Chapter 5
The Origins of Art

Around the turn of the century, books devoted to the birth of art began to multiply. Titles included Ernst Grosse's *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (1894; *The Beginnings of Art*, 1897), Yrjö Hirn's *Origins of Art* (1900), Carl Stumpf's *Die Anfänge der Musik* (1909; *Beginnings of Music*, 1911), Ludwig Jacobowski's *Die Anfänge der Poesie* (The Beginnings of Poesie, 1891), Francis B. Gummere's *Beginnings of Poetry* (1901), Erich Schmidt's "Die Anfänge der Literatur und die Literatur der primitiven Völker" (The Beginnings of Literature and the Literature of Primitive Peoples, 1906), and Heinz Werner's *Die Ursprünge der Lyrik* (The Origins of Lyric, 1900). On the one hand, we can understand this trend in the context of empirical aesthetics, which was formed by Gustav Theodor Fechner in the last third of the nineteenth century.[1] On the other hand, it can be viewed alongside the search in the human sciences for the origins of Europe's own culture. For while Fechner pursued empirical psychology, the studies listed above combined an empirical,

1 This at any rate is the argument made by Sebastian Kaufmann in *Ästhetik des 'Wilden.' Zur Verschränkung von Ethno-Anthropologie und ästhetischer Theorie 1750 – 1850. Mit einem Ausblick auf die Debatte über 'primitive' Kunst um 1900* (Basel: Schwabe, 2020). His study draws extensively on my own research (Nicola Gess, ed., *Literarischer Primitivismus* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013]), as well as Priyanka Basu, "Die 'Anfänge' der Kunst und die Kunst der Naturvölker: Kunstwissenschaft um 1900," in *Image Match. Visueller Transfer: "Imagescapes" und Intervisualität in globalen Bildkulturen*, ed. Martina Baleva, Ingeborg Reichle, and Oliver Lerone Schultz (Paderborn: Fink, 2012), and Ingeborg Reichle, "Vom Ursprung der Bilder und den Anfängen der Kunst. Zur Logik des interkulturellen Bildvergleichs um 1900," in the same volume. Also of note are the following articles by Doris Kaufmann, which were also very important to my work on the intersection of primitivism and the theory of art as I was writing the German version of this book: "Kunst, Psychiatrie und 'schizophrenes Weltgefühl' in der Weimarer Republik. Hans Prinzhorns Bildnerei der Geisteskranken," in *Kunst und Krankheit. Studien zur Pathographie*, ed. Matthias Bormuth, Klaus Podoll, and Carsten Spitzer (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007); "Zur Genese der modernen Kulturwissenschaft. 'Primitivismus' im transdisziplinären Diskurs des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Wissenschaften im 20. Jahrhundert. Universitäten in der modernen Wissenschaftsgesellschaft*, ed. Jürgen Reulecke and Volker Roelcke (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008); "'Pushing the Limits of Understanding': The Discourse on Primitivism in German *Kulturwissenschaften*, 1880 – 1930," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (2008); "Die Entdeckung der 'primitiven Kunst.' Zur Kulturdiskussion in der amerikanischen Anthropologie um Franz Boas, 1890 – 1940," in *Kulturrelativismus und Antirassismus. Der Anthropologe Franz Boas (1858 – 1942)*, ed. Hans-Walter Schmuhl (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009); and "'Primitivismus': Zur Geschichte eines semantischen Feldes 1900 – 1930," in *Literarischer Primitivismus*, ed. Nicola Gess. For an early (and largely uncritical) discussion, see also Thomas Munro, *Evolution in the Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1967), especially chapter 10.

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inductive approach with a search for human prehistory – even though barely any hard data existed for it.

The paradigm of the 'primitive' promised a way out of this impasse. As we have seen in earlier chapters, it understood certain categories of people in the present day – children, the mentally ill, and indigenous communities – as survivals of prehistoric humanity. In such a framework, empirical-inductive projects examined the linguistic, visual, and musical productions of native peoples, the mentally ill, and children in order to understand the nature and function of art in its 'primal state.' Studies of this kind included Richard Wallaschek's *Primitive Music* (1893), Herbert Kühn's *Die Kunst der Primitiven* (The Art of Primitives, 1923), Alfred Vierkandt's *Das Zeichnen der Naturvölker* (The Drawings of Primitive People, 1912), Hans Prinzhorn's *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (1922; *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 1972), and Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub's *Der Genius im Kinde* (The Genius within the Child, 1922). Another good example is Karl Lamprecht's "Einführung in die Ausstellung von parallelen Entwicklungen in der bildenden Kunst" (Introduction to the Exhibition of Parallel Developments in Visual Art, 1913), a speech delivered at the *Kongress für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (First International Congress of Aesthetics [ICA]), where "numerous lectures complemented the research on non-European and prehistorical 'primitive' art by considering [works] by children."[2] Lamprecht contends that "the artistic development of lower cultures in the present day and prehistory alike has proceeded according to the principles of development found in children's art."[3]

As Max Dessoir emphasizes in *Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (1906; *Aesthetics and Theory of Art*, 1970), the task of a systematic and empirically based study of the arts was to research their "genesis and divisions." To this end, it was considered necessary to study "the art of peoples in a state of nature, children, and prehistory," and more and more frequently also that of the mentally ill. Together, these works were to be "viewed as interconnected elements in the research field of 'primitive art.'"[4] It was only logical, then, for the field of art

2 Sebastian Kaufmann, *Ästhetik des 'Wilden,'*" 680.

3 Karl Lamprecht, "Einführung in die Ausstellung von parallelen Entwicklungen in der bildenden Kunst," in *Kongress für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin 7.–9. Oktober 1913* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1914), 78.

4 Basu (summarizing Max Dessoir), "Die 'Anfänge' der Kunst," 117. On the other hand, Barbara Wittmann points out that recapitulation theory was increasingly losing significance for cultural history from about 1910 on. This can be seen, for example, in Max Verworn ("Kinderkunst und Urgeschichte," *Korrespondenz-Blatt der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 27 [1907]; *Die Anfänge der Kunst: Ein Vortrag* [Jena: Fischer, 1909]; *Ideoplastische Kunst: Ein Vortrag* [Jena: Fischer, 1914]); and Wilhelm Wundt ("Die Zeichnungen des Kindes und die zeichnende Kunst der Naturvölker," in *Festschrift Johannes Volkelt zum 70. Geburtstag*

studies (*Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*) to draw on the findings of ethnology, developmental psychology, and psychopathology, which offered considerations of their own on the linguistic, visual, and musical works of their objects of research, often in close conjunction with theories of 'primitive thinking' (see Chapters 2–4).

Without intending to, these disciplines thus provided historians and theorists of art a possible answer to one of their most important questions: the enigma of creativity. As Ernst Meumann observes in *Einführung in die Ästhetik der Gegenwart* (Introduction to Contemporary Aesthetics, 1908), "aesthetics' most difficult problem" was "genius" – in other words, the reasons underlying creative activity. To date, answers had proven "quite unsatisfactory"; as he puts it, "we are far from having said the final word [...] on the essence of artistic creation."[5] The paradigm of the 'primitive' promised to shine light into this black box, as it regarded artistic creativity as recourse to a 'primitive thought' that was deeply buried but not completely inaccessible to men and women of the time.[6]

Nonetheless, research into the origins of art did not merely provide a justification for the study of art and new stimuli for aesthetics. It also legitimized modern art itself through a spectrum of arguments. For evolutionary thinking, the topos of origins made it possible to demonstrate the extent to which modern European art supposedly stood at the summit of the 'evolution of the arts.' The topos also granted a sounder footing to *critical* views of progress inasmuch as it could be used to establish *general* laws of artistic activity that would be valid for *all* places and times and which now might be studied *ab ovo*. Finally, the topos of origins also had an important function, where, with a gesture critical of 'civilization,' contemporary art was denounced for having grown estranged from an anthropological 'essence.' Or, conversely, contemporary art was identified as the last refuge of and sole access to an origin from which modern society had alienated itself to its detriment.

[Munich: C. H. Beck, 1918]). However, the "ghostly power" it held for the avant-garde was unaffected (Wittmann, *Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien*, 241).

5 Ernst Meumann, *Einführung in die Ästhetik der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1908), 85.

6 As Susanne Leeb points out, at the end of the nineteenth century artistic production was increasingly "viewed as a generic trait of human nature acquired through evolution or activity prompted by drives," while "intelligence, talent, creativity, and the creative drive" were deemed "biological and genetic capacities" above all (*Die Kunst der Anderen*, 19).

