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Objects of Desire: Surrealist Collecting and the Art of the Pacific Northwest Coast

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of four figures connected to the surrealist movement: André Breton, Kurt Seligmann, Wolfgang Paalen, and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and their interest in art and objects from the First Nations peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast. It includes case-studies of four specific objects that each of them collected: a Kwakwaka'wakw *Yaxwiwe'* headdress, a Wet'suwet'en *Keïgiet* totem pole, a Tlingit *Chief Shakes Bear Screen*, and a Tsimshian *Shaman Figure*, respectively. While recent scholarship fixes their interest in these objects to their backgrounds in anthropology, philosophy and theory, I will argue that the basis for their collecting was driven by 'surrealist desire' and that other considerations were secondary to this desire. I examine the history of surrealist collecting, the intersection of anthropology and surrealism, and the role of the 'primitive' object in surrealism.

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Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to re-situate the surrealist interest in 'primitive'[1] art not as solely anthropological or philosophical, but more appropriately as a comprehensive approach that incorporates art-historical as well as anthropological and philosophical perspectives. At its core, surrealism was an attempt to liberate human consciousness through 'pure' poetic methods—whether these were literary, visual or other.[2] The surrealists' interest in primitive art was propelled by an affinity for the 'other' as defined in political, psychological, and philosophical terms. Rather than try to describe the surrealists' interest in primitive art in singular or binary terms, I would like to address these issues through multiple, but equally valid, approaches. While there is an ongoing, and valid debate concerning the surrealists' appropriation and use of indigenous cultural artifacts, my approach is primarily an historical argument.[3] Why did the surrealists collect objects from the Pacific Northwest Coastal First Nations peoples? What drew them to specific objects, and how did the surrealists see themselves in relation to the objects they collected?

The surrealist fascination with the 'primitive' predates the formal

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1 A note on terminology: While I do use the term 'primitive' throughout this thesis, it is not without hesitation. I am well aware of the colonialist implications of such a word when describing art and objects from non-western cultures. However, as an historical term used extensively by the subjects of this study, it cannot be avoided in this discussion.

2 André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)" in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

3 There is a large body of scholarship that deals with the contemporary issues surrounding the surrealists and the continuing legacy of their collecting practices. For more information, see Amy Winter, ed. *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas: Special Issue on Surrealism and Ethnography*, 2.1 (2008) and W. Jackson Rushing III ed., *Journal of Surrealism and the*

foundation of the movement in 1924.[4] André Breton was known to be an active collector in his youth, and in 1931 he and Paul Éluard put up for auction their respective collections of tribal art objects and primitive sculptures. The auction was held at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris and was intended to raise money to pay off debts and secure living expenses. There were a total of 314 items in the auction, all related to Breton's and Éluard's interests in 'primitive' cultures. Almost half of the items were from the Americas, with a small number from the Pacific Northwest Coastal[5] First Nations.[6] All of these objects had been collected over many years of scouring Parisian flea-markets, buying from antique and curio shops and bartering with friends. To sell off these prized possessions must have been a tremendous ordeal for Breton, an insatiable collector and devotee of divergent cultures. The sale raised 285,000 francs[7], a significant amount of money for Éluard and Breton and almost immediately they began to collect again. Breton's desire for primitive objects was never satisfied, even to his death in 1966. The auction also marked a shift in his collecting practice away from African objects, and allowed him to refocus his interest on objects from the Americas and South Pacific.

Americas: Special Section on Native American Surrealisms, 7.1 (2013).

4 Fabrice Flahutez, *Nouveau monde et nouveau mythe: Mutations du surréalisme, de l'exil américain à l' "Écart absolu" (1941-1965)* (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2007), 303-04.

5 For the sake of brevity, I will be abbreviating Pacific Northwest Coast as PNWC throughout this paper. While the term covers a very large geographic area, I am employing it to denote the diverse indigenous groups that have historically inhabited and still live today between the Pacific Ocean and the coastal mountain range, in northern Washington, central British Colombia and southeastern Alaska.

6 Evan Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," in *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* vol. II, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 546.

7 Approximately US$11,400 in 1931 or US$175,400 adjusted to 2013.

Surrealism was formally established in 1924. Breton and the other early surrealists saw themselves as researchers into the limitless possibilities of the human mind, using literature and visual modes of creation as a means to an end. Breton had previously worked with shell-shocked veterans of WWI at a neuropsychiatric clinic at Saint-Dizier[8] and had some experience with the use of automatism—hypnotism, free association, automatic writing, and dream interpretation—to treat the patients. Although its clinical application proved limited, Breton believed that automatism could be employed to explore the unconscious mind, and through these 'experiments' a reality just beyond the rational could be understood. While the term 'surreal' had existed prior to the formal foundations of the group, Breton and his allies quickly staked their claim on its use by laying out its definition in the first "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924):

> "SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.
>
> "ENCYLOPEDIA: Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life."[9]

Their influences ranged from the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, the poets Charles Baudelaire and Guillaume Apollinaire, the social anthropologist James Frazer, the

8 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), xi.
9 Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), 26.

philosopher Georg F.W. Hegel and later the politics of Karl Marx. In late 1924 they opened the *Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes* [*The Bureau of Surrealist Research*] and began publication of the periodical *La Révolution Surréaliste* [*The Surrealist Revolution*]. Although their literary and visual output is too great to list in detail here, almost all of their activities were spurred on by a search for the 'marvelous' in any experience. As Breton had described in the first "Manifesto of Surrealism": "the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful."[10] Through surrealist strategies—such as automatic writing, dream imagery, and the chance encounter[11]—the marvelous would be understood and the unconscious mind could be revealed. However, the 'beautiful' that the surrealists sought was not based on Kantian ideas of aesthetic beauty, where the conscious mind subjectively appreciates external experience; rather, it was an expression of a purely poetic moment without "aesthetic or moral concern." All other surrealist expressions are bound up in the 'marvelous' and its manifestations: 'desire' and 'the uncanny'—both terms that can be traced back to Freudian psychoanalysis—describe the surrealist moment of revelation. Desire is especially important in that it can be both the catalyst for and effect of the 'marvelous': desire drives the search for the marvelous, and through convulsive beauty, unconscious desire is exposed (as we will see in detail in the first chapter

10 Ibid., 14.

11 Automatic writing was used in order to unlock unconscious thought, by inducing trance-like states and recording the outcome. Dream imagery was valued for its clues to the dreamer's interior desires and fears, using Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* as just one basis for analysis. And finally, chance encounters were moments experienced during everyday life, when the extraordinary coincided with the mundane in such a way as to reveal deeper truths to those open to the experience. Breton's books, *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou,* both demonstrated examples of the chance encounter.

of this thesis). For Breton and the other surrealists, the marvelous was anything that could spur that moment of recognition: a word, a poem, a coincidental encounter with an old friend, the re-discovery of a forgotten memento, or even the sideways glance from a stranger.

At the same time that the surrealists were investigating the unconscious interior, they were also looking outward for pre-existing examples of the surreal. They turned to anthropology and ethnography as one avenue of research. As I mentioned, an early influence on their thinking was the Scottish anthropologist James Frazer and his expansive text, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (published in three editions between 1890 and 1915). Although the surrealists disagreed with Frazer's evolutionary approach to 'primitive' cultures, they were still attracted to his elaborate theories of magic and myth.[12] Other anthropologists of importance to the surrealists included Franz Boas, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Marcel Mauss and Marius Barbeau. This mixture of sociology, ethnography and philosophy would inform all of the surrealists' approach to anthropology, as a study of human culture. Although this is a slightly reductive definition of anthropology, it is adequate for our needs in discussing the surrealists and their relationship to the objects of the PNWC. They were interested in the formation of myth and magic, the influence of the totem and taboo, and how different processes of thought could produce new knowledge free from a

12 His importance to the surrealists even merited a place of honor at the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* [International Exposition of Surrealism] in 1947. A staircase was built leading to the "Room of Superstitions", and each stair was dedicated to the twenty-one Major Arcanas from a deck of tarot cards. The riser of the fourth step was painted to resemble the spine of *The Golden Bough*, which in turn corresponded to the 'Emperor' Arcanum. Flahutez, 308.

western-European influence. The surrealists saw themselves as 'researchers', but not constrained by systematized methodological concerns. Although there were efforts made towards more thorough anthropological endeavors—such as Benjamin Péret's book of mythology, *Anthologie des mythes, légendes et contes populaires d'Amérique* [*Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales of the Americas*] (1960), or Robert Lebel's unpublished but extensive drawings of Yup'ik masks—the surrealists mostly referenced indigenous art and mythology as evidence of innate surrealism.

Methodology

This thesis will focus on four figures that operated within the surrealist movement—André Breton, Kurt Seligmann, Wolfgang Paalen and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss[13]—as well as four case studies of specific objects they collected. Although the surrealists as a group collected a diverse amount of material and objects, here I will narrow my focus on this collecting of items from the PNWC First Nations peoples. In subsequent chapters I will go into detail regarding the specific items each of these four figures collected and the reasoning behind such collecting, but for the purposes of this introduction, I will refer to their collecting in broader, more general terms. The main focus of my study is on the late 1930s and early '40s, during the surrealists' exile in the United States and the Americas. By this point, their methods, interests and influences had

13 Although Lévi-Strauss was never a formal member of the surrealist group, his friendship with and contributions to the group's activity during their exile in New York (approximately 1941-1946) remains significant.

been established, but the familiar environment of Paris and Western Europe was gone, replaced with the turmoil of WWII and a new continent to explore.

The surrealists' reason for collecting was as diverse and eclectic as the things they collected. The drive to collect could have been for anthropological reasons, archival interests or simply to fulfill a mysterious need to possess something marvelous. It could have been for any and all those reasons, and more. It is folly to make declarative statements pertaining to all of their (divergent) collections, but I do believe there is an undercurrent of 'unconscious desire' to their collecting habits. In his forward to the 1948 exhibition *Oceania,* Breton says of the objects assembled, "I am still as captivated by these objects as I was in my youth, when a few of us were instantly enthralled at the sight of them. The surrealist adventure, at the outset, is inseparable from the seduction, the fascination they exerted over us."[14] In this thesis, through the examination of four specific objects—a headdress, a souvenir shaman figure, a house panel, and a totem pole—I will argue that although the surrealists collected PNWC objects for a variety of reasons (visual aesthetic, political statement, cultural affinity, anthropological or even monetary value) primarily their practice was driven by desire, whether explicit or implicit. While I am not proposing to psychoanalyze each of these figures based on objects they collected, I do argue that in the selection and attraction to these certain items, there is a thematic recurrence of desire best described by using the surrealist term "convulsive beauty."

14 André Breton, "Oceania," in *Free Rein,* trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 172.

The first chapter of this study will focus on the meeting and subsequent relationship of André Breton and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Breton, of course, was a founder and leader of the surrealist movement. He helped to guide the group and was influential in the formulation of surrealist thought, processes and philosophy. He was an avowed collector, finding the marvelous in the everyday and unexpected. His collecting exploits are well documented in historical contexts and through his books *Mad Love* and *Nadja*. He first began collecting at the age of twelve, when he bought an Easter Island figure, an act of revolt that was said to have "scandalized his parents."[15] He began to seriously collect 'primitive' objects in his early twenties, with the urging of his mentor, Guillaume Apollinaire.[16] The auction in 1931 did not stop him from collecting either, for he eventually amassed an extensive collection of transformation masks, totemic objects, fetishes, bentwood boxes, domestic items and decorative objects. Breton's attraction to the objects from the PNWC, along with many other items, is in line with the formulation of convulsive beauty as a means to the recognition of the unconscious. I will explore this concept in depth in the second chapter of this study, but will introduce the basic terms here. Breton's definition of convulsive beauty contains three independent but inter-related elements: the veiled-erotic, the fixed-explosive and the magic-circumstantial. In simplified terms, the veiled-erotic is the initial physical reaction one has to a surrealist discovery, be it literary, visual, or experiential; the fixed-explosive is akin to potential energy, an action or

15 Louise Tythacott, "A 'Convulsive Beauty': Surrealism, Oceania and African Art," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 11 (May 1999), 50.
16 Ibid., 50.

moment that is arrested but contains the implication of change; and finally, the magic-circumstantial describes the method of revelation that the surrealist moment might be imparting, essentially it is the answer to a question un-asked. Louise Tythacott begins her essay, “A 'Convulsive Beauty': Surrealism, Oceania, and African Art”, by explaining that the primitive object as seen by Breton was used in this “attempt to convulse” and thus “unlock the rich repertoire of imagery located in the depths of the unconscious: shock was the means to unleash repressed human creativity.”[17] Hal Foster, in his book *Compulsive Beauty* also examines convulsive beauty as a surrealist method of unlocking unconscious desire, but formulates it as a manifestation of the death drive.[18] This key concept of convulsive beauty will find its way into all four of my case studies in some manner.

Lévi-Strauss was a French anthropologist and friend to the surrealists. He is significant in this thesis for a number of reasons: his move from philosophy to anthropology; his introduction to surrealism; and the mutual influence he had on the surrealists and they on him. James Clifford posits that Lévi-Strauss' early formulations of structural anthropology were influenced by the surrealists, and that in turn his anthropological training and world view influenced the surrealists. Clifford goes on to state that Lévi-Strauss began to formulate his theories of structural anthropology while living and working in NY during WWII, when his status as a refugee mirrored that of the surrealists.[19] I agree that this exchange of

17 Ibid., 43.
18 Foster, 28.
19 James Clifford, “A Chronotope for Collecting,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University

ideas between Lévi-Strauss and the surrealists has validity when viewed in light of the surrealists' interest in anthropology, but I would argue that the degree of influence is not entirely quantifiable. As Richardson points out in his essay, "An Encounter of Wise Men and Cyclops Women: Considerations of Debates on Surrealism and Anthropology," it should not be a question of placing surrealism and anthropology in direct opposition to each other, but rather that "we should perhaps start by seeing what each has to offer the other."[20] By including Lévi-Strauss in this paper, it is my aim to reconcile the anthropological approach of the surrealists and the surrealist aspects of anthropology.

The second chapter will compare the collecting trips and objects of Wolfgang Paalen and Kurt Seligmann. Both men traveled to the PNWC in the late 1930s in order to study the indigenous cultures and collect objects from them. Like Breton, the Austrian-born painter Paalen was an inveterate collector, and started his habit at an early age.[21] Although he was a member of the surrealist group between 1935 and 1941, he broke from the group and began publishing his own journal, *DYN* in 1942.[22] Through his own research, readings and travels in the Americas he formulated a unique philosophy based on art, politics, primitivism and totemism. *DYN* was his outlet for these philosophical writings, which at the same time gave other sympathetic authors and artists a voice. While his travels through Canada and the PNWC and eventually Mexico—where he

Press, 1988), 236-46.

20 Michael Richardson, "An Encounter of Wise Men and Cyclops Women: Consideration of Debates on Surrealism and Anthropology," *Critique of Anthropology* 13.1 (March 1993): 71.

21 Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist of the Avant-Garde* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 4.

22 He eventually returned to the surrealist group in 1951.

emigrated in 1939—all informed his affinity to the tribal cultures from which he purchased objects, I argue that it was a deeper need to understand these cultures and possess their objects that drove his collecting habits.

The final figure important to my discussion is the painter and sculptor, Kurt Seligmann. A Swiss-born artist, his unique visual style was greatly admired by Breton and the surrealists. He formally joined the group in 1937, and first traveled to North America and the PNWC in 1938 at the behest of the Musée de l'Homme to collect anthropological artifacts and specimens. The social anthropologist and ethnographer Marie Mauzé details this trip in her essay "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures Through the Eyes of Wolfgang Paalen and Kurt Seligmann," and builds the case that these two artists worked in opposing manners, the former as a theorist, and the latter as an anthropologist.[23] While Seligmann did collect the objects for the French institution, I argue that his choices were at least partially driven by the surreal desire for the marvelous.

