

*Surrealist Visions of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and the Legacy of Colonialism
The Good, the (Revalued) Bad, and the Ugly*

Keith Jordan

Department of Art and Design, California State University, Fresno

We encounter a paradox here—that the Surrealists were, on the one hand, progressive and radical, on the other fixed within the world-view of their time. Though bounded by prevailing cultural concepts—evolutionism, psychoanalysis, primitivism—they continually problematized them... Yet while disavowing the discourses of evolutionism and aesthetic primitivism they constructed in their place equally problematic discourses of the fantastic, the magical and the mythical. Though their radicalism enabled them to stand outside some of the dominant bourgeois ideologies of European modernist society, they never broke totally free of the boundaries of their own (largely French) race, language and culture.¹

Introduction

Following in the primitivist spirit of its precursors among the Fauves, Cubists, and expressionists, the Surrealists valued positively, and drew formal, iconographic and conceptual inspiration from pre-Columbian Mesoamerican art. This admiration was shared across the divide between the orthodoxy of Breton and the “dissidents” around Bataille, as well as by later offshoots like the contributors to Paalen’s *DYN*, and that Surrealist *sui generis*, Artaud. However, this fact has been frequently overshadowed both in the writings of the Surrealists themselves and in later criticism and art historical inquiries, by its accolades to and borrowings from Oceanic art.² A number of those art historical studies that devote any space to the Surrealist afterlife of Mesoamerican visual traditions have confined their focus to looking for formal similarities while ignoring less immediately apparent but nonetheless significant conceptual borrowings.³ Krauss’ essay on Giacometti

Keith Jordan: keJordan@csufresno.edu

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for the catalog of the controversial Museum of Modern Art primitivism show, on the other hand, attempts precisely to trace such conceptual parallels, though characteristically her presentation bypasses more traditional methods of art historical inquiry and many of her assertions are not firmly supported by documentary evidence.⁴ Pre-Columbian connections are commonly presented in the literature for the works of artists whose relation to the Surrealist movement was marginal. Thus, the formal borrowings of Henry Moore's sculptures of the 1920s from Maya, Toltec, and Aztec stone carving has received wider attention and is repeated in more generalized treatments, e.g., Colin Rhodes' survey of primitivism.⁵ In fact, Moore's interest in Mesoamerican art seems to have been inspired by his reading of Roger Fry long before his tentative affiliation with the British Surrealists and participation in exhibitions with Breton's group. Mexico's indigenous heritage has received its proper due as iconographic source for Frida Kahlo's corpus of paintings, courtesy of its obvious presence, ample documentation, and the nationalist politics that have surrounded her posthumous cult. But although she exhibited with the Surrealists in Paris in the late 1930s after her "discovery" by Breton, Kahlo's work represented an independent development despite some overlap in methods and preoccupations. She rejected the Surrealist label and maintained significant ideological and aesthetic distance from the movement.

A large proportion of the last three decades of scholarship in English and French has focused on the literary visions of ancient Mesoamerica in the writings of the "dissident" Surrealists Artaud and Bataille.⁶ This reflects the prominence these writers gave to prehispanic Mexican civilizations in some of their most representative (and notorious) texts. It also seems to reflect Bataille's connections to the history of anthropology in France, and to a positive comparison by some authors of his knowledge of ethnography and archaeology vis-à-vis the Breton wing of the movement.⁷ It probably also reflects the "discovery" and promotion of Bataille for an Anglophone art historical and critical audience by Krauss and the October group, leading to his near-veneration as a kind of antinomian saint in some circles. Much less ink has been spilled over Breton's essay on Mexico describing his 1938 pilgrimage, with its frequent allusions to pre-Columbian art. In a similar fashion, there has been for years a relative neglect of the writings of Wolfgang Paalen, though this gap has begun to be filled by Winter's book and the publication of a facsimile of *DYN* with accompanying introductory texts.⁸ The reaction of the Surrealist exiles in Mexico to the indigenous traditions of their new home also has only recently attracted detailed attention.⁹ There has been little in the way of attempts to integrate all of this material into a cohesive whole, or comparison of the constructions of the Mesoamerican past across the factions of the movement, over time, and in

relation to contemporary historical, political and social developments in its European homeland.

What I attempt here is not a comprehensive survey of the Surrealists' use of Mesoamerican art—abroad and in exile, Breton faithful or Bataille schismatics. That would be the subject of a book length project, and a multi-volume tome at that. Rather, I seek to compare Surrealist visions of pre-Columbian Mexico as reflected in the writings of Bataille and (perhaps) related sculpture of Giacometti from the late 1920s and 1930s, the writings of Antonin Artaud from roughly the same interval, the “orthodox” viewpoint of Breton's post-1938 writings, and the activities of Paalen and other expatriates in the 1940s into the 1960s. When considered within the framework of a dichotomy of traditional European appraisals and constructions of Native Americans arising in the sixteenth century and persisting in some quarters down to the present, it appears that Bataille takes that pole of these opposite views emphasizing violence and blood sacrifice, but consistent with his philosophy of *bassesse*, inverts the negative valuation historically associated with Native Americans in general, and the Aztecs in particular.¹⁰ He makes Aztec ritual violence into a positive, an analogy and prefiguration of the revolutionary excesses called for by his political theories during this period. Bataille emphasizes myth and ritual in Aztec art, but in a thoroughly materialist (although still paradoxically mystical) framework, and in the context of the revival of myth in contemporary fascism and his unsuccessful struggle to re-appropriate this dimension of experience for the benefit of the Left.

Artaud, an inwardly-oriented schizoid personality who during the period of his Surrealist activity was traversing a path that was to lead him into psychosis in 1938, had little use for the external orientation of leftist politics. He sought in Mexico a mystical, transhistorical revolution of the mind, taking as inspiration pre-Columbian art, myth, and ritual. The revival of indigenous cosmology and religion would permit an escape from the modern condition of alienation represented for him by both capitalism and Marxism. His version of ancient Mesoamerica as the land of hidden esoteric wisdom related to the hermetic and kabbalistic traditions of the West, a lost paradise, puts him firmly in a tradition of utopian versions of the pre-Columbian past, particularly those branches colored by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occultism.

Breton, who along with Eluard was an avid collector of pre-Columbian antiquities, did not emphasize Mexico in his literary pontifications until the late 1930s. Orthodox surrealism was preoccupied with myth in the 1920s, but most of the focus was on classical mythology and ethnographic material related to totemism as filtered through Freud and Frazer.¹¹ Interpreted as a product of the unconscious, such material was a potential aid to the liberation of repressed creativity for the

Western artist, and linked (however uneasily) in Breton's doctrine with social revolution. Breton's visit to Mexico was an attempt to preserve and consolidate the political ground of the movement after the triumphs of Stalinism and fascism put it in peril. His meeting with Trotsky and encounter with indigenist trends among the Mexican Left, especially mediated through Rivera and Kahlo, are reflected in his 1938 evocations of ancient and modern Mexico as sources of political renewal as well as the seat of ancient mystery. Anticolonialist politics mingle with romantic views of indigenous peoples that enshrine colonialist tropes. But with the exile of Breton and other members of the group following the Nazi occupation of France, the emphasis shifted to myth—Mesoamerican and otherwise—as a vehicle of mystical transformation largely disconnected from sociopolitical concerns, a position ironically prefigured in the views of Artaud that had led to his expulsion from the movement.

Wolfgang Paalen, whose interest in Mesoamerican art predated his exile in Mexico and in the form of collecting and dealing in antiquities led to his untimely death, was perhaps the most self-conscious of the Surrealist writers and artists regarding the history of European trends both exoticizing and devaluing pre-Columbian New World civilizations. Winter's study of his thought highlights a tension throughout his life and work between a rationalist, empiricist, and analytical orientation, reflected in a strong interest in science (particularly physics) and his conflict with Breton over the latter's mystical interests, and a powerful tendency to romanticism stemming from his early exposure to Central European idealist philosophy and Romantic literary traditions. This conflict is reproduced in microcosm in his treatment of Mesoamerican art. On the one hand, his writings make clear his critical awareness of primitivist tendencies to idealize Native American cultures. He attacked the Breton school for its lack of attention to cultural context in discussing the art of indigenous cultures. His review, *DYN*, published the works of pioneers of Mesoamerican art history and archaeology like Miguel Covarrubias and Alfonso Caso alongside his own art and theoretical writings and contributions from members of what was soon to crystallize into Abstract Expressionism. Yet, despite his cautiousness, romantic primitivism is still present in his use of Mesoamerican (and Native North American) cultures. It is there in his championing of Native American art as an alternative source of inspiration to a spent and war-torn European civilization; in his continuing equation, via Jung and Lévy-Bruhl, of Mesoamerican art and thought with a primal layer of consciousness present, via the principle of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny in the psychology of children and the adult unconscious in the West; and in some of his treatments of Mesoamerican myth. In many ways, Paalen, like Bataille, is consistent with the

anthropological theory of his times, and reflects that discipline's continuing struggle to emancipate itself from colonialist and evolutionist models.

Origins of the Surrealist Conceptualizations of Mesoamerica: Polarities in the European Vision of Pre-Columbian Mexico

In her biography of Wolfgang Paalen, Winter summarizes a key paradox of the Surrealists. "The Surrealist relationship to non-Western cultures was problematic. On the one hand it was radically anticolonialist, opposing the exploitation and oppression of 'other' peoples by the dominant powers of Europe. On the other, it practiced its own form of colonization through decontextualization, distortion, and projection of Surrealist fantasies and agendas onto ethnographic art and cultures."¹² But those fantasies and agendas are only the most recent versions of much older European fantasies and agendas.

A divergence in conceptualization of the Aztec and Maya Other in Western thought emerged shortly after the Spanish Conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century among the conquerors and their ecclesiastical successors. Disputes over the repressive policies applied to the indigenous inhabitants of the new colonies were characterized by recourse of polemicists from both sides of the issue to opposing images of the state of native culture before the invasion. One image of the Indians of Mesoamerica (and of Native Americans in general) was championed among those among the Spanish clergy who supported the ongoing enslavement of the natives and presented indigenous peoples—especially the Aztecs—as barbarous, depraved, and demonic. Opposed to this current, a smaller but highly vocal group, represented at its most eloquent by the cleric Bartolome de las Casas, condemned Spain's brutal policies in the New World. In defense of their position, they elaborated and promoted an idealized view of ancient Mexico as a utopia. As Benjamin Keen, in his masterful history of Western conceptions of Aztec culture, puts it: "These humanists responded to charges of Indian inferiority by arguing that Aztec cultural achievements equaled or surpassed those of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The writings of these men embellished the Indian past, depicting a pagan Golden Age... Human sacrifice and other major blights on Aztec civilization they minimized or rationalized."¹³ This visionary construction owed as much to medieval European fantasies of terrestrial paradises, and their classical and Judeo-Christian antecedents, as to the observed realities of Mesoamerican civilization.¹⁴

The poles of the debate, and a spectrum of intermediate views, were taken up beyond the Spanish empire by artists, philosophers, literati, and later, historians and anthropologists across Europe and in the Europeanized Americas. During the Enlightenment, the romantic vision of the pre-Columbian world became prominent

in French literary culture. Voltaire, taking full opportunity of the anti-Catholic ammunition this position potentially supplied, dismissed reports of Aztec human sacrifice as Spanish propaganda, while Rousseau's praises of the naturally free state he ascribed to indigenous peoples fostered idealized conceptions of Native Americans as "Noble Savages" among some of his later followers.

This French tradition of an idyllic Mexican past merged in the nineteenth century with the revival of interest in the occult stemming from Romanticism. It was further fueled by the exoticising accounts of Maya and Toltec ruins by romantic antiquarians like Waldeck and Charnay, and by the works of Auguste Le Plongeon, a predecessor of today's "New Age" pop archaeologies and a fixture of the burgeoning crank literature on Atlantis and Mu.¹⁵ Such ideas became cudgels against the alienating effects of industrialization: "Popular interest in pre-Columbian cultures incorporated many of these...antimodernist responses to the profound disjunctions of the late nineteenth-century. There was an especially strong strain that associated pre-Hispanic civilization with occult and supernatural phenomena...mystical notions about pre-Columbian culture had a very wide currency, and even purportedly scientific investigations of ancient America were saturated with them."¹⁶ Thus one influential French scholar of the period, Basseur de Bourbourg, while making major contributions toward the decipherment of Maya calendrical and mathematical glyphs, also attempted (erroneously) to translate the Maya Madrid Codex as an account of the destruction of lost Atlantis, from where he believed the Maya had come as refugees.¹⁷ Basseur de Bourbourg's work became a staple of the occult literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, inspiring Ignatius Donnelly's books on Atlantis as well as being cited by Masonic and Theosophical writers like Manly P. Hall.¹⁸ Other dilettantes also looked in Mesoamerican codices and carved hieroglyphic inscriptions "for insights into...occult lore since Plato and Pythagoras."¹⁹ This view of the Maya as the mystical inheritors of the secret knowledge of lost continents endures in New Age subcultures in Europe and America, which Braun views as the ideological inheritors of the French romanticizing tradition.