Justifying the Study of Art

The proliferation of books around 1900 dealing with the 'beginnings' of art stood in the larger context of the search for origins that shaped the "Age of History" (Foucault). Indeed, the paradoxical relation between the foreign and one's own culture attending the emergence of ethnology and the paradigm of the 'primitive' (see Chapter 2) also informed the discipline of art studies. 'Primitive art' was thought of as the historical source of modern European art. In this way, it was not regarded merely as foreign, but rather its otherness proved to be the basis for one's own artefacts.[7]

However, art studies dealt with this paradox quite differently than the human sciences. Instead of unintentionally destabilizing standard notions of cultural identity, they projected the basic features of modern European art back onto a foreign past.[8] Often, such undertaking did not concern the beginnings of art so much as seek out the fundamental principle thought to shape art's further evolution.[9] In this framework, whatever is supposed to stand at the beginning does not become obsolete over time, but carries on in ulterior stages of development. In its most extreme form, such reasoning gives rise to an ontologizing view in which the first beginnings of art *are* its essence. Accordingly, in "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), Martin Heidegger declared,

> Origin means here that from where and through which a thing is what it is and how it is. That which something is, as it is, we call its nature [*Wesen*]. The origin of something is the source of its nature. The question of the origin of the artwork asks about the source of its nature.[10]

In what follows, I will expand on these theses by examining some representative studies in the fields of art history, musicology, and literary studies. In doing so, I will show how these disciplines shared the goal of justifying both their own existence and that of contemporary art. At the same time, we will see that their lines

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7 See also Leeb: "What is decisive is that modern art formed its self-understanding in the first place through both the included and the excluded Other, e. g., through the art of 'primitives'" (*Die Kunst der Anderen*, 16).

8 On the mechanism of projection and its significance for theories of culture at the turn of the century, see Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*.

9 The argument draws on Alexander Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53.2 (2000), especially 346 – 347.

10 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1. Also quoted in Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," 347.

of argument proceeded quite differently and also shifted significantly from the late nineteenth century to the late 1920s as a positivistic orientation gave way to speculativism and the evolutionary paradigm was replaced by cultural critique.

Art Studies (Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft)

With its intensive thematization of origins, the discipline of *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* sought to justify itself. Whether focused on music, literature, or visual art, scholars sought to secure the scientificity of their approach by examining the underlying essence and "laws of development" governing aesthetic production and by enlisting empirical data, especially from ethnology. Grosse's *The Beginnings of Art* represents a case in point. Here the author criticizes art studies for having thus far neglected to "begin at the beginning" and therefore for failing to identify the laws of development for art, as befits a serious science:[11]

> If we are ever to attain a scientific knowledge of the art of civilized peoples, it will be after we have first investigated the nature and condition of the art of savages. [...] The first and most pressing task of the social science of art lies, therefore, in the study of the primitive art of primitive peoples. In order to compass this object, the study of the science of art should not turn to history or pre-history, but to ethnology.[12]

Grosse seeks to remedy the lack of data from prehistoric cultures by performing an allochronic turn, relocating indigenous peoples of the present to a point earlier in time. Inasmuch as "savages" are thought to have no history, their works still display the qualities of those produced by the first human beings to inhabit the earth.

At the same time, however, Grosse acknowledges that the "highest [...] mastery"[13] is evident in the "artistic achievements [of] primeval men."[14] The reason for such sophistication lies with the "exercise of two faculties"[15] that archaic communities had to cultivate in their struggle for existence (that is, not for purely aesthetic purposes): skilled observation and manual dexterity. In other words, Grosse relativizes the evolutionistic standards used until that point by evaluating

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11 For a thorough discussion of Grosse's work, see Basu, "Die 'Anfänge' der Kunst"; Reichle, "Vom Ursprung der Bilder"; and Kaufmann, *Ästhetik des 'Wilden*,' 664–674, who observes that Grosse was hardly the first to make this claim (665).

12 Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art*, 21.

13 Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art*, 197.

14 Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art*, 164.

15 Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art*, 198.

'primitive art' as masterful.[16] Moreover, he contextualizes creative activity in cultural and historical terms, revealing a tendency for cultural relativism (as the American anthropologist Franz Boas was doing in the same period). Grosse grants to each culture artistic forms of its own and stresses that it is impossible to judge them as having higher or lower value on a universal scale of development. Art can only be more or less suitable to its own community.

The novelty of Grosse's view of 'primitive art' is plain in light of more traditional perspectives from the time. Heinrich Schurtz's *Urgeschichte der Kultur* (Prehistory of Culture, 1900), for instance, baldly declares that European culture occupies the summit of developments to date; it follows that the cultures of non-European peoples would lag far behind. Although he also calls for research on them, this serves only to gain information about the beginnings of European culture. Schurtz invokes Haeckel's biogenetic law and advises researchers "to come closer to achieving insight into the past through self-observation."[17] Inasmuch as he regards people as passing through the stages of human development over the course of their childhood and youth, he believes traces of ontogenetic and phylogenetic antiquity still exist in adults and can be investigated. Consequently – and in contrast to Grosse – Schurtz does not deem these childlike 'primitives' to be great artists so much as a strange combination of wild children and philistines:

> The "bad behavior" of our children, which comes out in seemingly inexplicable fits of defiance, stubbornness, and destruction and has its counterpart in eruptions of tempestuous tenderness, is found among members of peoples living in the state of nature, just in more dangerous form. [...] A Philistine learns what is necessary for his station, and this is enough for him to live his life without needing to learn anything new. Primitive peoples occupy the same position: their period of apprenticeship lies far in the past, and they have in a sense retired and need nothing more.[18]

Therefore, Schurtz is convinced that because they are unwilling to evolve, they have remained at one incipient phase for thousands of years.

However, Schurtz agrees with Grosse that general rules of art can be inferred from examinations of 'primitive art.'[19] Even though he cautions against trying to

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16 See Kaufmann, "Zur Genese der modernen Kulturwissenschaft," 43; for her, the "fundamental shift in the conception of primitive art" starts with Alois Riegl (43).

17 Heinrich Schurtz, *Urgeschichte der Kultur* (Leipzig, Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1900), 24.

18 Schurtz, *Urgeschichte der Kultur,* 66, 75.

19 The same holds for other representatives of *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*. August Schmarsow, for instance, invoked Grosse when he called for researchers to take a cue from ethnology

extract "the essence of a phenomenon from its sprouts,"[20] he maintains that looking at the "most primitive peoples" will facilitate "deeper understanding" of art's "root," which still fuels modern art's creative force. This root reaches "so far back that it was there before any awareness" of it existed; "fundamentally, and still today, art derives its true creative power from the process [*Treiben*] unconsciously at work."[21]

In similar fashion – and contradicting the cultural relativism he endorses elsewhere – Grosse, at the end of his study, declares that "primitive forms of art" are suitable for formulating the laws of art in general, since they show that what now exists was already there at the beginning. In acknowledging this state of affairs, he calls for scientific aesthetics to acquire an empirical footing:

> Strange and inartistic as the primitive forms of art sometimes appear at the first sight, as soon as we examine them more closely, we find that they are formed according to the same laws as govern the highest creations of art. And not only are the great fundamental principles of eurhythm, symmetry, contrast, climax, and harmony practised [...]. Our investigation has proved what aesthetics has hitherto only asserted: that there are, for the human race at least, generally effective conditions for aesthetic pleasure, and consequently generally valid laws of artistic creation.[22]

Grosse looks for a starting point where basic principles determining future development had been cultivated. In so doing, he projects features of modern European art back onto 'primitive artforms' in order to then recognize them as its supposed source. To take just one example, the eurhythm he identifies as a universal principle evident in 'primitive art' is a term that would only come into fashion in the early twentieth century in the context of anthroposophy.

Musicology

The same pattern is evident in specific disciplines of the study of the arts, for example in musicology. As Alexander Rehding has shown, scholars sought to

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in order to explain the "nature of art" and its "genesis" – that is, to retrace its evolution ("Kunstwissenschaft und Völkerpsychologie," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 2, no. 3 [1907]: 309). Ultimately, Schmarsow considered art to be based in affect and expressive motion (327, 337–339), in keeping with the rules governing human physiology.

20 Schurtz, *Urgeschichte der Kultur,* 493.

21 Schurtz, *Urgeschichte der Kultur,* 494.

22 Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art,* 307.

prove that their field was a true science by adopting a genealogical perspective; in so doing, they would disclose the beginnings of music and demonstrate its "essential constitution" (*Wesensbeschaffenheit*).[23] Carl Stumpf's *Die Anfänge der Musik* (1911; *Origins of Music*, 2012) exemplifies that undertaking. The author begins by taking issue with the assumptions on music guiding the thought of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Karl Bücher, who, in his estimation, had failed to explain the origins of an art "whose material consists essentially of fixed and transposable tonal steps."[24] For his own part, Stumpf considers that music has its origin in "acoustic signals" consisting of consonants shouted together. "Primordial humans [...] may have noticed this uniformity and may have particularly liked using simultaneous pitches [...] while having the impression of singing the self-same note, i.e., a strengthened note."[25] Such calls would have served the purpose of "signalling to people" and "the invocation of gods" (or, more precisely, "the demonic magical powers of air and water").[26] From here, intervals, polyphony, and tonality were gradually discovered.

Stumpf's observations are marked by a rhetorical move that projects basic principles of Western music back to the origin as supposed universals. Rehding notes that "the categories Stumpf privileged as universals are in fact particularly fitting for Western music, with its emphasis on the harmonic and polyphonic structure."[27] Accordingly, the author views the compositions of his own day as the fulfillment of the essence of music in general:

> Our present European music [...] is now, by contrast, entirely built on the chordal system which is derived by consistently and exclusively carrying through the principle of consonance. Since this is the primordial phenomenon out of which music arose, which forms its flesh and bones, and since it has brought this elementary fact most purely and perfectly

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23 Guido Adler, "Antrittsvorlesung an der Universität Wien, Musik und Musikwissenschaft," *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters* 5 (1898): 29; also quoted in Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," 345–385. On the debate (especially Wallaschek's position), cf. Alexandra Hui, "Origin Stories of Listening, Melody and Survival at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *Music and the Nerves, 1700–1900*, ed. James Kennaway (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Gernot Gruber, "Das 'Archaische' in der Musikkultur der Wiener Moderne. Eine Skizze," in *Kunst, Kontext, Kultur. Manfred Wagner 38 Jahre Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte an der Angewandten*, ed. Gloria Withalm, Anna Spohn, and Gerald Bast (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); Basu, "Die 'Anfänge' der Kunst."

