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ANNA A. SUVOROVA

Herzen University,
48, Moika Embankment, Saint Petersburg 191186, Russia

ResearcherID: JFB-0032-2023

ORCID: 0000-0002-6421-8514

e-mail: suvorova_anna@mail.ru

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Modes of Monstrosity in Visionary and Outsider Art: From divine to Machine and Back

Abstract. The art of visionaries and outsiders is a space of fantastic narratives, authorial mythologies, and hybrid identities. Their personal religious doctrines and pseudohistorical epics generate monstrous bodies and entities combined with characteristics of the divine, human, and machine.

The article examines the representations of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art, art brut, and art of the insane of the 20th and early 21st centuries, investigating the representations of monsters in the artworks of Karl Brendel (Karl Genzel), Bernard Schatz (L-15), and Allen Christian.

The general characteristics of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art of the 20th and early 21st centuries are the visionary nature of images, multiculturalism, hybridity, the combination of the scientific, pseudoscientific and religious narratives and popular culture. In the early 20th century, religion had a significant impact, manifested in the hybridization of religious images and pseudo-anthropomorphic distortion in art. In the second half of the 20th century, space narratives had a great influence and were embodied in images of aliens, the cosmos, etc. The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries was the time for rethinking technology, and the symbiosis of human and technology, the origin of species and alternative theories of evolution became popular themes.

Keywords: monster studies, visionary art, outsider art, art brut, art of the insane, posthumanism, anthropomorphism, monstrosity, Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel), Bernard Schatz (L-15), Allen Christian

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АННА АЛЕКСАНДРОВНА СУВОРОВА

Российский государственный педагогический университет

им. А. И. Герцена,

191186, Санкт-Петербург, набережная реки Мойки, 48

ResearcherID: JFB-0032-2023

ORCID: 0000-0002-6421-8514

e-mail: suvorova_anna@mail.ru

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Модусы монструозности в визионерском и аутсайдерском искусстве: от божественного к машинному и обратно

Аннотация. Искусство визионеров и художников-аутсайдеров — пространство фантастических нарративов, авторской мифологии и гибридных идентичностей. Их личные религиозные доктрины и квазиисторические эпосы генерируют монструозные тела и сущности, в образности которых соединяются характеристики божественного, человеческого и

машинного.

В статье исследуются репрезентации монструозности в визионерском и аутсайдерском искусстве, ар-брюте и творчестве душевнобольных XX и начала XXI века, и анализируются репрезентации монстров в творчестве Карла Бренделя (Карла Генцеля), Бернарда Шаца (L-15), Аллена Кристиана.

Общими характеристиками монструозности в искусстве визионеров и аутсайдеров XX и начала XXI века выступают: визионерский характер образов, поликультурность, гибридность, соединение научных, псевдонаучных и религиозных нарративов и массовой культуры. В начале XX века сильны влияния религиозной картины мира, что проявляется в гибридизации религиозных образов и псевдоантропоморфном искажении в искусстве. Во второй половине XX века космические нарративы имели огромное влияние и воплощались в образах пришельцев, космоса и т.п. Рубеж XX и XXI века был временем переосмысления технологий и симбиоза человека и технологии, происхождение видов и альтернативные эволюционные теории также стали популярными темами.

Ключевые слова: монстрология, визионерское искусство, аутсайдерское искусство, ар-брут, искусство душевнобольных, постгуманизм, антропоморфизм, монструозность, Карл Брендель (Карл Гренцель), Бернард Шац (L-15), Аллен Кристиан

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INTRODUCTION

After years of studying naïve and outsider art, and various related forms of non-professional creativity (self-taught art, art brut, visionary art, neue invention), I determined that these objects constantly evade definitions and boundaries. In the very term *outsider* art there is a certain slyness, because for all the alienation of outsiders, their art is still connected with culture. A visionary reveals echoes of an objective world in their unreal ontologies. An outsider or a visionary is most often, in fact, unconsciously appropriating what has been produced by global or local culture. These boundaries and vertexes, conventions and gaps between outsider art and the art of “insiders” should be a special area of this study. The **optics** of this article is an attempt to determine the specificity of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art.¹

¹ Colin Rhodes, Art Historian and one of the most famous specialists in outsider art, underlines

Over the past decades, monster studies have been aimed both at developing the theory (Cohen, 1996; Picart & Browning, 2012) and various aspects of the representation of monsters in history and modern culture (Weinstock, 2014; Koenig-Woodyard et al., 2018). However, a dedicated study of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art has not taken place yet.