It is therefore not surprising that European modernist artists seized on the idealizing tradition of images of Mesoamerica as an alternative to a moribund classical tradition. Gauguin, champion of *fin-de-siècle* primitivism, found pre-Columbian architecture "primitive and beautiful"—basically synonyms in his mental universe.²⁰ Actual borrowing of pre-Columbian forms in his work, however are mostly Inca and Moche in derivation, consistent with the valuation of his Peruvian maternal ancestry in his personal myth, and are largely limited to ceramic productions.²¹ According to Rubin, Picasso rejected Mesoamerican art as elitist

and overtly religious, but according to Braun, Apollinaire had an intense interest in prehispanic Mexican manuscripts and may even have been influenced by the rebus-like pictographic writing of the Mixtecs and Aztecs in his creation of the calligram as a literary form.²² But although contemporary art historical scholarship has neglected the appraisal and inspiration of Mesoamerican art on the avant garde movements of early twentieth-century Europe, tending to focus on their alleged and actual formal borrowings and (mis-)perceptions of African art, it nevertheless appears that pre-Columbian Mexican and Maya art assumed more importance for the Surrealists than for any previous current of modernism. Perhaps in their valorization of Oceanic and pre-Columbian art over the African sculpture that inspired their predecessors one may detect a kind of “anxiety of influence,” an attempt to demarcate an identity distinct from previous artistic movements.²³ But it may be the overtly mythic character of much of Mesoamerican art which had led to its dismissal by Picasso (despite his contradictory championing of African sculpture as inspiration for an art of exorcism) that also led to its greater importance among the Surrealists.

Yet it is not in the mainstream of Surrealist orthodoxy that this admiration first achieves a prominent place, but in the writings of the loosely organized dissident faction that coalesced around Bataille. It is here that the play of colonialist categories, with radical revaluation but not transcendence of the old dichotomies, is blatantly manifest. While the Surrealists condemned colonialism, they remained, as people of their time and place, in the shadow of its legacy of images of ancient America. As Tythacott puts it, “for all their radical intent, many Surrealists remained locked within the framework of early twentieth-century Eurocentric primitivist references.”²⁴ These primitivist tropes in turn were constructed from the raw materials of four centuries of colonialist ideology.

Bataille: Sacrifice, Sadism, and Revolutionary Expenditure

Georges Bataille’s first work in celebration of Aztec sacrifice appeared in 1928 in *Les Cahiers de la République des Lettres, des Sciences et des Arts*, and was published in 1930 in a volume edited by Jean Babelon featuring contributions by Alfred Métraux and Paul Rivet alongside Bataille’s short essay “Vanished America” (*L’Amérique disparue*).²⁵ The articles (and book) responded to and accompanied a major exhibition of pre-Columbian art at the Musée d’Ethnographie at the Trocadéro.²⁶ This would not be the last time Bataille worked alongside these eminent anthropologists, his friends Métraux and Rivet, who would go on to contribute material to his review *Documents* during its two-year run (1929-1931).²⁷ As Winter notes, this exhibition was the first to exhibit pre-Columbian works as art rather than as ethnographic material—interestingly, a strategy counter to Rivet’s opposition to

privileging “art objects” produced by “non-Western” societies over other, utilitarian artifacts for study and display.²⁸ Rivet’s influence prevailed during the first run of Documents, where the year-end index of articles listed the contributions on African, Oceanic, and Native American subjects under ethnography rather than art. This text was central to Krauss in her 1984 paper on the “primitivism” of Giacometti in relation to his association with Bataille.

The opening paragraph of the piece sets the tone: “jamais sans doute plus sanglante, excentricite n’a ete concue par la demence humaine: crimes continuels commis en plein soleil por le seule satisfaction de cauchemars deifies, phantasms terrifiants. De repas cannibals des pretres, des ceremonies a cadavers et ruisseaux de sang, plus qu’une aventure historique evoquent les aveuglantes debauches decrites par l’illustre marquis de Sade.”²⁹ As Krauss comments, “Broadening the reference from Mexico to de Sade was characteristic of the intellectual field of 1920s ethnological thinking, particularly in the circle of Marcel Mauss” to which Bataille as well as Métraux and Rivet belonged.³⁰ It is sufficient to note here the positive revaluation of Sade by Bataille. The latter saw the violence of the “Divine Marquis” as a model for the orgiastic revolutionary violence of the proletariat against the ruling class, a liberation of desire against the forces of repression in both the psychoanalytic and political senses of the term.³¹

Bataille goes on to briefly discuss and then summarily dismiss as uninteresting the Incas of Peru, deriding their art as reflective of “sauvagerie mediocre”—a disparaging colonial turn of phrase.³² He has a far more positive assessment of the Maya, praising their representations of gods, “lourde et monstrueuse,” but concludes that their art is something of a “stillbirth” (“mortné”)³³ It is for the Aztecs that his prose waxes in florid intensity. He quotes the inquisitor Torquemada, significantly one of the early framers of the negative colonialist image of ancient Mesoamerica as identified by Keen, interpreting the “grotesque” images of Nahua gods in the surviving screenfold manuscripts as results of the demonic obsessions and sinful nature of the Indians. But Bataille, operating, in classical psychoanalytic terms, from within an anal dynamic of inversion, makes what was demonic to the colonial cleric into a strength.³⁴ The Aztecs are for him “le plus vivant, le plus seduisant meme par sa violence demente, par sa demarche de somnambule.”³⁵ He finds Nahua mythology full of black humor, reproducing two tales of the shamanic trickster deity Tezcatlipoca turning dancers to stone and causing a rain of stones.³⁶ Returning to “le dieux des manuscrits,” he calls them “bogeymen or funeral attendants” with their “sinister, evil pleasures, full of malevolent humor.”³⁷ He moves on to a lovingly detailed description of sacrifice by heart extraction, cannibalism, and the wearing of flayed human skins, imagining

the clouds of flies that must have been attracted by such carnage.³⁸ He concludes by pairing these sanguinary aspects of Aztec society with its refined sense of the beautiful reflected in its magnificent architecture and love of flowers. For the Aztecs, he says, “death was nothing,” like squashing a bug.³⁹

Bataille’s rapture over Aztec sacrifice was to receive a more coherent justification in the next several years through his developing (anti-)aesthetic theories and his search for an alternative to the standard Marxist economic theories and political strategies embraced by the traditional Left in France. His “base materialism,” formulated in opposition to Breton and other professed Marxists whom Bataille accused of still clinging to idealist baggage, privileged the experience of heterogeneous, dangerous excremental matter and its psychological counterparts rather than erecting a materialist metaphysics. Such socially excluded base material ranges from actual excrement, death, and decaying cadavers to mental and cultural phenomena seen as subjectively identical with it, including “ritual cannibalism; the sacrifice of animal gods...religious ecstasy; the identical attitude toward shit, gods, and cadavers.”⁴⁰ In Bataille’s view, what unites such phenomena is the universal treatment of them by all human societies as foreign bodies that must be controlled by expulsion or absorption, by excretion or appropriation. This human tendency lies at the heart of religious myth and ritual. Thus, according to one of his most prominent latter-day disciples, “violence has historically been lodged at the heart of the sacred...to be genuine, the very thought of the creative must simultaneously be an experience of death.”⁴¹ Art itself originated among children and primitive peoples (he retained, like Breton, the primitivist equation of the two) not from a will to creation but a sadistic urge to distort and destroy the human image.⁴² In this anti-aesthetic philosophy, art is only useful insofar as it mutilates and dislocates form and embodies the hideous and the base, a quality Bataille celebrated in Picasso’s painting and in Dali’s *Lugubrious Game* in the essay of the same title.⁴³

For Bataille, sacrifice, as a transgression of prohibitions against homicide, leads to a collective compromise formation combining guilt and an ecstasy shattering the normal boundaries of self and experience. As Esther Pasztor, one of the few contemporary Mesoamerican art historians to acknowledge and address Bataille’s views on pre-Columbian ritual, summarizes: “Bataille argued that the phenomenon of sacrifice makes sense psychologically only if guilt is involved; sacrifice is a transgression of the normal rules of life that include the high value placed on life itself...According to him, participating in a shared act of guilty violence can bring victim, sacrificer, and witnesses together in a shared state of consciousness.”⁴⁴ Art and sacrifice are intimately and dynamically linked, as in the case of Van Gogh’s self-destructive acts.⁴⁵ It is clear how such an aesthetic, as set forth in writings

roughly contemporary with “Vanished America,” explain Bataille’s enthusiasm about Aztec sacrifice and his celebration of the “hideous” images of Nahuatl deities. But the partial attention to and subjective judgments of aspects of this complex culture are basically the same as were used by four centuries of apologists for genocidal colonialism to demonize the ancient Mexicans. The partial focus of the traditional negative trope is retained by Bataille. He has assigned a positive value to it in opposition to the European orthodoxies of his day, a common strategy for modernist primitivists. The pieces take different places on the board, and the rules of the game is revalued, but the pieces remain the same. He has not rejected Torquemada, just stood him on his head. This strategy fits well within what Tythacott calls the “reverse racism” of Surrealist primitivism.⁴⁶

In the realm of political economy, Bataille’s alternative to orthodox Marxist theory is represented for the 1930s by his 1933 essay “The Notion of Expenditure,” where he separates human consumptive behavior into the categories of productive vs. unproductive expenditures.⁴⁷ He counts among the latter “war, cults, games, spectacles, arts...all these represent activities which at least in primitive [sic] circumstances, have no end beyond themselves...a group characterized by the fact that in each case the accent is placed on a loss that must be as great as possible for that activity to take on its true meaning.”⁴⁸ He notes especially that “Cults require a bloody wasting of men and animals in sacrifice. In the etymological sense of the word, sacrifice is nothing other than the production of sacred things...it appears that sacred things are constituted by an operation of loss.”⁴⁹ Proletarian revolution also will, or should, be a manifestation of expenditure on a colossal scale akin to Aztec sacrifice, as the oppressed destroy a system based on hoarding and accumulation in an eruption of profligate destruction: “the poor have no other way of re-entering the circle of power than through the revolutionary destruction of the classes occupying that circle—in other words, through a bloody and by no means limited social expenditure...Class struggle...becomes the grandest form of social expenditure when it is taken up again and developed, this time on the part of the workers, and on such a scale that it threatens the very existence of the masters.”⁵⁰ In his later work, which in its themes and its debt to the work of Marcel Mauss on the gift continues preoccupations already in evidence in the 1930s, he carries forward this economic theory. But after World War II and Bataille’s abandonment of hope in proletarian self-emancipation, Bataille explicitly presents Aztec sacrifice as an exemplar of destructive expenditure.⁵¹ But he rips Aztec sacrifice from its meaning in cultural context—as part of a reciprocal exchange between gods and humans to maintain life and forestall the destruction of the world—to make it into profligacy with no point beyond destruction. As Goldhammer notes, Bataille’s notion of sacrifice is

quite different from that of the Aztecs—or almost any other traditional religious practices—because it involves an irrevocable loss with no gain for the sacrificer in return.⁵² In celebrating Aztec violence, Bataille inflicts a violence of his own on its meaning and context.

While Land suggests that “what unfolds beneath Bataille’s scrutiny cannot be an apology for the Aztecs,” the exuberant tone and detailed descriptions of Bataille’s prose whenever he discusses Aztec sacrifice, suggests otherwise.⁵³ His personal interest in the subject of human sacrifice allegedly led to plans to take up the practice in the present. Stoekl and Surya, drawing on the recollections of Bataille’s colleague Caillois, report a claim that Bataille was interested in putting his interest into concrete action with his *Acephale* group in the late 1930s, but never brought the plan to fruition (allegedly, a willing victim was available but no executioners).⁵⁴ Whether or not this tale is apocryphal, it does reflect on Bataille’s personality as perceived by Caillois. The contribution of Bataille’s personal preoccupations and conflicts as reflected in his collective oeuvre to his fixation on Aztec sacrifice and celebratory revaluation of the old negative stereotypes is strongly suggested. Richardson, who explicitly critiques Bataille’s theories as grounded in misconceptions about Aztec society—misconceptions identical with aspects of the traditional myth of Native American savagery—calls Bataille’s image of Aztec civilization “a vulgar popularization fueled by his own wish-fulfillment.”⁵⁵ Certainly, his praise of Aztec sacrifice is of one piece with the preoccupations of his other writings of 1927-1930, like “The Pineal Eye” and “The Jesuve” where fantasies, themes and images of sacrificial death, the power of the sun, decomposition, and ordure mingle in exultant glee.⁵⁶ Even the flies from “Vanished America” return in “The Pineal Eye” as an agent of the sun, facilitating the process of decay.