Primitivism and Totemism

Central to my argument and this thesis is the conception of primitivism and the surrealist interest in primitive cultures. A broad term to define, it also incorporates a number of other related discussions concerning totemism, anthropology and ethnography, politics and psychoanalysis. In his essay "Dada and Surrealism"*,* included in "*Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the*

23 Marie Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures Through the Eyes of Wolfgang Paalen and Kurt Seligmann," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, 2 (2008), 1-24.

Tribal and the Modern, Evan Maurer traces the influence of non-western cultures on the surrealists. Through his discussion of people such as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Sigmund Freud, with both of whom the surrealists were familiar, Maurer elucidates the avant-garde's understanding of primitivism.

For modern artists, European culture was seen as inadequate for describing human experience; it was thought that spirituality, the unconscious, societal freedoms and sexuality were all (to some extent) repressed or ignored by modern society and that these repressed impulses, behaviors and states of consciousness could be more easily explained or attained through an appreciation of the "Other." [24] Although in discussing surrealism, the "other" can refer to the unformed or unrecognized interior self, here I use the "other" in direct reference to an external unknown. The "other" could be the clinically insane or the opposite sex, or it could include untrained artists or folk art. More typically, 'primitive' usually refers to any 'non-western' cultures, be they African, Oceanic, or North and South American societies. These cultures were seen as either existing within a contemporary temporal mode, but as yet untouched or unsullied by western civilization, or as fading cultures that still retained some traits, customs or rituals from a period pre-dating contact with western civilization. Primitivism, as opposed to the 'primitive', can best be understood as an appreciation for a culture free from the repressive societal norms of the west. Breaking down this initial understanding, there seem to be two types of appreciation, not just from a surrealist perspective: visual aesthetic primitivism and cultural primitivism.

24 Maurer, 541-43.

Throughout the history of art there have been many well-researched issues concerning the use of the Other or primitivism as aesthetic influence. For example, Picasso's interest and possible use of African masks as models in his paintings is considered a utilization of primitivism; the same could be said of Gauguin's idealized paintings of Tahitian subjects.[25] When these western artists took up the formal aspects of another culture, they were essentially co-opting the visual aesthetic of that culture. But for the surrealists, their interest went beyond the formal or aesthetic qualities of the Other in visual culture. For them, primitivism was an understanding of or interest in the culture itself: religious, spiritual, sexual understanding, as well as an interest in the societal structure that dictated the lives lived in that culture. Primitivism as a term was a method of identifying with an 'other' culture on the same intellectual level without adopting its entire culture. However, this approach is not free from critique, as it still assumes a colonialist position in relation to the cultures they were interested in. As we will see in the second chapter with Seligmann, there was a fundamental contradiction in the collecting practices of the surrealists.

A second key aspect of the surrealist fascination with indigenous art is found in totemism, which has its roots in primitivism. This idea was described by Lévy-Bruhl and heavily utilized by Paalen in his writings in *DYN* and elsewhere. Lévy-Bruhl theorized that totemism was an understanding of the world through universal connections to a spiritual plane, which in turn was controlled by a

25 For an extended discussion of these two examples, see Kirk Varnedoe, “Gauguin” and William Rubin, “Picasso” in *“Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, vol I, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 179 and 241.

spiritual guide or “stand-in.” Although the term is now out-moded, from an earlier anthropological understanding totemism was a cultural phenomenon pertaining to shamanism, ritual trances and societal structuring. A family clan is denoted by a totemic animal or being. These animals/spirits were neither physical manifestations nor ephemeral apparitions, but are still 'mystical' according to Lévy-Bruhl. The totem could take on multiple forms at the same time but could also transform from one being into another, with each form having independent myths and meanings attached.[26] The surrealists' interest in anthropological research stems from their readings of Lévy-Bruhl, who also heavily influenced Paalen's conception of totemism as a universal condition found throughout the world. Maurer explains Lévy-Bruhl's core thesis: “Primitive man organized the world on a dualistic principle which gave great value to the mystical, spiritual forces that animate all things and give impetus to all causal motivation.”[27] Julia Kelly reminds us that the surrealists' “Do not read” list included Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl.[28] However, it is clear that many of the surrealists did read these authors.

The surrealist conception of primitivism could also be understood in the context of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* of 1913 which helped to reinforce these connections between primitive man and modern society, linking them through

26 Maurer, 543.
27 Ibid., 542.
28 Julia Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects* (New York: Manchester Press, 2007), 33. This list was printed in 1930 as a guide to surrealist influences and precursors. Consisting of two columns, “*Lisez*” and “*Ne Lisez Pas*”, [“Read” and “Do Not Read”] it placed those authors and thinkers deemed worthy of surrealist consideration side-by-side with their opposites, for example Sigmund Freud opposed Henri Bergson and Swift was favored over Molière.

social anthropology, folklore and psychology.[29] Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams,* first published in 1900 was a second connection between the psychoanalytic and the primitive. While Lévy-Bruhl maintained that primitive cultures were in a constant state of communication with temporal reality and a spiritual realm, it was the dream state that heightened this connection. Add to this Freud's postulation that the dream was a metaphoric reenactment of repressed conscious thought, and the surrealists' affinity to primitivism was well-established.

Objects of Surrealism

It would not be possible to discuss the surrealist interest in the objects of the PNWC without first defining two other related ideas: the surrealist object, and what I will refer to as 'objects of surrealism'. Whereas the former is a specific type of object, the latter encompasses a broader spectrum of objects, as we will see. Although the surrealist object was not formally described until the '30s, Breton first made mention of such an object in his 1924 essay, “Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality.” As Janine Mileaf explains in her book, *Please Touch: Dada & Surrealist Objects after the Readymade* the Surrealist Object “was understood to mediate between the competing realities of the mind and the external world, dialectically reconciling the two.”[30] It was an idea born from a dream image, a book with a disfigured spine and pages made of “ thick

29 Maurer, 543.

30 Janine Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects after the Readymade* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 95.

black wool."[31] The object could be an imaginary object, an aesthetically pleasing object, an anthropological or ethnographic specimen, an object of devotion or a catalyst for the marvelous; or all of these things at once. Through surrealist publications and exhibitions in the 1930s, and after, the object as a point of research became paramount. The *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* [Surrealist Exhibition of Objects] held from May 22-29, 1936, at the Charles Ratton Gallery is one of the most well known examples of the surrealist focus on the object. Displayed in an almost taxonomical arrangement, the exhibition included objects ranging from cubist collages and Readymades[32] to surrealist constructions and found objects. It also included a number of examples of tribal masks and figures from the PNWC, Oceania, and elsewhere. Most importantly, the title of the exhibition shows a shift in the surrealist relationship to the object: rather than being Surrealist Objects they are objects of surrealism. Although the difference is slight, it is an important distinction to make: the Surrealist Object was a category invented for the manifestation of thought processes in material objects, which was outside the existing categories of painting and sculpture; objects of surrealism were items that interested the surrealists and had the potential of becoming a Surrealist Object.

The Surrealist Object was not conceived rationally, but rather it could be constructed from found material, and instigated by automatism, dream imagery or

31 Breton, quoted in Mileaf, 94.

32 The Readymade was first conceived in 1913 by Marcel Duchamp, an eclectic artist related to the Dada and Surrealist movements. His conception of the Readymade was an everyday object placed in an art context that would then re-define the object as 'art'. For example, Duchamp purchased a snow shovel from a hardware store and renamed it *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915), thus a new artwork was born.

chance encounter. Eclectic materials were like the new cubist collage; disparate objects could be combined to spur new meanings or catalyze entirely new directions of thought. Manipulation for the sake of discovery was key, while aesthetic considerations were put aside for the most part, in favor of multiple meanings, readings or other revelatory approaches. The Surrealist Object was multifaceted and could come from anything. It asked questions and answered none. It was no longer a sculpture or a piece of art, nor was it utilitarian. It was neither a specimen nor was it a precious commodity. Meret Oppenheim's surrealist construction, *Objet (Le déjeuner en fourrure)/Object (Breakfast in Fur)* (1936), [Fig. 1] perfectly illustrates this shift from sculpture to object. The work consists simply of a teacup, saucer and spoon covered in fur. The utilitarian object was rendered unusable, and instead new meanings and implications were offered: the quotidian object was turned extraordinary while psycho-sexual implications could be inferred through the use of fur on items normally associated with the mouth.

The surrealists found in the primitive object many aspects of the Surrealist Object. The early shift of the primitive object as described by Julia Kelly was from ethnographic function to art object. While the art dealer Paul Guillaume rejected the idea of the “fetish” or ritual object, preferring to think of them instead as 'art' objects, Breton's mentor Guillaume Apollinaire celebrated them as fetishes, embracing the objects' original function.[33] Kelly says; “The continuity between

33 While there is a connection of the 'fetish' object to Freudian psychoanalysis and castration anxiety—where the 'fetish' object becomes a stand-in for an imagined loss—I believe in this instance the 'fetish' is in reference to the 'primitive' or the perceived ritualistic use of the object.

the objects and their makers and users could also extend by association to their viewers and collectors."[34] While this mostly refers back to the African 'primitive' object, the same could be applied to the surrealist interest in Oceanic and PNWC objects. In his 1962 book, *La Pensée sauvage* [*The Savage Mind*], Lévi-Strauss elaborated on the idea of the *bricoleur* as a sort of interpreter of mythological signs from incomplete or limited knowledge.[35] The surrealists performed a sort of *bricolage* when confronted with the 'primitive' art object: their initial reaction to the object combined with their limited knowledge of the originating culture would result in a surrealist appreciation or understanding of the object. Although Lévi-Strauss's conception of the *bricoleur* involved a mechanistic component, as a type of engineer putting together physical elements, here the surrealists employ that same function but through purely associative methods.

The PNWC objects fulfilled many of the criteria of an object of surrealism. Although they could be both utilitarian and visually appealing, more importantly they were transformative and totemic at the same time. Both Steven Harris and Mileaf recall Breton's quotation of Hegel in his 1935 lecture, "The Surrealist Situation of the Object": "the art object lies between the sensible and the rational. It is something spiritual that appears as material."[36] Here the sensible refers to the experiential, that which is sensed; while the rational refers to the logical absolute of the ideal. This Hegelian, or dialectical approach is easily

34 Kelly, 24.
35 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 16.
36 Breton, quoted in Mileaf, 95, and Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 153.

applied to the surrealists' understanding of the PNWC object, which itself oscillated between realms of imagination and reality. Kelly describes the role the PNWC object could play in the surrealist project in her book *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*: "The 'blankness' of the ethnographic object, as something whose original meaning is lost and which now serves as a space onto which its 'finder' now projects new meanings, also has parallels with the surrealist found object as a bearer of complex narratives."[37] This could apply to all four of my different case studies, through different levels of intensity. And although I agree with Kelly that these PNWC objects could act as blank screens on which to project surrealist ideas, I don't believe it was a matter of 'either/or' for the surrealists—either as a blank screen or an object with its own inherent meanings. There seems to always be a trace of appreciation for the origin of the ethnographic object, through respect paid to the originating culture or at the least an attempt to understand the ethnographic meaning of the object.

From the outset, the surrealists had a history of collecting Oceanic and North American indigenous art. As Tythacott explains, the surrealists had almost an ingrained reaction against the then-fashionable collection of African art and objects. By 1919 *Africanisme* had swept across all aspects of French society and visual culture: "African art [had shifted] from an esoteric symbol of avant-garde taste to a more or less popular, fashionable accessory."[38] In reaction to this, the surrealists sought out an alternative approach, one not dictated by aesthetic

37 Kelly, 96.
38 Tythacott, 46.

appreciation or colonial influences. With the 1929 publication of *Le Monde au temps des surréalistes* [*The World at the Time of the Surrealists*][39] [Fig. 2] these alternative locations of surrealist influence were formalized. As Kelly points out, "The often-noted surrealist preference for non-western material other than African has been attributed to several factors, not least the vagaries of avant-garde one-upsmanship (marking a break with cubism and its alleged 'African' inspiration)."[40] These 'other factors' included anthropological interest, cultural affinity, and political sympathies. As Breton detailed in an interview in 1946, "The European artist in the twentieth century can ward off the drying up of the sources of inspiration swept away by rationalism and utilitarianism only by resuming so-called 'primitive' vision, which synthesizes sensory perception and mental representation."[41] Breton saw in this "so-called primitive" art a strategy of revelation that connected the inner self with exterior manifestations, but without the limiting effects of a rationalism that emphasized aesthetic beauty. He continues in the interview, "African sculpture has already made its explosive contribution. Today it is especially the plastic arts of the red man that permit us [the surrealists] to accede to a new system of knowledge and relations." Again, Breton rejects the African art that had become so popular among the European

39 First published in the Belgian journal *Variétés* in 1929, this fantastical map of the world exaggerated the relative sizes of different countries, continents and islands in order to emphasize the importance certain geographical locations had to surrealism. For instance, Russia and Alaska loom large while Africa and South America shrink, and the continental United States is completely omitted. This map is sometimes referred to as *The Surrealist Map of the World*.

40 Kelly, 31.

41 Breton, "Interview with Jean Duché," in *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont, trans. April Zuckerman (London: Pluto Press, 1978), 263.

avant-garde, and instead focuses on American indigenous art—which included not only the art of the PNWC but that of the peoples of the American Southwest, especially the Hopi and the Navajo Nation.

James Clifford asserts that the "collecting of Lévi-Strauss and the surrealists during the '40s was part of a struggle to gain aesthetic status for these increasingly rare masterworks."[42] I disagree with this assessment for two reasons. The first is that the work was not becoming increasingly rare, it was becoming more accessible and easier to acquire. Once the surrealists discovered Julius Carlebach's antiques store in Manhattan, it was only a matter of time before they had access to the Museum of the American Indian and the surplus of transformation masks that its director George Heye[43] was willing to part with for tens of dollars.[44] This demonstrates an abundance of readily-available material, rather than a scarcity that needed to be venerated. Secondly, the surrealists weren't as interested in the aesthetics of the objects as much as they were interested in what the aesthetics could reveal about the originating culture. For the surrealists, the extraordinary forms that the objects took were products of a system of thought, at once mysterious and freeing.

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42 Clifford, 239.

43 George Gustave Heye, 1874-1957, was the founder of the Museum of the American Indian (MAI), now the National Museum of the American Indian, a wing of the Smithsonian Institution. Heye originally began his collecting as a hobby while working in the American Southwest, but eventually amassed one of the largest collections of indigenous art in North America.

44 The surrealists' collecting trips to the MAI will be explained in more detail in the following chapter.

Surrealist Anthropology

This discussion of the surrealist attitude towards the ethnographic object naturally leads to the problem of the Surrealist Anthropologist. Although almost none of the surrealists made trips to Oceania or the PNWC until the late 1930s, they were familiar with the art via ethnographic museums—or their catalogues—throughout France, Britain and Germany. They collected 'primitive' objects where they could find them: curio shops, flea markets, and private dealers. Most of the surrealists would have been familiar with such works via printed images. Elizabeth Cowling, in her essay "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists" reports that Robert Lebel confirmed to her the surrealists' use of the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of Ethnology Annual Reports for their ethnographic readings.[45] In his essay, "Travel, Surrealism, and the Science of Mankind" Michael Richardson asserts that the surrealists did not care for travel and aside from one or two unique cases, they shunned the thought of travel for 'research' purposes.[46] He invokes Michel Leiris'[47] trip to Africa (1931-33), and Éluard's mysterious trip to the South Pacific (1925), but he neglects both Paalen's and Seligmann's trips to the PNWC and Paalen's extended travels in the US and Mexico. One could also count Breton's travels to the Caribbean and Mexico in these same types of travel, as research. From Elisa Breton we learn that André

45 Elizabeth Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists," *Art History* 1.4 (1978), 487.
46 Michael Richardson, "Travel, Surrealism, and the Science of Mankind," *Diogenes* 38.152 (December, 1990), 36.
47 Although Leiris left the surrealist group in 1929, before he went to Africa.