This study examines the representation of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art and the characteristics attributed to monsters. The research problem lies in the necessity to study the image of the monsters in visual representation: gods and goddesses, aliens and “intergalactic angels,” etc., since most of the existing studies do not cover this theme, and the representation of monsters is understudied. The object of my analysis is visionary and outsider art, which include characters representing monsters of various types. For this study, I obtained material from analyzing three artists, Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel), Bernard Schatz (L-15), and Allen Christian. Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel) was chosen as he presents outsider art of the early 20th century and different discursive poles that are of interest for this study. The other two artists—Bernard Schatz (L-15) and Allen Christian—present visionary and outsider art of the second half of the 20th—early 21st century and belong to a different sphere of non-professional art (persons who weren’t forcibly isolated), which allows us to study the representation of the intergalactic and technical monsters. The aim is to identify the peculiarities of the monster representation in visionary and outsider art in the perspective of posthuman turn.

The **objectives** of the study include the following steps:

- to interrogate the concept of monsters in the perspective of posthuman turn;
- to study different approaches to the concept of monsters and to identify strategies for constructing the otherness in visionary and outsider art;
- to identify the features of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art;
- to analyze the works of Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel), Bernard Schatz (L-15), Allen Christian for the representation of monstrosity, to identify common representation strategies based on them.

The **methods** of formal, semiotic, and narrative analysis will be used to identify monster representation patterns in visionary and outsider art. The

that the definition of terms has always been controversial. He defined outsider art as synonymous until the 1980s with art brut. The “iconic” figures of outsider art were socially or culturally marginal figures: usually undereducated, sometimes alien to the prevailing dominant culture, many had been diagnosed as mentally ill. Also, Colin Rhodes argues with the positions of Jean Dubuffet and Roger Cardinal in the definition of spiritualist mediums, such as Augustin Lesage and Madge Gill and others with visionary experience, as outsider artists. Following this position, outsider art and visionary art are intercrossed fields.

following discourse theory and various types of statements are used as research materials: visual art, texts by artists and researchers, images and narratives of popular culture.

OUTSIDER AND VISIONARY ART IN THE CULTURE OF THE LATE 19TH—EARLY 21ST CENTURY

During the history of outsider art, its conceptual frames and boundaries have been quite volatile. In certain periods of the existence of the term, outsider art included self-taught art, art of the insane (artworks of persons with mental disabilities), and art of social outcasts. For many centuries (Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment), the phenomenon of outsider art was not described through conceptual frameworks, although individuals who today can be considered as outsider artists created their artworks. The first precedents of terminological meaning and systemic description appeared at the turn of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Outsider art has a discursive character and, despite the emergence of the term in 1972, it included earlier art phenomena: art of the insane (Hans Prinzhorn) and art brut (Jean Dubuffet). The person who coined the term outsider art, Roger Cardinal, emphasized the specificities of this type of art, explaining that it is not measurable only by the boundaries of mental dysfunction:

I should point out that the criteria for Outsider Art (*art brut*) are sufficiently flexible to embrace not only art arising within the context of extreme mental dysfunction but also art produced by individuals who are quite capable of handling their social lives but who recoil, consciously or unconsciously, from the notion of art being necessarily a publicly defined activity with communally recognized standards. (Cardinal, 2009, p. 1459)

Nevertheless, the term outsider art is sometimes criticized in contemporary institutions, exhibition practice and activism because of the change in the discourse of mental and physical disability, as well as the transformation of social boundaries. Also, the criticism of the concept is due to a change in the structure of art, the institutional boundaries within art are becoming more transparent, both the works of outsiders and insiders are included in large exhibitions of contemporary art and museum expositions. Nevertheless, it is premature to talk about the irrelevance and non-functionality of the term. In spite of discussions about the usage of this term (Hahl et al., 2017), the discourse of art authenticity is essential and widespread in museums and art business. All of the above leads to the active use of terminological frames “art brut,” “art of the insane” in the context of historical collections and outsider art to describe diverse phenomena of contemporary non-professional and non-institutionalized art.

Under these circumstances, a new, posthuman metaphysics can recognize,

as the a priori ontological locality of knowledge produced by someone, the impossibility of knowing the Universe. Thus, new horizons of the ethics of outsider creativity, rather than aesthetics, are opened. Outsiders create the space of their worlds, which do not imitate anything, but, on the contrary, have an ontological and creative self-sufficiency. In the construction of outsider ontology, we find narratives, languages, images, and symbols appropriated and reshaped in our own way.

The creativity of outsider artists often has a complex character. Drawings and canvases, texts and videos produce a distinct universe, organized according to the creator's ontological attitudes. In the history of outsider art, there are dozens of harmonious, well-structured ontological systems. Cultural attitudes, national and religious narratives, personal semiology and traumas become a basis for individual ontologies, demonstrating their enormous variability. Similar author's ontologies of outsiders, embodied in various creative forms, unite the worlds of physical objects and states, mental images, scientific hypotheses, fiction and nonfiction, phenomena of media culture.