In a similar vein, Surya suggests that “The Aztec people gave him the opportunity to consider [his obsessions with the sun, blood, sacrifice, death] in another way, from another angle, legitimized by the ethnographic pretext.”⁵⁷ Yet at the same time, Bataille’s preoccupations harmonized with similar tendencies in the French anthropological thought of his day: “Speaking of this people in a way that science would be unable to find fault with, Bataille was still speaking, in an exemplary way, of himself: ‘doubtless a more blood-spattered eccentricity has never been conceived by human folly.’” While Surya is surely wrong in making the monolithic and ahistorical blanket statement that “Anthropology does not contradict the main lines he opened,” and it is certainly open to debate whether Bataille was “ahead of his time”—he rather seems as much constrained by it—some of his contemporaries found merit in this work. Thus, according to Surya, Métraux found “real insight” in “Vanished America”. “Insight, for Métraux, was required to see the Aztec gods

as ‘tricksters, mischievously fond of practical jokes, often as whimsical as they were cruel.’⁵⁸ ‘By a sort of curious intuition, he also proved to be the precursor of a whole school of anthropologists who sought to define ethnos, in other words the hierarchy of social values which gives each civilisation its own values.’⁵⁹ If Bataille’s obsessions led to his manipulation of traditional tropes of pre-Columbian America, he was also a man of his times and reflected the anthropology of his day, itself heir to contradictory historic views of Native American culture.⁶⁰

But Bataille’s darkly ecstatic vision of the Aztecs’ alleged orgiastic expenditures through sacrifice must also be viewed in the immediate political context of the late 1920s and 1930s. The spread and triumph of fascism alarmed Bataille to form the organization *Contra-Attaque*, a far-Left antifascist tendency, mostly armchair in nature, alongside Caillois, the quasi-Trotskyist dissident Communist Boris Souvarine, and erstwhile rival Breton.⁶¹ A journal of the same name served as its short-lived organ. Bataille at this time misguidedly attempted to appropriate those aspects of sacrificial violence and ritual he saw as underlying the success of the Nazis for the Left. This led to accusations that Bataille was creating a “Left Fascism” or “sur-fascisme”, accusations later perpetuated by Habermas and other members of the Frankfurt School.⁶² The emphasis on violence seems to have contributed to Breton’s withdrawal from the group in 1936, and ultimately apparently frightened Bataille himself, who eventually distanced himself from these positions.⁶³ But *Contra-Attaque*’s “cult of force” harmonizes with Bataille’s interest in the sacred warfare and sacrificial practices of the Aztecs, as stressed in the traditional “demonic view” at the expense of other aspects of Aztec culture.⁶⁴

If it is constructed out of the building blocks of the demonizing colonial view of Native Americans, Bataille’s celebration of the Aztecs also partakes at the same time of the romantic vision as well. As Noys observes, Bataille appears “nostalgic for a past that is supposed to have achieved a sacred relationship with death, where in the act of sacrifice we found ‘a primal continuity linking us with everything that is.’”⁶⁵ This seems to be Bataille’s version of utopian “harmony with nature” primitivism given a unique twist from the dark side. This point is supported by Goldhammer’s reading of Bataille’s political theories: “Both ethnographic evidence and Bataille’s reliance on Marxist thought during the early 1930s contribute to his retention of an essentialist view of human nature. Bataille nostalgically maintains that ancient societies with well-established sacrificial practices were better able than modern societies to provide their inhabitants with outlets of sumptuary loss conducive to human nature. What is more, Bataille agrees with both Marx and Nietzsche that modern society is stripping human beings of capacities essential to a healthy state of being. Thus a return to unproductive sacrificial loss

allows human beings and the proletariat in particular, to experience the accursed share (le parte maudite) of their nature, which has been reduced to servility.”⁶⁶ It is in retrospect ironic that Bataille seems to have envisioned sacrificial violence as a way of overcoming the tyranny of the modern capitalist state and its apotheosis in fascist ideology.⁶⁷ Current anthropological and historical interpretations stress the political function of Aztec sacrificial practices as “a form of external propaganda to demonstrate to other kingdoms the awesome power of the gods and the state,” as well as “propaganda by terror” aimed at keeping the Aztec king’s own subjects in line.⁶⁸

Bataille’s interest in Mesoamerican sacrificial practices is reflected in his selection of works by other writers for publication in *Documents* and may have inspired the form and content of the work of at least one artist who moved in the same circles at the time. Hervé’s essay “Sacrifices humains du centre-Amérique,” is an attempt to present a psychological as well as ethnographic account of the experience of Aztec sacrificial rites, illustrated with scenes from both colonial Aztec and Mixteca-Puebla codices.⁶⁹ However, Hervé seems to be more conscious of the bias of Conquest-era European accounts of Aztec practices than his editor, observing that the exaggerated attitudes of the conquistadors toward Aztec sacrifice served to help legitimize their own cruelties during the Conquest.⁷⁰ Ades notes that Hervé reproduces a contemporary but erroneous interpretation of the scenes on pages 15-16 of Codex Borgia as sacrificial rituals, whereas more recent considerations of the iconography of this section read the images of deities applying bone awls to the eyes of smaller human figures as symbolic of creation and birth, using the metaphor of carving sculpture, even though another recent analysis retains the sacrificial interpretation.⁷¹ Whatever the meaning of the images in their original context, the appeal of these scenes suggestive of enucleation to an editor who was the pseudonymous author of *Story of the Eye* is obvious. In the *Documents* dictionary entry for “Poterie,” a Mixtec vessel from Oaxaca is reproduced alongside Peruvian pottery and an example from Versailles, collapsing the privileging of French and generally “Western” productions by this juxtaposition.⁷²

Krauss attempted to trace the influence of Bataille’s celebration of ancient Mesoamerican ritual violence in the forms and conceptual underpinnings of Giacometti’s sculptural work of the early 1930s, when he moved between the Breton and Bataille factions of Surrealism. She finds in the sharp, phallic wedge of “Suspended Ball” an echo of a common form seen in a Late Classic (600-900 CE) stone object from Veracruz, the so-called palma, a protective device and counterweight worn by players of the Mesoamerican ball game.⁷³ The game itself would indeed have been of interest to Bataille because of its inextricable connection

to human sacrifice, to which it was frequently a prelude, a more likely basis for affinity than the “accounts of bloody wounds caused by the ball and deaths of players in the court” invoked by Krauss.⁷⁴ As typical of Krauss’s approach, however, no specific evidence in a more traditional art historical sense, in the form of letters or statements by Giacometti, is provided in support of her claim, which nonetheless is plausible on circumstantial grounds. She illustrates Giacometti’s claimed familiarity with pre-Columbian art by reference to an earlier sculpture, *Crouching Man*, given “an early Mexican connection” by her but without a specific analogy. On purely formal grounds, I posit as a possible source the squatting Terminal Classic Maya “standard bearer” from Chichen Itza also used by Moore as a model for his *Seated Figure* of 1930.⁷⁵ Other equally possible formal sources include a Mixtec penate figure collected by Désiré Charnay in the 1880s, which passed through the Ethnographic Museum at the Trocadéro to its successor institution the Musée de l’Homme, institutional niche of Bataille’s anthropological associates, and Aztec stone figures of a common type which had earlier served as inspiration for Derain.⁷⁶ Again, as with Krauss’s assertions, these suggestions must remain speculative in the absence of documentary evidence. Krauss also cites Giacometti’s *Head* of 1925 as another possible example of Mesoamerican quotations in his oeuvre, but perhaps a more suggestive example is its successor, *Man’s Head*, reproduced as a photograph in *Minotaure* in 1934.⁷⁷ This work has been connected by Bonnefoy and Stich with the infamous crystal skulls, attributed at the time to the pre-Columbian Aztecs but now considered to be mostly post-Conquest pastiches.⁷⁸ Stich’s Fig. 75 reproduces an example from the Musée de l’Homme, formerly in the Ethnographic Museum at the Trocadéro, again another possible link to the circle around Bataille. But pre-Columbian visual sources need not be limited to these artifacts: Mesoamerican art is replete with skulls and skeletal deities.⁷⁹

Krauss interprets Giacometti’s *Hour of the Traces* (1930) in light of Bataille’s views of Mesoamerican cultures, which provide “a possible reading of *The Hour of the Traces* as the ecstatic image of human sacrifice. The figure at the top of the work whose rictus is either that of extreme ecstasy or pain (or, as Bataille would have it, both) appears posed on the altar, below which is the form of a disembodied heart.”⁸⁰ She finds a possible visual analogue in a photograph of an Aztec pyramid at Castillo de Teayo in Veracruz, surmounted by a pole and thatch structure, suggestive of the architectural forms in the Giacometti work, that she terms an “altar.”⁸¹ In fact, from the accompanying photograph, Krauss’s “altar” is the ruins of the original stone temple in the process of restoration, topped by a modern thatched reconstruction of its perishable roof.⁸² Perhaps Giacometti profited by a similar misreading of the image, though again direct documentary evidence is lacking.

Artaud: Ancient Mexico as Font of Hermetic Mystery

In his 1927 rejoinder to the Surrealist group which had just expelled him for his refusal to support the movement's turn toward the Communist Party, Antonin Artaud denounces proletarian revolution as "meaning nothing to the Absolute."⁸³ It is in that transcendental sphere that Artaud looked for salvation, and at this stage of his tortured trajectory, it was in myth and occultism that he discerned the potential keys for unlocking access to the experience of ultimate reality.⁸⁴ Artaud seems to have derived much of his knowledge of Asian religions from the writings of René Guenon, who suggested that a secret universal teaching underlay the diverse manifestations of the world's religions.⁸⁵ Artaud linked the myths of pre-Columbian Mexico to both Eastern religions and the western mystery traditions represented by alchemy and the Kabbalah, as lost paths to liberation from the alienation of modern society.⁸⁶ After his incarceration at Rodez, he would vehemently reject occultism in favor of an idiosyncratic delusional system, but in the 1930s it drew him to embrace Mesoamerican mythology and ultimately make his own pilgrimage to Mexico.

In *The Theater and Its Double*, Artaud scripted a scenario for a mass spectacle based on the Spanish Conquest of Mexico which makes clear his adoption of the "Golden Age" model of Mesoamerican civilization:

The Conquest of Mexico...revives in a brutal and implacable way the ever active fatuousness of Europe. It permits her idea of her own superiority to be deflated...It corrects the false conceptions the Occident has somehow formed concerning paganism and certain natural religions, and it underlines with burning emotion the splendor and forever immediate poetry of the old metaphysical sources on which these religions are built...It contrasts the tyrannical anarchy of the colonizers to the profound moral harmony of the as yet uncolonized. Further, by contrast with the disordered European monarchy of the time, based upon the crudest and most unjust material principles, it illuminates the organic hierarchy of the Aztec monarchy established on indisputable spiritual principles.⁸⁷

It is not that he sees the Aztecs as pacifists, as some versions of the Noble Savage myth envisioned, or indeed as the Classic Maya were viewed by established archaeological scholarship during much of the twentieth century.⁸⁸ The scenario is full of violence. Like Bataille, Artaud embraced an aesthetic of shock, a far more visceral variant of Breton's "convulsive beauty."⁸⁹ But for Artaud during this period, ritual violence opens up paths to the truly transcendent, beyond the materialist mysticism of Bataille to the spiritual Absolute of the hermetic philosophers and

Asian mystics.