24 Carl Stumpf, *The Origins of Music*, trans. David Trippett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43.

25 Stumpf, *The Origins of Music*, 46.

26 Stumpf, *The Origins of Music*, 47.

27 Stumpf, *The Origins of Music*, 56. Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," 382.

> into being and thereby established the stylistic principle for the whole imposing design [*Bau*], we may regard it as the highest form of music so far, without being narrow-minded from the perspective of either ethnopsychology or developmental history.[28]

Stumpf was not alone in holding this belief, which led early ethnomusicologists to find the foundations of – and justification for – modern European music among indigenous peoples. Richard Wallaschek's *Primitive Music* (1893), draws on travelogues to advance such a claim:

> When at the beginning of the last century [Friedrich Wilhelm] Kolbe travelled among the Hottentots he found them playing different gom-goms in harmony. They also sang the notes of the common chord down to the lower octave [...], thus producing a harmonious effect. [William John] Burchell, who repeatedly assures us that he probably was the first European who ever touched the African soil in that part where he travelled, describes the harmonious singing of the Bachapin boys [...] guided only by their own ear, [...] in correct harmony. The Bechuana [...] have a sufficient appreciation of harmony to sing in two parts.[29]

Accounts like these demonstrate for Wallaschek the "naturalness" of harmony and, with that, the naturalness of European music in the present day.[30] Indigenous music that did not display such characteristics was attributed to a different genetic disposition (that is, "racial" difference).[31] Alternatively, it was ignored or dismissed. Hugo Riemann exemplifies the latter attitude:

> The striking congruencies of the division of the octave into twelve semitones, which completes the seven-step scale by interspersing a semitone between alternatively two and three tones [i.e., the diatonic scale] – found likewise by the Chinese, Greeks, and the nations of the European West in the space of many centuries – is a historical fact, which cannot simply be overthrown by a couple of pipes with faulty bores from Polynesia or by the questionable vocal achievements of colored women.[32]

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28 Stumpf, *The Origins of Music*, 64–65; also quoted in Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," 353–354.

29 Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1893), 139.

30 This judgment does not concern expanded tonality, much less atonality, but the status quo of classical and Romantic music. In fact, the line of argument at issue lent itself to a dismissal of avant-garde compositions as "pathological," if not "degenerate."

31 Wallaschek, *Primitive Music*, 144. Cf. Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," 359.

32 Hugo Riemann, *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel, 1904). 1: vi; quoted in Rehding, "The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900," 355.

Compared to the *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* at the turn of the century, musicology exhibited even more strongly the paradox of simultaneously taking distance from and identifying with supposed origins – that is, retrojecting Western musical principles while denying or disqualifying all others. First beginnings counted not as the expression of a primordial essence so much as an element that unfolds over time and culminates in modern European music as its fulfillment and highest form.

Literary Studies

Literary studies at the turn of the century were similarly motivated to cite ethnological findings in order to replace the merely hypothetical structure of earlier claims with "unbroken chain[s] of evidence obtained by empirical means"[33] and thus to demonstrate the scientific nature of their undertaking. In *Anfänge der Poesie* (1891), for example, Ludwig Jacobowski calls for a "poetics [...] based strictly on empiricism, [that is,] the natural sciences" since this alone would be able "to validate the scientific nature of literary studies in the future."[34] On the basis of Haeckel's biogenetic law, he seeks to prove the historical priority of lyric over epic. To that end he shows how for children, "subjective (i. e., lyrical) moments of feeling precede the objective (i. e., epic) moments of perception" and how children from their earliest days of life can express such sentiments in the sounds they utter.[35] The equation of "subjective" and "lyrical" as well as "objective" and "epic" bears the mark of contemporary poetic theory – the entire process is once again informed by a projective mechanism.

For Jacobowski, this insight into the child's psyche applies to "primitive man" as well:

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33 Karl Bücher, "Arbeit und Rhythmus," *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, 17 (1897): 80. Grosse also plays an important role in this context, insofar as in 1887 he presented the most comprehensive (and earliest) plan for turning literary history into literary science (*Literaturwissenschaft*): "The task of the modern science of literature is determining laws," which include the "law of poetic evolution in general" (Grosse, *Die Literatur-Wissenschaft*, quoted in Klaus Weimar, "Die Begründung der Literaturwissenschaft," in *Literaturwissenschaft und Wissenschaftsforschung*, ed. Jörg Schönert [Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000], 139). Since no data is available for prehistory, Grosse advises scholars to take a "detour" via "similar but less complicated [...] phenomena" – for instance, children's games (quoted in Weimar, "Die Begründung der Literaturwissenschaft," 140).

34 Ludwig Jacobowski, *Anfänge der Poesie. Grundlegung zu einer realistischen Entwickelungsgeschichte der Poesie* (Dresden: E. Pierson's Verlag, 1891), v.

35 Jacobowski, *Anfänge der Poesie*, 7.

> Inasmuch as we must deem primitive man [...] approximately equal to the child intellectually and psychically, because, according to Haeckel's biogenetic law, we have a miniature image of primitive man in the child's development, we carry over results obtained on an ontogenetic basis to the phylogeny of primitive man and find, for him, what holds for the newborn child and highly developed animals: that his "worldview" is a matter of epistemological sensualism. With that, it is proven that perceptions represent the first, decisive moment in the psychic life of primitive man. And since I conceive of primordial lyricism [*Urlyrik*] as the transposition of perceptions into vocalizations, its priority stands beyond doubt.[36]

The historical priority of lyric – that is, the (supposed) fact that it developed before epic and drama – implies a positive value judgement: Jacobowski considers contemporary poetry that stands closest to that of human origins to be "the actually 'true'" lyric – in particular, "intimate confessional or occasional lyric in the highest Goethean sense."[37] Many literary scholars would follow him in affirming the priority of lyric. Thus, Erich Schmidt's "Die Anfänge der Literatur und die Literatur der primitiven Völker" still considers the point of origin to lie in spontaneous vocalizations of sentiment and choral expression.[38]

Movement and rhythm competed with affective vocalization in theories of literary origins.[39] *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Work and Rhythm, 1897) by Karl Bücher – a work regularly invoked as authoritative by his contemporaries – identified "energetic, rhythmical physical movement, especially that motion we call work," as

36 Jacobowski, *Anfänge der Poesie*, 10.

37 Jacobowski, *Anfänge der Poesie*, 11.

38 Erich Schmidt, "Die Anfänge der Literatur und die Literatur der primitiven Völker," in Erich Schmidt, Adolf Erman, Carl Bezold, et al., *Die orientalischen Literaturen* (Berlin and Leipzig: Teubner, 1906), 7–8. Yrjö Hirn (*The Origins of Art. A Psychological and Sociological Inquiry* [London: Macmillan, 1900]) also derives "artistic drive" from conventional psychological notions of expressing emotion.

39 Heinz Werner did not take sides in the debate between rhythm/motion and vocalization/affect (although his sympathies lay with the latter view) so much as he identified two equally valid "primitive types": "The first primitive type is distinguished by its senselessness, following from the predominance of the motoric component of vocalization. The second primitive type is brief, extemporal interjection, which derives immediately from overall mood dictated by feeling; this is the primal form of logical poetry, from which higher types evolve" (*Die Ursprünge der Lyrik* [Munich: Reinhardt, 1924], 8). Werner's study attains a greater level of sophistication than the others discussed here because the author reflects on and defines the operative conception of primitiveness (e. g., "[its] essence [lies] in a significant lack of differentiation, diffuseness, and [...] much lower degree of centralization and subordination" [5]); the main part of the book delineates the developmental course of major "poetic elements" [42], for instance, allegory, repetition, ellipsis, rhythm, and rhyme instead of undertaking a sweeping survey of literary genres.

having "led to the development of poetry."[40] Another example is Francis B. Gummere's *The Beginnings of Poetry* (1901), which starts out by warning against equating indigenous peoples, children, and prehistoric ancestors and draws attention to the speculative nature of many sources. However, he then goes on to enlist these sources himself and to point to the behavior of children to substantiate his thesis about literary origins.[41] Gummere focuses on the ballad or "communal song," arguing that it emerged from "choral rhythm" as a means of creating collective identity: "In rhythm, in sounds of the human voice, timed to movements of the human body, mankind first discovered that social consent which brought the great joys and the great pains of life into a common utterance." With this insight into its beginnings, he makes the demand that contemporary poetry not neglect rhythm, lest it lose its community-building power.[42]

Finally, a third position affirming the historical and normative priority of lyric deemed figurative language (not affective expression or rhythmic movement) to be the primordial form of human expression (see Chapter 6). In contrast to theorists who favored affect and rhythm, scholars such as Alfred Biese adopted an ontologizing perspective: since metaphorical language is non-arbitrary and originary, it counts as true in a fundamental sense and offers a privileged means for disclosing reality. Poetic language opens the way for gaining insight into the world-in-itself (*Welt an sich*).[43]

Art History

In the 1910s and 1920s, the tendency to ontologize origins was most pronounced among art historians. In *Die Kunst der Primitiven*, Herbert Kühn – an art historian and authority on prehistory – does his best to liberate 'primitive art' from evolutionistic prejudices. Like Grosse had done two decades earlier, he stresses the interconnection of art and worldview, pointing out that the 'primitive art' in question is not underdeveloped so much as it has emerged from a different way of looking at things. In spite of this relativizing perspective, however, 'primitive art' continues to play the part of a timeless ideal for him.