When outsiders create monsters, one otherness produces another. Outsider's monsters are a part of outsider ontologies, in which being is built according to its own laws, including its own structure, form and properties of being, space, time, and motion.

MONSTER STUDIES AND THE POSTHUMAN TURN IN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE: THEORETICAL ASPECTS

Initially, let us explain some theoretical approaches on monster studies applicable to analysis of visionary art and outsider art. Who are monsters? Where they may be found? In 2017, Mittman wrote about the opportunity to locate the monstrous, because they don't lie solely in its embodiment, its location, the process(es) through which it enacts its being. The crucial importance of the monsters is (perhaps primarily) in its impact on culture in general (Mittman, 2017).

In one of the most significant texts dedicated to monster theory, *Monster Culture* (Seven Theses), Cohen (2016) emphasizes that the monster is a cultural phenomenon, and we should strive to understand cultures through the monsters they inhabit. Cohen's *Monster Culture* (Seven Theses) may be analyzed in the perspective postmodern and posthumanism studies. Due to the object of this research more relatable theses are chosen.

The first thesis is, "The monster's body is a cultural body":

Vampires, burial, death: inter the corpse where the road forks, so that went it springs from the grave, it will not know which path to follow. Drive a stake through its heart: it will be stuck to the ground at the fork, it will haunt that place that leads to many other places, that point of

indecision. Behead to corpse, so that, acephalic, it will not know itself as subject, only as pure body. (Cohen, 1996, p. 4)

The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence.

Even more essential in the perspective of this study is the following characteristic, mentioned by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in the third thesis, "The monster is the harbinger of category crisis." The main point of this thesis is, "The monster always escapes because it refuses easy categorization" (Cohen, 1996, p. 6). For the reason of its ontological liminality the monster "notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes" (Cohen, 1996, p. 6). The idea of monsters as a concept recalls us to radical rethinking of boundary and normality. As Cohen wrote, "the monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration" (Cohen, 1996, p. 7).

The fourth thesis leads straight forward to the idea of outsider art: "The monster dwells at the gates of difference." The author claims that,

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within. Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual. (Cohen, 1996, p. 7)

To summarize the characteristics of monsters in culture, S. Erle and H. Hendry (2020) outline the following:

- monsters serve as metaphors for anxieties of aberration and innovation;
- monsters represent evil or moral transgression and each epoch, evidences a "particular type of monster";
- social and cultural threats come to be embodied in the figure of a monster and their actions literalize our deepest fears.

The concept of monsters in the perspective of posthuman turn interrogates R. Braidotti, P. MacCormack and other researchers. A posthuman is one of the basic ideas of posthumanism, understood "as a point of assembly of mythical, chimerical, technological, social, biological; as a further deconstruction of humanistic 'Vitruvian man'" (Kriman, 2020, p. 58). As R. Braidotti (2013) and Fr. Fernando (2019) wrote, the main features of posthuman are post-anthropocentrism, post-dualism, and post-humanism. Following the analysis of these concepts in the context of philosophical anthropology, the tendency to de-anthropologization is becoming more visible. The destabilization of previous opposites such as man/woman, culture/nature, etc.,

outlined as the key position of post-anthropocentrism approach of posthuman. One of the most distinguished examples of this deconstruction are post-gender beings such as Dolly the sheep cloned in 1996 (Braidotti, 2013, p. 74). Also, the embodiment of post-anthropocentrism both natural and produced (OncoMouse), represents impossibility of hierarchy (Haraway, 1997, pp. 51–52).

The comprehension of the concepts of monsters or monstrosity in literature, contemporary research and culture based at the intersection of the humanities and social sciences showed that in contemporary culture monsters have become “more humane than ever before” (Erle & Hendry, 2020). They demonstrate characteristics of human beings:

Monsters are strong, resilient, creative and sly creatures. Through their playful and invigorating energy, they can be seen to disrupt and unsettle. They still cater to the appetite for horror, but they also encourage us to feel empathy. The encounter with a monster can enable us to stop, wonder and change our attitudes towards technology, our body and each other. (Erle & Hendry, 2020)

P. MacCormack in *Posthuman ethics: Embodiment and cultural theory* interrogates the posthuman from a transhumanist perspective. In her point of view, posthuman is an attempt of “thinking the new grand narrative of the human itself” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 8). The category of the human is questioned “in order to exclude any limitations or accountabilities in reference to immanent existences of other lives, including other ‘human’ lives, be they considered majoritarian human or minoritarian flesh” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 8). The rethinking of characteristics which made minoritarians the object of former oppression—the incomplete, the hybrid, the germinal—are offered as a future design for the infinite human.