In a letter of 1935 soliciting financial support for his voyage to Mexico, Artaud alludes to the Aztec deities “Tezctlipoca[sic]-Huichiboloch[sic]-Quetzalcoatl” as “No theogeny...more effervescent and efficient.”⁹⁰ He presents his intended trip as a quest for arcane knowledge:

We have much to learn from the secrets of Mexican astrology, as read and interpreted on the spot through hieroglyphs not yet deciphered. Much to learn from a kind of diffuse consciousness—which there belongs to everyone...If the civilization of Mexico offers a perfect example of the magic spirit of primitive civilizations, we shall extract from it all forms of primitive and magic culture that such a civilization can furnish.⁹¹

In another letter, he states that the essence of Surrealism is “nothing else than the old animist spirit of the Mexican totems, and the high magical poetry and metaphysic of the Popol Vuh, of the Pyramids of Chichen Itza, of the Mayan Hieroglyphs.” He proposes to lecture in Mexico on “Poetic and magical spirit of the Popol Vuh compared [sic] Zend-Avesta, Bible, Zohar, Sefer Yetzirah, Vedas, Raja Yoga, and will end with Universal Myth Cure...”⁹² Both the influence of Guenon in discerning a common wisdom behind historically and geographically distinct esoteric traditions and texts, and Artaud’s therapeutic hopes in recovering it, are readily apparent. In a similar spirit, he saw Maya mythology as identical to Hindu mysticism, reflecting the belief in a universal lost knowledge at the time not only argued by Guenon, but espoused by the Theosophists and their various sectarian offshoots. Such a lumping of Mesoamerican traditions with the “mysteries of the East” continues the romantic tradition represented by Le Plongeon, who connected the Maya with the Sphinx of Egypt (and later Freemasonry) via the fabled continent of Atlantis.⁹³

In his personal notebooks, Artaud penned the following lines in anticipation of his Mexican voyage:

A sensibility of the flayed

Where the body is blessed
It is there one finds the soul.

The eagle and the serpent.

The plumed serpent,

The memory of a sorcerer writer,
a bloody garment.

When the past comes back into the light of day.

The day of resurrection.

When the gods descend to earth.

How myths are restored.

To be invited by the Mexicans.

Awaken love the ancient invisible magic,
The tamer of epidemics,
To heal the catastrophes of heaven.
Voyage to the land of speaking blood.⁹⁴

There appears to be an allusion to the flayed god Xipe Totec in the opening line, and Artaud proceeds to invoke the Aztec myth of the foundation of Mexico City, and Quetzalcoatl, equating his coming voyage with a revival of traditional wisdom capable of renewing humanity. In an essentialist fashion, he draws no distinction between the Mesoamerican past and the modern country he is about to visit—a reflection of notions of the “timeless primitive.” This stance is reflected in other writings of this period: “The Indian blood of Mexico preserves an ancient secret of race, and before the race is lost, I think we must obtain from it the power of this ancient secret...The rationalist culture of Europe has failed and I have come to the earth of Mexico to see the traces of magic culture which can still spring forth from the power of the Indian soil.”⁹⁵

This lack of clear demarcation between pre-Columbian past and the Mexico of 1936 is not purely a product of Artaud’s subjective fantasy. One will find similar essentialist notions in Breton’s writings on his Mexican voyage several years after Artaud’s, as discussed below. Besides the context of European varieties of primitivism, it must also be seen in light of developments in Mexico itself. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 had involved the mobilization and self-activity of indigenous peoples in far greater numbers than any previous social movement.⁹⁶ One of the results of this social fact was the adoption of the traditional European utopian image of ancient Mexican civilization by the proponents of indigenismo.

This movement is divided by Keen into two broad tendencies. One idealized the Aztec empire as a political utopia destroyed by colonialism, which could serve as a model for an independent socialist Mexico. The other, far less influential, was mystical, not unlike Artaud's views.⁹⁷ Artaud, learning of indigenist trends at a distance, mistakenly believed that they "signaled a return to the mythological concerns of the Indian Civilizations which had existed before the Spanish Conquest."⁹⁸

His expectations would be dashed by the reality he encountered. He found the Mexican intellectuals he encountered imbued not with revived Aztec paganism, but espousing the Marxism which had led to his rupture with the Surrealists. He admitted the disparity between distant perceptions and reality in one of his Mexican lectures, putting it in the third person. "One can almost say that Europe sees the Mexicans of today dressed in the costumes of their ancestors in the act of actually sacrificing to the sun on the steps of the pyramid of Teotihuacan. I assure you that I am scarcely joking. In any case, people heard about the vast theatrical reconstructions that took place on this same pyramid, and they believed in good faith that there was in Mexico a well-defined anti-European movement, just as they believed that modern Mexico wanted to build its revolution on the foundation of a return to the pre-Cortes tradition. A fantasy of this kind is being circulated in the most advanced intellectual circles of Paris"—by which he means his, and perhaps, Breton's circle as well.⁹⁹

This state of affairs did not stop Artaud from attempting to proselytize the Mexican students and officials he addressed to adopt his views of what their relation to the indigenous past ought to be. But while he was well-received, his pro-Indian polemics, "inflammatory appeals for Mexican youth to abandon Marxism and embody a revolutionary movement that would turn back time to before the Spanish conquest...a revolution of magic and anatomical transformations," fell largely on deaf ears.¹⁰⁰ He delivered a lecture entitled "Man Against Destiny," denouncing dialectical materialism as "an invention of European consciousness."¹⁰¹ To it he opposed "Moslem esoterism and Brahman esoterism... the Jewish esoterism of the Zohar and of the Sefer Yetzirah, and here in Mexico there is the Chilam Balam and the Popol Vuh. Who does not see that all these esoterisms are the same, and mean spiritually the same thing? They express a single idea...organic, harmonious, occult—an idea which reconciles man with nature and with life. The signs of these esoterisms are identical."¹⁰² The utopian, Golden Age, trope of ancient Mexico is very clear here in its occult variant. In another address, he invoked the "ancient vital relations of man with nature that were established by the old Toltecs, the old Mayas...this contribution of capital importance which Mexico can bring us today

consists precisely in the discovery of those analogical forces thanks to which the organism of man functions in harmony with the organism of nature.”¹⁰³ He thus attributes a version of the hermetic axiom “as above, so below” and the alchemical and Kabbalistic law of correspondences to the Maya, as exemplified in his discussion of a series of sculptures from the Cross Group at Palenque, portraying scenes of royal succession centering around the axis mundi of the Mesoamerican cosmos, the World Tree as such:

The Cross of Palenque perfectly embodies this two fold action. Here, inscribed in stone, is the hieroglyphic representation of a single energy which, through the cross of space, that is by passing through the four cardinal points, moves from man to the animal and to the plants.¹⁰⁴

In fact, Artaud in some ways is here not far off the mark: the World Tree is a conduit bridging the levels of a universe divided in Maya myth into Upper, Middle and Underworld, and divided into quarters by the four cardinal directions.¹⁰⁵ Along this axis, according to the ruling ideology of the Classic Maya, shamanic rulers mediated with gods and ancestors to the benefit of their subjects, and souls leaving and entering bodies traveled in and out of the terrestrial realm.¹⁰⁶ Yet, in the evocation of energy and the comparison to alchemical philosophy, this passage can be also read as squarely within the French fringe literature on the pre-Columbian of the late nineteenth century: Le Plongeon had both attributed mystical significance to Maya art and interpreted linear designs in Maya architectural sculpture as reflecting ancient knowledge of telegraphy.

A claim has been made that Artaud’s encounter with prehispanic art during his Mexican sojourn is echoed in some of the drawings produced both before and after his protracted hospitalization. His “spells” of 1944, aimed at providing magical defense against hallucinated demons and imagined persecutors, feature skulls “Inscribed at the center of . . . geometric architecture, as though imprisoned,” for which Beaumelle finds a “multiplicity of references . . . in the immured figures of sacred pre-Columbian sanctuaries.”¹⁰⁷ However, this link, based purely on formal similarities, is tenuous, given the availability of other, more local visual sources (the Celtic temple with enshrined skulls at Marseilles, as she acknowledges) and the universality of skulls as emblems of death.

Breton and After: Parisians and Exiles In Search of Myth

The mainstream or orthodox Surrealist circle around André Breton evinced an interest in pre-Columbian Mexican art almost from the movement’s inception in

the early 1920s, but for the first decade and a half of its existence, this fascination expressed itself mostly through collecting rather than literary reflections or visual allusions. Breton himself had amassed a collection of sufficient quality and quantity by 1928 that he would lend some of his Mesoamerican works to the Musée d'Ethnographie show that ironically served as inspiration for Bataille's "Vanished America."¹⁰⁸ But both Breton and Paul Eluard were soon forced to put their collections of pre-Columbian, Native American, and Oceanic art on the auction block in 1931, in the wake of the Great Depression. Tythacott reproduces a page from the catalogue to the Breton/Eluard sale of 1931, showing both pre-Columbian and Northwest Coast stone carvings. The former appear to include a Mixtec penate (top, center), three Teotihuacan and one Mezcala mask (left) and an Aztec seated figure. The complete inventory included Zapotec urns.¹⁰⁹ Despite this setback, the Breton circle's passion for acquiring Mesoamerican art continued throughout the "pope's" life. Even in exile during World War II, Surrealists continued to collect in New York, buying Teotihuacan masks with Claude Lévi-Strauss from a Third Avenue curiosity shop. Tythacott's Figure 7.1 reprints a 1961 photo of Breton in his study with a Teotihuacan mask.¹¹⁰

However, although pre-Columbian objects were displayed alongside Tanguy's paintings in a 1927 exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste and Breton may have made possible passing reference to a pre-Columbian figure in his collection in *Nadja*, it was not until his visit to Mexico in 1938 that Mesoamerican art took on a more prominent role in his writings.¹¹¹ Partly inspired by Artaud's journey, partly in search of new sources of creative energy for the movement, Breton's voyage was heavily political in motive. Having broken decisively with the PCF, he sought to preserve Surrealism's Marxist political commitment by drawing closer to Trotsky, whom Breton had idealized since the early 1920s. "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art," written by Breton, Trotsky, and Breton's host Diego Rivera, but signed only by Breton and Rivera, was the result of this pilgrimage. The trip was also highlighted by Breton's "discovery" of Kahlo for a European audience, leading to a Paris exhibition of her works, alongside pre-Columbian and folk art, the following year. In response to his encounter with Mexico, he produced an essay, "Souvenir du Mexique" (1938) in *Minotaure*, and a pamphlet, "Mexique" (1939), to accompany the exhibition. He also refers to pre-Columbian art and architecture in his account of his visit to Trotsky, where Aztec statuary set up around the old Bolshevik's house by Rivera, and the pyramid of Xochicalco, which Breton climbed in Trotsky's company, seem to take on the reflected glow of the halo-like aura with which Breton has endowed his exiled hero.¹¹² Besides the presence of Trotsky, Breton was attracted by the Mexican Revolution as the potential basis for a new political myth to replace

the tarnished image of the already, in Trotsky's term, "bureaucratically degenerated" USSR.¹¹³ The Mexican government had recently nationalized the petroleum industry, and this, alongside its granting asylum to Trotsky and its hostility toward the Catholic Church, made Mexico into a revolutionary paradise in the dreams of the poet. The mass participation of indigenous peoples in the Mexican Revolution enabled Breton to wed primitivist to state socialist ideas of utopia.

It is therefore no surprise that Breton speaks of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican art and architecture in romantic terms in the essay recounting his journey. He invokes images of "pyramids made of various types of stone" and tombs "charging the air with electricity". Like Bataille, but in a far more idealizing mode, he is impressed by Aztec deity images. "Mexico...will continue to evolve under the protection of Xochipilli, god of flowers and lyric poetry, and of Coatlicue, goddess of the earth and of violent death, whose effigies dominate in pathos and intensity all the others." It is the colossal image of the goddess in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City that awes him the most, with its severed head replaced by serpents and its skirt of snakes with skull belt ornament. She receives the veneration of "the Mexican peasants who are its most frequent visitors," "trading winged words and hoarse shouts." In the juxtaposition of death and fertility imagery in this deity image, Breton sought to see the Surrealist marvelous, the juxtaposition of opposites, and the final goal of a surreality where all opposites are reconciled. "This possibility of the reconciliation of life and death is doubtless the principal attraction that Mexico disposes."¹¹⁴ Here Breton imposes his own hermetic via Hegelian anticipation of a union of opposites as a teleological Absolute on to very different Mesoamerican ideas about the reciprocity of sacrifice and the bounty of the gods, and the dual nature of a continually fluxing and dynamic universe. This juxtaposition of the images of peasants with the Aztec monument expands this mystical utopian view of the pre-Columbian to the political.

