed signifier. In this regard Darger’s epic (as signifier) is a symptom of the loss (repression) of his sister at the age of four. The symptom is lifted when the word associated with the symptom appears in treatment. In Darger’s case this never happened. But, Lacan argues that even when this does happen—the anaysand grasps what his fundamental symptom (sinthome) is—such a symptom does not necessarily go away. The anaysand is not “cured” as was claimed by Freud. Rather, she or he recognizes the fundamental fantasy that is the “cause” of behavior. To “give this symptom up” would be to fundamentally unravel existence as it is lived. This would be like a heterosexual traversing his
or her fundamental fantasy to desire a same sex partner. When and if that does happen, this is to recognize that one is gay, bisexual, lesbian, or transsexual. The "closet" is removed and life becomes radically changed. But this may not happen—ever.

Here I extrapolate from MacGregor’s account to grasp Darger’s sinthome. When a real-life photo of a young girl, Elsie Paroubek aged five, and his notebook, both signifiers for his lost sister, went missing from Darger’s belongings when he was nineteen and still in a mental asylum, he began to wage war on God (which was later worked out through his epic tale) believing that God had abandoned him. He demanded that God intervene and the two items be returned to him—according to his autobiography. (Paroubek had been found strangled in a drainage ditch about the same time that the picture and notes went missing, casting suspicion on Darger by MacGregor’s intensive investigations. This caused some consternation within the artistic community by those who presented Darger as posthumous Outsider artist.). Again, in a classical understanding of the symptom, a type of unconscious formation can disappear. Producing the repressed signifier (e.g., Paroubek’s photo) unmakes the metaphor and unknots the symptom. Darger is (perhaps) relieved of his guilt over his missing—lost sister, or (perhaps) guilt over the possible murder of Paroubek. A symptom as metaphor contains within itself the possibility of its own cure. However, we need only think of the strings of balls that Darger wrote about throwing at the statue of Christ in his diaries. There was no simple “disentanglement” of his symptom. In his seminar XXII, R.S.I. (1974-1975) “the symptom can only be defined as the way in which each subject enjoys [jouiti] the unconscious, insofar as the unconscious determines him (p. 45).” It is this excess in relation to Freud’s pleasure principle (pleasure as experienced within the acceptable cultural laws), which defines jouissance as an excess of pleasure or suffering—Darger’s “strange satisfaction” that is attached to his art, which is found in the
Real. Not to overcomplicate what can become a very difficult discussion, this means that the symptom is *transformable, but not curable*. We all must live with the *jouissance* of our symptoms. This is not a pathology as it is a primordial state of existence. We are all constantly struggling with the empty kernel of ourselves that we do not know, our unconscious drives.

Lacan pushes this understanding of symptom one more step. To be psychotic, and here my argument has been that Darger’s art prevents his fall into psychosis, means to be outside the Law. There is no internalization of the Name-of-the-Father. The psychotic, as a serial killer, kills without remorse. There is no guilt. In certain cases of psychoses (like that of Darger I am suggesting), his *sinthome* (epic) can keep his ego together and supplement the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father; in brief, Darger’s art prevents him from becoming—perhaps—a psychotic serial killer. This is why MacGregor’s accusation that Darger may have killed Paroubek when he escaped from the asylum was so disturbing and controversial. If we say that he did, his artwork is a long-standing battle *not* to kill again. Bizarrely, his epic as his *sinthome*, kept him “alive.” When found out, to reiterate once again, he was “dead.”

This, of course, takes us back full circle as to why Lacan states that the fundamental question of existence for the obsessional remains “Am I dead or alive?” Darger, as do the other Outsider artists previously mentioned, illustrates an important characteristic of Bataille’s *informe*—entropy, or “expenditure,” by which he means regulation through *excess*. To the extent the obsessional can repeat the “pulse” of his or her jouissance, s/he remains “grounded”—or “horizontal” to call on Bois and Krauss (1997) again, in the way the body remains attached to the Imaginary narrative. For Darger, like Jackson Pollock, this narrative was stretched out before him—*horizontally*, on the tabletop that he worked on. Restricted and determined by the table’s dimensions, it
was then rolled up into a tube much like scrolled manuscript to be continued each and every day. It does not take too much imagination to recognize that such action was much like rolling up a ball of string, or weaving with string like Scott, or creating yet another book, like Bye. These obsessional activities in a very fundamental sense provided the “expenditure” needed to maintain the energy necessary to stay minimally horizontal (grounded). But his string (narrative) snapped when he was “discovered.” There was no activity to give him the will (energy) to go on. Entropically speaking, it was simply a question of time that Darger reached the state of ice-cold death.