As MacCormack sees the features of the posthuman, it can be “as ethical, material, experimental, creative and yet which escapes definition—the organically human but inhuman, the a-human, the nonhuman, the infinite wonders of diverse human forms” (MacCormack, p. 79). Monstrosity is presented as “a spectacle of flesh (in ‘deformity’),” “capability (in diffability for example),” it includes patterns of non-specular expressivity (in the spectrum of unremarkable behavior) (MacCormack, 2016, pp. 79–80). But despite of the attempts to build the catalog of monstrosity, its contingent is uncontainable: “Monsters have been studied from the mystical to morally objectionable, and currently include a constellation of disparate corporealities from diffability studies to perpetrators of school massacres, online roleplay gamers to queers” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 80).

The definitions of monsters given by MacCormack (MacCormack, 2016) are discursive:

- 1) they are not not-monsters, not us, not normal (MacCormack, 2016, p. 82);

- 2) the monsters are creatures *in between, the mixed, the ambivalent* (MacCormack, 2016, p. 86) (the same characteristics were also given Braidotti). There is also a resistance to any singular definition of subjectivity, “reflecting the ‘holes’ of discourse enclosed simply as ‘other’” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 88);
- 3) they are the others, but their otherness has a discursive character (the very flesh of the other that is usually subjugated). As MacCormack wrote, “an event of the human cannot be posthuman if it stands in opposition to a less attractive, oppressed or suppressed other who both threatens to re-emerge in order to subsume it, but also reminds it of the irrefutable necessity for dominance in the quest for liberation from the flesh” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 83);
- 4) the quality to be in between provide the hybrid character of monsters: “the monster operates through this system of hybridity” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 82);
- 5) the monsters are perceived as a mystical or aberrant grotesque (primarily defined through ‘mal’formation of the flesh) (MacCormack, 2016, pp. 85–86). But in order for old monsters to be replaced by new monsters “there will always be a form of monstrosity devalued beyond all others” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 87);
- 6) “monstrosity requires a certain lawlessness” (MacCormack, 2016, p. 92), so monsters show the triumph of pure singularity;
- 7) monsters are the reflection of exclusion: “monsters are lesion bodies that majoritarian regimes say must be excised from the body politic, the corpus, for the benefit of all” (MacCormack, 2016, pp. 92–93).

Monster studies may be applicable in several disciplines: as a part of culture and gender studies, art criticism, etc. The range of multidisciplinary connections brings into focus the pertinent theoretical and methodological challenges relating to how the monstrous finds application not only in critical thinking but also in art and visual culture. Let us turn to the theory and methodology of discourse, based on the writings of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 2002; Foucault, 2003) and postmodernism and posthumanism theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977). Recent interdisciplinary investigations of monsters or monstrosity (Kriman, 2020; Erle & Hendry, 2020) find Foucault’s theory appropriate for monster studies.

Moreover, the approach of Michel Foucault’s writings—both theoretical and conceptual—is applicable to developing the methodology of monster studies in outsider art (Foucault, 2003). Foucault in his lectures on Abnormal (Foucault, 2003) outlines three different figures of monstrosity: the “human monster”—someone or something having the “capacity to create anxiety (...) due to the fact that it violates the law” (Foucault, 2003, p. 56); the “individual to be corrected”; and the

“masturbator” breaking the moral law. Foucault in his *Abnormal* interrogates the shifting relations between the normal, the abnormal, and the sexually deviant to explain monstrosity. Also, in support of the convergence of Foucault’s optics and the approaching posthuman turn, it will be persuaded that Foucault emphasized the quality of or “blending” of species, sexes and forms (Foucault, 2003, p. 63). Summarizing this, monsters in visionary and outsider art might embody some cultural unconsciousness, cultural body. Monsters, represented by visioners and outsiders, became the dialectical Other and recall us to radical rethinking of boundary and normality.

Analyzing outsider and visionary art, art of the insane, we are handling a double discursive construction. On the one hand, these authors, as artists and personalities, are excluded (or rather, expelled) from the limits of the norm, pushed into the space of pathology (or some kind of human zoo); on the other hand, the images they produce are a priori encoded as abnormal or pathological. The statements of outsiders (textual, visual, performative) are a priori regarded as pathology due to their predetermined exclusion. Imagery and aesthetics of outsider art, often fed by the mainstream of culture, seem to function in a dual coding mode: the created images are recoded in an unconventional logic. Thus, outsider art is a constructed discourse, where the monstrous is both excluded from the cultural context and reflects it. For examining the idea of monstrosity, this exclusion and recoding are crucial. Foucault’s discourse theory shows each analyzed case as a separate discourse which intersects with other discursive formations.