Breton's view of the Aztecs was shaped by the politicized indigenism he encountered in the Mexico of the late 1930s. Breton's host, Rivera, was also keenly interested in the dualities of Mesoamerican mythology and referenced them in his own work. Rivera also conceived of the Aztecs in politically utopian terms, neglecting their imperialism and militarism.¹¹⁵ Barbara Braun's critique of Rivera applies equally to Breton: "in his call for a renewal of the Aztec state, which was grounded in authoritarianism and militarism, in the new Mexican nation, Rivera failed to recognize that the monstrous deity images he used in the murals expressed Aztec power relations as well as philosophic concepts about natural forces... The monolithic Coatlicue is a product of the imperial Aztec state, which validated itself by representing its indivisible connection with the sacred universe through ancient

cults addressed to natural phenomena. Her gruesome imagery reinforced the state's demand for bloodthirsty sacrifice...which it needed for the integration of conquered peoples into its society."¹¹⁶ Rivera's, like Breton's, political idealization derives proximally from their Leninism: the authoritarian state as agent of social utopia, confused in Breton's outlook with libertarian ideals of freedom. The contradiction in using the Aztec state as inspiration for what ultimately are anarchist or libertarian communist goals and ideals resembles the same paradox noted above in the case of Bataille. But it has its ultimate roots in the idealizing version of the indigenous Americans in early colonial thought.¹¹⁷

Breton's perceptions of Mexico, past and present, seem filtered through clichéd images of the country, with a strongly essentialist and static notion of national culture.¹¹⁸ This romanticized racism shows through most clearly in his 1938 essay on Kahlo for her exhibition at the Julian Levy Gallery in New York, where he treats the artist with the same sort of admiring objectification as if she were another pre-Columbian sculpture to add to his collection. Linked to the timeless land and its fauna, and to a romanticized, equally timeless notion of indigenous peoples, she becomes an artifact or part of the landscape: "I had never heard the immemorial songs of the Zapotec musicians...I had never held in my hand a lump of that red earth from which had emerged the statuettes of Colima which are half-woman, half-swan, their make-up already beautifully applied by nature, and lastly, I had not yet set eyes on Frida Kahlo de Rivera, resembling these statuettes in her bearing and adorned, too, like a fairy-tale princess, with magic spells at her finger-tips, an apparition in the flash of light of the quetzal bird which scatters opals among the rocks as it flies away."¹¹⁹ The inclusion of pre-Columbian art and Mexican folk art—comprising two-thirds of the displays—alongside Kahlo's canvases in his "Mexique" exhibition presented this Mexican variant of the myth of the timeless primitive in concretized form. In a brief but perceptive analysis of Breton's attitude, Winter notes the presence of some evidence of self-awareness of his colonialist vision, which however, seems to have been rather weak and fleeting: "Confessing his own 'imperious' vision, he nonetheless contrasted it with the imperialism of the West. But his own self-examination did little to prevent his use of Mexico in the service of Surrealism."¹²⁰ She observes that in his essay on Kahlo, Breton "treated Frida as a mystical being, another object of his desire and imagination, much to her displeasure...Claiming Frida's paintings for Surrealism..."—the way, one might add, colonial explorers claimed indigenous lands for their mother countries.¹²¹ No wonder Kahlo referred to the Surrealists as "coocoo lunatic sons of bitches" and parasites of the bourgeoisie.¹²² Breton was later (1950) to frame Tamayo's work in a similarly essentialist fashion.¹²³

The political utopian ideal of Mexico for the Surrealists was to be crushed soon after Breton's voyage. Breton had already observed the nationalist regime's penchant for censorship in the artistic as well as the political sphere, and denounced it accordingly. In 1940, Trotsky was assassinated, and by 1941, the Surrealists around Breton were forced into exile by the German occupation, some (Peret, Paalen, Onslow Ford, and, ultimately, Carrington) fleeing to Mexico. The prehispanic Mexican past remained a source of inspiration for many of them, but as the Fourth International fractured into squabbling sects and fascism triumphed in Europe, the interest in politics almost completely gave way to a focus on mythology not dissimilar to the stance for which Artaud had been expelled from the movement. The Breton group and its new recruits became increasingly preoccupied with alchemical and mystical traditions, withdrawing from the political. In 1942, Breton wrote his abbreviated "Third Manifesto" on the "Great Invisible Ones" suggesting as an organizing myth for society belief in an order of beings beyond the visible world, which Golan and Godoy Divan interpret as reflective of the exiles' alienation from the closing avenues for radical political activity.¹²⁴ The British Surrealist group had long since turned away from Freud to Jung, and a similar interest in archetypes was developing among the future Abstract Expressionists in New York.¹²⁵ With the convergence of these factors, "By the early 1940s, myth and the marvelous were one...Trips to Mexico...and other exotic lands combined with reexamination of primitive magic and ritual and alchemical and occult theory to produce an idea of myth that diverges significantly from that of the 1930s."¹²⁶ Myth and mysticism became an alternative, not an adjunct, to Marxism, as the Surrealists "explored mythology to replace 'the God that failed'."¹²⁷

It is in this context that an increased interest in Mesoamerican art developed among the later Surrealists. Victor Brauner's study of the Mixtec codices reflected in the forms of such works as *Prelude to a Civilization*.¹²⁸ Onslow Ford, an ardent admirer of Jung, includes what appears to be a Teotihuacan talud-tablero architectural profile as one of the geometric elements in his painting *The Circuit of the Light Knight Through the Dark Queen*.¹²⁹ Peret wrote a text accompanying a collection of photographs of pre-Columbian art from the National Museum of Anthropology, in which he compares the Maya to the Greeks (a standard trope of the day) and the Aztecs to the Egyptians. These comparisons of ancient American civilizations to the idealized dawn of "Western" civilization had been hackneyed standards of the romantic colonial myth for four centuries. In a similar spirit, he equates Aztec myth with the unfettered cognition of children and the insane as potential sources of renewal for a world desiccated by rationalism. As Mario Schreiber sums it up, Peret's "theory is founded on the marvelous and the esoteric."¹³⁰

The fusion of mystical primitivism with veneration of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican art continued among the Mexican exiles over the succeeding decades. Carrington painted the mural *The Magical World of the Mayas* in 1963 for the National Museum, a romanticized view of a contemporary Maya village.¹³¹ Although Carrington's work was commissioned by her friend the eminent archaeologist Ignacio Bernal, and Carrington participated in ethnographic fieldwork in Chiapas alongside Gertrude Blom as preliminary research, it was published in book form alongside an essay by Carrington's associate Laurette Séjourné.¹³² Séjourné, wife of the Russian anarchist turned Bolshevik Victor Serge, arrived with her husband in Mexico alongside exiled Surrealists in 1941, and went on to attract notoriety as a self-styled archaeologist trading in facile Jungian interpretations of the art of Teotihuacan.¹³³ Séjourné, who rationalized the presence of bleeding hearts on knives in Teotihuacan frescos as symbolizing the mystical sacrifice of the ego to God rather than the product of a more literal bodily dismemberment, has become a minor icon in New Age circles, her writings promoted by Jose Arguelles, who brought us the abortive apocalypse of the "Harmonic Convergence" in the 1980s. Séjourné's interests and ideas harmonized well with Carrington's explorations of alchemy and a romantic view, derived from her Irish mother, of Celtic lore, though Carrington consciously avoided equating Celtic and Mesoamerican mythology in the universalizing fashion of an Artaud.¹³⁴ However, in her 1977 painting *I Took My Way Down*, she juxtaposes an image of a Mesoamerican pyramid decorated with skulls with her own ideas about the afterlife derived from Western esoteric traditions.¹³⁵

The Paradoxes of Paalen

In the writings of Paalen from the period following the Surrealists' New World exile, we find both perhaps the most self-conscious effort on the part of any Surrealist to recognize and transcend the primitivist tropes through which the movement's perceptions of prehispanic Mesoamerica were filtered, and yet a failure to completely break free of this legacy. Winter's biography provides a remarkable portrait of an intensely divided personality, and Paalen's views on Mesoamerican and Native North American cultures represent just one arena in which his ambivalences manifested. Winter traces the uneasy coexistence in Paalen's thought of two formative traditions, German Romanticism and science.¹³⁶ This dichotomy shows clearly in his approach to Mesoamerica, and to "non-Western" art in general.

On the one hand, Paalen was highly critical of orthodox Surrealism's shortcomings in the movement's understanding of the ethnographic contexts for the "primitive" art it extolled. In particular, he was aware to some degree of the problems of the evolutionist models of cultural development which figures like

Breton retained, merely inverting the values assigned to modern European vs. “primitive” cultures. Paalen was familiar with the work of Franz Boaz, who rejected the traditional evolutionism of European anthropology in favor of a relativism which insisted that each society—and its art—needed to be studied in light of its own social structures and values rather than through norms based on concepts of European culture as the teleological endpoint for all human development.¹³⁷ Like Bataille, Paalen counted some of the leading anthropologists of his day as close associates, including members of Bataille’s circle. Thus Paalen was in contact with Rivet, who provided him with a letter of recommendation for his ethnographic and collecting tour of the Northwest Coast in 1939.¹³⁸ Later, Paalen published a review of Rivet’s book *Les origines de l’homme Américain* in *DYN*, a journal the very purposes of which included an attempt to counter the deficits of orthodox Surrealist ethnographies.¹³⁹ To this end, like *Documents*, *DYN* included articles from archaeologists and anthropologists alongside the literary, artistic and philosophical contributions of Surrealists and members of the emerging New York School.¹⁴⁰ His intention, as boldly stated in the preface to the famed Amerindian issue of *DYN* “would be the negation of all exoticism. For it presupposes an understanding that abolishes the frontiers which are unfortunately still emphasized by the quest for the picturesquely local. . . .”¹⁴¹ Here he recognizes the problem of the Eurocentric exoticism clouding Surrealist perceptions of indigenous cultures, raised briefly but then ignored by Breton, and unseen by Artaud and, paradoxically for all his knowledge of contemporary anthropology, Bataille. In this sense, Paalen is the most self-conscious of these distorting mechanisms of any of his Surrealist contemporaries and precursors.

In the area of Mesoamerican art and archaeology, Paalen was personally acquainted, as both friend and antiquities dealer, to luminaries of the field like Herbert Spinden.¹⁴² He invited the contributions of the greatest Mexican archaeologists of his day to the pages of *DYN*, including Alfonso Caso, who contributed an essay on “The Codices of Azoyú” to the Amerindian issue.¹⁴³ He also published essays on Tlatilco and La Venta by Miguel Covarrubias in the last issue of the review, seminal contributions to the theory of the Olmec as “cultura madre” for later Mesoamerican civilizations.¹⁴⁴ The pages of Paalen’s periodical included work like Miguel Angel Fernandez’s “New Discoveries at the Temple of the Sun in Palenque,” an excavation report and analysis of glyphs from this structure of the Cross Group at Palenque.¹⁴⁵ (Contrast this to Artaud’s coverage of the Tablets of the Cross and Foliated Cross noted above, embedded in Theosophical speculations!) As if demonstrating an intellectual genealogy distinct from some of his fellow exiles, as well as Artaud, Paalen published two Catherwood drawings, aligning himself with

the rationalist tradition of nineteenth century Maya explorations, versus the mystical tradition represented by Le Plongeon, Brasseur de Bourbourg, and Waldeck.¹⁴⁶

Paalen's use of Mesoamerican artistic sources in his visual oeuvre also reflects his extensive and current knowledge of Mexican archaeology. While Brauner had been content to emulate the painted forms of Mixtec codices, Paalen went one step further, manufacturing indigenous bark paper on which to paint codex-inspired compositions like *Aerogyl* (1945).¹⁴⁷ His *Planetary Face* has been interpreted by Winter as containing a visual allusion to the Olmec colossal heads revealed by the work of Paalen's contemporary Matthew Stirling at La Venta and San Lorenzo, and Paalen was certainly aware of these sites and the debate over their age, having published Covarrubias' essay.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, the face of the title seems to me equally reminiscent in form of both Olmec masks and the Teotihuacan masks that had attracted the collecting interests of Breton, and which as popular portable objects, had no doubt crossed Paalen's hands on occasion in his role as antiquities dealer. Paalen's *Les premières spaciales* quite consciously draws upon his sophisticated knowledge of Mesoamerican religious iconography, with his own comments confirming an allusion to the conch shell symbol of the Nahua wind god Ehecatl.¹⁴⁹

Paalen's knowledge of the cutting edge of archaeological and anthropological thinking of his day, and the scientific side of his personality, likewise made him resistant—at least on the surface—to the late Surrealist turn toward myth. His separation from the Bretonian faithful was predicated in part on this rejection of the call for a "New Myth" espoused in documents like the Third Manifesto. In place of the creation of new myths in imitation of the old, Paalen espoused "a new rationalism that would counter conventional, bourgeois rationalism and incorporate the Surrealist perception of an 'other', perhaps truer, reality, based in intuitive, sensory and emotional as well as logical responses."¹⁵⁰ As he forcefully stated, "We do not want any myths any more, neither ancient nor new ones, because myths always fossilize into churches, even materialistic myths."¹⁵¹ In the last line we see a clear stab at Breton's orthodox Marxism, and Paalen was as critical of the metaphysics of dialectical materialism as he was of the turn to myth.