Kühn identifies two styles – the sensory/naturalist and the imaginative/abstract – that have alternated time and again throughout the history of art in keeping with dominant lifestyles and social structures. In so doing, he takes

40 Bücher, "Arbeit und Rhythmus," 80.

41 Francis Gummere, *The Beginnings of Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 11–29; 102.

42 Gummere, *The Beginnings of Poetry*, 114, see also 473.

43 Cf. Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 78–103.

up a broadly accepted art historical theorem of the time that was also influenced by contemporary art and its abstract or expressive modes, but he recasts it as an ahistoric universal.[44] He recognizes the ideal form of both styles in the productions of the earliest humans and thus posits that all subsequent art must revert to its 'primitive' antecedents:

> The sensory experience of paleolithic human beings, bushmen, and eskimos is thoroughly sensory, sensory without reserve: the imaginative life of mankind in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages is the very type of this sensibility [*Stilform*]. It is as if all later art looked back to these primal forms in unconscious recollection of these great works of art.[45]

Kühn, then, does not see the highest expression of a primordial principle in the art of his day, but he praises the latter for approaching an essence that found its fullest realization in the mythical past: "The modern artist and the artist of the Neolithic creates Law, Cosmic Force [*das Kosmische*], the Whole. Both possess the same will, the same thought, the same feeling of connectedness to the Universe and God."[46] Meanwhile it is clear that the summit of artistic development can never be reached again because it lies at its beginning. Kühn exhuberantly extolls the superiority of 'primitive art.' For instance:

> Here is a will for the extreme, the radical in art; later times, which always carry within them the inheritance of what is passed, cannot bring it forth again. In this early time, all is more defined, clearer, and unconditional. [...] This is what makes the primitive age so inwardly mighty for those who have eyes to see.[47]

In place of a distancing and deprecating treatment of 'primitive art,' Kühn's work takes an affirmative, ontologizing approach. No conflict emerges with the relativistic perspective that assigns different forms of art to different worldviews because Kühn distinguishes between two eternally recurring outlooks and as a mat-

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44 This is also the approach taken, e.g., by Max Verworn in his 1907 lecture, published as *Zur Psychologie der primitiven Kunst* (Jena: Fischer, 1908). Calling for a renewal of the psychology of art and ethnology (*Völkerkunde*), he starts with the opposition between paleolithic (authentic, true to nature and life) and later (stylized, ornamental, and distorted) art – that is, "physioplastic" and "ideoplastic" forms, which are respectively modeled on natural phenomena and what the human mind thinks or knows about them. On this basis, he contests the analogy between the art of primeval human beings and that of children.

45 Herbert Kühn, *Die Kunst der Primitiven* (Munich: Delphin Verlag, 1923), 13.

46 Kühn, *Die Kunst der Primitiven*, 78.

47 Kühn, *Die Kunst der Primitiven*, 82; see also 24, 29.

ter of principle finds the fullest realization of the various forms of art at their origin.

In offering these reflections, Kühn is able to draw on a book published a decade earlier, Wilhelm Worringer's enormously influential *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908; *Abstraction and Empathy*, 1957).[48] Worringer's search for art's origins does not concern its material or techniques. Rather, it involves speculations about an archaic psyche and the intentional "primal artistic impulse" (*Urkunsttrieb*) at work within it. The author recognizes this impulse in the push for abstraction as the sole possibility for "man [to] rest in the face of the vast confusion of the world-picture."[49] Worringer also finds its fullest realization – and with that "the highest, purest regular art-form" – in "primitive culture": "The less mankind has succeeded, by virtue of its spiritual cognition, in entering into a relation of friendly confidence with the appearance of the outer world, the more forceful is the dynamic that leads to the striving after [the] highest abstract beauty."[50] Worringer credits "primitive man" with an "instinct for the 'thing-in-itself,'" intuitive understanding of the "necessity" and "regularity" of phenomena beyond the coloration imparted by environment and subjective perception. Modern-day humans and their ancestors alike share this experience. But now what was once a matter of collective instinct has transformed into individual knowledge, which is why it can bear no fruit: "The individual on his own was too weak for such abstraction."[51] Worringer concludes that modern art's ideal lies out of its reach: 'primitive art' alone was able to achieve it. Yet here too it is clear that the ideal for 'primitive art' is derived from modern European works.[52] The tendency toward abstraction in the latter is once again projected into the past and declared to be the timeless and enduring essence of art itself.

Insofar as they see the highest level of art to have been achieved at its first beginnings, Worringer and Kühn's idealizations of 'primitive art' are critical of European civilization. As we will see below, this critical impulse is even more pronounced among works in art history concerning the paradigm of schizo-

48 On Worringer in the context of literary studies, see Claudia Oehlschläger, *Abstraktionsdrang. Wilhelm Worringer und der Geist der Moderne* (Munich: Fink, 2005); Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 249–286; in relation to primitivism, cf. especially Helmut Lethen, "Masken der Authentizität. Der Diskurs des 'Primitivismus' in Manifesten der Avantgarde," in *Manifeste: Intentionalität*, ed. Hubert van den Berg and Ralf Grüttemeier (Amsterdam: Brill, 1998).

49 Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 19.

50 Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 17.

51 Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 18.

52 This is also the case for Carl Einstein's widely-read *Negerplastik* (1915; *Negro Sculpture*, 2016), which is primarily an engagement with Cubism based on an appreciation of primitive art.

phrenic 'primitives,' whose works were thought to protest against the alienated conditions of modern life.

The Enigma of Creativity

The nature of creativity often posed a mystery for earlier aesthetic theory. The question of what enables artists to produce original works was bypassed with references to their inborn genius. Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is exemplary in this regard:

> Genius is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art. [...]
>
> From this one sees: [...] That it cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being, but rather that it gives the rule as nature, and hence the author of a product that he owes to his genius does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him.[53]

One can describe what genius does:

> [it] find[s] ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hit[s] upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others.[54]

But nothing, save for vague references to "talent,"[55] is said about what makes such activity possible in the first place. The "bourgeois myth of the artist"[56] could never have emerged without this air of mystery because it contributes to the aura of uniqueness so essential to it. The figure of the artist exhibits "an auratic structure in the Benjaminian sense: no matter how close he comes to his public, he remains at a remove from it." Both the nature and the capacities of

53 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 186–187.

54 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 194–195.

55 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 195.

56 Andreas Reckwitz, "Vom Künstlermythos zur Normalisierung kreativer Prozesse," in *Kreation und Depression*, ed. Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2010).

the artist must remain unique and inaccessible for genius to exist as a special form of subjectivity (or "Spezialsubjekt").[57]

The rise of empirical aesthetics during the second half of the nineteenth century only partially changed this state of affairs. For example, Wilhelm Dilthey's *Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters* (1887; *The Imagination of the Poet*, 1985) presents an ambivalent picture. On the one hand, the author stresses that the point of departure for his theory necessarily lies "in the analysis of the creative capacity": "the poet's imagination and his attitude toward the world of experience provide the point of departure for every theory seriously directed to explaining the manifold world of poetry and literature in the succession of its manifestations."[58] In this spirit, Dilthey sets about examining psychological processes hitherto obscured by the designation of "poetic imagination."[59] He arrives at the insights that "the same processes" at work in the writer's mind "occur in every psyche"[60] and that poetic imagination is related to the psychic activities occurring in dreams, madness, and children's play.

At the same time, however, Dilthey is anxious to preserve the elect status of poets. Ultimately, he sets their imaginative activity apart from ordinary madness by granting them "the freedom of a creative capacity,"[61] that is, the ability to distinguish between fantasy images and reality. Likewise, he sets writers apart from children at play insofar as the latter have no alternative to the "freedom from purpose" that prevails in their fantasy worlds. The same principle of difference applies all the more to the general population of adults. Even if they possess the same psychological dispositions as poets, they remain miles away from them: "the creative imagination of the poet confronts us as a phenomenon totally transcending the everyday life of mankind." Indeed, the "great poet" "differs from every other class of human beings to a much greater extent than is usually assumed."[62]

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57 Reckwitz, "Vom Künstlermythos zur Normalisierung kreativer Prozesse," 105.

58 Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Imagination of the Poet: Elements for a Poetics,* in *Selected Works*, vol. 5, *Poetry and Experience,* ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 35.

59 Dilthey, *The Imagination of the Poet,* 5: 66.

60 Dilthey, *The Imagination of the Poet,* 5: 60.

61 Dilthey, *The Imagination of the Poet,* 5: 101.

62 Dilthey, *The Imagination of the Poet,* 5: 60. Cf. Sandra Richter: "The psychology of the extraordinary personality of the poet becomes a major part of Dilthey's poetics. According to Dilthey, the poet is different from ordinary men in the following respects, which result from his extraordinary 'imagination' (*Einbildungskraft*)" (*A History of Poetics: German Scholarly Aesthetics and Poetics in International Context, 1770–1960* [Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010], 156).