I will consider both the local outsider’s narratives (each of them formed a unique discourse) and the discourse of monstrosity in this research, without analyzing other intersectional discourses. In the discourse of monstrosity, research optics will be aimed at tracking the posthuman turn—from a deconstruction of humanistic “Vitruvian man” to the appearing of the main features of posthuman: post-anthropocentrism, post-dualism and post-humanism, the disappearance of binaries, hierarchies and connections.

In the perspective of discourse theory, the following scheme of analysis is proposed:

- definition of the discourse of the outsider or visionary multiverse (based on the available statements of the authors or evidence about them);
- identification of double codification (connection of the exclusion of the author and understanding the creator as an excluded person);
- definition of the monstrous in the perspective of non-conventional appropriation of images and narratives of the dominant culture, conventions and breaks with it;
- interpretation of the language used, symbols and techniques in the

outsider object in terms of comparison with the characteristics of monstrosity indicated above (also via semiotic analysis).

The research material was the cases of artists Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel), Bernard Schatz (L-15), Allen Christian. The choice takes into account the following factors: the presence of sufficient material to identify the discourse of the author's multiverse, the necessary corpus of images of the monstrous, the presence of articulated / amenable to deconstruction elements of analysis. Thus, the following works of the named authors are distinguished:

- Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel) (1871–1925) (*Three Head-and-Foot Figurines* (n.d.));
- Bernard Schatz (L-15) (1931–2015) (*Raku Solid Body Porcelain Sculptures* (1987), *Inter-galactic Angels* (1987; different series));
- Allen Christian (b. 1957) (*Found objects and Objects* (n.d.)).

WEIRD GODS OF CARL BRENDEL (KARL GENZEL)

Carl Brendel (Karl Genzel) (1871–1925), his life and work, was described in an extensive monograph by Hans Prinzhorn in his book (1922), *Artistry of the mentally ill*. Brendel is one of the Ten Schizophrenics who was given the pseudonym Karl Brendel. Karl Genzel was born in Thuringia, worked as a bricklayer, plasterer, and molder. He had signs of mental illness, and was hospitalized in the early 20th century for schizophrenia, after “a series of prison terms for increasingly violent behavior, and a partial amputation of one of his legs” (Borum, 2023).

Prinzhorn characterized Genzel's delusion as religious, so his artistic productions in the asylum were uniquely abstracted, carved figures with some religious motifs (Prinzhorn, 1922). Before schizophrenic manifestation, Genzel had carved wooden figures for his children, and in the asylum, he began to mold obscene shapes from chewed bread. As Jenifer P. Borum described:

He soon began to carve animal figures in wood, and increasingly inventive forms, often with religious overtones. Focused on the figure of Jesus Christ, Genzel forged a visionary mode of figuration that included hermaphroditism, and variations on the convention of the crucifix that evolved into creatures with giant heads supported by stork-like legs. Genzel's facility for abstracting the human figure was recognized by Paul Klee, who imitated and refined his compositions, a modernist homage to the raw power of his Outsider muse. (Borum, 2023)

Brendel created odd, hybrid figures, embodied a kind of conditional, “broken” anthropomorphism. Obviously, Brendel manifested himself as a demiurge, who

sustained new forms of being that have recently appeared from available pieces of matter, lumps of a human. Although they resemble a person in their elements, they are habitual, non-human forms of life.

The three figurines of the head and legs, that Prinzhorn reproduced in his book, are a good example of the author's monstrosity (Fig. 1–2). They consist of absolutely round heads with conditional faces with eyes, noses, mouths, ears. One of the heads bears the features of masculinity—with a mustache and a beard; the others two have details resembling penises. But an exceptional oddity is that these figures are in their cephalopod-like appearance—they have no bodies and arms (only one conditional arm is located between the legs). Thus, the figures represent radical oddness. They are conditionally monstrous for us, but, apparently, not for Karl Brendel.

To summarize the case of Karl Brendel, it is possible to identify the following patterns of the monstrosity construct:

- it is a precedent of double exclusion, the author was excluded in the social field and repressed by the psychiatry (the division into norm and pathology), and his art, by categorization's grids, is outside the bounds of conventional art;
- the objects of Karl Brendel are practically not amenable to classification and nomination, and attempts at this nomination were manifested in comparison with so-called "primitive" African art;
- the images of the monstrous are marked by radicalized hybridity, contrary to the attitudes rooted in a European culture of the early 20th century;
- deconstruction of dichotomies and / or rejection of them, which manifests itself in the unification of the earthly and divine, anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic, human and animal principles.