And yet, conscious as he was of the romantic primitivist temptation, Paalen, as a figure of his times, was unable to fully transcend it. Winter observes that Paalen's approach retained aspects of the primitivism of Surrealist orthodoxy combined with the specific New World/Amerindian-oriented nativism emerging among his associates in the budding New York School. As Onslow Ford remarked in a tribute to his friend, Paalen's "fascination with American Indian Art was in part a respect for the Indian way of life and way of seeing that was close to Mother Earth and which we of the industrial age society will have to learn to respect if the human race is

to survive.”¹⁵² At the outset of her biography, Winter notes that despite his critical position vis-à-vis Surrealist orthodoxy “Paalen’s ideas and practice were a fusion of the primitivism and ‘Americanism’ of German, Parisian, and North American modernism. A kind of twentieth-century Gauguin, he despised the corruption of modernity—the excesses of industrialization and the alienation of urban existence. In one of the letters he wrote from Mexico, he admitted feeling ‘incurably unfaithful to the white race.’”¹⁵³ His thought remains more than half stuck in the idealizing version of Native North American and Mesoamerican cultures stemming from the early colonial period. The boy raised under the influence of both German Romanticism and Karl May novels never fully emancipated himself from this legacy.¹⁵⁴

Like his associates Onslow Ford and other late Surrealists, Paalen was strongly drawn to Jung’s thought.¹⁵⁵ Like Jung, Paalen tried to present mystical ideas and mythology in scientific terms.¹⁵⁶ But like Freud, Breton, and Bataille, Jung in evolutionist fashion equated “primitive” art and culture with the unconscious, and Paalen retained this notion as well.¹⁵⁷ In the same Amerindian issue of *DYN* that featured the latest contributions of Caso and Covarrubias, Paalen’s own essay on “Totem Art” appeared, including this passage: “...we can find in everyone’s childhood an attitude toward the world that is similar to that of the totemic mind. ‘For man felt before he reasoned’-as emotional creatures we are hundreds of thousands of centuries old; as rational beings we date from yesterday.”¹⁵⁸ This evolutionism is consistent with some currents of anthropological thought at Paalen’s time of writing, like the theories of Lévy-Bruhl, but does not fit well with the relativism of the Boaz school. It is consistent with Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* as well as with Jung’s elaboration of Freud’s ideas about a phylogenetic unconscious. For Paalen, the “totemic mentality” is still equivalent in many ways to the psychology of the infant with its blurry ego boundaries, “not distinguishing clearly between the subjective and objective, [which] identifies itself emotionally with its enviroing world.”¹⁵⁹

As a primitivist, of course, Paalen took these evolutionist notions and inverted them into something resembling the utopian pole of the colonial spectrum of views on Mesoamerica. And, despite his conscious intention to stay clear of the pitfalls of orthodox Surrealist use of “non-Western” art, he winds up in basically the same territory, as Winter concedes: “Like other modernist artists, Paalen was prone to thinking in positive evolutionary terms about ‘primitive’ man...‘early’ was not equated with backwardness or deficiency. To the contrary, it was seen as a desirable alternative to the ‘civilized’.”¹⁶⁰ “His ideas...of the human psyche passing through ‘emotion to abstraction’, ‘ancestral stratifications, and ‘evolutionary stages of the

species,' reflected the positive evolutionary stereotype of his times, whatever its limitations. The avant-garde belief in the open, imaginative capacity of childhood, the unspoiled Eden of 'primitive' societies...were as highly valued and desired by Paalen as by the European avant-garde."¹⁶¹

Despite his theoretical sophistication and conscious intent, there are still strong echoes in Paalen's writings of the 1940s of the mystical variant of the utopian view of ancient Mesoamerica that had been espoused by Artaud. In a short essay, "Birth of Fire," he laments in terms reminiscent of Artaud the disappearance of indigenous religions, and in a Jungian fashion that would have been acceptable to Artaud's borrowings from Guenon, ties Mexican myths around volcanoes to the legend of Prometheus, because "The cosmic symbolizations, through all differences of epoch and race, remain astonishingly alike."¹⁶² He goes on to relate these myths to a hypothetical replacement of an ancient matriarchal order by patriarchy. This turn is called "precocious" by Winter "in its support of early theories of matriarchal precedence," as well as "anthropologically sound (and progressive) in its examination of the iconology of myth."¹⁶³ Like much of Paalen's work, this evocation of a pre-patriarchal lost world is Janus-faced, two-edged, both forward-looking and at the same time indebted to the dominant anthropological trends of his day, embedded in the patriarchal discourse Paalen seemingly seeks to oppose. In its context, it is progressive in its intent. Winter relates Paalen's discussion of an ancient matriarchal stage of social evolution to the more general Surrealist interest in androgyny.¹⁶⁴ While the Surrealists could no more completely transcend the gender norms and conceptions of their time any more than they could break completely free of colonialist notions about Native Americans, this exploration of androgyny does subvert and undercut traditional concepts of gender identity and male dominance.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, Paalen's suggestion is very much a product of its own and earlier, times, an application of Bachofen's nineteenth century theories of social evolution from matriarchy to patriarchy (and Bachofen certainly favored the latter as a desirable evolutionary endpoint) which had influenced a range of authors from Surrealist favorites like Engels and Frazer to classicists like Jane Harrison.¹⁶⁶ While some of Bachofen's philological and mythological analyses of classical tradition are still of value today, as a literal interpretation of social development his work suffers from some of the flaws and limitations of nineteenth-century evolutionary models.¹⁶⁷

Paalen's use of these ideas in a Mesoamerican context form an interesting parallel to their employment by Sir Arthur Evans in his fanciful reconstructions of Minoan myth and art.¹⁶⁸ Paalen, however, refrains from bringing in Mesoamerican archaeological material to force-fit into a concretized view of a matriarchal stage in the fashion of Evans. His use of these evolutionary ideas consciously opposes and

is clearly distinct from the overt racism that mars the life and thought of Evans.¹⁶⁹ However, such ideas in a concretized version, with Bachofen's original valuation of his postulated matriarchal phase inverted in a manner paralleling earlier primitivist mental gymnastics with colonial views of Native American peoples, later (in the 1970s) became staples of New Age and pop archaeological fables about an Edenic culture of "Great Goddess" worshippers in ancient Europe. These notions in their literalistic form have even been adopted by some feminists in spite of both their ultimately essentializing and reactionary views of gender and their lack of foundation in archaeological evidence.¹⁷⁰ Paalen does not succumb to a similar temptation towards a "fundamentalist" reading of Bachofen, though the tradition certainly poses this temptation.

Despite his unusual self-awareness, Paalen remains within a colonialist tradition. Consistent with the attitude of his time, he showed no qualms about looting and selling antiquities; as his third wife boasted, "Objects that were made for the Gods passed through his hands."¹⁷¹

In their opposition to imperialism and their attempts, however flawed and limited, to examine pre-Columbian art in its own cultural contexts, as in much else, the Surrealists were ahead of their time. Yet at the same time their constructions of ancient America remain trapped within Eurocentric stereotypes that they were aware of to varying degrees, but could not transcend. Whether they saw the Aztecs and other indigenous peoples as demonic revolutionaries of excess and expenditure, as pre-Columbian Communists, or as mystics living in harmony with nature, they played the game of conceptualizing Native Americans using the same pieces that had been on the board of European thought since the Spanish Conquest, even if they tried to change the colors to maneuver them in subversive alternative strategies. Whether inverting the negative or accentuating the utopian, their vision remained colonialist, and their wish to understand and identify with indigenous peoples ultimately foundered, perpetuating instead old images of the Indian as Other. They were unavoidably people of their times, and illustrate the adage of the Marx that the Breton wing revered that people make their own history, but do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing. Their shortcomings remain as lessons for any seeking to salvage the liberatory values and potential of the movement as a reminder of the need for vigilant awareness of the distorting effects of ethnocentric concepts and filters.

I would like to thank Romy Golan and Jack Spector for their critiques of earlier versions of this paper.

- 1 Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London: Routledge, 2003), 14.
- 2 Perhaps the best, if briefest, treatment of the relation of the Surrealists to pre-Columbian Mexico (as well as Mexican folk culture) is Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 173-188
- 3 For instance, Evan Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," in William Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 534-593.
- 4 Rosalind Krauss, "Giacometti," in Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism,"* 502-533.
- 5 "Precolumbian art was an important source in much modern work related to surrealism, from Moore's translation of the 'stoniness' of Mayan rain gods [sic] in *Reclining Figure*." Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 180. The reference here is to Terminal Classic Maya "chacmool" figures from Chichen Itza in Yucatan, which, although their fanciful modern name incorporates the name of the Maya rain deity, Chaak, were not representations of that entity.
- 6 For instance, for Artaud see Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Bombs and Blows* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993). For Bataille, Nick Land, *The Thirst For Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Materialism—An Essay in Atheistic Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992); Alice Letvin, *Sacrifice in the Surrealist Novel: The Impact of Early Theories of Primitive Religion on the Depiction of Violence in Modern Fiction* (New York: Garland Press, 1990); Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 7 Letvin, *Sacrifice*, 36; Jack Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919-1939: The Gold of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177.
- 8 Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist of the Avant-Garde* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2002); Christian Kloyber, ed., *DYN: The Complete Reprint* (Vienna and New York: Springer-Verlag, 2000).
- 9 Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginnings of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*.
- 10 For contemporary manifestations of this polarity of tropes, compare Mel Gibson's sanguinary caricature of the Classic Maya in *Apocahpyto* with the content of one of any number of books on Maya "prophecies," the year 2012, crystal skulls, etc, to be found in the New Age sections of any large chain bookseller.
- 11 Krauss, "Giacometti" in Rubin ed., *"Primitivism,"* n. 57. See also *Collection André Breton, Breton, André- 42, Rue Fontaine* (Paris: Calmels Cohen, April 2003). Entries for "primitive" art, Alain de Monbrison and Pierre Amrouche; for pre-Columbian art Jacques Blazy. On myth see Whitney Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting 1929-1939* (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1975), 13, 86; Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 177.
- 12 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, 72.
- 13 Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 77. Keen's early, profusely documented and more traditionally historical work is my main point of departure for this essay. For an exploration of the same topic, in the context of nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarly constructions of the relations between the Maya and Toltec, and methodologically indebted to the Continental hermeneutic tradition represented by Gadamer, see Lindsay Jones, *Twin City Tales: A Hermeneutical Reassessment of Tula and Chichen Itza* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1995), especially Chapter 1. The relevance of the same Noble Savage vs. depraved barbarians dichotomy, as more generally applied to colonized peoples in Africa and Oceania as well

as the Americas, and to European modernist primitivism as early as Gauguin has been recognized by, for example Robert Goldwater, "Judgments of Primitive Art: 1905-1965," in Daniel Biebuyck, ed., *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 24-41. For a more self-consciously theoretical discussion of this subject see Hal Foster, "The Primitive Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin, Black Masks," in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1985), 181-210.

14 For a brief but interesting art historical treatment of early images of the New World in relation to the Land of Cockaigne and other medieval utopias, see Hans Belting, *Hieronymus Bosch: Garden of Earthly Delights* (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 103-106.

15 Lawrence Desmond and Phyllis Messenger, *A Dream of Maya: Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon in Nineteenth Century Yucatan* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988) remains the definitive biography of this remarkable figure.

16 Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World* (New York: Abrams, 1993), 34-35.

17 Keen, *Aztec Image*, 341-342.

18 Manly P Hall, *The All-Seeing Eye 1930-1931* (Whitefish, NY: Kessinger, 2004), 306.

19 Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 35.

20 Keen, *Aztec Image*, 510.

21 Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art*, Chapter 2.

22 "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction," in Rubin, ed., "Primitivism," 1-81, 3;

Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 381; see also Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 175.

23 I am indebted to discussions with and research/writing assignments for Dr. Sarah Brett-Smith and Dr. Jack Spector of Rutgers in arriving at this hypothesis. Tythacott suggests a complementary motive for the Surrealists' distancing from African art: they regarded it as already "domesticated" by its assimilation into modernism, draining it of subversive potential (*Surrealism*, 120, 127).