Lessons for Art Education: 
The Paradoxes of Artless Art

Was Darger a madman turned artist, or an artist who became mentally ill? The question raises one of the perplexities of teaching art. In his cheeky title, *Why Art Cannot be Taught* (2001), James Elkins exposes the repressed un(becoming) in art educational institutions—art colleges, art schools, and fine art departments in universities. To articulate his thesis Elkins, over and over again, stumbles across the irrational kernel in art education, especially in the way critiques are conducted where often there is no rhyme nor reason as to what gets passed as art. Most often it becomes a rhetorical interaction between student and instructor that negotiates what is acceptable and what isn’t. This kernel of irrationality is found in the simplest of questions concerning art history. Take German Expressionism and the various expressionists that developed from it. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the movement Die Brücke achieved their *l’art brut* style in the space outside the artistic academy, intentionally ignoring its established canon. This phenomenon is not isolated, but almost the rule. Much like Marx could not be a Marxist, Kirchner could not be an Expressionist. Those that followed became Expressionists, a generalized signifier that became
incorporated into the artistic canon. The “event” of Expressionism, which had its moment of being Outside, preceded them. What was un(becoming) became one of becoming, the Derridean supplementary logic referred to earlier. After World War I, when Kirchner turned to scholarly research by examining historical styles, he lost his “edge.” The point is that this “edge” is always Outside. Initially, it always eludes a supplementary logic.

This tension between an Outsider art that needs no instruction and an art that does is continually negotiated repressed in art and its education. Teachers can often quickly recognize student artwork that seems to defy any need for studio instruction. The art teacher really is no help here since a rational canon is not being transferred in such exceptional cases. For such artists, it is best that they do not stay in fine art departments or art schools lest what is singular and unique quickly becomes mediocre as conformity sets in despite the art teacher’s desire not to have this happen. Ever since Romanticism, when art became a fragment, no longer part of the social order but a critique of it, such an irrational kernel of un(becoming) remains repressed in our art institutions. Outsider art, as I have theorized it above, is the pure raw expression of such lifted repression for the Symbolic Order is completely ignored. There is complete withdrawal. Only life (zoe) as led in the incessant production of art necessity to maintain sanity becomes all encompassing and consuming.

The repression of this irrational kernel of the Real in art making—historically referred to as mania, passion, poetic rupture, and even more prosaically as creativity, as that “something” which cannot be “graded” or taught—has been successfully carried out in art schools through a Bauhausian legacy; namely, as the application of skill, craft, identifiable principles and elements of design, basic rules and procedures, all of which can be taught. Here the authority of the Symbolic Order rules as embodied in the art teacher—the holder of the canon. In postmodernity
this repression has become even more dominant as designer capitalism invests in art forms that continue to rationalize visual communication through the new computerized media of the Internet and the design of consumerables for the market. At the same time, as a counter measure there has been a “return of the Real” in art, as Foster (1996) argued. Art students who lean on the irrational side of the ledger often end up being art teachers, searching for a “legitimate” way to keep up their need to create to stay sane. Those who wish to earn designer dollars turn to multi-corporations that promise wealth.

Both madness and possession by trance were long believed to be manifestations of divine inspiration. Tribal shamans as schizophrenics who heard voices in their head as auditory hallucinations were signs that the gods were talking to the chosen. Oddly, can it not be said that this lingering Real still calls on art education? Art teachers find students in their classes, especially in the senior years when they say: I cannot teach this person anything. They have gone far beyond what I can offer them; they seem to be inspired by their own passion, developing portfolios that seem unique and idiosyncratic to them. We have all recognized such students. The most outstanding students are often the most troubled ones. They do not easily fit in the Symbolic Order.