Fig. 1–2. *Three Head-and-Feet Figurines*: Front and rear views, Wood (Carl Brendel, n.d.). Photo from the 1922 book *Bildnerie der Geisteskranken* by Hans Prinzhorn²

² See the image source: <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/prinzhorn1922/0174/image> (03.10.2023).

INTER-GALACTIC ANGEL L-15 (BERNARD SCHATZ)

Space themes have been developing in visionary and outsider art since the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The presentation of this topic in fiction, cinema, television series, comics, and news stimulated the emergence of many outsider ontologies. The central place in them was occupied by the structure of the Universe, interplanetary and intergalactic travel, life on other planets, alternative evolution and the origin of man, the theory of panspermia, space aliens and their technological development. A significant density of cosmic ontologies can be observed in artworks of outsider artists, whose personal formation occurred at the beginning of the cosmic era—the 1960s.

Bernard Schatz (1931–2015), an American visionary artist, experienced a psychic breakdown—a vision of intergalactic angels, and then took the name L-15. His history can be analyzed as an outsider ontology, which includes performance (performances on television shows (Fig. 3-4), specific public self-presentation (Fig. 5), and performance of music), sculptures and objects from different materials, and memories and entries of visionary revelations.

In his texts, Bernard Schatz describes a meeting with intergalactic angels, a peculiar procedure for initiating and recognizing himself as part of an intergalactic community, as well as some events of his life. The text of 1986, which retrospectively describes the moment of Schatz's meeting with aliens and his transition to a different status—L-15, may be the most significant (based on the artist's biography of the mid-50s):

Two months ago the most amazing thing happened. I found myself in a hospital being examined for the cause of extensive internal bleeding. At one point in the investigation (which took a number of days—the 'cause of the bleeding' mysteriously was never found) they took me to the x-ray department for the notorious Barium x-ray examination. (L-15. Artist Compound, n.d.)

This boringly begun narrative is interrupted by the space motif, setting the boundaries of another intergalactic ontology. The story, which began as an informational text, further preserving this structure and logic, is transformed from a description of everyday reality into an unfolding of a cosmic ontology:

Well, as soon as my body was bombarded with x-rays (and cosmic energy released) the room became filled with a wonderful golden-blue light, and two beautiful figures became manifest to me. They were about 7 feet tall, had glorious rainbow colored wings, and were clad in magnificent glowing gold raiments. They signaled to me to be silent about their presence, and came and touched me. At once I became filled with an inner peace (I believe that at that instant the

bleeding stopped) and a wonderful feeling of happiness. They spoke to me in a foreign, or rather an alien tongue—which for some reason I could understand. (L-15. Artist Compound, n.d.)



Fig. 3–4. Cheyanne Schatz. Screen captures from *The Steve Allen Show*. August 2, 1963³

³ See the image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U4tffp1jko> (03.10.2023).

These shining messengers were Intergalactic Guru-Angels who could influence Bernard's past. From that moment on, the aliens accompanied him, appearing and disappearing unnoticed by other people and speaking to him in a strange musical language, similar to the melody of a harp. The alien creatures have revealed that obscure physiotherapist Bernard Schatz is also an Intergalactic Angel Guru and is 28 million years old (28,918,357 to be exact) and has traveled across more than 16 million celestial bodies (L-15. Artist Compound, n.d.).

Thus, hundreds and hundreds of objects created by L-15 over many decades are variations of representations of Intergalactic Guru-Angels. He made the huge series of *Intergalactic Angels in Glazed Porcelain on Velvet Fabric Bodies* (1987); *Intergalactic Angels in Glazed Porcelain on Wire Bodies* (1987), *Intergalactic Angels in Glazed Porcelain on Wire Bodies* (1987) and others. Therefore, L-15 explores the inhabitants of a metaverse generated by him. Since, according to Schatz, the number of Intergalactic Guru-Angels is huge, he shows us many variations of them. Unlike his memoirs, the angels do not have visual intersections with the images of Christian angels at all. Rather, they resemble something hybrid, composed of the motives of nature—both wildlife and inanimate nature. These can be “tadpoles” with comet tails (*Intergalactic Angels in Glazed Porcelain on Velvet Fabric Bodies*) or some entities resembling birds and airplanes at the same time (*Intergalactic Angels in Glazed Porcelain on Wire Bodies*). But in a few cases, they do not carry any chaotic connotations.