24 Tythacott, *ibid.*, 13

25 Although it is dated to 1929 in the Gallimard edition of his collected works.

26 Georges Henri Rivière and Alfred Métraux, eds., *Les arts anciens de l'Amérique*, Musée des arts Décoratifs, Musée du Louvre (Paris: Les Éditions G. Van Oest, 1928).

27 See, James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988),

126-127; and Jean Jamin, "On the Human Condition of 'Minotaure,'" in *Focus on 'Minotaure': The Animal-Headed Review* (Geneva: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1987), 78-87, for a detailed history of their association. For Bataille's friendship with Métraux from the early 1920s, see Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 55-56. For Bataille's relationship to contemporary French archaeology, including Rivet, see C.F.B. Miller, "Archaeology," in Dawn Ades and Simon Miller, eds., *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 41-50.

28 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, 35. This decision reflects the philosophy of the exhibition's curator, and another member of Bataille's circle, Georges-Henri Rivière, a former musician and songwriter for Josephine Baker (Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 99). Rivière later collaborated with Bataille on *Documents*, but deferred in this context to the contrary ideas of Rivet, who hired him as an assistant following the success of the 1928 show.

29 In Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 152-159.

30 Krauss, "Giacometti" in Rubin, ed., "Primitivism," 510-511.

31 These ideas are already present in his 1929 essay on Dalí's *The Lugubrious Game* in *Documents 7*: 297-302, originally entitled "The Scream of Sade," translated in Allen Stoekl, ed., *Visions of Excess*:

Selected Writings 1927-1929 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 24-30, and were given a more systematic exposition in “The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Comrades),” dating to 1929-1930 and first translated in Stoekl, *ibid.*, 91-102.

32 Bataille, “L’Amérique disparue” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, 152.

33 For an eccentric recent attempt to examine both ancient and modern Maya culture through the lens of Bataille’s theories, see Robert John Brocklehurst, *Excessive Narratives: Georges Bataille, Self-Sacrifice, and the Communal Language of the Yucatec Maya: An Essay and U Chan Tsol’ni Ek Balam: The Short Story of the Black Cat: A Yucatec Maya Play* (Ashby-de-la-Zouche: Inkermen Press. 2006). Unfortunately it is marred by numerous factual errors in its treatment of pre-Columbian history and culture and by a convoluted and obscure prose style.

34 See Leonard Shengold, *Halo in the Sky: Observations on Analogy and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) for discussion of reversion and inversion as related to anality.

35 Bataille, “L’Amérique disparue” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, 155.

36 *Ibid.*, 156.

37 *Ibid.*, 156, trans. Jordan.

38 *Ibid.*, 157.

39 *Ibid.*, 158, trans. Jordan.

40 Bataille, “The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade” in Stoekl, ed. *Visions*, 94.

41 Krauss, “Giacometti” in Rubin, ed., “Primitivism,” 510.

42 See Bataille’s 1930 article “Primitive Art” in *Documents* 7: 389-97, translated in Jack Flam and Miriam Deutsch, eds., *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 225-230.

43 See Miller, “Archaeology” in Ades and Miller, eds., *Undercover Surrealism*, 47-48, for Bataille’s similar championing of the fragmented forms of Gaulish copies of classical coins against their models, related to a primitivist view of the Celts and equating them with the African peoples oppressed by French colonialists.

44 Esther Pasztor, *Teotihuacan: An Experiment in Living*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 201.

45 See Bataille’s “Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,” in *Documents* 8 (1930), 1-20, translated in Stoekl ed., *Visions*, 61-72, where he links Van Gogh’s self-mutilation and psychiatric case studies of similar acts with ethnographic accounts of sacrificial practices. Though there is no direct reference to the Aztecs in this piece, his description of sacrificial rites which substitute an animal for human as “cowardly,” his reference to “nightmare gods” associated with sacrifice, and reference via Hubert and Mauss, to self-sacrificing deities, resonate with his rhapsodies in “Vanished America.”

46 Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 12, 84; also 187: Bataille “maintained a life-long admiration for Mesoamerican society as transgressively other to European norms.” Though the “transgression” is valued, the Aztecs remain the Other.

47 Published in the leftist journal *La critique social* 7 (1933): 7-15. Translated in Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, eds., *The Bataille Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), 167-181.

48 *Ibid.*, 169.

49 *Ibid.*, 170.

50 *Ibid.*, 178.

51 *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1. Translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Zone Books, 1988), a

decidedly and deliberately academic work compared to Bataille's earlier presentations of these ideas. So great was Bataille's distancing from revolutionary theory and activism by this point (1949) that he positively frames the Marshall Plan as an example of expenditure, at least as a more positive instance of "gifting" as he naively saw it, than the alternative of expenditure by nuclear war between the US and USSR. As Jesse Goldhammer (*The Headless Republic*, 154) puts it: "In short, after the war, Bataille puts sacrifice to work and betrays the theory of sacrifice, which he developed in the 1930s." The Aztecs are treated in the third chapter, "Sacrifices and Wars of the Aztecs" (45-61 of the English translation by Hurley), and in the fourth chapter on the potlatch as well.

52 Jesse Goldhammer, "Dare to Know, Dare to Sacrifice: Georges Bataille and the Crisis of the Left," in Shannon Winnubst, ed., *Reading Bataille Now* (Bloomington/ Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 15-34, 23.

53 Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, 32.

54 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 250; Allen Stoekl, "Introduction," in Stoekl, ed., *Visions*: xx.

55 Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 81.

56 "The Pineal Eye" is translated in Stoekl, ed., *Visions*, 79-90, and dated by Stoekl to "roughly the same period" as "The Jesuve," translated in Stoekl, *Visions*, 73-78, and dated by him to 1930.

57 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 119.

58 *Ibid.*, 120.

59 Métraux, quoted in Surya, *ibid.*

60 Bataille is often hailed as possessing a superior knowledge of the anthropological and ethnographic literature of his day vis-à-vis the Breton group (e.g., Spector, *Surrealist Art*, 177). Thus Tythacott (*Surrealism*, 8) stresses that Bataille and Leiris "were most closely aligned with ethnologie... . In Bataille's work, we see a creative fusion of anthropological knowledge with psychoanalytic theory." Neil Cox, "Sacrifice," in Ades and Baker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism*, 106-117), presents a more limited range of anthropological background for Bataille during the period of *Documents*, affirming (106) that Bataille had read "parts of" *The Golden Bough*, *Totem and Taboo*, Mauss's "Essay on the Function and Nature of Sacrifice," and Salomon Reinach's *Cults, Myths and Religions*. In reading Freud and Frazer, at least, Bataille's ethnographic background would seem to differ little from that of the Breton group (Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting*; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 51-55) particularly Max Ernst's. The notes to Bataille's essay on Van Gogh and sacrifice cite all of these sources (except Frazer), but indicate a familiarity with a wider array of sources, referring to E.M. Loeb's *The Blood Sacrifice Complex*, articles from *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Karsten's *The Civilization of the South American Indians*, and Robertson Smith's *The Religion of the Semites*. For recent interpretations of Aztec sacrificial practices, see David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), who draws on an array of approaches and thinkers from the realms of anthropology and comparative religion; (curiously, while he mentions Mauss and Girard's theories of sacrifice, Bataille goes unmentioned, despite his influence on Girard and other theorists of religion); Michel Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Kay Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), which links sacrifice to Aztec concepts of time; Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), a more speculative work by a historian that contrasts and differs sharply with Read on many points.

61 According to Surya, *Georges Bataille*, Bataille's only street-level revolutionary activity was his participation in demonstrations against an attempted Fascist putsch against the Republic in February 1934.

- 62 For Bataille's relationship to fascism, and a defense of him against these accusations see Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: a Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 38-47, and Goldhammer, *Headless Republic*, 174-177.
- 63 Spector, *Surrealist Art*, 24.
- 64 Spector's wording, *ibid.* For an analysis of Bataille's theories of political violence in the context of classical and Christian ideas of sacrifice, the violence of the French revolution, and Sorel's thought, see Goldhammer, *Headless Republic*.
- 65 Noys, *Georges Bataille*, 24. The statement quoted by Noys comes from a later work, *Eroticism*, but similar sentiments are easy to discern in Bataille's writings of the 1920s and 30s.
- 66 Goldhammer, *Headless Republic*, 167.
- 67 Bataille's writings of the mid-1930s are characterized by a movement toward a critique of the state form that differs from the ideas of the authoritarian Marxism dominant among his comrades and colleagues. Goldhammer ("Dare to Know, Dare to Sacrifice," in Winnubst, *Reading Bataille Now*) describes him as an anarchist, which is accurate in the sense of his moving toward an anti-statist position. But as Goldhammer notes, Bataille is quite distinct from the traditional anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin, jettisoning its humanistic Enlightenment heritage with his emphasis on the irrational. Noys (*Georges Bataille*, 8) describes Bataille's politics as gauchiste (anti-party and anti-state) in the post-1968 sense.
- 68 Michael Smith, *The Aztecs*, second ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2003), 220.
- 69 Roger Hervé, "Sacrifices humains du centre-Amérique." *Documents* 4 (1930).
An image from Codex Vaticanus A later accompanied Bataille's brief piece "The Sacred" (*Cahiers d'Art*, 1-4 (1939): 47-50, translated in Stoekl, ed., *Visions*, 240-245) with the note: "Human sacrifice is loftier than any other—not in the sense that it is crueller than any other, but because it is close to the only sacrifice without trickery, which can only be the ecstatic loss of oneself." (243)
- 70 Dawn Ades, "Human Sacrifices of Central America," in Ades and Baker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism*, 116-117.
- 71 Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) refers to this section as a "birth almanac;" Bruce Byland, "Introduction and Commentary," in Gisele Díaz and Alan Rodgers, *The Codex Borgia: A Full-Color Restoration of an Ancient Mexican Manuscript* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993), xii-xxxi: the gods appear to be "sacrificing the eye of a smaller human figure with a sharpened bone awl" (xix).
- 72 Reprinted in Ades and Baker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism*, 236.
- 73 See John Scott, "Dressed to Kill: Stone Regalia of the Mesoamerican Ballgame," in E. Michael Whittington, ed., *The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 50-63, for an overview of stone ball game equipment. For the ball game see the other essays in Whittington, *ibid.* and in Vernon Scarborough and David Wilcox, eds., *The Mesoamerican Ballgame* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).
- 74 Krauss, "Giacometti" in Rubin, ed., *Primitivism*, 512. Krauss is aware of the sacrificial aspect of the ball game: see *ibid.*, 529, n. 37.
- 75 Illustrated by Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 117.
- 76 For the penate, see Elizabeth Easby and John Scott, *Before Cortes: Sculpture of Middle America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), catalog 267. For the Aztec figures, see Esther Pasztor, *Aztec Art* (New York: Abrams, 1983), 222-226. For Matisse's possible visual quotation of an Aztec figure, see Jack Flam, "Matisse and the Fauves," in Rubin, ed. *Primitivism*, 210-239 (discussed/illustrated 215, 218).