What is the extreme example of Outsider art—the battle for sanity minus the Symbolic or big Other—is the everyday occurrence in our art classrooms with the big Other very much present. The Journal of Social Theory would lose its impact if this was not the case. The difference however is that the monsters are sublimated in the classroom—framed, trapped, explored, examined, and finally overcome and done away with. Violence is channeled, signifiers are imploded, and exploded. Texts are played with, Situationist détournement actions are marshaled against the social Order, graffiti is given its free reign when possible. The portrait transforms the face into an icon, a symbol. And, as this symbol becomes more and more expressive, stylized, the portrait loses
its verisimilitude and passes into something else—caricature. From there, it is a short step to monstrosity. Often the question is whether the caricature, by revealing the person through extreme exaggeration and distortion, doesn’t capture the “true” Real self—that grotesque hidden side, the demonic inversion of the self? The metaphorical humanized animal emerges; the continuity between human and animal becomes distorted like so many horror shows like The Fly, “becoming-animal” as Deleuze and Guattari (1987pp. 242-243) would say. One need only think of Francis Bacon here, who shows the inside of the person outside, or even Daumier’s characterization of Charles X as “Le Poire,” his grotesque pear shaped head “crapping out” legislative laws for the specific benefit of the haute bourgeoisie. Such experiences in art classrooms show us just how close we come to the horrors of the Real. Fortunately, art again and again sublimates such formlessness through the materialized signifier, no matter how tenuous, as demonstrated by the many examples by Yve-Alain Bois & Rosalind Krauss’s important book Formless (1997). But, not everything can be controlled. In specific traumatized contexts—like the childrens’ art of refugee camps, war, drought and starvation—does the Real dramatically show itself.

The Real Lesson

The fragility of un(becoming) sits uneasily in art programs. Art history is littered with substance abuse and excess as this irrational kernel within ourselves—the sinthome—is struggled with. To sum up we can identify the contradiction embedded in un(becoming) as the very tension of the bodily drives (Triebe) as opposed to social desire, and spell this out in Lacanian terms. All art is a sublimation of the psychic Real—put more prosaically, all art struggles to “frame” some “impossible” aspect of reality (the informe) so that we may become “enculturated.” The psychic Imaginary of our egos is precisely where this struggle goes on. On one the side of the ledger, this is the tension
with our unconscious Real selves, our embodied symptoms that we are ignorant of. Looking over an artistic oeuvre we, as an audience, can get a glimpse of what those struggles may have been for any given artist. The hundred upon hundreds of Rembrandt self-portraits trace his transformations throughout his life. But Rembrandt painting any single one of them could never fully grasp who he was at any one time. They document his struggle to know his Real self. Yet, every now and again, within his portraits, the excesses of what he could not control \((\text{informe})\) began to reveal themselves, dwelling within the spaces of his masterly chiaroscuro—smudges and paint strokes that no longer held together in a coherent context—unconscious actions trying to grasp ghostly, ephemeral states of being that defied representation.

The fall into the Real where there is no Law, no authority and no embodied language as it is commonly understood is referred to as psychosis. There is a foreclosure \((\text{Verwerfung})\) of the \textit{Le Nom-du-Père}. The Law has not been internalized. Here is where Outsider art dwells. The un(becoming) art that is produced, vivifies the kernel of the Real within a Symbolic Order that has been pathologically foreclosed in any number of complicated ways. Symbolic language as we know it, does not play a significant role. Visual signifiers are singular and idiosyncratic in their formation, unique to the individual. If we take Darger as an exemplary case, he was his own authority. There is no subject-object split between his body and his art. It was his “art” that prevented him from becoming totally psychotic. The distorted, caricatural, and stangified nature of Outsider art, the extreme distortions of the human face and figure, are the intensifications of mental struggle to at least exist within a Symbolic Order that has no normative meaning. The bodily drives take precedence. There is no desire of the Other.