Breton did not like to travel, that for him "it was more than a great inconvenience: he did his traveling, she felt, through his collection of art objects."[48] This recalls the conclusion of Breton's "Oceania" essay, in which he imagines traveling to the origin of the objects, in an act of internal repatriation: "For us, they fit the pattern of those *haloed* objects by which we are enthralled, and we have not done paying them the tribute they deserve. As for me, I often need to come back to them, to watch them as I am waking up, to take them in my hands, to talk to them, to escort them back to their place of origin so as to reconcile myself to where I am." [49] Breton is venerating these objects not just for their auratic qualities, but also because they have the ability to transport him to another place, in order to "reconcile" him to his place in the world.

Richardson asserts that surrealist travel was almost always in the context of 'participating' in a foreign culture, whether 'authentic' or contemporary. If the surrealists were to be classified as Anthropologists, then their methods were eclectic to say the least, "since surrealism is a moral attitude and not a technique." [50] Richardson goes on to explain: "Rather it is the dialectic interplay between [the surrealist] self and his perception of the external world that is addressed. Internal and external, in this context, become inseparable."[51] As Kelly asserts: "the 'new' generation to appreciate non-western cultures also included the writers and artists associated with surrealism, whose approaches to them were not always consistent with the aims of ethnography. Indeed, in the context of the major 1931 Colonial

48 Richardson, "Travel...", 36.
49 Breton, 174.
50 Richardson, "Travel...", 40.
51 Ibid., 41.

Exhibition in Paris, surrealists and ethnographers were apparently in direct opposition."[52] Here Kelly is drawing attention to the Colonial Exhibition and the surrealists' participation in a protest exhibit held concurrently.

The Colonial Exhibition ran for six months at the Bois de Vincennes in the outskirts of Paris, and was a massive display of the French colonial reach, drawing an estimated 33 million visitors.[53] In September of that same year the surrealists, in conjunction with the French Communist Party, launched a counter-exhibit titled *l'Exposition Anti-Impérialiste: La Vérité sur les colonies* [*The anti-Imperialist Exhibition: the Truth about the Colonies*]. Split into three sections, the surrealists organized the "Cultural Problems" section which allowed them to present indigenous art and objects from Africa, Oceania and North America as both surrealist and ethnographic objects, but ones charged with political overtones. Mileaf argues that while the aim of the surrealists was to inject a measure of irrationality into the proceedings, they ultimately fell short of this goal and instead their section "maintained a logical exposition of ideas."[54] As a response to the hegemonic displays at the Colonial Exhibition, the surrealists' display of tribal objects and ethnographic material was an attempt to re-present these cultures as autonomous entities, with their own sets of knowledge and value systems, free from their colonial powers.

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52 Kelly, 31.

53 Janine Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* 40 (Autumn 2001), 239-255.

54 Ibid., 248.

Literature Review

Much of the scholarship that deals with the surrealists and their interest in 'primitive' art tends to define their approach in binary terms; the surrealists are seen as either connoisseurs, or amateur anthropologists, or privileged Europeans playing at tribalism. The most sympathetic authors praise the surrealists for seeing past a pejorative colonial definition of primitivism as art of 'savages and child-like natives'. Authors such as Amy Winter and Marie Mauzé give credit to the surrealists for embracing the culture whose objects they were actively collecting. More critical scholars such as James Clifford critique the surrealists for projecting their pre-existing values onto tribal cultures and for celebrating a romanticized culture that only exists in their minds. Either approach is difficult to support when faced with the breadth of surrealist interests; a more valid reading might be both sympathetic and critical of the surrealist interest in and use of non-western cultures.

Clifford has been dealing with surrealism and anthropology for some time, in essays and articles spanning the last 30 years. His approach to the subject usually concerns an examination of chronological topography, something he calls “chronotopes” in his essay on Lévi-Strauss in New York. Clifford theorizes that the surrealists used anthropology as a means to an end, without serious consideration of anthropological methodology. He takes a critical view of the surrealists' appreciation for 'primitive' cultures, and in turn denies their contribution to the broadening of anthropology beyond taxonomic collections and

the salvage paradigm.[55] In his essay "On Ethnographic Surrealism" from 1981, he examines the break between Breton and Georges Bataille, culminating in the latter's editorial contribution to *Documents.* This journal was published between 1929 and 1931, and featured a wide range of topics and contributers, including a number of dissident surrealists. Clifford uses Breton and his allies as foils to his view of Bataille's more aggressive approach to anthropological concerns. While he does clarify early on in his essay that it is not his intent to oppose anthropology and surrealism, his conclusions seem to contradict that very aim; he states, "The surrealist moment in ethnography is that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity. This moment is repeatedly produced, and smoothed over, in the process of ethnographic comprehension."[56] For Clifford, the surrealist interest in tribal cultures was an affront to ethnographic studies that were "engaged in the reduction of incongruities"[57] He sees a bit of the surrealist mentality in ethnographers, but does not accord the surrealists a reciprocal status.

Some earlier scholarship only sought to define the surrealist use of the 'primitive' in terms of a visual aesthetic or style. Elizabeth Cowling, in her 1978 essay "The Eskimos, The American Indians and the Surrealists" attempted to link the surrealist 'discovery' of the North American Indian to the appearance of those

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55 For a detailed discussion of the 'salvage paradigm' see James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage Paradigm'", in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture I,* ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 121-150. A contemporary term, the salvage paradigm describes the colonialist approach of 'saving' a perceived disappearing culture through the preservation of its material goods.

56 James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Society for Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23.4 (October 1981), 563

57 Ibid., 564.

same aesthetic styles within surrealist visual production. Although she does attempt to elaborate on the social, political, and philosophical influence that the indigenous objects had on the surrealists, her most vigorous argument is made in connecting the visual cues of primitivism within different surrealist artworks. Her most significant example is Joan Miró's 1924-35 painting *Harlequin's Carnival*. Beyond hypothesizing that Miró's admittedly hunger-induced hallucinations were somehow connected to North American Indian methods of triggering visions, Cowling describes his painting as having unmistakable allusions to "certain Alaskan Eskimo masks, especially those from the Yukon and Kuskokwim river regions."[58] She finds these same 'primitive' allusions in Seligmann and Paalen's works after their respective trips to the PNWC, and again in Max Ernst's affinity for bird imagery, which is related to his interest in Kuchina dolls from the American Southwest.

The scholarship surrounding Seligmann and Paalen tends to follow the same pattern of 'either/or' classifications relating to surrealism and anthropology. Marie Mauzé and Amy Winter have both written extensively on Seligmann and Paalen. While Mauzé has written about both Seligmann and Paalen, Winter has focused almost exclusively on Paalen, culminating in her monograph *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist of the Avant-Garde*. Mauzé addresses Seligmann's and Paalen's trips to the PNWC, but with an overtly anthropological reading in mind. Her essay, "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures Through the Eyes of Wolfgang Paalen and Kurt Seligmann*"* argues that their collecting trips had

58 Cowling, 489.

similar goals, but divergent philosophical approaches. Mauzé sees Seligmann as an anthropologist, while describing Paalen as a theorist. To a degree these readings are perfectly valid, but I would argue that they are limiting and ultimately fall short in describing the multiple roles the surrealists played. Winter, on the other hand, tends to forgive Paalen's sometimes paternal attitude to aboriginal cultures; instead she explains that this attitude is an intensely philosophical approach to 'primitive' and totemic art. In her monograph of the artist, she theorizes that Paalen had an innate connection to 'primitive' cultures through his family history, as well as a psychological identification with totemic mythologies.

Winter contends that the 'Amerindian' issue of *DYN* (1943), and especially Paalen's contribution, "Totem Art", "dispelled the usual fragmentary image of isolated, out of context artifacts—however admirable in workmanship or conception—presented in museums and publications."[59] While I agree that the images are not completely out of context or isolated, they are still presented with minimal explanatory text, if any at all. It would be more honest to say that Paalen was aware that the images he was presenting were fragmentary, and therefore could not represent the whole culture from where they came. In order to illustrate his understanding of the myths and legends, however, the individual masks and objects were necessary. He chose specific works to illustrate larger ideas and the examples he presented in *DYN* were intended to prove the extent and breadth of PNWC art and design, rather than to show a fallacious evolution from simple and

59 Winter, 161.

'primitive' to complex and sophisticated, as was common in ethnographic museums at the time. The problem with Winter's assertion is that many of the images are presented without direct explanation, and what information is given doesn't tie directly into the larger essay. This leads to a disconnection between the illustrations provided and the body of the text, and therefore her argument rings hollow.

Where Winter is sympathetic to Paalen's theoretical approach, Mauzé is critical. Mauzé admits that she is approaching Seligmann and Paalen from an anthropological stance, which does not allow for other readings to come through. Her assessment of Paalen is dismissive of his intense interest in the cultural history of the PNWC; she also does not take into account Paalen's extensive argument in *DYN* for an autochthonic genesis of PNWC art and design, free from European influence—which his contemporary anthropologists mostly supported.

Other authors follow this same pattern of binary approaches. In "Anthropology in the Journals *DYN* and *El Hijo Prodigo*: A Comparative Analysis of Surrealist Inspiration", Daniel Garze Usabiaga examines these periodicals as the precursors to two exhibitions in Mexico City in 1945.[60] While his anthropological assessment follows Mauzé's closely, he excludes Paalen's artistic and surrealist history. The major issue with Usabiaga's analysis is that the author interprets *DYN* incorrectly, stating that Paalen only wanted to use anthropology "scientifically". This falls short of a more complex analysis. Paalen's approach to

60 Daniel Garze Usabiaga, "Anthropology in the Journals *DYN* and *El Hijo Prodigo*: A Comparative Analysis of Surrealist Inspiration", in *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto*, eds. Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2012), 95-110.

the work was both objective and subjective; he used the objects as evidence of a "diffusionism", but at the same time he experienced the work on a personal level, connecting to it spiritually. By ignoring entire sections of Paalen's or Seligmann's interests, these scholars limit their readings and therefore present their arguments with an appearance of bias.

In the following chapters I hope to reconnect these differing approaches and to come to an understanding of the surrealist project as a holistic endeavor, rather than as sets of divergent interests. This is not to say that I will try to apologize for those aspects of surrealism that might seem to our contemporary eyes to be questionable in nature. In looking back we might argue that the surrealists were merely continuing the colonialist attitude towards non-western cultures by co-opting their belief systems, or incorporating 'Indian' motifs into their visual output. At the same time, the surrealists truly felt that their attention to these oft-overlooked cultures was a sign of respect and admiration, and by raising up the Native American myths, rituals and material culture, they were somehow giving them their due.

Chapter 1: Breton and Lévi-Strauss: A Friendship in Exile

The surrealist André Breton and his anthropologist friend Claude Lévi-Strauss collected objects from the Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations. Their interest in these objects was born from a variety of influences and experiences: anthropology and ethnography; sympathetic political views; and to a lesser degree visual and aesthetic appreciation. More importantly, overlapping philosophies and perceptions of the world drove their interest in these objects. The objects that spurred their imaginations and drove their desire to collect were examples of myth and magic, manifestations of the unconscious and the irrational, mirrors on which to project and reflect an internal 'Other.' But most of all their desire to collect was precipitated by an understanding that these objects were products of a process of thinking. This process of thinking was valuable to both collectors; for Breton it was informed by his own theories of surrealism, and for Lévi-Strauss it was a key to his later formulations of structural anthropology. As Breton and the other surrealists understood it, the mythologies of the PNWC tribes had their own rules and structure, unencumbered by a western demand for rational logic; their rituals and stories moved seamlessly between dream and reality, with transformations between human and animal happening without apparent contradiction. For neither thinker was this process of thought inferior or less valuable than western European thinking. For Breton and to a lesser degree, Lévi-Strauss, the objects from the PNWC exemplified a surrealist understanding of the liberating nature of the irrational.

When Breton journeyed to North America from Europe in 1941, he was already well established as a leader of the surrealist movement. However, Lévi-Strauss was a young anthropologist and academic, with a limited publishing career. Their somewhat coincidental meeting aboard the *Capitaine Paul-Lemerle,* and their subsequent friendship, would help to shape Lévi-Strauss's conceptualization of structural anthropology. In the same manner, Breton's young anthropologist friend would help to influence Breton's collecting habits and his thinking, first while they were both living in New York and later when Breton had returned to Paris after the war. Only through the lens of time is it possible to analyze the degree of influence these two thinkers had on each other. Though their individual experiences and ideologies differed, their mutual admiration for the objects from the PNWC is indicative of the power these objects held for them.

While both men collected numerous objects throughout their lives, in this chapter I will focus almost exclusively on two specific pieces that will help to illustrate my arguments. For Breton and the surrealists in general, their interest in objects from the Pacific Northwest Coast was well documented from the earliest days of the movement, and this fascination was never diminished by the passage of time. In 1964 Breton sold *The Child's Brain*, a Giorgio de Chirico painting he had owned for many years, and with the proceeds he purchased a Kwak-wa̲ka̲'wakw headdress in 1965 along with two carved Melanesian figures. This headdress, known as a *Yaxwiwe'* [Fig. 3], or Peace Dance headdress, had a place of distinction in Breton's study. It was displayed prominently on his desk, and he

was known to sit for hours contemplating its every detail.[1] Breton also advised Lévi-Strauss in his purchase of a Tsimshian Shaman figure [Fig. 4], acquired between 1941 and 1946 during their time in New York. This carved wooden figure fascinated Lévi-Strauss, but he was unsure of its origins, believing it to be a souvenir object rather than a piece of "traditional art." Lévi-Strauss later recalled that Breton said the figure was a good piece, and especially liked its "ground-coffee quality", an opinion that helped him in his decision to purchase it.[2]

On the surface, the reasons for the acquisition of these two objects could be purely aesthetic. Both men understood the aesthetic value of art, and their initial conversations aboard the *Capitaine Paul-Lemerle* will attest to this fact. But I believe the reasons go much deeper than the visual pleasure one might receive upon viewing these objects. For Breton, the headdress was a manifestation of a cornerstone of surrealist thought; when analyzed closely it becomes clear that the headdress fulfills all three aspects of convulsive beauty: the veiled-erotic, the fixed-explosive and the magic-circumstantial. And for Lévi-Strauss, the Shaman figure was not only the physical product of a certain process of thought, but also a symbolic talisman of sorts, a memento of his relationship with Breton and the surrealists and a reminder of the lessons they taught him. As an anthropologist, he was keenly aware of the social and cultural implications of the objects he was studying, but I believe that his appreciation of the Shaman figure illustrates a

1 Marie Mauzé, "A Kwakwaka'wakw Headdress in André Breton's Collection," in *The Colour of my Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art*, ed. Dawn Ades (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2011), 267.

2 Stéphane Massonet, "Collecting Tribal Art: André Breton and Claude Lévi-Strauss," *Tribal,* 12.1 (Autumn 2007), 102.

more irrational attraction—in the surrealist sense—to these objects.

Neither Breton nor Lévi-Strauss wrote specifically about the two objects highlighted in this chapter, so it is necessary to analyze their major and minor publications in order to extrapolate possible reasons for their collecting of the objects. As a starting point, I will refer to their exchange of letters aboard the *Capitaine Paul-Lemerle* that were published in full in *Regarder, écouter, lire* [*Look, Listen and Read*] (1983), before moving on to subsequent writings regarding objects from the Pacific Northwest Coast and 'primitive' art in general. Breton's writing on 'primitive' art is fairly extensive. Two essays in particular —"Note sur les masques à transformation de la Côte Pacifique Nord-Ouest" ["Notes on the Transformation Masks of the Pacific Northwest Coast"][3], and "Phénix du masque" ["Rebirth of the Mask"][4]—focus primarily on the art of the PNWC and the role of the mask in multiple cultures. Other writings make reference to the PNWC and his interest in 'primitive' cultures, especially *L'Art magique* [*Magic Art*] and the already mentioned exhibition review "Oceania." Almost all of Lévi-Strauss's major publications refer to art and culture from the PNWC, specifically *La Voie des masques* [*The Way of the Masks*] (1975) and *La Pensée sauvage* [*The Savage Mind*] (1962), as well as essays and memoirs in *Le regard éloigné* [*A View from Afar*] (1983) and *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). I will also be using the author Boris Wiseman's recent publication *Lévi-Strauss, Anthropology and Aesthetics* in order to navigate Lévi-Strauss's complex theories of struc-

3 First published in *Neuf*, 1950.
4 First published in *XX^e siècle* no. 15, 1960.

tural anthropology and its possible relation to surrealist thought. An eminent scholar and Lévi-Straussian expert, Wiseman makes the argument that Lévi-Strauss had a nuanced relationship and understanding of aesthetics, which previous scholarship has ignored; he surmises that Lévi-Strauss's theoretical approach lies between the philosophical aesthetics of beauty and the critical methodology of anthropology.