Dilthey's observations are characterized by an antithetical movement: the artist's exceptional stature is diminished by psychological comparisons to children and the mentally ill, but at the same time his or her exclusivity and the black box protecting it are upheld. Resistance to shining light into the black box of creative genius was widespread and vigorous. In *Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewusstseins* (Poetic Fantasy and the Mechanism of Consciousness, 1869), Hermann Cohen therefore criticizes contemporary aesthetic discourse for its intense objection to uncovering the secret of creativity, stating that his colleagues deemed it "barbarous and unproductive" to voice "doubt in the grace of the moment, the divine cradle [*Götterschooß*] of genius." Accordingly he argues – inasmuch as "uncritical" belief in "the creations of genius" was still the norm – scholars had not come very far in "exploring the essence and origins of literature [*Dichtung*]."[63] Instead, time and again, they had gotten lost in tautologies (e. g., Friedrich Theodor Vischer, who merely "explains fantasy with fantasy"[64]).

Cohen, in keeping with principles of the journal *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* (Journal for Folk Psychology and Linguistics), which was responsible for the original article's publication, sought to remedy this state of affairs by adopting a psychological approach to "poetic fantasy,"[65] which he derives from myth, its linguistic form, and the ways that children think and speak corresponding to mythic consciousness:

> Poetic fantasy [is based] on a mechanism that myth reveals to us. [...] Hereby, the first question concerning the *a priori* conditions of imaginative literature [*Dichtung*] has been solved. As inadequate and fabricated as [any particular instance of] poetic fantasy may appear, it nevertheless is drawn from myth. [...] Myth itself does not derive from a "creative fantasy," but rather is constituted by a group of apperceptions. The unity of consciousness in the first poet of all, the myth-making people [*das mythendichtende Volk*], is evident.[66]
>
> Mythical apperceptions are first practiced by the child, and therefore also by the poet in his childhood, and having penetrated the as-yet empty, receptive consciousness, they remain firmly lodged there.[67]

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63 Hermann Cohen, *Die dichterische Phantasie und der Mechanismus des Bewusstseins* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler's Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1869), 2. First published as an article in the journal *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, 1869: 173 – 263.

64 Cohen, *Die dichterische Phantasie*, 7.

65 The same holds for others. For example, Wilhelm Scherer "[relied] on Darwin [...], Herbert Spencer and Edward Burnet Tyler [sic] to explore the origin of poetry" (Sandra Richter, *A History of Poetics*, 168). Hereby, "creative forces of the soul" drawing on "various 'empirical' contributions [to] the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*" represented the "main area of interest" (171).

66 Cohen, *Die dichterische Phantasie*, 43.

67 Cohen, *Die dichterische Phantasie*, 68.

Cohen's reflections are already guided by what would become the obvious hypothesis in the paradigm of the 'primitive': the key to artistic creativity lies in 'primitive thinking,' which exists contemporaneously in the artist as much as it does in his or her individual past, which reenacts the development of the species. Thus, as Cohen writes, "The force of myth is not extinguished in modern man."[68] At the same time, this proposition entails the demystification of genius: there is no longer a black box. More still, even a person who is not a genius can do the same, provided that she or he is able to harness "the mythical force."[69]

Pathology or Heroization: Genius and Madness

However, aesthetic theories that saw the key to creativity in 'primitive thinking' differed on how best to understand and evaluate these origins. For example, in the late nineteenth century, the negative evaluation of the return of 'primitive thinking' and the related pathologization of artists (recalling the configuration of the mentally ill 'primitive') played a prominent role in studies of art. From a sociological perspective, this negative assessment can be explained as an effort to "delegitimize delegitimizers": The myth of the artist as an "individualistic ideal ego" (who "conveyed deviant ideas and images" and promoted bohemian lifestyles) questioned the "central patterns of bourgeois culture (morality, industriousness, marriage, rationality, etc.)."[70] But those questions were themselves now called into question as they were pathologized. This, as Bettina Gockel has shown, provided the starting point for a new "science of the artist" in the second half of the nineteenth century, which sought to demystify the genius of old in light of biologistic theories of degeneration.[71]

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68 Cohen, *Die dichterische Phantasie*, 65.

69 From this changed conception, Leeb draws parallels to Joseph Beuys' dictum that "everyone is an artist. When 'man' takes the stage as a new epistemic figure, art becomes a human capacity" and a "generic trait" (*Die Kunst der Anderen,* 12).

70 Reckwitz, "Vom Künstlermythos zur Normalisierung kreativer Prozesse," 108, 106, 108.

71 Much has been written in recent years on the application of psychopathological theory to aesthetics; see John MacGregor, *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*; Kaufmann, "Kunst, Psychiatrie und 'schizophrenes Weltgefühl'"; Gockel, *Die Pathologisierung des Künstlers*; Yvonne Wübben, *Verrückte Sprache. Psychiater und Dichter in der Anstalt des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Konstanz: UVK, 2012); Thomas Anz, "Schizophrenie als epochale Symptomatik. Eine Erinnerung – auch an die literarischen Anfänge von Gerhard Köpf," in *Feder, Katheder und Stethoskop – von der Literatur zur Psychiatrie*, ed. Corinna Schlicht and Heinz Schumacher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), and *Literatur der Existenz. Literarische Psychopathographie und ihre soziale Bedeu-*

Of particular influence was Cesare Lombroso's *Genio e follia* (1872; *The Man of Genius*, 1896), which explores the "resemblance between genius and insanity"[72] as well as the "art of the deranged."[73] While calling on astrological, racial, and familial complexes, he premises that "in the visible manifestation of their thoughts, the insane frequently revert (as also do criminals) to the prehistoric stage of civilization."[74] Around the same time, in *Die Ästhetik der Gegenwart*, Ernst Meumann discusses prominent "aesthetes" of the day who subscribed to Lombroso's position. These included Siegmund von Hausegger, "who compares the artist's work with dreamlike and hypnotic states," Max Dessoir, who emphasizes "how the increased nervous activity of the genius borders on the pathological," and Paul Julius Möbius, who "has tried to show, apropos of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Goethe, and others, how talent often occurs alongside a neurasthenic disposition, hereditary burdens, and various pathological traits."[75] How compelling the link between artistry and mental illness apparently was around the turn of the century is exhibited by the fact that Meumann numbers Dilthey among the advocates of Lombroso's line of argument, even though the philosopher was indeed ultimately interested in stressing the *difference* between genius and madness.

If the anti-bourgeois artist received a negative evaluation in this strain of discourse, some twenty years later – in the context of an increasingly pointed critique of civilization – the opposite tendency prevailed.[76] The 'special subject' of the artist continued to be associated with madness, but now the connection served to distinguish the artist as a heroic figure of protest whose thoughts and deeds resist bourgeois norms.[77] As I showed in Chapter 4, Alfred Storch,

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tung im Frühexpressionismus (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977); Thomas R. Müller, "Genie und Wahnsinn," *Soziale Psychiatrie* 141, no. 3 (2013): 11–13.

72 Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* (London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 1896), vi.

73 Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, 185.

74 Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, 191.

75 Meumann, *Einführung in die Ästhetik der Gegenwart*, 92.

76 Gockel writes, "in the discursive field that comes into view there are signs of a decisive change to [...] how the ideal figure of the artist is conceived during and after the First World War." The "image of the epileptic, degenerate genius" loses "more and more ground after 1900, yielding to schizophrenia as the paradigmatic affliction of artists at the end of the 1910s and into the 1920s." Thereby, the artist tends to be represented "as an exceptional human being triumphing over his illness," who "remains a mad genius" but, "as a schizophrenic, achieves a spiritual existence thanks to disciplined and self-disciplining work" (*Die Pathologisierung des Künstlers*, 22).

77 See also Anz, *Literatur der Existenz*, who points to the anti-bourgeois thrust of existential figures in literature around 1910 (39–45); as well as Anz, "Schizophrenie als epochale Symptomatik," 121–122.

for instance, took such a view. And as Gockel notes, it can also be observed in the existential psychology of the 1920s – for instance, in the works of Ludwig Binswanger, who, in discussing "the relationship of phenomenology [...] to psychology and psychopathology,"[78] declares

> there are people who know that, apart from sensory perception, there is another kind of more immediate and more direct way to know or experience things, that, besides conceptual analysis in discrete elements, another, more authentic and more complete mode of intellectual apprehension exists. Such people include, among others, the true artists.[79]

This line of argument may be observed not just among psychologists, but also among art historians. If Worringer and Kühn's idealizations of 'primitive art' serve as an implicit critique of Western civilization, then the same impulse is even more pronounced in the works of authors employing the paradigm of schizophrenic 'primitives.'[80] A prime example of that impulse is *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (1922; *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 1972) by the art historian and psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn. A veritable sensation, this book made a lasting change to the reception of the art of the insane.[81] Prinzhorn concludes that "the differentiation of [patients'] pictures from those of the fine arts is possible today only because of an obsolete dogmatism" – he thus rejects artistic tradition and training as "external cultural embellishments of the primary configurative process."[82] The latter, he argues, is intrinsic "to all men," even if it has been "buried by the development of civilization."[83] Mental illness, combined with the isolation produced by institutionalization, leads to the reactivation of the primal creative drive.[84] Counter to received wisdom in reference works on psychopathology, Prinzhorn argues that regression is not at work in this process; this "natural-scientific" way of explaining things is too "causally directed" to be useful. Instead,

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78 Ludwig Binswanger, "Über Phänomenologie," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 82 (1923): 11.