On the other side of the ledger, the tension between the Real and the Imaginary where the Law is already internalized, where the Symbolic Order as a shared language is in place, the art produced must...
face the critique of authority as represented by the art teacher, the artistic institution and they paying public. Desire of the Other is therefore very much present. The artist struggles to be an authority but cannot escape entirely this ethical and political obligation demanded by the Other. I would argue this is the normative tension that is felt in artistic becoming. On the one hand, there are artforms that critique society (the big Other). This is not Outsider art, but art that is often, at first abjected, but then finds its way back into the accepted canon through a supplementary logic. Since Romanticism, such art has pitted itself against the Law (as rebelliousness, avant-garde, anti-institutional, and so-on). Accepted conventions are intentionally broken—the nihilism of Dada, being the exemplary case. The psychic Real is struggled with in such art forms, but it is done so within the cultural contexts of institutions. What the Other thinks and says still matters. Take the case of Duchamp. His “retirement” into chess playing was also a clever disguise for his constant critique of the Western frame of reference. As mentioned earlier, Van Gogh may have become mad, but he still wanted to be accepted by the artistic establishment. On the other hand, we have what I would call today designer art where the Real is tightly sealed up—the Bauhausian tradition rules despite the mysticism of Johannes Itten. Walter Gropius soon ended his three-year tenure. Art appears as if it is a rational disciplined exercise, where the canon can be taught and innovations—endless it seems—are possible. More often than not, economics, safety, and measured standards take precedence.

This then is the secret of un(becoming): the tensions of the Imaginary psychic register with the unknowable Real, Bataille’s informe, as pressured by the presence of the Symbolic social Order of language. Our art classrooms are a testament to such tensions. We attract the “rejects,” the “throwaways,” as well as the Advanced Placement academic kids, the IB (International Baccalaureate) students where all their art is conceptually researched. And also, we find the occasional
student who is truly Outside, struggling hard with those demons and dragons of the unconscious that are just barely tamed. Sometimes they can't. There is more than one art teacher who has told me of the tragedy of suicide, at times suffered as a violent death. This perhaps is the toughest lesson of all. In the end, the Outsider is always living in us.

Notes
1 This passage refers to the 15,145 page illustrated epic, *The Realms of the Unreal*, by the Outsider artist Henry Darger whom I discuss later on. Jessica Yu made a documentary bearing the same title in 2004. My title substitutes the Unreal with the Real, which will be given a Lacanian psychoanalytic definition.


3 A remarkable attempt to show the influences between mainstream and outsider artists can be found in the exhibition held from Oct. 18, 1992 – Jan. 3, 1993 in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art curated by Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel (1992).

4 Bye "is concerned with the uses of the page, the relationships between the images on the page, movement within the book and the composition of singular and multiple imaged pages" (Blandy, 1991, p.100).

5 I am capitalizing Symbolic Order throughout this essay to refer to both the accepted and unaccepted clandestine operations that go on in the name of the Law. The Symbolic Order refers to the normative circulation of signs that encompass the Law and its shadow side. (see Zizek, 1994).
6 Capitalized throughout the essay to indicate all possible authoritative representatives of the Symbolic Order, including language itself. The Symbolic Order can be thought of as a "big Other."

7 The pun should be obvious. He also produced a six-volume weather journal (1957-1967), which was telling of his psychic state, and an eight volume, a 5,000-page autobiography, *The History of My Life*, which was a sequel to his epic novel.

8 The mirror stage is a well-known Lacanian concept that identifies the birth of the ego in the imaginary mirror of the consciousness. A gestalt image forms of who one thinks he or she is in the reflection of a metaphorical mirror. The formation of such an alter ego is actually a double reflection formed by an impossible gap that opens up between who one believes she or he is and who one is within the Symbolic Order. The two reflections can never become one. We can never know with complete certainty how we are perceived by the Other. Typically this happens as a process from six to eighteen months of age.

9 Darger bestowed the girl figures with male genitalia. The psychoanalyst, Harvey Freed (in Bonesteel, 2000, p. 22) argues that perhaps this was due to his identification with the young Angelinian children, feeling himself effeminate, weak, and helpless. A better explanation for such transsexuality would be his ambiguity to sexuality in general since he was impotent. The penis is portrayed as flaccid, there is no aggressiveness of masculine machismo. There is no sex in the epic, only hugging and kissing. Freed diagnosed him as an "ambulatory schizophrenic" (MacGregor, 2002, p.79).

10 *Le Nom-du-Père* is often translated into English as "The- Name-of-the-Father," but in the French it has the added meaning of "The- no-of-the-Father" indicating that the Law has been internalized.
References