The Boat

In 1941, with Paris occupied by the Germans, many French intellectuals and artists had relocated near Marseilles in southern France, where they attempted to secure passage to North America as religious, political, or cultural refugees. While the French Vichy Regime that controlled central and southern France was ostensibly an independent government, it enforced many of Germany's racial laws, revoking the citizenship of Jews and rounding up undesirables.[5] Aided by the Emergency Rescue Committee's American agent Varian Fry, many of the surrealists were able to escape the continent aboard passenger ships, cargo ships and merchant marine vessels.[6] Their first destination was Martinique, a Vichy-controlled colony in the Caribbean. From there they made other arrangements to

5 Elizabeth Kessin Berman, "Moral Triage or Cultural Salvage: The Agendas of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee," in *Exiles + Emigrés: The Flight of the European Artists from Hitler,* ed. Stephanie Barron (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 1997), 99.

6 Lévi-Strauss had previously traveled between France and South America during his employment at the University of São Paulo, and so was recognized by an employee of the shipping company from which he secured his passage and stateroom (*Tristes Tropiques*, 21-25). Breton and his family secured their visa with the help of the American arts patron, Peggy Guggenheim. See Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde 1920-1950* (New York: Thames & Hudson Press, 1995), 180.

reach the United States, Mexico, or other destinations. It was on one of these ships that Breton first met Lévi-Strauss. Although they were at different points in their careers, because of their mutual respect for 'primitive' culture, sympathetic political viewpoints and their respective intellectual pursuits, there was an almost instantaneous admiration and friendship. While Lévi-Strauss had some knowledge of who Breton was prior to their meeting on the boat, it was highly unlikely that Breton had any prior knowledge of Lévi-Strauss.[7] Lévi-Strauss was only 32 at the time of their first meeting and was still relatively unpublished. But it was precisely these early interactions with the surrealists that influenced his approach to observation and helped to formulate his later theories of structural anthropology.

Breton and Lévi-Strauss quickly became acquaintances on the voyage across the Atlantic. Although Lévi-Strauss was first awestruck by another passenger, the prominent socialist author Victor Serge, it was Breton with whom he became close friends. Lévi-Strauss said of meeting Breton: "[He] was very much out of place *dans cette galère*, strode up and down the few empty spaces left on deck; wrapped in his thick nap overcoat, he looked like a blue bear. A lasting friendship was about to develop between us, through an exchange of letters which lasted for quite some time during that interminable voyage and in which we

7 Lévi-Strauss references the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* in his initial letter to Breton aboard the boat, indicating that he had some prior knowledge of Breton and surrealism. Conversely, Breton might have had some knowledge of Lévi-Strauss prior to their meeting aboard the ship. Both figures had contributed to the political journal, *Monde,* in 1928. Lévi-Strauss was quoted at length in response to an open survey posed by its editors, while Breton's response was published in the subsequent issue, and was the first that directly addressed the questions of the survey. See Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2004), 58-59.

discussed the relationships between aesthetic beauty and absolute originality."[8] While they both had a background in leftist politics—with Breton's belief in the necessity of revolution overlapping somewhat with Lévi-Strauss's earlier participation and continuing interest in socialist politics[9]—this topic never seemed to enter into their conversations. More importantly, their discussions centered on the surrealist understanding of aesthetics, the perceived contradiction between the object conceived as art and as document, and Breton's attempts to clarify the surrealist position in regards to this contradiction. This conversation is documented in the "exchange of letters" mentioned earlier and published in their entirety in Lévi-Strauss's book, *Look, Listen, Read*.

The "letters" were really a single exchange: Lévi-Strauss started by asking Breton to clarify the surrealist position regarding art with aesthetic value versus art as document; and then Breton responded, acknowledging the validity of Lévi-Strauss's concerns, but concluding that the contradiction was inevitable. As Lévi-Strauss understood it, the surrealist formulation of art was as a document, created spontaneously without regards to formal considerations or mediation. The results would have an inherent aesthetic value, but that value would remain secondary to its role as document. He proposed the possibility that all documents could be considered art, but worried that this would diminish the aesthetic value of existing

8 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques,* trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), 25.

9 Early in his career, Lévi-Strauss was associated with the SFIO, or *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* [French Section of the Workers International] and even ran for cantonal elections in 1932 (which he lost). For more discussion on Lévi-Strauss's politics, see Vincent Debaen, "'Like Alice Through the Looking Glass': Claude Lévi-Strauss in New York," *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 28.1 (Spring, 2010): 46-57.

art. "The work of someone mentally deficient has a documentary interest equal to the work of Lautréamont; it may even have greater polemical value. But the one is a work of art and the other is not, and there must be the dialectical means to account for the difference…"[10] His basic question for Breton could be summarized in this way: 'if all art is a document, and surrealism celebrates the document regardless of aesthetic value, how can surrealism then reject some art and embrace others?'

Even Lévi-Strauss recognized later the naivety of his questions to Breton, but the response was magnanimous and insightful. While acknowledging the contradiction that Lévi-Strauss pointed out, he explained that it was an irreducible dilemma, one that he had struggled with previously. Breton refers to *La Beauté sera convulsive* [Beauty will be Convulsive] first printed in the journal *Minotaure* and later reprinted at the beginning of his book *L'Amour fou* [*Mad Love*] (1937). I will return to this text later, but first must clarify Breton's direct response to Lévi-Strauss. Breton explained that the value of the work of art contains two independent but related functions. His first reaction is to always "search for the pleasure the work of art gives" which he describes as "para-erotic" and the second leads him to "interpret the work of art as a function of the general need for knowledge." [11] It is this dialectical formulation of the object that is most significant when analyzing his relationship to the art of the PNWC.

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10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Look, Listen, Read*, trans. Brian Singer (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 147.

11 Ibid., 149.

Breton disagreed with Lévi-Strauss's assertion that a work's aesthetic value was dependent on the spontaneity of its creation. He was more concerned with its authenticity first as a surrealist endeavor, "beyond any aesthetic or moral preoccupation."[12] Breton surmised that a mediocre artwork was due to the author's lack of dedication to a truly automatic process, and therefore would not be considered art at all. He concluded his response to Lévi-Strauss with a mini-manifesto of sorts. He agreed to a point with Lévi-Strauss's conclusion that there must be some secondary elaboration when it came to measuring aesthetic value, but countered this by saying, "I am not certain that a work's *aesthetic* value depends on its degree of spontaneity. I was much more concerned with its authenticity than its beauty..."[13] His reasons for opposing Lévi-Strauss's conclusion were "of a practical nature." In Breton's estimation, if it was necessary to loosen psychological responsibilities or release any preconceived notions in order to create the work, then "so be it"; the conscious self acts in a theater of its own concretions—referring to the manifestation of thought made concrete in an object or text—and therefore, the "self is called on to produce and reproduce itself." Breton called it a "tendency to synthesize the pleasure principle with the reality principle." And finally he argued, above all there must be an agreement between the artwork and the process of its creation. His final statement is simply "Anti-valéryism", which is an allusion to his former mentor, the author Paul Valéry, and

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

the philosophical differences they had regarding the creative process: consciously crafted work versus work produced through an automatic process.

My reasons for lingering on this exchange of ideas are three-fold: the first to demonstrate the type of relationship that Breton and Lévi-Strauss shared, which was one of intellectual equals committed to open debate; the second, to establish a baseline for Lévi-Strauss's understanding of surrealism, and to give a starting point from which his theories might begin to evolve; and lastly, to show that their discussions had a lasting impact on each of their subsequent trajectories. Lévi-Strauss would later give credit to Breton for his approach to observation; that in order to make larger connections it was necessary to observe every detail, no matter how small or seemingly inconsequential. He said in an interview with Claude Courtot in 1968:

> "So for me, the exotic is increasingly not on the surface but deep down: it is what we can achieve provided we put enough heart and will into it to find right here, on the spot, provided we notice a certain number of very rare and very precious things to which we did not pay attention....I must say, since I'm speaking to you, that this is something I especially learned beside Breton. It's really Breton who showed me that you could look without shame at stones, insects, leaves or flowers, with the same intense curiosity and in drawing from this contemplation emotions just as strong as those one feels before sculptures or paintings."[14]
>
> [Alors, pour moi, l'exotisme est de plus en plus, non pas en surface mais en profondeur : il est celui que nous sommes capables, à condition d'y mettre

14 Claude Lévi-Strauss, interview with Claude Courtot, *L'Archibras*, 3 (March 1968), 30. [my translation] This was a surrealist periodical, and Courtot was a member of the group, which provides the context for the discussion of Breton.

> suffisamment de cœur et de volonté, de trouver sur place, ici même, à condition de percevoir un certain nombre de choses très rares et très précieuses auxquelles nous ne prêtions pas attention....Je dois dire, puisque je vous parle, que cela, c'est auprès de Breton que je l'ai surtout appris. C'est vraiment Breton qui m'a montre qu'on pouvait sans honte regarder des pierres, des insectes, des feuilles ou des fleurs, avec la même intense curiosité et en retirant de cette contemplation des émotions aussi hautes que devant des sculptures ou des tableaux.]

Along with the idea that all details are worth studying, Lévi-Strauss also compares favorably the minutiae of nature with formal art, and the emotions that both could evoke in the observer. While this approach is more inductive, structuralism is generally construed as deductive. It was from Breton that Lévi-Strauss learned to combine both of these approaches. This is a more simplified approach to the convulsive beauty of surrealism, which I will discuss in a moment.

Exile in New York

Their time in New York was an eventful period for both men, although they had slightly different experiences while there. For Breton, exile in the United States was a difficult time in his life. Not only was there external criticism of his decision to flee France, but political turmoil within the surrealist group continued to trouble him. Although there was a large community of intellectuals, artists and writers living in exile in New York at the time, the city itself proved to be an obstacle in creating a wider network of associates, since it lacked the cafe culture

so prevalent in Europe.[15] Breton continued to write, lecture and promote surrealism, despite his continuing lack of funds; the surrealists organized exhibits, contributed to journals and literary publications, and of course, they collected art and objects. Lévi-Strauss was included in many of the surrealist activities, but in his memoirs he most fondly reminisced about their collecting trips to the Museum of the American Indian. At the same time, he was engaged in his own anthropological research, spending days at the New York City Public Library and The American Museum of Natural History, as well as at his teaching post at the New School for Social Research.

One of the highlights for Breton and the other surrealists was their discovery of Julius Carlebach's curio shop on Third Avenue. Filled with all manner of 'primitive' and tribal objects, it was as, Lévi-Strauss called it, "Ali Baba's cave."[16] Max Ernst had found it first, bringing back to the other surrealists a small collection of PNWC objects. He was reluctant at first to reveal the location of his source, but it was only a matter of a few days before the rest of the group found Carlebach's gallery and began buying from him as well. Although Carlebach specialized in Oriental, African and Eastern European art and antiquities, he did have connections to curators at the Museum of the American Indian. Since the surrealists were primarily interested in North American and Oceanic tribal objects, they pressured him to find more material that fit their interests.[17] Eventu-

15 Tashjian, 181.
16 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *A View From Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 261.
17 Edmund Carpenter, introduction to *Form and Freedom: A Dialogue on Northwest Coast Indian Art,* eds. Bill Holm and William Reid (Houston: Rice University Press, 1975), 12.

ally he arranged for the group to visit the MAI warehouse, where they could peruse thousands of items in a collection that had been amassed over decades of work.

Different scholars tell the same basic tale of the surrealists and their friends, including Roberto Matta, Georges Duthuit, Max Ernst, Robert Lebel[18], Breton and Lévi-Strauss, piling into cabs for the trip to the Bronx to visit the MAI Annex. Once there they were allowed to pick from a selection of masks and objects the museum staff had deemed duplicates. They first bought Yup'ik masks before moving onto transformation masks from the PNWC.[19] The masks were especially intriguing for many of the surrealists, for they recognized in them a resemblance of their own poetic expressions. Despite their limited funds, the group found the 'primitive' objects irresistible and bought many items from Carlebach, the MAI warehouse and from various other sources. They also used their connections at the Museum of Natural History to borrow masks and objects for their own exhibitions, such as *First Papers of Surrealism* (1942) and *Northwest Coast Indian Painting* at the Betty Parsons Gallery (1946) (the latter organized by Max Ernst and Barnett Newman).[20] This relative surplus of PNWC material was a reaffirmation for Breton, solidifying his alignment with 'primitive' art and allowing him to expand his already diverse collections.

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18 Roberto Matta was a Chilean artist who officially joined the surrealists in 1938, but was expelled from the group in 1948. Georges Duthuit was a writer loosely associated with the surrealists and close friend of André Masson. Max Ernst is arguably one of the most prolific and recognizable surrealist artists. Robert Lebel was a French intellectual and art historian, and became a close ally of the surrealists while he was living in New York during WWII.

19 See either Massonet or Carpenter for extended descriptions of this anecdote.

20 Carpenter, 10.

Lévi-Strauss was included in many of the surrealist activities, but was a sympathetic compatriot rather than an official member of the group. He spent a great deal of time with the surrealists; along with their collecting trips to the MAI he contributed essays to publications such as the first issue of *VVV,* the journal founded and edited by Breton and Ernst in 1942. He was just beginning his foundational research for later publications such as *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* (1949), *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), and the much later *Savage Mind* (1962) and *Way of the Masks* (1975). His initial reaction to New York was generally more positive than Breton's, with a more receptive attitude towards the city and what it could offer him during his exile there. He was in awe of the vastness of the city and "strode up and down miles of Manhattan avenues, those deep chasms over which loomed skyscrapers' fantastic cliffs."[21] He saw the city not as an ultra-modern metropolis, but as conglomeration of multiple villages, comprised of any number of ethnic groups living in semi-autonomous enclaves. His anthropological training was put to use while exploring the city, observing its inhabitants and finding connections between this contemporary urban setting and the wild jungles of Brazil. In the ground floor gallery of the American Museum of Natural History, he found the hall dedicated to the Indians of the Northwest Coast and British Columbia, calling it a "magical place where all the dreams of childhood hold a rendezvous."[22] He understood the temporal overlap and discontinuity that the city could accommodate without apparent contradiction. He reminisced about working

21 Lévi-Strauss, *A View From Afar*, 258.
22 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Art of the Northwest Coast at the American Museum of Natural History," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 24 (September, 1943), 175.

in the American room of the New York Public Library, "under its neo-classical arcades and between walls paneled with old oak, I sat near an Indian in a feather headdress and a beaded buckskin jacket—who was taking notes with a Parker pen."[23] Whether this image was real or imagined I'm not sure, but it illustrates the point: the city offered him a world where anything was possible and incongruity was acceptable.

Yaxwiwe' or, The Peace Dance Headdress

While New York in the 1940s was a prolific time for Breton's collecting practice, his enthusiasm for 'primitive' objects never diminished. He continued to collect items and objects up until the last years of his life, and his dedication to surrealism and its tenets never wavered. The objects he collected in the 1960s were no different than the objects he was collecting in the 1940s. By the time Breton purchased the *Yaxwiwe'* headdress in 1965 [Fig. 3], it had traveled many thousands of miles and passed through many different hands; from its creator to its rightful owner and dancer, and then on to a number of agents, collectors, dealers and intermediaries before finally landing in a Parisian gallery, mislabeled as a Haida mask. Like other items Breton collected, he was drawn to this particular headdress for a myriad of reasons. Its patina of time lent it an air of originality, the use of ermine tails and abalone shells evinced its precious status, and the large carved eagle-beak announced its regal heritage. But more than any of these superficial reasons, Breton may have felt the "para-erotic" within this object, and

23 Lévi-Strauss, *A View From Afar,* 267.

understood it to be a "function of the general need for knowledge." This headdress became an object of surrealism, and as we shall see, for Breton it embodied all aspects of convulsive beauty.