79 Binswanger, "Über Phänomenologie," 12; quoted in Gockel, *Die Pathologisierung des Künstlers*, 94.

80 Doris Kaufmann ("Kunst, Psychiatrie und 'schizophrenes Weltgefühl'") discerns a shift, after 1910, in popularity from the "native primitive" to the "schizophrenic primitive."

81 On Prinzhorn, see also Doris Kaufmann, "Kunst, Psychiatrie und 'schizophrenes Weltgefühl.'"

82 Hans Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, trans. Eric von Brockdorff (New York: Springer, 1972), 274.

83 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 270.

84 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 270 – 271.

he calls for a "method of observation in which the creative factors of psychic life will be given their just place."[85]

In other words, Prinzhorn takes issue with his colleagues' allochronization of art by the mentally ill – their penchant for viewing it as an early point in the course of phylo- or ontogenetic development and deeming it 'less developed.' Against developmental logic of all stripes, he attributes ontological significance to the images he examines. They point to an essence at the core of human existence: the primary urge to create (*Gestaltungsdrang*), which stands fundamentally beyond history and can no longer thrive in modern civilization. Though it is impaired by the latter, this primary configurative urge can still be observed in works produced by those defined as outsiders – children, members of indigenous communities, and especially the mentally ill.[86] In Prinzhorn's eyes, such images represent the most suitable resource for studying the "primary configurative process" and all its "subconscious components" in "almost pure form."[87]

Moreover, Prinzhorn's study shows quite clearly that, in engaging with the works of the mentally ill, the justification of contemporary art stood at issue. The author asserts that images produced by the insane would be more closely related to those by modern artists than those by children and indigenous peoples would be. Prinzhorn bases his argument on a line of reasoning we have already heard from Kronfeld: that the behaviors to which the patient is driven – "renunciation of the outside world," "devaluation of [...] surface luster," and "a turn inward upon the self"[88] – and which nourish his creative drive are also sought by the artist, as "intuition and inspiration."[89] Therefore, the images of both groups resemble each other, even though in one case they have been created compulsively, and in the other deliberately.[90] This is also why so many painters hold the works of the mentally ill in high regard: "shaken to their foundation" by what they see, they believe "they [have] found the original process of all configuration, pure inspiration, for which [...] every artist thirsts."[91] Prinzhorn thus diagnoses among 'healthy' contemporaries a "longing for inspired creation" that is "denied to us." But he leaves it open as to whether he judges such a longing critically or pathologizes it. On the one hand, he speaks of "schizophrenic" feeling, declares that human beings "intoxicate themselves" with "primary configura-

85 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 273.
86 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 273.
87 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 274.
88 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 271.
89 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 273.
90 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 271, 273.
91 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 271.

tions," and attributes to them a "craving [*Sucht*] for direct intuitive experience."[92] On the other hand, he seems to share the views of Storch and Kronfeld, for he ultimately reaches the conclusion, at the end of the book, that an "original process of all configuration" is evident, in exemplary fashion, in the pictorial works of the mentally ill.[93]

In reaction to Prinzhorn's book, the psychiatrist (and early contributor to the Expressionist movement) Arthur Kronfeld also examines "the process of artistic configuration in light of psychiatry" and identifies three factors in comparing artists and the mentally ill: For one, statistics indicate that schizophrenia is common among artists. Second, a similar creative situation prevails for both groups. Of the artist, Kronfeld writes, "The configurative process presupposes a psychic situation organized in such a way that it simultaneously represents its symbol and its solution, its outlet and its compensation."[94] The same holds for the schizophrenic, but here he adopts a more pathos-laden tone:

> Archaic strata of the psyche, magical and inspirational, projective modes of enormous vitality, summoned forth from primal urges [*Urtrieben*], give the self unconditional victory over what has prevailed until now, yielding in new but originary form, in hallucinatory, immediate experiences of a revelatory or inspired nature, in new intellectual processes of synthesis, original in kind, an immense, self-created reality, as it were, the "worldview of psychosis."

Third, Kronfeld claims that both artists and schizophrenics consider their products to be "intuitively evident." In affirming the kinship between "the creative element of works by psychotics and those of artists,"[95] he verges on heroizing the mentally ill – a tendency already evident in Storch's work.[96] Kronfeld describes both groups as freedom fighters, seeking to achieve liberation "from the effect of the world on the self."[97] In his estimation, the schizophrenic proceeds in a much more radical fashion and earns the distinction of being "the spiritually richer human being" possessed of "authentic life without compromis-

92 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 272.

93 Prinzhorn, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, 271.

94 Arthur Kronfeld, "Der künstlerische Gestaltungsvorgang in psychiatrischer Beleuchtung," *Klinische Wochenschrift* 4.1 (1925): 29.

95 Kronfeld, "Der künstlerische Gestaltungsvorgang," 29.

96 Doris Kaufmann speaks of Kronfeld's "emphatic conception of schizophrenia," which "was widespread in scholarly discourse on culture in the 1920s" ("Kunst, Psychiatrie und 'schizophrenes Weltgefühl,'" 57).

97 Kronfeld, "Der künstlerische Gestaltungsvorgang," 29.

es."[98] Therefore, the analogy drawn between the schizophrenic and the artist does not entail the pathological depreciation of the latter; on the contrary, the artist is stylized on the model of the schizophrenic as a fearless loner living by his own concepts and laws.

Mystisches Denken, Geisteskrankheit und moderne Kunst (1923), by Walter Lurje, represents another attempt to understand the essence of modern art: "Why is it that, despite their best efforts, so many people fail to grasp modern art?"[99] The answer, Lurje maintains, is that the "mystical thinking" shared by "peoples living in a state of nature," children, and "psychically abnormal individuals" (including not only the mentally ill, but also "certain religious minds" and "true artists") defies the logic of modern European adults.[100] Lurje calls for the right measure to be implemented to evaluate such thinking. At the same time, he undermines his relativism by declaring that mystical thought affords insight into "primordial cause[s]," the "source of every essence," and "fount of being."[101] The corollary of this position is his normative stance that only an artist "capable of mystical experience" is able to create "real works of art."[102] Lurje invokes literary figures (Friedrich Huch, Alfred Kubin) whose writings represent to him a mystical perception of the world, and he offers examples from the fine arts (Marc Chagall, Alexander Archipenko, Oskar Kokoschka), where he sees mystical thinking expressed not by "content, but form."[103] In the latter, he traces how symbolic representation yields to (dream) images that evoke the fantasies of childhood and call its imaginative activity back to life. Such works, he argues, do not invite logical thought so much as its opposite, "innermost" feeling or "instinct." Once again, contemporary art is justified by its representation as the product of a primordial human endowment. The process of artistic production, which Lurje mystifies as "mystical thinking," is simultaneously projected back in time and detemporized – that is, it is declared to be still accessible (for some) as the "source of all Being."[104]

98 Kronfeld, "Der künstlerische Gestaltungsvorgang," 30.
99 Walter Lurje, *Mystisches Denken, Geisteskrankheit und moderne Kunst* (Stuttgart: J. Püttmann, 1923), 3.
100 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 10.
101 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 14.
102 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 15.
103 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 21.
104 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 14.

Normalizing the Artist

Regardless of whether heroicized or pathologized, the artist, understood as a 'primitive madman,' still qualifies as a 'special subject.' Even though artists' psychological capacities do not fundamentally differ from others in this line of thought, they possess (like the mentally ill) more courage to activate the other way of thinking lying dormant within them and with which they are perhaps more substantially equipped. As Lurje writes, "A true artist is no average person and cannot be understood or evaluated in terms of ordinary human beings."[105] Only "among true artists is the capacity for mystical-prelogical thought and experience present to a degree that is no longer the case for other adults."[106]

This rather exclusive conception of artistic identity contrasts, as Meumann had already observed in 1908 of contemporary aesthetics, with a "fundamentally different" perspective, which considered "artistic talent" in terms of "the science of talent in normal human beings,"[107] thus disregarding the creative individual's singularity. This gesture served to normalize artists, but it could also strike a utopian tone inasmuch as the creative potential for thinking and perceiving the world differently was now supposed to extend to the general population. In this line of thought, the artist was connected not so much to the 'schizophrenic primitive' but rather to figurations of the 'primitive' as represented by indigenous peoples or children.