- 77 Valerie Fletcher, *Giacometti: 1901-1966* (London: Humphries, 1986), 107.
- 78 Yves Bonnefoy, *Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of His Work* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 214; Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1990), 74-79. Breton later reproduced examples of these objects in crystal in "Souvenir de Mexique," alongside Posada woodcuts and Day of the Dead candies. Two of these skulls belonged to Wolfgang Paalen.
- 79 Bonnefoy, *Alberto Giacometti*, 214. And, of course, the skull-like head's form and conception are overdetermined: Fletcher (*Giacometti*: 106) discerns echoes of Cezanne's still-lives with skulls as well as the impact of a series of deaths of close associates afflicting Giacometti from 1921 to 1934. Bonnefoy (17) ties the work to Giacometti's ongoing anxiety about extinction and loss of self, while Stich (*Anxious Visions*, 77-78) notes that skulls figure prominently in Surrealist iconography because of the more immediate past: World War I, which left human remains, scattered by its new and improved artillery across the countryside, to be recovered for years following the cessation of hostilities. Skulls took on the role of ominous portents in the 1930s, as the rise of Fascism signaled another war on the horizon, and were apt emblems of the thanatos-saturated culture of Nazism, for both its adherents (the SS insignia) and its opponents (e.g., the 1933 montage by Erwin Blumenfeld of Hitler's face merging with a skull (Stich, *Anxious Visions*, Fig. 94); or Paalen's winged skull in *Vent d'Est* of 1937 (Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, Fig. 19). These images return us to the political context of Bataille's fascination in the 1930s with sacrificial violence.
- 80 Krauss, "Giacometti" in Rubin, ed., "Primitivism," 512.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 529, n. 40.
- 82 For the fully reconstructed version see Felipe Solís Olguín, "The Pyramid of Castillo de Teayo: Aztec Influence in Veracruz," in Marilyn Goldstein, ed., *Ceremonial Sculpture of Ancient Veracruz* (Brookville, NY: Long Island University, 1988), 32-35, plate 14.
- 83 "In Total Darkness, or the Surrealist Bluff," translated in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 139-145.
- 84 See Naomi Greene, *Antonin Artaud: Poet Without Words* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 134-135.
- 85 Greene, *ibid.*, 107. Artaud cites Guenon on p. 237 of "Mise en Scene and Metaphysics" from *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 227-239.
- 86 As Ronald Hayman ("Antonin Artaud," in Margit Rowell, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 16-26) puts it (21): "His idea of spirit was founded on essentialist and religious assumptions, while his distaste for contemporary culture and the scientific method was partly the cause and partly the result of his nostalgia for primitive [sic] and oriental [sic] cosmographies. He was thinking in terms of metaphysics and exorcism, magic and mysticism."
- 87 *The Theater and Its Double*, 1938, trans. Mary Richard (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
- 88 For an interpretation of how the two polarized European myths of the nature of Native American societies were embodied in twentieth-century notions concerning the "peaceful" Maya vs. the "barbaric" Toltecs and Aztecs, see Jones, *Twin City Tales*.
- 89 Letvin, *Sacrifice*, 51.
- 90 Translated as "No Theogeny..." in Jack Hirschmann, ed., *The Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1965).
- 91 *Ibid.*, 65-66.
- 92 "To the Alliance Francaise" (December 14, 1935), in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 347-349.
- 93 Many of the linkages made by Artaud are present even in the title of Le Plongeon's 1886 book,

Sacred Mysteries Among the Mayas and Quiches 11,500 Years Ago: Their Relation to the Sacred Mysteries of Egypt, Greece, Chaldea and India.

94 “Excerpts from notebooks and private papers,” (1935). Translated in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 353-354.

95 Cited in Greene, *Antonin Artaud: Poet Without Words*, 142.

96 For instance, Keen, *Aztec Image*, 464.

97 *Ibid.*, 470.

98 Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Bombs and Blows*, 74.

99 In his 1936 essay “First Contact With the Mexican Revolution,” in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 366-370.

100 Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Bombs and Blows*, 81.

101 “Man Against Destiny,” in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 357-364 (originally written in 1936).

102 *Ibid.*, 364. Guenon was a convert to Sufi Islam and wrote extensively on Hinduism.

103 “What I Came to Mexico to Do,” in Sontag, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 370-374 (written in 1936).

104 *Ibid.*, 374.

105 On the Palenque Tablets of the Cross and Foliated Cross, see Mary Ellen Miller, *Maya Art and Architecture* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 112-114; Merle Greene Robertson, *The Sculpture of Palenque, Vol. 4: The Cross Group, the North Group, the Olvidado and Other Pieces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 9-54.

106 See David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: William Morrow, 1993); Elizabeth Wagner, “Maya Creation Myths and Cosmogony,” in Nikolai Grube, ed., *Maya: Divine Kings of the Rain Forest* (Cologne: Konemann, 2000), 280-294.

107 Agnes de la Beaumelle, “Introduction to Spells and Gris-Gris,” in Margit Rowell, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper*, 39-41.

108 Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 176.

109 *Ibid.*, 166, Fig. 6.8; 238-239, n. 14.

110 *Ibid.*, 152, 174. On Surrealist collecting and visits to the shop of Julius Carlebach in New York see Florence Duchemin-Pelletier, “Surréalisme et art inuit: la fascination du Grand Nord” in this issue.

111 On the exhibition see Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 176. On p. 129 of the English translation of *Nadja* by Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960) he refers to “a small statue of a seated Cacique” which Nadja found “more threatening than the others.”

112 “Visit to Leon Trotsky” (1938), translated in Franklin Rosemont, ed., *What is Surrealism?* (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 173-182, (171).

113 Lourdes Andrade and José Pierre, “Una revolución de la Mirada,” in *Un listón alrededor de una bomba* (Mexico City: Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, 1997), 44.

114 All Breton quotes in this paragraph are from the Spanish version of Breton's 1938 essay, “Recuerdo de Mexico,” in Marguerite Bonnet, ed., *Andre Breton Antología (1913-1966)* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1973), 162-165, English translation Jordan.

115 “This idealization of the Aztecs colors all of [Rivera's] nationalist murals. Rivera glossed over the exploitation, fanaticism, and hierarchism that were intrinsic to the maintenance of a unified state in Aztec times...in his advocacy...of a return to an agrarian communalism of the Aztecs that ceased to exist during their reign” (Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 234).

116 *Ibid.*

- 117 For more on Rivera's Marxist Aztec primitivism in historical context, see Keen, *Aztec Image*, 525-528.
- 118 Tythacott (*Surrealism and the Exotic*, 185) perceptively and incisively remarks: "Surrealist perceptions of Mexico were mediated by stereotypes of this Latin American land: images of passion, violence, bloodshed and the macabre celebrations of death, revolutionary politics, ancient civilizations, exotic flora, dignified peasant existence, fiestas, and fiery cultural life."
- 119 "Frida Kahlo de Rivera," in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 140-144) (1938).
- 120 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, Chapter 4, "Surrealism in Mexico/Mexico in Surrealism," 78.
- 121 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 122 Cited in Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper and Row: 1983), 242 and 246.
- 123 "Rufino Tamayo," in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, 230-234: e.g., Tamayo's "colors against a background of curiously deep sonority which evokes the harmonies of the pre-Columbian codices, the secret of an all-powerful artist" (234).
- 124 Breton, "Prologemena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else," in Rosemont, ed., *What is Surrealism?*, 209-217; Romy Golan, "Mise en suspens de l'incrédulité: Breton et le mythe des Grands Transparentes," in *Breton: La Beauté Convulsive* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1991), 353-354; Marcela Godoy Divin, *Breton: Entre dos estrellas—Presencia de Hispanoamerica en el Surrealismo francés* (Santiago: Ediciones Manquel, 1997), 73-78.
- 125 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 177; Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*, Kirk Varnedoe, "Abstract Expressionism," in Rubin, ed., "Primitivism," 614-659.
- 126 Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting*, 196.
- 127 Spector, *Surrealist Art*, 157.
- 128 William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealism* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson), 1969, 313; Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," in Rubin, ed., "Primitivism," 577.
- 129 Reproduced in Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*, 261: identification is mine.
- 130 Luis Mario Schneider, *Mexico y el Surrealismo 1925-1950* (Mexico City: Arte y Libros, 1978), 204-205.
- 131 Published by the Museum in book form under the same title in 1964.
- 132 Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Aldershot, Great Britain: Lund Humphries, 2004), 97. See p. 62 for the beginnings of her friendship with Bernal in the 1940s.
- 133 Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 182. See Keen, *Aztec Image*, 484-485, on Séjourné's mystical primitivism.
- 134 In Carrington's own words: "The Mexican traditions of magic and witchcraft are fascinating, but they are not the same as mine, do you understand? I think every country has a magical tradition, but our approach to the unknown is peculiar to our ancestry. It is something that has to do with birth, your blood, flesh and bones." (Quoted in Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 122). Although eschewing the "lumping" approach of Artaud, she seems here to be enshrining a romantic notion of national character not dissimilar from the stereotypes that haunt Breton's writings on Mexico.
- 135 Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 126.
- 136 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen*, 9.
- 137 *Ibid.*, 10, 20.
- 138 *Ibid.*, 34-35.

- 139 Ibid., 91-92.
- 140 Interestingly, Winter found that Paalen had the full series of *Documents* in his personal library (ibid., 36).
- 141 Cited in ibid., 160.
- 142 Ibid., 52.
- 143 *DYN* 4-5 (December 1943): 3-6.
- 144 "Tlatilco, Archaic Mexican Art and Culture." *DYN* 4-5 (December 1943): 4-46; "La Venta: Colossal Heads and Jaguar Gods." *DYN* 6 (November 1944): 24-33.
- 145 *DYN* 4-5 (December 1943): 55-58.
- 146 These were positioned following the article "The Enigma of Maya Astronomy" by astronomer Maud Makemson, who also discussed sculpture from the Cross Group at Palenque, in the Amerindian issue, no. 4-5 (December 1943) of *DYN*.
- 147 Gustav Regler, *Wolfgang Paalen* (New York: Nierendorf Gallery, 1946) (established by Winter as most likely having been written by Paalen himself).
- 148 Reproduced as Fig. 9 in Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*.
- 149 Ibid., 182.
- 150 Ibid., 141.
- 151 Cited in ibid., 142.
- 152 Gordon Onslow Ford, "Paalen," in Christian Kloyber, ed., *DYN: The Complete Reprint*, xi-xvi.
- 153 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, xxiv.
- 154 Ibid., 17.
- 155 Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*, 271, discerns "the basically Jungian approach" of Paalen's writings. See also Winter, ibid., 140.
- 156 Winter, ibid., 12.
- 157 Ibid., 22.
- 158 Page 20 of "Totemic Art," *DYN* 4-5 (December 1943): 7-37.
- 159 Ibid.: 18-20. The idea of "non-Western" cultures having the diffuse ego boundaries of infants is found in early psychoanalytic studies, for example Romain Rolland's notions of the "oceanic feeling" applied to an "understanding of Indian culture and Hindu religious experience. For a critique of these ethnocentric notions, and an example of how a psychoanalytic approach to cross-cultural psychology can self-consciously avoid them, see Alan Roland, *In Search of Self in India and Japan: Toward a Cross-Cultural Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- 160 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, 168.
- 161 Ibid., 199.
- 162 "Birth of Fire." *DYN* 4-5 (December 1943): 71.
- 163 Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen: Artist and Theorist*, 168-169.
- 164 Ibid., p. 172.
- 165 The parallels in the achievements and limitations of the Surrealists in these areas are discussed by Spector, *Surrealist Art*, in Chapter 4.
- 166 This also represents another parallel between Paalen and the Bataille group, who also drew on Bachofen in their anthropological writings (Spector, *Surrealist Art*, 160).
- 167 For enduring aspects of Bachofen's work, see for example, Marilyn B. Arthur, Review of *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure and Origins* by M.L. West and *Amazons: A Study In Athenian Mythmaking* by William Blake Tyrell, *Signs* 12:3 (Spring 1987): 589-593.
- 168 Winter insightfully compared Paalen's understanding of a Mesoamerican (and other) matriarchal

stage with the myth of Theseus. For the intellectual historical context of Evans's use of Bachofen's and related ideas, and a critique of the distortions they introduced into his construction of Minoan civilization, see Kenneth Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History* (New York: Da Capo 2002), 66-90.

169 See Joseph Alexander MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

170 For an incisive critique of these theories on both counts see the collection of contributions by feminist archaeologists in Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, eds., *Ancient Goddesses* (London: British Museum, 1998). This is certainly not to argue that some past (and surviving hunter-gatherer) societies did not have more egalitarian gender roles than in later patriarchal orders, or that an alternative to patriarchy is impossible. It was against patriarchy that the Surrealists, enmeshed as they were in patriarchal structures and biases, nonetheless rebelled in their most liberatory insights.

The problem is the idealization of societies like those of the Bronze Age Aegean and Neolithic Europe as seen through the lens of later myths, if not themselves completely products of, then at least redacted and modified by, later patriarchal and hierarchical cultures (e.g., Classical Greece). Such interpretations distort potential understandings of these cultures by fitting their art and ritual remains into a framework derived from later mythology and often ignore archaeological evidence for violence, warfare, and inequality (see, e.g., the critique of Marija Gimbutas and Michael Dames by Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992). They also tend to reinforce notions congruent with traditional patriarchal gender norms (the Goddess ideal defined by motherhood) and the idea of a female essence that determines the benign nature of the hypothesized matriarchy. While myth in many forms has—and can—serve the cause of social change, as the Surrealists at their best recognized, the temptation to create concrete, fundamentalist versions (easily deflated because of their reliance on questionable “fact”) remains a temptation of such approaches.

171 Onslow Ford, “Wolfgang Paalen” in Kloyber, *DYN: The Complete Reprint*, xv. Of course, his Mexican colleagues Covarrubias and Rivera also acquired looted objects for their collections. Rivera even reset Aztec sculptures around the residence of his then-mentor and ally Trotsky.