The *Yaxwiwe'* was originally carved in the late 1800s. It is comprised mainly of carved and painted maple, inlaid abalone shell, sea lion whiskers and ermine fur. A large human face dominates the center of the round frontlet, its eyes and teeth comprised of shimmering abalone shell. Small hands protruding from below the larger face are positioned palms-up, showing smaller faces with grimacing mouths that mirror the larger face. On top of the frontlet a small Thunderbird figure holds his claws up, mirroring the hands below. The doubling of the yellow and red hook-nose reinforces the interplay between human and animal, blurring the boundaries between each and exaggerating their similarities. The back of the headdress is comprised of cloth covered in ermine fir and topped with a ring of sea lion whiskers, sewn in vertically. This headdress would have been worn only during the winter potlatch ceremonies; downy eagle feathers would have been loosely placed in the vertical sea lion whiskers, so when the wearer danced and moved, the puffs of down would escape and fall through the air like snow.[24]

The headdress had originally been acquired by George Heye from the wife of Donald Angermann, the policeman who had confiscated it from the tribal chiefs in 1921. Angermann was enforcing the 1885 amendment to the Indian Act

24 U'mista Cultural Society, *The Story of the Masks*, accessed November 3rd, 2013. http://www.umista.org/masks_story/en/ht/tlasalaFrontlet.html

that specifically prohibited traditional aboriginal ceremonies. This practice of seizure was not an isolated incident; thousands of objects were confiscated from tribes and clans throughout the PNWC. Many of the items were destroyed, while the remaining objects were sold or traded to collectors, anthropologists and tourists.[25] The fate of these objects led to a large influx of specimens into ethnographic museums and collections on the East Coast. George Heye's entire collection numbered nearly a million pieces at one point.[26] Breton's headdress was de-accessioned from the MAI in 1957 and purchased by Edward Primus, a Los Angeles gallery owner. After further trading, it ended up in a Parisian art gallery specializing in 'primitive' art, where Breton purchased it in 1965.[27]

Basing her statements on correspondence with Jean-Jacques Lebel, Marie Mauzé suggests that Breton felt a "sensual connection" to the headdress, with its fur coverings and "shimmering brightness of the abalone shell decorating the eyes and the teeth of the hawk."[28] The headdress invoked the "para-erotic," and can be found to contain all three elements of convulsive beauty. When Breton told Lévi-Strauss that he had already addressed the contradiction between art and document, he referred to the idea of convulsive beauty, a topic he had discussed in previous publications. Convulsive beauty is best summarized by the concluding sentence in the first section of *L'Amour fou*: "Convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magic-circumstantial, or it will not be."[29] Of course, it is necessary to

25 Carpenter, 10.
26 See both Le Fur, "Magical Notebooks," 240 and Mauzé, "A Kwakwaka'wakw Headdress in André Breton's Collection," 265-67 in *The Colour of My Dreams.*
27 Mauzé, "A Kwakwaka'wakw Headdress," 266.
28 Ibid.
29 André Breton, *Mad Love (L'Amour fou),* trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of

parse this idea out to fully understand the complete thought.

First, the veiled erotic refers to the initial response of the viewer in witnessing the artwork, reading a poem, or discovering an object. Breton said that it must invoke in him something "like the feeling of a feathery wind brushing across my temples to produce a real shiver."[30] This sensation is akin to erotic pleasure, but with a difference of degree. Although he was referring more to literary examples, it could be anything or anyone that provokes this "shiver." Secondly, the fixed-explosive recalls both the moment of perception and the action of the perceived. Breton wrote, "the word 'convulsive'...would lose any meaning in my eyes were it to be conceived in motion and not at the exact expiration of this motion."[31] This is an object or thing transfixed in a moment of time, yet in a continual state of becoming. He refers to a derelict locomotive, rotting in the forest, or the formations of limestone in a grotto: both are understood as frozen in time, but with the potential to continue to change. Each is formed by spontaneous methods dictated by years or even millennia of incremental change; as the form changes, so to do the rules contributing to its creation. The ultimate example of this is the crystal: "The work of art, just like any fragment of human life considered in its deepest meaning, seems to me devoid of value if it does not offer the hardness, the rigidity, the regularity, the luster on every interior and exterior facet, of the crystal."[32] Finally, the magic-circumstantial refers to the process of comprehension when confronted with the dissimilarity between the

Nebraska, 1987), 19.
30 Ibid., 8.
31 Ibid., 10.
32 Ibid., 11.

"object wished for and the object found."[33] Although automatic writing is the perfect example of the surrealist process, it can invoke an idea of an object. When searching for that object there might be many ways to fulfill the imagined desire; the object that is eventually found differs from the imagined object but may fulfill the desire more perfectly than what was imagined. In *L'Amour fou*, Breton—describing a process of intuitive chance and pseudo-mystical card-reading—says that the object "has never told me about anything other than myself, bringing me back always to the living center of my life."[34] The contradiction that Lévi-Strauss saw, between the document and the aesthetic object, is forgotten in the moment of comprehension; everything beyond the surrealist moment is secondary.

At its foundation, convulsive beauty is a process of discovery. Breton felt that the surrealist moment must include the three criteria of convulsive beauty: veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive and magic-circumstantial, otherwise it cannot be surrealist. It was not so much a rule but a set of guidelines useful in determining whether an object or moment was surreal or not. And by following these guidelines, the headdress fulfilled all three criteria of convulsive beauty for Breton. Already mentioned was Breton's initial reaction to the headdress: "the sensual connection" as described by Mauzé is the para-erotic response. The head-dress, like a transformation mask, is created based on the mythology and ritual aspects of the PNWC tribes, dictated by generations of tradition. But the formal aspects of the headdress in turn influence and change the mythology that it is

33 Ibid., 13.
34 Ibid., 16.

illustrating—as demonstrated in Lévi-Strauss's theories laid out in *The Way of the Masks,* which I will return to shortly. The process of creation was influenced by a system of rules that were intrinsic and extrinsic at the same time, just as the crystal was formed by a process influenced by its environment. The headdress is thus perceived in the moment of the fixed-explosive as defined by Breton. Mauzé also recalled Breton's continuing relationship to the object: "Set on top of a small Haida box, the headdress was situated in a central position, just across from Breton as he sat at his desk. His friends [Jean Benoît and Jean-Michel Goutier] remarked later that he spent long hours watching it in the sleepless nights before he died."[35] Again, we recall Breton's foreword to the *Oceania* exhibit in 1948, in which he described his attraction to the objects from the South Pacific: "As for me, I often need to come back to them, to watch them as I am waking up, to take them in my hands, to talk to them, to escort them back to their place of origin so as to reconcile myself to where I am."[36] In those moments of contemplation, the magic-circumstantial aspect was fulfilled. For Breton, the *Yaxwiwe'* headdress seemed to be telling him something about himself that he already knew but had yet to discover. The imagined journey to the object's origin is a journey within his own unconscious, whereas the final destination is not necessarily the one he had been looking for. The *Yaxwiwe'* headdress had the power to transport Breton to those islands of the Pacific Northwest Coast, but what he would find there was what already existed in his unconscious.

35 Mauzé, "A Kwakwaka'wakw Headdress... ," 267.
36 Breton, "Oceania," 174.

While the personal attraction to the object is born from the initial convulsive reaction, this doesn't preclude a wider understanding of its origins. As defined by Hal Foster, convulsive beauty is a cognate of the marvelous, related to objective chance and the uncanny. In other words, the marvelous is a rupture of rational logic and causality. It is a dialectical process of "rationalization as irrationalizing" that avoided contradiction in favor of revelation.[37] Foster argued that convulsive beauty was directly tied to the "inextricability of death and desire."[38] His formulation conflated the seductive nature of the object to an associated trauma, but by doing so he essentially dismissed the origin of the object itself. As a function of the general need for knowledge, the headdress was the product of a process of thinking that intrigued Breton. While he promoted a revelatory approach to the object, he understood that it was important to consider the culture or people that had created the objects. Breton said in the "Phénix du masque" essay: "To break the emotional chain that connects us to the deep drives from which the mask is born is to condemn oneself to remain on this side of the real problem or to only provide laughable solutions to it." [Briser la chaîne émotionnelle qui nous rattache aux pulsions profondes dont le masque est issu, c'est se condamner à rester en deçà du vrai problème ou n'en fournir que des solutions dérisoires.][39] The "laughable solution" he refers to here is what he perceived as the objective approach of anthropology or ethnography that only considered art as a symptom or result of culture, rather than as a powerful tool of influence and shaper of knowledge and

37 Foster, 19 & 230.
38 Foster, 29.
39 André Breton, "Phénix du masque," *Œuvres complètes* vol IV (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 992. [my translation]

belief. For Breton, the knowledge that the object conveyed was not only accessible to its creator, but to anyone willing to accept its power. He continued, “it is obvious that the mask, in so far as it is an 'instrument of hypnosis' and 'organic capacitor of the subconscious,' draws all its power from the agitation that it has been made to generate.” [Il est bien évident que le masque, en tant qu' « instrument de l'hypnose », « condensateur du subconscient organique », tire toute sa vertu du trouble qu'il a été fait pour engendrer.][40] In this way, the *Yaxwiwe'* was an agent of agitation, hypnotizing Breton, seducing him with its affective power and pulling him into the fantastic realms of its origins; however, the secrets it revealed to Breton remain hidden to us.

The question still remains: what was it about this specific headdress that appealed to Breton? Unfortunately trying to answer this question is speculative, at best. We know from his interactions with Lévi-Strauss that it could not be a purely aesthetic attraction, despite the visual composition of the work. It could have been both an attraction to and understanding of the various elements of the headdress: the ermine fur recalls the surrealist usage of fur as sexual stand-in—recall Oppenheim's *Breakfast in Fur*—at the same time that it denoted the wealth of its original owner; his interest could have been spurred by the expressive face of the central figure, with its hooked-beak nose mirroring the eagle above; or it could be the transformation of the hands into faces, recalling his attraction to the agitating powers of the transformation masks. I believe it is a culmination of all of these factors and more. As a lifelong student and devotee of the PNWC cultures

40 Ibid.

combined with his commitment to the surrealist revolution, Breton must have seen in this headdress all of the elements of an object of surrealism, as well as an item of great importance to its originating culture.[41]

The Shaman Figure

Lévi-Strauss was a receptive audience and discerning collector of the objects and artifacts from the PNWC. Wiseman calls him an "infatuated aesthetician," whose "amorous encounters" with the objects were only later transformed into theorization.[42] This process of attraction and analysis is repeated in both Lévi-Strauss's personal and theoretical writings. In his introduction to *The Way of the Masks*, Lévi-Strauss described his attraction to the objects of the PNWC, after having been forced to sell most of his collection in 1951: "Despite these disappointments, and no doubt partly because of them, there has never been a slackening of the almost carnal bond that has tied me to the art of the Northwest Coast ever since the inter-war period when I first caught sight of [these] rare specimens..."[43] We can see the parallels here to surrealist strategies and to Breton's understanding of convulsive beauty: the object must first "speak" to him: it must be fixed in a moment of change, and it must tell him something that he already knew, but had not yet recognized. The Shaman Figure he purchased—with the advice of Breton—is an example of his nuanced understanding of PNWC culture

41 In a final act of repatriation, Breton's daughter, Aube Elléouët, returned the headdress to the Kwakwaka'wakw in September, 2003. It now resides in the permanent collection at the U'Mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia. Mauzé, "A Kwakwaka'wakw Headdress...", 267.

42 Boris Wiseman, *Lévi-Strauss, Anthropology and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

43 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks*, trans. Sylvia Modelski (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 10.

and appreciation for its artistic and aesthetic abilities.

Lévi-Strauss saw in the PNWC objects a forgotten or neglected culture that had a tremendous amount of knowledge yet to convey. However, these objects were more than mere specimens; he foresaw a time when the "collections of the Northwest Coast [would] move from anthropological museums to take their place in art museums among the arts of Egypt, Persia and the Middle Ages."[44] In the American Museum of Natural History he was able to study the diverse output of the major tribes of the PNWC. Each group had distinguishing characteristics in their objects, styles, and myths, but all shared a sophisticated approach to their material culture. In the transformation masks he saw "the omnipresence of the supernatural and the perpetual life of myth beneath the calm of daily illusions."[45] The monumental house poles were poetic "correspondences...guiding the inhabitant of the house, advising and comforting him."[46] The objects had the power to communicate through their form because their creators had imbued them with myth and magic.

Lévi-Strauss's time in New York taught him that beauty could take "curious shapes" and when certain items that were judged beautiful became too expensive, then those with limited budgets could find "previously scorned items" which could provide one with "satisfaction of a somewhat different order—not so much aesthetic as mystical and, one might say, religious."[47] The objects he collected were among those neglected artifacts that had yet to find a popular audience;

44 Lévi-Strauss, "The Art of the Northwest Coast...," 175.
45 Ibid., 180.
46 Ibid.
47 Lévi-Strauss, *A View from Afar*, 263.

the masks he purchased from the MAI were considered "jokes" by Heye and were sold for $38 and $54 each.[48] Lévi-Strauss said of the Yup'ik masks, "I was reluctant to become the owner of such fragile masterpieces and feel responsible for their safekeeping to future generations. I even doubted that these masks belonged to the solid world of objects. I rather saw them as fleeting and almost immaterial embodiments of words, visions, and beliefs, eluding durable possession."[49] The concern for their possession and ownership recalls Breton's desire to take hold of the object, to feel it in his hands in order to be transported to its place of origin.

Lévi-Strauss acquired the *Tsimshian Shaman* figure [Fig. 4] in New York sometime during his stay there in the 1940s.[50] Most likely an early twentieth-century item, it is made of carved and stained wood and adorned with deer skin, bear claws, and fox teeth. The Shaman figure poses on one knee, as if in the middle of some secret ritual or dance. His arms are raised to his chest, his hands closed in loose fists, as if holding missing objects—which recalls Alberto Giacometti's surrealist sculpture, *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* which had been reproduced in *L'Amour fou* [Fig. 5].[51] The Shaman's face is a mix of naturalistic features and form-line decoration, with the lips slightly opened to reveal pointed teeth. The eyes are open wide, with yellow discs replacing the iris and pupils, recalling a full moon or bright sun. The figure is clothed in a soft leather shirt and

48 Carpenter, 10.

49 Quoted in Edmund Carpenter, *Two Essays: Chief and Greed* (North Andover, MA: Persimmon Press, 2005), 120-21.

50 I have made a great effort to establish the provenance of this object, but my search has so far been inconclusive. Lévi-Strauss acquired it sometime between 1941 and 1946, and it entered the collection of the Musée de l'Homme in 1951. It now resides in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly.

51 Breton, *L'Amour fou,* 27.

tunic, again decorated with black form-line images. He wears a crown of bear claws on top of a coarse wig of animal hair. It is approximately ¼ life-size, yet holds a commanding presence. The figure has no ritual or traditional function, but still conveys a plethora of significations that drew Lévi-Strauss to the object. The shaman is an important figure within the tribal hierarchy, as well as a keeper of knowledge. In *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss equated the shaman to the psychoanalyst, through oration and listening, respectively. Both the shaman and the psychoanalyst were able to establish a "direct relationship to their patient's conscious and an indirect relationship with his unconscious."[52] The role of each was as the object of transference: the shaman as the vehicle for spiritual exorcism; and the psychoanalyst as the catalyst for eliminating neurosis. Although their methods greatly differed, Lévi-Strauss concluded that their results were the same: the shaman speaks and the psychoanalyst listens (both being a form of a ritual), but in the end, the patient is cured. While these theories were not formalized until the publication of the essay "L'Efficacité symbolique" ["The Effectiveness of Symbols"] in 1949, the parallels must have occurred to Lévi-Strauss given his previous field work with the Amazonian tribes in the mid 1930s and his association with the surrealists in the early 1940s; the former group employed shamanism, while the latter group was interested in the psychoanalysis of the unconscious.