Theories along these lines rested on one of two very different conceptions of artistic creativity. The *first group* focused on myth as a way to figure out the origin of creativity and art. Depending on the ethnological school in question, scholars either chose an individual-psychological explanation (the next two chapters will explore how influential this orientation was both for primitivist theories of language and metaphor and for literary figurations of the artist as 'primitive'), or they adopted a social-psychological mode of explaining the origin of myth and creativity. The latter approach was especially urgent for thinkers eager to connect politics and aesthetics in theory and practice. Examples include the Collège de Sociologie, active in Paris during the late 1930s, which sought to counter the fascists with their own weapons. The *collège* – whose members had strong ties to the milieus of literature and ethnology (and briefly included Walter Benjamin) – saw its activities as a continuation of the French sociological tradition,

105 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 3.
106 Lurje, *Mystisches Denken*, 14.
107 Meumann, *Einführung in die Ästhetik der Gegenwart*, 92.

especially the Durkheim school, but with emphasis on the sacred.[108] As Stephan Moebius writes, its sociology of the sacred sought to "analyze, uncover, and renew vital elements [...] that were vanishing in the modern world, for example, collective experiences initiated by rituals, celebrations, or games"[109]. Activities involving "aspects of social bonds that are charged with energy, a-teleological, and experienced imaginatively and affectively" should be freed from their "secondary or supplementary status," and their revitalization should not be left to the fascists alone.[110]

Art as (Child's) Play

In the *second group*, which I will focus on in the remainder of this chapter, theoretical reflections on the origins of art and artistic creativity focused on play (not myth) and invoked the 'primitive' through the figuration of the child.[111] In 1895, James Sully remarks on a widespread belief "that children are artists in embryo, that in their play and their whole activity they manifest the germs of the

108 Moebius, *Die Zauberlehrlinge*, 134.

109 Moebius, *Die Zauberlehrlinge,* 135.

110 No project undertaken by members of the Collège makes this ambition as clear as Georges Bataille's secret society, Acéphale: "A communal myth (Acéphale/Dionysos) with assorted rules of conduct and rituals, the celebration of self-loss and self-sacrifice, and [...] a sense of transgressive, mystical-ecstatic 'joy before death' were supposed to create religious-magical cohesion and sound the depths of the sacred *in actu*" (Moebius, *Die Zauberlehrlinge,* 254). For Bataille was convinced, as he documents in his studies of Nietzsche, that "the formation of a new structure, of an 'order' developing and raging across the entire earth, is the only truly liberating act, and the only one possible, since revolutionary destruction is regularly followed by the reconstitution of the social structure and its head" (Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985], 198–199). Bataille's secret society and the project of the Collège de Sociologie as a whole have garnered criticism for attempting to combat fascism with its own weapons, that is, for instrumentalizing the power of myth to found community. Needless to say, the question is whether a myth-creating collective can act against fascism at all. Moebius quotes Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, who ask if, "on the contrary, the mythical function with its national, *völkisch*, ethical, and aesthetic effects [...] is what a future politics must be reinvented *against*" (quoted in Moebius, *Die Zauberlehrlinge,* 154).

111 Parts of this section of the chapter were published previously in a longer version: Nicola Gess, "Vom Täuschen und Zerstören. Spiel und Kunst aus der Perspektive der Entwicklungspsychologie um 1900," in "*Sich selbst aufs Spiel setzen.*" *Spiel als Technik und Medium von Subjektivierung*, ed. Christian Moser and Regina Strätling (Paderborn: Fink, 2016).

art-impulse."[112] Endorsing this position, he studied the relationship between playing and art.[113] For Sully, children's play is determined by a fantasy-driven (re)shaping of the world,[114] and artistic activity is its continuation. Accordingly, he speaks of how "the impulse of the artist has its roots in the happy semi-conscious activity of the child at play" and states that "the play-impulse becomes the art-impulse."[115] For him, then, art is not just what had at one time been play. Instead, the productions of adult artists continue to draw their force from play. In his chapter on children's drawings, Sully indicates that "genuinely artistic work"[116] derives from an ability the small child possesses in full and the adult artist must endeavor to preserve: the "innocence" of seeing first introduced to critical discourse by John Ruskin.[117]

Sully's premise was still the consensus some thirty years later. In *Der Genius im Kinde*, the reformist educator, Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, distinguishes between two "forms of experience" in the child, dreaming and playing, in terms of the media each involves: speaking on one side and doing and forming on the other. In either case, the "refusal to acknowledge the world as simply mechanical" – that is, an animistic bearing expressing a "'fairytale' relationship to nature,"[118] and "a world of invisible and magical relations"[119] – is closely allied with the "power to imagine/give form [*Ein-Bildungskraft*] in the proper sense." In this relationship to the world, the child repeats the "oldest, half-dreaming, and visionary state of man, in which [...] the fairytale is rooted,"[120] then gradually passes through all other levels of culture (from fairytale notions to heroic sagas, for instance).[121] Although Hartlaub invokes Haeckel's biogenetic law, he also justifies the parallel by affirming that the child possesses an "inextinguishable presentiment" that its fairytale world "somehow belongs to the sum-total of the cosmos, in a word, that it is also real [...] , and that one must [...] save it."[122] On this score, Hartlaub is making the child the mouthpiece of

112 Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, 318. On views in the field of child psychology concerning children's art and its relation to the adult artist, see also Boas, *Cult of Childhood*, 79–102. Cf. Wittmann, "Johnny-Head-in-the-air in America," for a discussion of children's drawings.
113 Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, 321.
114 Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, 326.
115 Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, 327.
116 Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, 398.
117 Cf. Wittmann, *Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien*, 84.
118 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 24.
119 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 25.
120 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 24.
121 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 27.
122 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 25, see also 27.

his own views, which are critical of civilization: "human maturation is not just a step forward, but also a motion backwards, a loss."[123] Many passages speak of childhood as a "paradise,"[124] where the "golden age" at the beginning of humankind is repeated.[125] Ultimately, artists alone refuse to let this paradise (i.e., dreams, play, and their products) disappear. Hartlaub writes, "Only the poet and the artist preserve [...] this general imaginative potential [*allgemeine einbildungskräftige Möglichkeit*] of the child [...]. The 'artist' alone knows how to salvage, more or less, [what remains of] the immense inner life of childhood."[126] The only difference between dreaming/playing and art is that the former is an end in itself, whereas the latter is made for others and requires technical skill.[127]

Sully, Hartlaub, and many other child psychologists thus stress the role of play when drawing analogies between children and artists.[128] They understand play as the (re)shaping of the world through imagination that – in contrast to art, which is intended for others – occurs for its own sake and is believed to be real by the child engaged in it. As I already demonstrated in Chapter 3, child psychologists lent particular attention to the self-deception and destruction at work when children play – especially in activities violating the norms of moral and/or healthy conduct that prevail among adults. Deception borders on both lying and madness. Destruction borders on crime, which is regarded as either evil or pathological behavior, depending on one's interpretation of criminal responsibility. But both characteristics also interested child psychologists because they enabled them to connect play to art. Opposed to moralizing and pathologizing perspectives on deception and destruction, they offered affinities with the production and reception of art situated beyond moral and medical questions. A child deceived by play was no longer interpreted in pathological terms or as losing touch with reality, then. Instead child psychologists viewed such play as behavior that would later give rise to the adult's readiness to fully engage in the world of art. Likewise, destruction of a plaything did not

123 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 29.
124 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 25, 29.
125 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 29.
126 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 30.
127 Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde*, 23, 30.
128 As noted in chapter 3, Freud's "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming" also acknowledges affinities between children's play and art: "A piece of creative writing, like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood." In other words, literature emerges from play and provides the same pleasure that childhood games do. The wish that "finds its fulfillment in the creative work" arises when "a strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood)" (442).

count as a primordial destructive urge potentially leading to criminality, but as an indication of the mature artist's sovereign command of his materials. In what follows, I will explain in greater detail how these psychological theories of aesthetics ground art in either deception or destruction.

Art and Deception

In broad terms, early child psychologists viewed children's self-deception in one of three ways. According to the first model (e. g., William Preyer), the child's initial concepts are taken for something real in their own right.[129] Karl Bühler represents the second position: in *Die geistige Entwicklung des Kindes* (1918; *The Mental Development of the Child*, 1930), he argues that children at play are aware that what they are doing is illusory.[130] The third school of thought, which posits that the child wavers between belief and disbelief, opens the possibility for understanding play as a mode of aesthetic reception *avant la lettre*.

A good example of the latter is Karl Groos' *Das Seelenleben des Kindes* (The Spiritual Life of the Child, 1904), which distinguishes between full illusion, to which children are more susceptible than adults, and conscious self-deception, illustrated by games of make-believe, when the child "complete[s] what is given by the senses in a twofold illusory manner."[131] In this process, the child projects shapes onto objects (for instance, a horse onto the back of a sofa) and moreover attributes psychic states to them, which Sully, like Groos, terms "personification." Groos differentiates such experience from thoroughgoing deception because "alongside incorrect apperception, the correct conception is present to consciousness."[132] Moreover, this special type of deception is procured at will and enjoyed.

For Groos, conscious self-deception provides a key for understanding art: "aesthetic behavior is a partial phenomenon out of the realm of games of illusion."[133] His earlier study, *Die Spiele der Menschen* (1899; *The Play of Man*, 1901), identifies this bearing as common to play and art and centers less on the production than on the reception of art, or "aesthetic pleasure" (*Der ästhetische Genuss*), which is also the title of a work the author published in 1902.

129 Preyer, *Mental Development in the Child*, 17.
130 Bühler, *The Mental Development of the Child*, 91.
131 Groos, *Das Seelenleben des Kindes*, 175.
132 Groos, *Das Seelenleben des Kindes*, 165.
133 Groos, *Das Seelenleben des Kindes*, 172.