Fig. 5. A Folk performance by L-15. L-15 combines the old Cheyanne Schatz performance style with a *Visionary Folk Art* presentation from the Jargon Society in Blacksburg, VA, 1985⁴

The theme of the monstrous is continued by Bernard Schatz in his peculiar studies, which he presented as visual artifacts. For example, his idea of an alternative

⁴ See the image source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U4tffp1jko> (03.10.2023).

evolution is provided in *Skulls of Missing Link* (n.d.)—ceramic braincases of extinct animals which once existed, according to Bernard.

Another version of the monstrous is a series of *Raku Solid Body Porcelain Sculptures* (1987), which seems to represent the chthonic spirits of the earth. As if the clay from which these creatures were molded turned out to be animated, able to move and express emotions. Also in this series, one can trace a certain anthropomorphism—outlined “eyes” and “mouth,” with some semblance of body and hands.

To sum up the study of the history and narratives of L-15 (Bernard Schatz), the following patterns of the monstrosity construct were revealed:

- Bernard Schatz, on the one hand, was a somewhat isolated person due to his mental status, but, on the other hand, American multiculturalism and the emerging postmodern attitudes in art do not make him an outcast or totally excluded;
- Bernard Schatz was included in discourses related to American popular culture (participation in shows with various performances), interest in aliens and extraterrestrial civilizations, contemporary art;
- the L-15 multiverse was not fully integrated with current scientific or religious concepts due to various integration paths. But at the same time, L-15 formed a fantastic hybrid far from the mainstream;
- in creating images of the monstrous, L-15 generates hybrid entities that fit into the concept of in between, the mixed, the ambivalent: his beings simultaneously bear the features of the human and alien or chthonic;
- his monsters have a hybrid character embodied in formal markers and descriptive language. Hybrids have an unconventional character for accepted discourses, cosmic narratives are combined with religious ones.

HOUSE OF BALLS BY ALLEN CHRISTIAN

Allen Christian (b. 1957), a.k.a. Mr. Lucky or The House of Balls Guy is a self-taught artist who makes a sort of cyborgs from different things such as electric and garden tools, wire, etc. He was born in Minneapolis, the sixth of nine children, “his fifth grade art teacher arranged Saturday drawing classes for him at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, but the young artist quit after several sessions” (American Visionary Art Museum, n.d.). In his childhood, Christian spent very happy hours in his father’s basement workshop.

During his four years of military service, based mostly in Europe, Christian was inspired by cultures possessed of “a vast history, where art was valued as a social treasure” (American Visionary Art Museum, n.d.). Christian had been working as an electrician during the 2000s, and later he had “enchanted visitors” to his Minneapolis-based House of Balls. This jam-packed studio was filled with found objects and recycled art. To give characteristic to his art, Christian says he “discovered the essence of humanity through found objects and through inanimate objects that are cast-offs. I try to give these inanimate objects a new lease on life, to imbue them with emotion” (American Visionary Art Museum, n.d.).

Allen Christian explains the idea of his creativity:

It's about an experience that I want to give somebody, so hopefully they believe a different person. I began in second grade when I drew an image of Christ on the cross. Through seeing it myself and kind of the admiration that I got, it gave me a sense of identity. (...) I repurpose things, I take things and rearrange them in a way that I find beauty and sometimes other stories. It's really about trying to get people to look at their own lives, it is not specifically about objects, it's about how can you rearrange the elements of your own life to give it meaning, to give it individuality, and give your life meaning. (...) This is really a way for me to look outside and be looked at from the inside. Over not too long of a period of time, it became apparent to me that this was about experimenting and playing with the public engagement. This is about my own growth. (Allen Christian, 2014)

At the House of Balls, there are many found objects that Allen Christian transformed into anthropomorphic creatures. (Fig. 6). Sometimes this can be done without any alteration at all, as in the case of electrical appliances—central-symmetrical dials are easily recognized by us as a smile and eyes (here, his experience as an electrician helps him). In other cases, he does customization, connecting several utilitarian objects. A shovel makes a face with slitted eyes, a pitchfork becomes sharpening hair, a large glass light bulb and jaw-wire and eye-socket details transforms into a “skull.”

But often anthropomorphic images have more complex characteristics: these are faces cut in metal, found object faces and figures assembled from a variety of metal and other details. These domestic cyborgs are part of our everyday life, they accompany us throughout our lives—electrical appliances, lamps, agricultural implements (Fig. 7). And after its utilitarian life, we do not send all this household stuff to scrap; we do not throw it in a landfill, but, as it were, we give it, so close and already humanized, a place to live next to us. Actually, all these “home” cyborgs do not embody horrors and fears at all, but, on the contrary, goodness and hope.