According to the Musée de quai Branly website and to Stéphane Masson-

52 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols" in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobsen and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 199.

et, Lévi-Strauss bought this figure with the help and guidance of Breton. As related by Massonet, Lévi-Strauss didn't feel that the figure fulfilled the “criteria and norms of traditional art” and therefore that it might be a souvenir piece. But Breton believed it was a good piece, especially its “ground-coffee quality,” so Lévi-Strauss agreed to its purchase.[53] Although anecdotal, it is interesting that Breton's first response was aesthetically minded—especially in light of his earlier disavowal of the aesthetic response—while Lévi-Strauss was concerned with its anthropological 'authenticity'.

Many objects produced by the PNWC tribes were solely intended for the souvenir market. The demand for these items was huge, especially by the mid-nineteenth century. As Carpenter explains: “By 1820, the demand for curios had created a souvenir industry. Great quantities were turned out. The Northwest Coast people had known luxury during the height of the sea-otter trade and were reluctant to give it up. Curios were a poor substitute for sea-otter pelts, but there was little else to trade.”[54] Most of these souvenirs were low-quality re-creations of traditional objects, crude masks and painted figures, but some of them retained the craftsmanship and elegance of more traditional pieces made for ritual purposes. There was also a trend in these objects to display aspects of tribal culture that couldn't be conveyed in more traditional, ritual objects. Items such as miniature totem poles and model kayaks became popular; argillite stone carving emerged as a medium to depict the different activities of the tribes.[55] I believe Lévi-Strauss's

53 Massonet, 102.
54 Carpenter, *Form and Freedom,* 13-14.
55 Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 290.

Shaman figure served that same purpose, as a souvenir which was a didactic tool of sorts. It shows the traditional dress of the Tsimshian shaman, wearing the bear-claw crown of the healer. He kneels in a pose reminiscent of both dance or supplication. The piece served no traditional role, but through its attention to detail and use of valuable materials, it conveyed the importance and central role of the shaman within the tribe. In his descriptions of the different tribal aesthetics, Lévi-Strauss called the Tsimshian, "more academic" in relation to the "brutal and powerful sculptors of the Haida or the Tlingit with their "most pure sculpture and most precious ornaments."[56] This academic presentation fits perfectly within the confines of traditional carving and decoration, but conveys information about the originating culture that would otherwise be unavailable or could be easily misinterpreted.

How would this figure have influenced Lévi-Strauss and his later formulations of structural anthropology? Wiseman believes that it is Lévi-Strauss's approach to art and aesthetics that led to the basic theories of structural anthropology, an approach that was subtle but unorthodox compared to other anthropologists. He describes Lévi-Strauss's methodology as ethno-aesthetics, rather than as wholly anthropological.[57] It was a strategy of nuanced appreciation for minute details that would otherwise be overlooked. At its core, structural anthropology is the study of connections; Lévi-Strauss theorized that through close examination of cultural and sociological phenomena, cross-cultural connections could be made

56 Lévi-Strauss, "The Art of the Northwest Coast", 176.
57 Wiseman, 27.

that were only comprehensible on a structural level. He credited linguists such as Ferdinand Saussure, Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy for the basis of structuralism and admitted only to adding to their theories and extending them to new areas.[58] Although the basis for his study began in linguistics and then extended to structuralist theory, he was able to expand that knowledge to all aspects of a culture and build connections between each area; myth, magic, kinship, marriage, food production, medicine, artistic production, domestic objects, and oral and written histories were all open to examination and study. By analyzing geographically distinct but culturally related societies, such as those found in the PNWC, it was possible to trace how those connections were made and understand how differences were formed.

In *The Way of the Masks* (1975), Lévi-Strauss embarked on an extended examination of a specific mask type found in different variations throughout the British Columbia tribes. Through this study, he was able to develop connections regarding the originating mythologies surrounding the mask and trace the subsequent influence the mask had on the evolution of its own mythology. Although he was always attracted to the masks and objects from the area, he was continually troubled by a certain mask type, what he comes to know as the *Swaih-wé.* This mask was formally distinct from other ceremonial masks, and served a unique role in the traditional ceremonies where it was presented. By asking the basic question as to why this mask was different, Lévi-Strauss began to draw connections between origin myths, marriage rites, and incest taboos. He under-

58 Lévi-Strauss, *L'Archibras* interview, 27.

stood that the mask could not be interpreted as a singular object, but must be considered as a semantic part of a linguistic whole. In this same way, Lévi-Strauss's Shaman figure from the 1940s must be seen not only as an aesthetic object, but also as the product of multiple cultural influences. Although he must have felt a "carnal bond" to the figure, its subtle details and intricate craftsmanship conveyed connections that he was only beginning to understand.

Persistence of Collecting

In 1946 Lévi-Strauss was appointed as a cultural attaché to the French Embassy in New York. While in this position he attempted, on multiple occasions, to promote the masks and objects of the PNWC to other French officials. For instance, there was a failed attempt to secure a large collection of PNWC objects for the French government in exchange for the pittance of a "few Matisse and Picasso canvases instead of taxable dollars."[59] In 1959 he contributed the essay, "Amérique du nord et Amérique du sud" [North America and South America] to the catalogue for the exhibition *Le Masque*; this exhibit featured over 250 examples of mask types from around the world. Breton loaned a number of masks from his personal collection to this exhibit, and wrote a review of it the following year in which he succinctly described his attraction to these masks, while also indicating their importance beyond the fact that they are specimens of an overlooked culture. It was a coincidental collaboration between Lévi-Strauss (contributing to the catalogue) and Breton (loaning work to it, and writing the review

59 Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks*, 10.

essay). Although Lévi-Strauss and Breton were close during the war years, they did not communicate much following their time together in New York and had a minor falling out in 1957. The *Masque* exhibition was an interesting crossing of paths for these two figures; it was especially telling that their passion for objects from the PNWC had not waned.

Breton wrote of the masks in the exhibit: “Even removed from the atmosphere of worship from which it originates and displaced to a degree among us, the hold it has on our being can only depend to a small degree on the 'plastic' qualities that we ascribe to it.” [Même soustrait à l'ambiance cultuelle dont il émane et dépaysé au possible parmi nous, la prise qu'il a sur notre être ne saurait dépendre que pour une faible part des qualités « plastiques » que nous lui prêtons.][60] The patina of time did not diminish the original power of the mask, and through its mere presence one could share in those same experiences: “The mask, for the primitive an 'instrument of participation in the hidden forces of the world,' is far from the end of its career” [Le masque, pour le primitif « instrument de participation aux forces occultes du mondes », est loin d’être au bout de sa carrière.][61] For Breton, the mask or object was a product of a certain process of thought, but also continued its “career” as an object of surrealism; for Lévi-Strauss, the mask or object continued to transmit the knowledge of its creators and in turn, influence subsequent myth formations.

60 Breton, “Phénix du masque,” 993.
61 Ibid.

Chapter 2: Seligmann & Paalen: Journeys to the PNWC

In the late 1930s, both Kurt Seligmann and Wolfgang Paalen traveled to the PNWC in order to experience the cultures of the aboriginal tribes and to collect their objects. Though they traveled separately, and for slightly different reasons, their understanding of the cultures and need to collect the objects informed the way they approached the experience. While Lévi-Strauss and Breton maintained an arguably more distant relationship to the PNWC peoples, Paalen and Seligmann immersed themselves in the environment. Recent scholarship has categorized their collecting trips as either anthropological or theoretical in nature, while diminishing the surrealist aspect of their interest in PNWC cultures and objects. This narrow-focused approach tends to compartmentalize the surrealists' interests; surrealism was in part spurred by ambiguity and the diversity of meaning that could be construed from a single image. Seligmann and Paalen's expeditions to the PNWC were "sort of a journey into the imaginary ideal world" based on the surrealist map of the world.[1]

Seligmann traveled to the PNWC at the request of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, in order to expand its collection of North American objects. What he discovered there was more than specimens: he found an extensive culture with a rich history of art and design informed by a unique process of thought. The items Seligmann purchased and sent back to Paris were indicative of his acute understanding of this culture, but as I will argue, can also be read for their implicit surrealist appeal. Where as Seligmann went to the PNWC with a mandate, Paalen

1 Stephan E Hauser, *Kurt Seligmann 1900-1962: Leben und Werk* (Basel: Schwabe, 1997), 145.

traveled more for personal reasons and the objects he collected tended to support his evolving belief in a universal totemism. While he was still aligned with Breton and surrealism when he made his trip to the PNWC, the myriad of objects he saw there only helped to fuel his decision to break from the group. The first issue of his journal, *DYN* in 1942, officially announced his disagreement with the surrealists and their preoccupation with communism and Freudian psychoanalysis; the fourth issue was solely focused on Amerindian subjects and featured his seminal essay "Totem Art," in which he laid out his argument for a universal totemism based in part on what he saw as the pervasive history of matriarchal societies.

Seligmann

Kurt Seligmann was primarily a painter, originally from Switzerland. He moved to Paris in 1929 and soon began associating with the surrealists through a number of artist friends. He was included in a number of surrealist exhibitions, including the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* held in January of 1938. That same year he was contracted by the Musée de l'Homme to travel to the PNWC where he was tasked with purchasing objects in order to fill out their meager American Indian holdings. He and his wife, Arlette, left for North America in the spring of 1938.

When the Seligmanns arrived in the US they first visited New York, where Seligmann met with anthropologists from the American Museum of Natural

History, and from whom he secured some contacts in the PNWC via Marius Barbeau, a preeminent anthropologist and expert on PNWC indigenous cultures. This forms one basis for Mauzé's argument that Seligmann acted as an anthropologist on his trip West. In a certain way, it was a pragmatic step: by validating him among the anthropological community and helping to secure contacts that would help to facilitate his acquisition of PNWC artifacts. He had no formal anthropological training and despite a number of Swiss anthropological collections that he would have had access to, Mauzé states that it cannot be established when he was first exposed to 'primitive' art.[2] At the very least, his contacts in New York and Canada gave him bureaucratic support when it came time to export his eventual purchases.

Upon reaching the West coast, he and his wife settled in Hazelton[3] on the Upper Skeena river, within Tsimshian territory. From there they were able to visit many other smaller villages, abandoned or neglected sites, as well as make trips farther afield. He stayed in Hazelton for four months, collecting many objects for the Musée de l'Homme, including a number of smaller ritual items, funerary objects and the totem pole which I will discuss in detail in a moment. He was meticulous in documenting the villages and totem poles he saw as well as transcribing the conversations he had with the locals. He and his wife made extensive notes and drawings of their experiences, as well as taking numerous photographs of the landscape they encountered. He eventually shipped to Paris

2 Marie Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures Through the Eyes of Wolfgang Paalen and Kurt Seligmann," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, 2 (2008), 3.
3 Ibid, 4.

fifteen major items from the Gitxsan, Haida, Kwakwaka'wakw and Tlingit peoples.[4]

Anthropology of Collecting

It is important to reiterate that Seligmann was not a trained anthropologist, but was acting on the behalf of an anthropological museum. Although he had an intense interest in 'primitive' art and extensive knowledge of the Pacific Northwest Coast,[5] the question remains: why would the Musée de l'Homme send an artist to do an anthropologist's job? It is quite possible that Seligmann's mandate from the Musée de l'Homme was secured through his wife's social connections, since Arlette was the niece of George Wildenstein, the owner of Wildenstein & Co, which was a very prominent private art gallery with locations in Paris, London and New York.[6] One contributing factor to Seligmann's mandate came from the continuing need for museums to expand their collections. As Douglas Cole explains in *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts,* many Western European museums began expanding their anthropological holdings at the turn of the century due to an increased interest in tribal and 'primitive' cultures. These existing collections were amassed during periods of intense colonial activity, either as extensions of larger institutions or as wholly separate ethnographic museums. A simplified reading of these collections shows

4 Hauser, 151.
5 Mauzé, 3-4.
6 Martica Sawin, "Magus, Magic, Magnet: The Archaising Surrealism of Kurt Seligmann," *Arts Magazine*, 60.6 (February, 1986): 79.

them to be opportunities for European audiences to define themselves in contrast to the Other. In this case, the Other was 'primitive' or tribal culture; a culture less technologically-advanced and therefore less civilized, according to this criterion, than those viewing the objects. This viewpoint had existed prior to the turn of the century, but the popularity of ethnographic museums began to reach a zenith with institutions such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in England and the Musée du Trocadéro in Paris—which later became the Musée de l'Homme in 1937. Up until the early twentieth century, French museums had focused on collecting objects from Africa and Asia, but had avoided the New World.[7] The Musée de l'Homme attempted to correct that oversight by funding major collecting trips to North and South America. Seligmann was tasked with bringing back the best specimens he could find and afford.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Seligmann travelled extensively, and became familiar with the Native American collections in Germany and Britain; collections that had been amassed in the late nineteenth century by various anthropologists, ethnographers and traders.[8] The history of these collections dates back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that the scope and range of desired specimens really expanded. This collecting frenzy was aided by the creation of the Smithsonian Institution in 1846, and spurred by perceived competition from its European counterparts. Cole details the history of the anthropologists and

7 Cole, 73.
8 Mauzé, 3.

ethnographers that flooded into the PNWC in search of all manner of Indian material, and notes that many of the collectors were traders and merchants with only a passing knowledge of anthropological concerns. The museums were driven by a need to amass the largest and best collection of objects, regardless of the toll their collecting would take on the aboriginal cultures from which they were buying and collecting. This is not to imply that they were outright stealing from the Native peoples; in fact, many of the indigenous peoples were willingly selling to the European visitors. Cole details many accounts of the trading savvy of the Native Americans, with anecdotes of price-fixing and artificial supply shortages. The anthropologists and agents of the museums purchased all manner of objects, but focused most heavily on those items seen as "authentic" or free from "white influence."[9]

The German and American museums were the most avid collectors of these objects; the Americans were intent on saving what material culture they could from the 'disappearing' Natives—an example of the salvage paradigm at work—while the Germans were interested in showcasing their perceived connection to a romanticized Native American spirit. Germanic culture placed great value on the land, and man's connection to mother nature. There was a romantic notion in German popular culture that the Native Amerindian and the Germanic ancestors shared this common affinity for a primeval heritage.[10] French institutions had previously focused on African and Asian territories, but had

9 Cole, 288-92.
10 Winter, 17.

lagged behind their colonial counterparts in regards to their North American collections since they no longer had any colonial ties to the continent. The French, like all of their colonizing counterparts, had a history of eclectic and sometimes questionable collecting methods; the Dakar-Djibouti expedition being one of the more famous of these endeavors.[11] The combination of Seligmann's personal interest in the PNWC, his arts background, the collecting frenzy of the time and his social connections may have provided the right elements to initiate his collecting mission.