Groos's reflections tie in with other theories of art – and not just Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1795), a watered-down version of which had long since grown commonplace among the educated middle class. Connections include the writings of Theodor Lipps, the co-founder of *Einfühlungsästhetik*, or "the aesthetics of empathy," and the works of Konrad Lange.[134] In his inaugural lecture at Tübingen, "Die bewußte Selbsttäuschung als Kern des künstlerischen Genusses" (Conscious Self-deception as the Core of Artistic Pleasure, 1894), the latter declared "awareness of aesthetic self-deception" to be a "*conditio sine qua non* for the pleasure taken in art."[135] Both here and in the book he would publish half a decade later, *Das Wesen der Kunst. Grundzüge einer illusionistischen Kunstlehre* (The Essence of Art: Fundamentals of an Illusionist Doctrine of Art, 1901), Lange describes the dynamic as a constant "alternation between deception and non-deception, illusion, and recognition of reality."[136] To illustrate his point, he refers to Goethe's remark that, when reading a good novel, one wavers between emotion (indulgence in illusion) and admiration for the author's skill (which destroys illusion).[137] Such "continuous oscillation between reality and appearance, gravity and play"[138] constitutes the "core appeal of artistic enjoyment"[139] according to Lange.

Groos modifies Lange's thesis along the lines of Lipps's *Einfühlungsästhetik*. In his eyes, the essence of aesthetic enjoyment is "co-experience" (*Miterleben*), a specific form of aesthetic illusion (or conscious deception) that amounts to an "inner imitation."[140] Unlike Lange, Groos does not simply *describe* the process by which art is received. Rather, he seeks to *explain* the psychological and physiological factors responsible for conscious self-deception. Indeed, he goes so far as to offer reasons for what motivates such "inner imitation." Ultimately, he fills in this gap with a putative drive; that is, he contends that human beings are endowed with an inborn mimetic impulse that stands at the source of all learning

134 Konrad von Lange, *Die bewußte Selbsttäuschung als Kern des künstlerischen Genusses* (Leipzig: Veit, 1895), 18.

135 Lange, *Die bewußte Selbsttäuschung,* 22.

136 Konrad von Lange, *Das Wesen der Kunst: Grundzüge einer illusionistischen Kunstlehre* (Berlin: Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1907), 357.

137 Lange, *Das Wesen der Kunst*, 358.

138 Lange, *Die bewußte Selbsttäuschung*, 22.

139 Lange, *Die bewußte Selbsttäuschung*, 23.

140 Groos, *Der ästhetische Genuss,* 214, 198.

and that is particularly evident in children's play. Thus he provides the key to what Yrjö Hirn, whose example he follows, deems the "origins of art."[141]

Art and Destruction

Destructive play interested aesthetic theorists as much as it did child psychologists. Theorists of degeneration, in the wake of Lombroso, saw such activities in children as a portent of future criminality. Here, no path led to art – unless it was conceived in pathological terms. However, other psychologists viewed games of destruction along different lines, not as the symptom of biogenetic fatalism, but as the striving for free, self-determined action upon the world. For Freud, not only a basic drive, but also a quest for sovereignty are responsible for destructive games. Thus, the game of *fort-da* that he describes in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920; *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1922)[142] manifests not just the so-called death drive (*Todestrieb*), but also the young child's effort to overcome an unpleasant situation (the mother's absence) by shifting from a passive to an active role. Likewise, William Stern recognizes children's destructive play as an effort to achieve mastery over unwelcome circumstances in *Psychologie der frühen Kindheit* (1914; *Psychology of Early Childhood*, 1924). In his estimation, "being the cause" procures pleasure, and it "can never be exhibited in a more elemental form than in destruction."[143] Stern thus clarifies that destruction is not sought for its own sake; instead, it represents the experience of being no longer the object but the subject of a situation. The child's impotence is replaced by a pleasurable destructive power. In contrast to Lombroso's claims of biogenetic determination, Stern regards children's destructive play as the first steps toward acquiring autonomy.

This view of destructive play held implications for a theory of artistic production that did not see the artist as the captive of his creation (i.e., in analogy to intoxication or madness), but as a self-aware creator forging a new order by sovereignly commanding his materials. Such a perspective had been topical since, at the very latest, Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus, as follows:

> A Becoming and Passing, a building and destroying, without any moral bias, in perpetual innocence is in this world only the play of the artist and of the child. And similarly, just as

141 Groos, *Der ästhetische Genuss*, 192, 201.
142 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 13–17.
143 Stern, *Psychology of Early Childhood*, 311.

> the child and the artist play, the eternally living fire plays, builds up and destroys, in innocence [...]. Not wantonness, but the ever newly awakening impulse to play [*Spieltrieb*], calls into life other worlds. The child throws away his toys; but soon he starts again in an innocent frame of mind. As soon however as the child builds he connects, joins and forms lawfully and according to an innate sense of order.[144]

Child psychologists took up this topos and, in a familiar manner, claimed to put it on positivistic footing in order to account for artistic activity and the sovereign gesture it represents. Along these lines, Freud asks in "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,"

> [s]hould we not look for the first traces of imaginative activity as early as in childhood? [...] every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he [...] re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him.[145]

In much the same way, Groos sees an analogy between artistic *production* and play primarily involving a shared "pleasure at being the cause."[146]

Above all, the politically committed avant-gardes of the early twentieth century embraced the attempt to derive art from the dynamic of destruction and creation; it is no coincidence that the "wild child" played a vital role in this context.[147] Examples include Dada, the Surrealists, the Futurists, and even cultural theorists such as Walter Benjamin, for whom, as I will discuss extensively in Chapter 9, the "grotesque, cruel, grim side of children's life" represents a model for artistic and revolutionary action.[148] But other art theorists were just as invested in the topos, for example Johan Huizinga's study, *Homo ludens* (1938; Eng. 1949), the roots of which extend as far back as 1903.[149] While it

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144 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Philosophy During the Tragic Age of the Greeks" (1873), in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy, vol. 2, *Early Greek Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 108.

145 Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming," 437.

146 Groos, *Der ästhetische Genuss*, 19, 21.

147 As Wittmann notes, the demise of recapitulation theory in science and scholarship did not lessen its "ghostly imaginative power" for figures as varied as Paul Klee, Walter Benjamin, Carl Einstein, and Georges Bataille (*Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien*, 241).

148 See also Nicola Gess, "Gaining Sovereignty: The Figure of the Child in Benjamin's Writing," *Modern Language Notes* 125.3 (2010).

149 Johan Huizinga does not restrict play and games to the child. Nevertheless, he often draws examples from childhood, and at the outset he derives the function of play from animals, children, and archaic cultures (which calls to mind his biogenetic structure of argument): for children, play is "already" something different than it is for animals, and in "passing" over to archaic cultures, "we find that there is more of a mental element 'at play'" (*Homo Ludens: A Study of*

does not focus on destruction, the moment of the creative transformation of the ordinary world as well as the sovereignty of the person(s) at play are nevertheless central for him.[150] Play, for Huizinga, is a "free activity" whose illusory nature is apparent for the player, even though it sometimes proves all-absorbing.[151] Play takes place within certain limits and establishes its own order there.[152] The same holds for poetry (*Dichtung*), which the author likewise bases on play. Compared with religion, science, law, war, and politics, poetic works are granted a higher ontological status. Whereas these other realms have grown distant from their ludic origins, "the function of the poet [...] remains fixed in the play-sphere where it was born."[153] Like other theoreticians of art, Huizinga invokes childhood and 'prehistory.'

> Poetry [...] lies [...] on that more primitive and original level where the child, the animal, the savage and the seer belong, in the region of dream, enchantment, ecstasy, laughter. To understand poetry we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and of forsaking man's wisdom for the child's.[154]

Once again, a genealogical proximity between play, literature, and childhood is affirmed here. Although Huizinga speaks of "enchantment, ecstasy, laughter," in reference to "that more primitive and original level," he simultaneously stresses the poetic tendency toward self-imposed limits, the creation of order, and the regularity of play by focusing on literary *forms*.

The theories discussed in the present chapter hardly agree on what constitutes the artist's creative activity, but they all assert that its mysteries can be unlocked by means of the paradigm of the 'primitive,' whether understood in reference to indigenous peoples, children, or the mentally ill. Regarding the causes of creativity, they fill in the space left blank by earlier notions of genius by seeing archaic, formative forces at work in artists. These forces bring about the expression of a different way of thinking and prompt a dialectic of unconscious drives and conscious acts of will. The theories I am discussing in this chapter thus no longer link artistic creativity to a mysterious 'talent,' but to the 'primitive.' Although 'primitive thinking' is marked by logical fallacies, drives, desires, emotions, and collective ideas, they are convinced that the depths of its existence, origins, and ways of function-

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the Play-element in Culture [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949], 14). In other words, the play of children represents an embryonic version of cultural development for whole societies.

150 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 19.

151 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* 13.

152 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* 15 – 16.

153 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* 19.

154 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* 119.

ing have been sounded by empirical research in the fields of ethnology and psychology. In brief, they argue that the artist activates the faculty that once defined all mental activity and that still defines the mental activities of children and the mentally ill. Furthermore, they hold it can be accessed even by 'healthy' adult Europeans in altered states of consciousness. At the same time, this explanation also lays the mechanisms of creativity open. Contrary to what Kant had claimed of the work of geniuses, creative acts are now said to follow a discernable pattern and certain procedures – for instance, image-agglutination by means of condensation and displacement. The artistic *outcome* is still original, but the artist's *procedures themselves* lack originality because they are common to a great number of mental acts. Or, in other words, the originality of the work of art is based on recognizable processes that obey certain 'primitive' patterns of thought. The 'genius,' in the Romantic sense of the word, no longer exists.