Christian's way of interpretation of “domestic cyborgs” correlates with the

idea of Donna Haraway's *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*:

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. (...) This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (Haraway, 1985, pp. 65–66)



Fig. 6. *Found Object*. Allen Christian, n.d.⁵



Fig. 7. *Object*. Allen Christian, n.d.⁶

⁵ See the image source: <https://www.houseofballs.com/?pgid=jx3g2r1z-477e13e5-daf1-48dc-8a6a-db409898dccc4> (03.10.2023).

⁶ See the image source: <https://www.houseofballs.com/?pgid=jx3g2r1z-b7532fe9-ec79-42fc-958d-367bfcd8ac> (03.10.2023).

To summarize the case of Allen Christian, the following aspects of the representation of monstrosity have been revealed:

among other analyzed authors, Allen Christian is the most integrated into American society: this is due to the changing culture and the rooting of the principles of post-industrial culture, which emphasizes the special significance of individuality;

in the Allen Christian multiverse, man and machine are equal partners: it is not technology that serves humanity or enslaves it, but some kind of symbiosis is built. Another unusual context is caring for a robot, a mechanism, a car—in the Allen Christian multiverse, they are likened to pets or relatives who need care that was previously shown only to human beings;

from the point of view of formal and semiotic optics, Allen Christian's monsters are transhuman hybrids, "domestic cyborgs" with emotional, humanistic, and technological components that do not come into conflict.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the symbolical and discursive characteristics of monstrosity and otherness in the case of each artist appear in different ways. The art of outsiders and visionaries represents the exclusion of the excluded. The construct of double isolation—social (often including physical, intellectual, and mental aspects) and cultural—creates situations for these artists to function outside of existing conventions. Images of culture penetrate the multiverses of outsiders, but are codified by them in a specific way, and, being returned back to the cultural context, are subjected to double codification in the course of interpretation.

To understand the constructs of monstrosity, the discourse of this phenomenon is principal: outsiders (especially in the period of modernity) are monsters themselves in the optics of the cultural community, the view of their art is similar to the view of the "human zoo," it is valuable for its strangeness sought by European culture. That is, in the MacCormack's categories, they themselves are *not non-monsters, not us, not normal*. Monsters spawn monsters as their friends, their inner circle, their gods (Carl Brendel, (Karl Genzel)), mentors (Bernard Schatz (L-15)), relatives (Allen Christian).

As we approach modernity, the time of the formation of the posthuman turn, it becomes clear to mankind. The wildness, the irregularity of Karl Brendel's

images of phallic gods, even for a researcher, required special cultural “props,” while at the beginning of the 21st century, Allen Christian’s domestic cyborgs are understood by the townsfolk. That is, monstrosity of the outsiders functions in culture, including the reception of this imagery.

For all the specificity of monstrosity, in these visionary and outsider art images, there are the key theoretical characteristics of this category designated by Donna Haraway, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Patricia MacCormack, Michel Foucault. Outsiders’ monsters are in between, the mixed, the ambivalent, to a much greater extent than the monsters spawned by mainstream culture.

The general characteristics of the representation of monstrosity in visionary and outsider art of the 20th—early 21st centuries are: visionary nature of images, multiculturalism, hybridity, the combination of scientific / pseudoscientific, religious narratives and images of popular culture. In the early 20th century, religion had a significant impact, manifested in the forms and symbols of art—the hybridization of religious images and pseudo-anthropomorphic distortion. The second half of the 20th century had an active influence of “space” narratives embodied in the images of aliens, cosmos, etc. The period at the turn of the 20th—early 21st centuries is the time of the rethinking of technology, neighborhood, and symbiosis of man and technology (technological monsters, “machine body,” animation of the machine), and the themes of the genesis of species and alternative evolutions.

The results of this paper can contribute to further studying of how otherness and monstrosity are represented in visionary and outsider art. Also, it may show different results when looking at a different set of non-professional artists, which provides opportunities for future research.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANNA A. SUVOROVA

Dr.Sci. (Art History),

Professor at the Department of Theory and History of Culture,
Herzen University,

48, Moika Embankment, Saint Petersburg 191186, Russia

ResearcherID: JFB-0032-2023

ORCID: 0000-0002-6421-8514

e-mail: suvorova_anna@mail.ru

СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

АННА АЛЕКСАНДРОВНА СУВОРОВА

доктор искусствоведения,

профессор кафедры теории и истории культуры,

Российский государственный

педагогический университет им. А. И. Герцена

191186, Санкт-Петербург, набережная реки Мойки, 48

ResearcherID: JFB-0032-2023

ORCID: 0000-0002-6421-8514

e-mail: suvorova_anna@mail.ru