Keïgiet, or The Monster Totem Pole

The totem pole that Seligmann purchased was called *Keïgiet*, or The Monster, and was the heraldic symbol of Gédam Skaníish, an ancestral elder of the Wet'suwet'en clan. [Fig. 6] The pole itself is remarkably tall, reaching almost 48 feet in height and carved from a single timber. All of the imagery sits on the front of the pole, while much of the rear is hollowed out to aid in its transportation and structure. The pole is a heraldic column denoting the importance of the chief for whom it was commissioned and the imagery is quite simplified, consisting of six figures spanning its entire length. Near the top of the pole there is a stylized otter that stretches its body between the final two figures, possibly representing another branch of the clan. At the very top of the pole is a single figure carved in the

11 Michael Richardson, "Travel, Surrealism, and the Science of Mankind," *Diogenes* 38.152 (December 1990), 38. The Dakar-Djibouti Expedition 1931-1933 was funded by the Trocadéro, and traveled the width of the African continent collecting nearly 3,600 objects in the process. Michel Leiris, a writer once connected to the surrealists, acted as secretary and archivist during the expedition and wrote about the journey in his published journals.

round which most likely depicts the second iteration of *Keïgiet* as the "baby-monster." Carved in relief, the figures seem to emerge from the width of the giant log, rather than existing independently of their support. Seligmann describes the difference between this earlier pole and later styles:

> "On most totem poles in British Columbia and especially those on the coast, the figures are close to each other, piled on top of or even interlaced with each other, while on the *Keïgiet* pole, they are separated; the characters are superimposed without their form being continued in this agitated rhythm found on the poles of a later period, whose style is perfect but often conventional."[12]
>
> [Sur à plupart des mâts-totem de la Colombie Britannique et surtout sur ceux de la côte les sculptures sont rapprochées les unes des autres, entassées ou même entrelacées, tandis que sur le mât Keïgiet, elles sont séparées; les personnages sont superposés sans que leur forme se continue en ce rythme agité qu'on trouve sur les mâts d'une époque postérieure et dont le style est perfectionné mais souvent conventionnel.]

The entire piece retains an aura of 'authenticity', which is carried through the intricate line-form masks and simplified bodies of each figure. The copper-gold patina of the cedar wood and the extent of the wood's deterioration attest to its age. Seligmann explains that many of the poles would have been completely covered in paint made from natural materials, but the *Keïgiet* pole only shows traces of paint around the eyes and face of each character. He dates the pole to the middle of the nineteenth century, based on oral accounts given by the elders as

12 Kurt Seligmann, "Le Mât-Totem de Gédem Skaníish," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes,* 31 (1939): 124. [all passages from this text are my translation]

well as the state of decay in certain sections of the wood.

Although the pole was in an abandoned state, it was still an object held in high esteem by the tribal elders, and was slated for restoration by the Canadian government. As Mauzé points out, there were cultural issues associated with this process of renewal. Previously, any symbol of 'primitive' culture was spurned by the white missionaries and government agents; those items that weren't actively destroyed were left to rot. But in the early 1910s the Canadian government began a program to preserve the largest and most majestic totem poles. Although outwardly the offer by the government to actively restore native culture would seem to be generous, its intentions were viewed with suspicion by the indigenous peoples. Essentially the government wanted to help preserve the totem poles because they saw them as symbols of Canadian heritage, with an emphasis placed on national pride rather than pride in Native culture. With the growth of the Canadian National railway system, the totem poles were considered to be tourist attractions, and therefore worthy of salvage; the actual people, however, were considered secondary to the material culture they produced.[13] *Keïgiet* was one of four remaining poles still standing in the abandoned village of Hagwilget; flooding had inundated the area in previous years and all of the villagers had left for more populated areas. In an exchange of letters between Seligmann and Barbeau in 1938, Barbeau had listed the *Keïgiet* pole as one that might be viable for purchase, due to its isolation and state of neglect.[14]

13 For an excellent study on the contemporary history and critical understanding of totem poles see, Aldona Jonaitis and Aaron Glass eds., *The Totem Pole: An Intercultural History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

14 Yannick Meunier, “Kurt Seligmann et Marius Barbeau: Chronique d'une rencontre décisive,”

As Seligmann explained, Gédam Skaníish was Wet'suwe'ten, but his clan was allowed to live within the Gitxsan territory, a practice not uncommon in the Pacific Northwest tribes. When Seligmann was negotiating its purchase, many of Gédam Skaníish's descendents were opposed to the sale, but with the help of the local Indian agent[15] he convinced them otherwise. In order to secure the purchase of the totem pole, he first had to be initiated into the tribe: Seligmann was "married" to the deceased sister of one of the tribal elders. While this initiation ceremony must seem like an extraordinary event, for Seligmann the process was merely a formality. His description of the circumstances leading up to his purchase puts more focus on the compensation that the elders demanded, rather than his inclusion into their clan.[16] After many preliminary meetings, in which he was able to appease opposition to the sale, he narrowed down the rightful owners to six tribal elders. Each elder was a direct descendent of Gédam Skaníish and was compensated proportionately to his social standing, $100 in total. After the group agreed to the sale, it had to be cleared with the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. Export clearance was granted via telegram in an astonishing five days, where normally such a request could take several months to process.[17]

With the consent of the Canadian government and the "moral support of

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in *Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-century Culture*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Andrew Nurse, and Gordon E. Smith (Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008), 89-90.

15 Indian agents were officials appointed by and acted as representatives of the Government of Canada under the Indian Act (1876), and were tasked with all administrative duties in relation to the First Nations and their peoples.

16 Seligmann, 126-27.

17 Ibid, 128.

Marius Barbeau,"[18] Seligmann could have chosen any number of totem poles in the area, but the question remains: what was so appealing about this specific pole, despite the difficulties in obtaining it? He was drawn to it for a number of reasons: it was aesthetically pleasing as well as being formally unique when compared to other poles in the area; it also offered anthropological evidence of its age and construction.[19] However, I will argue that he was most drawn to the pole for the psychological value of the story that it told and the interest it held for him as a surrealist. While his approach might have been an anthropological one, his desire for the object superseded an anthropological objectivity.

Published in 1939, Seligmann's essay in *The Journal de la Société des Américanistes* detailed the story of the pole, its history and his process in purchasing it. He was especially meticulous when relating the story of the pole and the gruesome, fascinating characters it portrayed. The pole takes its name from the protagonist of the story: *Keïgiet*, or Giant Monster. As retold by Seligmann, the story follows *Keïgiet* as he stole a wife from a village cabin and put her into a fire, intending to eat her. However, before he could begin, the woman's husband arrived and shot an arrow into *Keïgiet's* only vulnerable spot: the palm of his hand. There the story could end, with *Keïgiet* dying, the woman burning in the fire and the hunter/husband returning to his cabin. However, as Seligmann explains, "The Indians show that their taste for complications, for the marvelous and the cruel is not, for all that, satisfied." [Mais le goût des

18 Mauzé, 7.
19 Seligmann, 125-126.

complications, du merveilleux, du cruel dont les Indiens font preuve, n'est pas assouvi pour autant.][20] When *Keïgiet* had stolen the woman from the cabin, his spirit entered her sleeping baby, which was then transformed into a baby-monster. After the hunter had vanquished the original *Keïgiet*, he returned to the cabin where the baby-monster then attacked him and ripped out his eyes and tongue. The baby-monster then went in to the village to do the same to all the villagers. He ripped out all of their eyes and tongues and prepared to put their bodies into the fire in order to eat them. At this point two girls emerged from isolation—they had been segregated due to reaching puberty and were menstruating—and intervened in the "horrible repast." The magical powers of *Hwotsi* (menstruation) overcame the powers that had been given to the baby-monster, and the girls pushed him into the fire that he had built. He completely burned in the fire except for his lips, which remained as swarms of mosquitoes that continue to torment men. The eyes and tongues of the villagers were saved and used to revive everyone.

The surrealist interest in such an object may become clear. Upon hearing this story, Seligmann says of the first part of the myth that once the *Keïgiet* was vanquished and the hunter returned to his home the story did not end because the Indians' taste for complications, the marvelous and cruelty was not satisfied. I would argue that by the conclusion of the tale Seligmann's taste for the complicated, the marvelous, and the cruel is also assuaged. This violent story seems akin to surrealist narratives. The eyes and tongues of the villagers mesh

20 Seligmann, 122.

perfectly with surrealist fascination with the Eye and its associated meanings regarding vision, the loss of vision, the inner-eye, etc. One is reminded of the eyeball slicing scene in Luis Buñuel's film *Un Chien Andalou*; or recalls the photomontage of the surrealists' portraits, all with their eyes closed, published in *La Révolution surréaliste,* number 12 (December 15, 1929) among other examples. According to Seligmann, the house that the pole stood in front of was adorned with "countless" sculptures and paintings of eyes, attesting to the deeds of the baby-monster, and was thus named "House of Eyes." There were two other great houses there, on either side of Gédam Skaníshʼs House of Eyes: The House of Rock and The House of Fire. Seligmann also wrote the essay "The Evil Eye" which appeared in the first issue of the surrealist journal *VVV* in 1942, which attests to his continuing interest in the meaning of the eye throughout multiple cultures.

The second major theme of the story, the power of menstruation—which is tied directly to issues of taboo—is another idea that would have resonated with Seligmann and the surrealists. As Freud states in *Totem and Taboo*, "The meaning of 'taboo', as we see it, diverges in two contrary directions. To us it means, on the one hand, 'sacred', 'consecrated', and on the other 'uncanny', 'dangerous', 'forbidden', 'unclean'."[21] Here we are concerned with the second state, where menstruation is considered unclean and those experiencing this condition are then afforded certain powers. Freud's definition of the taboo explains that "'Persons or

21 Sigmund Freud, "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence," in *Totem & Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics,* trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950), 18.

things which are regarded as taboo may be compared to objects charged with electricity; they are the seat of tremendous power which is transmissible by contact..."[22] The two girls who appear from isolation are in a state of taboo, and thus are able to defeat the baby-monster by channeling the inherent power of their taboo. Whether implicit or explicit, all of these connections help to explain Seligmann's fascination as a surrealist with this particular totem pole.

Returning to Breton's exchange with Lévi-Strauss in regards to the aesthetic value of art versus the document, the totem pole straddles both sides of the argument. Although elements of the forms are derived from an established system of line-form conventions, the final image is informed by the artist with the carving tools as well as the specific details of the story that are being emphasized. The story the pole depicts is the culmination of an oral tradition; once the pole was carved and erected, the story would naturally take on aspects of the totem pole not originally in the story. Seligmann was drawn to the PNWC natives' taste for the marvelous and their untroubled approach to the seemingly grotesque; the totem pole in its aging 'authenticity' was the manifestation of this attitude. The totem-pole was the signifier for an intricate story with ambiguous interpretations and multiple meanings, and thus was an extraordinary example of an object of surrealism.

Paalen

In Amy Winter's thorough biography of Paalen, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist of the Avant-Garde,* he is described as having been an astute,

22 Ibid., 20.

inquisitive child, shadowing his father in his intellectual pursuits and enjoying a classical education in philosophy and the humanities. Paalen was born in 1905 to a wealthy family outside of Vienna. His father was a well-known intellectual and art collector, from whom Paalen inherited his keen eye for interesting and valuable artifacts. His family was supportive of his desire to become an artist, and encouraged his travels to expand his art education. He moved first to Berlin in the early 1920s, where he met Hans Hofmann, then eventually to Paris in 1929 where he met Breton and the other surrealists, and joined the surrealist group in 1935. By 1939 he had been included in a number of surrealist exhibitions as well as having solo shows in Paris and at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in London, Guggenheim Jeune. His travels, education and familial wealth allowed his collecting habits to flourish; Winter notes that before leaving Europe he had amassed a small collection of very fine materials, including Oceanic sculptures, Cycladic artifacts and a number of Northwest Coast masks and objects, as well as a small library of ethnographic literature. He was a voracious reader, and absorbed a great deal of knowledge through his numerous contacts in ethnographic museums in Berlin and Paris.

In 1939 he and his wife, Alice Rahon, along with his friend and patron Eva Sulzer, left for North America. Their initial plans were to visit New York City before heading to Mexico. These plans changed slightly when Paalen decided that they would take a detour through the PNWC, following in Seligmann's footsteps. Their trip took them first north to Ottawa, then west to Winnipeg—which he

described as a "fortress of boredom"[23]—then across the plains of Saskatchewan and Alberta, through Jasper and the Canadian Rockies before arriving on the verdant west coast. Unlike Seligmann, they did not stay long in any one area, opting instead to continue traveling north into Alaska before returning south to the Queen Charlotte Islands and Vancouver Island.[24] Paalen described parts of this journey in a series of essays in the journal *DYN*, titled *Paysage Totemique I-III* (Totemic Landscapes), as well as in the recently published journal he kept during the trip, noted below as "Voyage Nord-Ouest." He was especially enamored with the way that the indigenous peoples integrated themselves into the environment and the way the landscape defined their culture. He saw in the "silver-grey forests" a landscape of peculiarly twisted trees and totem-poles standing as "ready-mades."[25] Andreas Neufert, in "Wolfgang Paalen: The Totem as Sphinx" describes Paalen's journey as an "apotheosis, an embodiment of [his] paintings, of his dreams and his childhood memories" which revealed his fascination with swamps, caves and other mysterious landscapes as a "nostalgia for the return into the aquatic, fertile preexistence of the maternal womb."[26]

During this trip he purchased numerous objects for his personal collection, from small rattles and spoons to masks and large monumental pieces; he had a particular affinity to objects which he saw as "authentic" or lacking European

23 Wolfgang Paalen, "Voyage Nord-Ouest," reprinted in "Wolfgang Paalen: Voyage sur la côte Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique," *Pleine Marge* 20 (December 1994), 14.
24 Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes...," 5.
25 Paalen, "Voyage Nord-Ouest," 21.
26 Andreas Neufert, "Wolfgang Paalen: The Totem as Sphinx," in *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto*, eds. Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 111.

influence. He purchased directly from Natives as well as from Indian agents and trading posts. Mauzé argues that Paalen lacked an anthropological interest in the objects, beyond those details which affirmed their 'authenticity'. His journals are never concerned with the stories or myths related to the object. Neither was he averse to collecting objects acquired through methods we would now consider immoral: at one point he witnessed items being directly removed from a shaman's grave, which he then purchased.[27] Mauzé uses this as just one example to support her argument that Paalen was approaching the PNWC objects as a theorist, with disregard for the cultural heritage of the people he was studying. At the same time, Winter explains that his attitude was only a symptom of the era, and that Paalen still held the PNWC people in high regard. These readings are both valid in the narrow sense, but do not incorporate the possibility of the opposite approach. Paalen was using his experiences in the PNWC to support his theories of totemism, while at the same time collecting these objects to satisfy a surrealist desire for the marvelous. Although nuanced, his position could be seen as both colonial appropriation and anthropological interest, concurrently.

The Chief Shakes Bear Screen

Andreas Neufert describes Paalen's first encounter with the Chief Shakes Bear screen [Fig. 7] as “one of the most spectacular artistic discoveries of his life...” Found hanging on the back wall of a trading post in Wrangell, Alaska, Paalen was “attracted by the spatial way in which the head and limbs, and faces with half-human, half-animal features, appear to move and grow.” Neufert

27 Mauzé, 10.

continues, “Paalen felt compelled to buy this intriguingly ambivalent work.”[28] This singular description of Paalen's first experience of the Bear Shakes screen perfectly matches the moment of the veiled-erotic, the first tenet of convulsive beauty, and a careful reading will reveal exactly why Paalen was drawn to this particular object. Mauzé claims that Paalen's objective distance drove his collecting practice and describes him as a theorist, “aloof from local Indians...more interested in the Northwest culture as an object of study rather than with living people in a poor economic predicament.”[29] However, I would argue that his need to own the Bear screen was driven by desire as much as by objective theory.

The screen is roughly 15 feet tall and is made from approximately 8 cedar planks butted together to form one continuous panel. The main figure is carved and painted to resemble a stylized bear, which is splayed to show its stomach and chest while raising two human-like hands. An ovoid opening is situated in the lower-center of the panel, large enough for a grown person to step through. There are two large ears that protrude above the main panel, each ear containing a smaller painted version of the bear figure. At each arm and leg joint, as well as on the palms of the hands, the eyes and the nostrils, there is an ovoid face looking back at the viewer. The feet of the bear end in exaggerated claws, which could also double as bird beaks. The chest of the bear is adorned with the line-form face of the Dogfish surrounded by yet more ovoid faces—the Dogfish, like the bear,

28 Neufert, 113.
29 Mauzé, 8-9.

was a totemic symbol of the Shakes family.

Paalen published a photo and watercolor illustration of the Bear screen in the Amerindian issue of *DYN*, along with an explanatory blurb describing the origin and rarity of such an object by G.T. Emmons, a prominent ethnographer who Paalen met during his travels west. Emmons attested to the importance of the Bear as a heraldic symbol of the Shakes family, which could be traced back to the mythical beginning of the clan. At the end of this small blurb, Emmons mentioned that the original community building that housed the screen had been torn down and a pitiful modern building had been put up in its place, with a copy of the original Bear screen placed on the facade. As Emmons explained, the Bear was an important totemic symbol of the Shakes clan, and "mythically goes back to the flood where two Brown Bears climbed a mountain on the Stikine river to escape the flood. They [the clan] killed one of the bears later and took the head and skin and wore both in festivals as the family-crest the most valued of all others..."[30] Neufert offers a second origin story to explain the importance of the Bear: "It references an ancestral creation myth in which a woman from a bear family has a love affair with a man from a human family and gives birth to mixed beings—the founders of the Shakes clan."[31] The screen is thought to have been in the Shakes family for an estimated 100 years before Paalen found it in the trading post in Wrangell where he purchased it. He had it shipped to Mexico, where it was eventually installed in Paalen's studio.[32] [Fig. 8]

30 G.T. Emmons, quoted in "Totem Art," *DYN* 3-4, 16.
31 Neufert, 113.
32 The screen is now at the Denver Art Museum, with the caption: "Artist not known, Tlingit, *House Partition with Shakes Family Crest*, about 1840" (Neufert, 129).

While the photo that accompanies Emmon's blurb in *DYN* shows the screen on the exterior of a house, originally it would have been used in an interior setting inside the Chief's house. It would have been utilized during ceremonial performances, acting as a screen between the main performance space and the 'back stage' area, where performers could change into their costumes unseen from the audience .[33] The performers would essentially enter through the vaginal opening of the Bear figure, an act that was especially significant for Paalen as we shall see.

In her biography of Paalen, Amy Winter asserts that he felt a great connection to the objects he collected, especially the Bear screen. She says of his collection: “Paalen kept the screen in his studio in Mexico City, along with other artifacts such as a petrified whale penis, which hung like a beam from the ceiling. He believed (or professed to believe) that these and other objects in his collection held powers that augmented his own.”[34] Neufert alludes to the juxtaposition of Bear screen and whale penis in conjunction with the Bear/Mother/Womb of the screen with the implication of a sexualized reading of the objects. In the same manner that Breton displayed his headdress in relation to the fertility statues from Oceania, Paalen's juxtaposition of his house-screen and whale penis illustrates a desire to make connections between dissimilar objects. They are both using the objects as catalysts for creativity; one could imagine Paalen contemplating the Bear partition in the same way that Breton was known to sit with his objects, deep

33 Winter, 164.

34 Ibid. (You can see the whale penis she mentions in the photograph of the Bear Screen installed in Paalen's studio, [Fig. 8] It hangs from a rafter near the ceiling.)

in thought.

Just as Breton could find all the elements of convulsive beauty in the *Yaxwiwe* headdress, so too could Paalen find the veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, and magic-circumstantial within the Chief Shakes Bear partition.[35] The veiled-erotic is predicated on an ambiguously physical reaction to a previously unknown object, idea or phrase. Returning to Neufert's description of Paalen's first encounter with the Bear partition, we see there was an initial revelatory reaction to the object. The fixed-explosive quality of the screen is a bit more elusive, but makes sense in the context of its origins and history. The fixed-explosive is essentially the potential energy of an object or idea—which this has, as an embodiment of thought. Breton illustrated the fixed-explosive by describing a photo of a decaying railroad engine abandoned in the forest. The previously mobile locomotive is now in a constant state of becoming, its forms dictated by the entropic advance of nature. In the case of the partition, the image of the Bear was dictated by the myths and history of the culture that created it, but once 'abandoned'[36] in the trading post where Paalen found it, it was forever in the act of becoming: referencing its past while influencing its future, in a constant state of metamorphosis for its subsequent viewers.

Lastly, the magic-circumstantial could be found in the way that Paalen read into the partition, and what it might impart to him in regards to his ideas and

35 Refer to chapter 1, pp 37-38 of this thesis for a discussion of convulsive beauty.

36 This is not to imply that the Bear partition was 'abandoned' by the Shakes family. Most likely it was sold or consigned to Walter Water's shop, where Paalen first saw it. But here I use the term 'abandoned' to indicate its displacement from its original usage, much like the locomotive engine displaced in the forest, removed from its intended environment.

theories of totemism. While Paalen was an adherent of surrealist theories such as objective chance and automatism, he disagreed with the surrealist fascination with Freud. Paalen felt that Freud's use of anthropology was flawed, and thus Freud's theories of the patriarchal origins in all cultures—as described in his 1913 book *Totem and Taboo*—were anathema to actual Totemic thought.[37] Paalen explained, in his essay "Totem Art," in *DYN*, that Freud was wrong in two ways: by only considering "the animal-ancestor for the totemic descent, and next: in giving this descent the signification of blood relationship...that leads him [Freud] to identify the totem with the father, to consider totemic animal as a substitute for the father-ancestor."[38] Paalen reasoned that totemic cultures originated from matrilineal systems and he himself more closely identified with mother-goddess beliefs. Neufert refers to a letter that Paalen wrote as a teenager to his then-girlfriend, in which he described his adolescent fantasies: "'The most important divinity in it,' he wrote in the letter, 'was the big, blind mother'."[39] At the same time that he was formulating his understanding of Totemic thought, he was rejecting the surrealist attachment to Hegelianism. For Paalen, Marxism and Freudian theories were merely replacements for patriarchal systems, and therefore were antithetical to the matriarchal origins of culture. Paalen understood through his close readings of the anthropologist Franz Boas that the PNWC tribes were matrilineal and therefore would not harbor the same father-psychosis as western society. Although he does believe that the totem is at heart a cross-cultural phenomenon, it is found in

37 Ibid., 114.
38 Wolfgang Paalen, "Totem Art," *DYN* 4-5 in *Wolfgang Paalen's* DYN*: The Complete Reprint* (Vienna & New York: Springer Press, 2000), 25.
39 Neufert, 121.

mother-goddess worship, rather than father-god iterations. For these reasons, Paalen would have understood the Bear partition to be a manifestation of the mother-goddess phenomenon, and not just an emblem of the clan. The partition was not only a utilitarian object in a performance space; it was a catalyst for the unification of man and animal, and a portal to a world of magic-circumstantial action. The ceremonies of the PNWC tribes contain ritualistic dancing, costumery, and animal mimicry, and according to Paalen all activate personal connections to "the great reservoir of generic memory." He continues, in "Totem Art": "Thus magic might be defined as a sort of *affective mimetism* through which man identifies himself with the universe."[40] For Breton, the magic-circumstantial answered questions that were not asked; for Paalen, the Bear screen revealed insights into ideas he was only beginning to understand.

However, I would argue that Paalen's formulation of totemism follows Breton's formulation of the surrealist object as the plastic expression of the unconscious. Paalen reads the totem as an outward expression of a system of thought, and as a document with aesthetic value. The images and figures that make up the totem are neither contradictory nor irreconcilable. The figures inhabit a realm in which man, animal, plant and landscape are all characters acting within the world, each with roles to play but capable of free will. Paalen argues that plastic expressions of universal beliefs will resemble each other, even without direct influence; hence his comparison of Greek statues to PNWC totem poles,

40 Paalen, 20.

etc.[41] As Breton explained to Lévi-Strauss, the work of art would be of value if it was made automatically, in the same way that Paalen argues that the art and objects of the PNWC tribes were created without outside ('white') influence. This is not to say that they were created automatically, but that there was no foreign influence on the creation of their visual systems.

41 Ibid., 27-28.

Conclusion

Paalen wrote in his journal: “Works of art are traps set for life—if the trap is well set, life is snared within it forever.” [Œuvres d'art, pièges tendus à la vie—si le piège est bon, la vie y est piégée pour toujours.][1] From this examination, we can see how a number of objects were “traps set for life” for these surrealist artists and thinkers. Breton was enthralled with the *Yaxwiwe'*, and saw it not only as a testament to the rich culture it came from, but also believed it held great power for anyone willing and open to experiencing it. For Lévi-Strauss, the Tsimshian Shaman figure was the embodiment of a system of thinking, informed by an extensive and complex social structure. For Seligmann, the *Keïgiet* pole was imbued with the life of a PNWC clan whose story perfectly illuminated its thirst for “the marvelous and the cruel”—an attitude shared by the surrealists. For Paalen, the Bear screen was the heraldic symbol that illustrated his philosophy of a universal totemism, while at the same time acting as a catalyst for his imagination.

Throughout this study, I have attempted to address the issue of the surrealist acting as anthropologist and vice versa. It is interesting to note that of the four objects I discuss in this paper, only one of them was collected directly from the originating culture. Both Lévi-Strauss and Breton purchased their objects from intermediaries, after the items had gone through numerous trades and resales. Paalen purchased some of his items directly from First Nations peoples, but the Chief Shakes Bear screen he first found at the back of a tourist goods store

1 Paalen, “Voyage Nord-Ouest”, 24. [Mauzé's translation]

in Wrangell, Alaska. Only Seligmann's totem pole came directly from its original home. Seligmann even had to become an initiate of the clan in order to obtain the right to own the pole and see it removed from the PNWC. Seligmann showed a level of commitment to his collecting that none of the others in this study would attain. It was in his apparent willingness to immerse himself into the culture and absorb its heritage that Seligmann demonstrated the surrealist fascination with the 'primitive', and also superseded an anthropological objective distance. This was not without precedent, however, as other anthropologists before him had 'gone native' during the study of their subject.[2]

However, there is still the issue of Seligmann's political beliefs and what we might now consider a contradiction in his anthropological collecting. As a surrealist he was an avowed anti-colonialist, but his active collecting of anthropological specimens directly defies those politics. He wrote in his journal: "Usually totem poles face the water: carved figures, animals and monsters, with a blank gaze, look as if they are meditating. To understand their beauty they have to be seen in their environment; the mysterious powers they give out, the enigma of their wide open eyes staring at the snowy horizons, and dark borders."[3] An attitude that would seem to ignore the fact that he had traveled to the PNWC with the express intention of purchasing a totem pole and shipping it back to Paris. Mauzé argues that Seligmann acted as an anthropologist, and by that logic he

2 See William Truettner. "Dressing the Part: Thomas Eakins's Portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing", *American Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Spring, 1985), 48-72, for an account of Cushing, a 19th century anthropologist who joined the Zuni tribe and lived with them for four years, attaining the title of First War Chief in the process.

3 Seligmann, quoted in Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes...," 6-7.

stops being a surrealist or even an artist while he is collecting these objects. Although she gives credit to Seligmann for his careful attention to detail and sensitive attribution of the artists and authors from whom he is collecting, this still diminishes the possibility that he was drawn to these objects for more personal reasons. However, I suggest that Seligmann cannot be parsed into surrealist, anthropologist or even just artist. Rather, these interests all intersected in his mind and collecting habits. With his distinct visual aesthetics, expansive cultural knowledge and his attachment to the surrealist group, his collecting was a combination of personal curation, anthropological research and surrealist desire.

Does this hold true for the other subjects of my study? As we have seen, Breton was not interested so much in 'pure' anthropological pursuits, preferring instead to approach the objects of his desire on multiple fronts and always open to the experience that they might impart. In some ways, Paalen was the theoretician that Mauzé claimed, but his careful research into the PNWC was born out of intense curiosity and attraction, rather than disinterested aloofness. His theories of universal totemism were based on empirical evidence as much as they were on personal experience and on other people's theories, of course. Finally, it could be argued that Lévi-Strauss was and will always be an anthropologist first, but I think that his relationship to the surrealists and the things they taught him went beyond the academic. Breton taught Lévi-Strauss to look for the deep connections in all aspects of life; he learned to see art not as a symptom of culture, but as products of a process of thinking, and in turn a catalyst for more connections.

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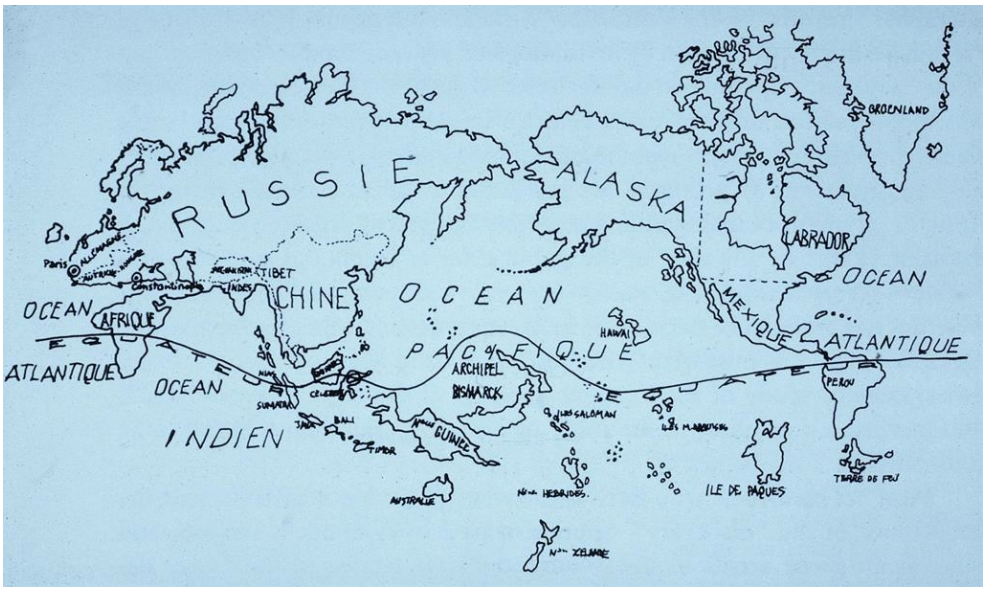
Appendix I: Images

1. Meret Oppenheim, *Objet (Le dejeuner en fourrure)/Object (Breakfast in Fur)* (1936), Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Reproduced with limited-use permission from Artstor Digital Library.



2. *Le Monde au temps des surréalistes* [*The World at the Time of the Surrealists*], first published in *Variétés* (1929). Reproduced with limited-use permission from Artstor Digital Library.

3. Kwakwa̲ka̲'wakw, *Yaxwiwe'* [Peace Dance Headdress] (c. 19th Ct), maple, abalone, paint, cloth, ermine fur, sea lion whiskers, 22 x 19.5 x 9 cm, U'Mista Cultural Society, Formerly from André Breton Collection. Photo: Trevor Mills, provided by the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia.

4. Tsimshian, *Shaman Statue* (c. 20th Ct), Patinated wood, painted hide, leather, bear claws. 82 x 32 x 32 cm, Collection of Musée du Quai Branly, inv 71.1951.35.2. Photo: Musée du Quai Branly/Scala/Art Resource, NY.

5. Alberto Giacometti, *Hands holding the Void (Invisible Object)* (1934), plaster, 156 x 34 x 29 cm, collection of Yale University Art Gallery. Reproduced with limited-use permission from Artstor Digital Library.

6. Wet'suwet'en, *Keïgiet*, totem-pole of Gédam Skaníish (c. 19th Ct), carved cedar, 1451 x 75 x 60 cm, © Musée du Quai Branly, photo: Patrick Gries. La restauration du mât Seligmann a été soutenue par la société des Amis du musée du quai Branly [The restoration of the Seligmann totem-pole was supported by the Friends of the Musée du Quai Branly]

7. Tlingit, *Grizzly Bear Interior partition screen from the house of Chief Shakes, Wrangell Village, Alaska* (c. 1840), carved, painted cedar, 457 x 275 cm, collection of Denver Art Museum, former collection of Wolfgang Paalen. Reproduced with limited-use permission from Art Images for College Teaching.

8. *Wolfgang Paalen, Studio building of Wolfgang Paalen by Max Cetto (architect), San Angel, Mexico 1947*, Paalen Archiv Berlin, Foto studio: © Succession Wolfgang Paalen et Eva Sulzer