

Surrealist Views, American Landscapes
Notes on Wolfgang Paalen's Ruin Gazing

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Critics have often noted that American nature and American landscapes made strong impressions on European surrealist painters such as André Masson, Yves Tanguy, Kurt Seligmann, Max Ernst, Roberto Matta and Gordon Onslow Ford. “The vastness and natural spectacles of the continent,” observes Martica Sawin, “impelled [these painters] to broach new subject matter, to invent new forms, and to deal with space in a multiperspectival way.”¹ But what of literary depictions of American landscapes? In a different way than visual works, surrealist literary texts tend to infuse the landscape with a series of explicit theoretical formulations worth exploring in depth. Perhaps the central examples are André Breton’s *Arcane 17* (1945) and *Martinique, charmeuse de serpents* (1948). In this article, though, I focus on a text more marginal within Surrealism and far less circulated; it has not, until now, been translated into English)—Wolfgang Paalen’s landscape-heavy “Paysage totémique.” Paalen (1905-59) was an Austrian painter and writer who arrived relatively early in the New World—summer of 1939, just on the cusp of the wave of European emigration during World War II. He had joined Breton’s circle in 1935, collaborated on the last numbers of *Minotaure*, and participated in the notorious “International Surrealist Exhibition” of 1936. His considerable gifts as a writer, thinker and linguist, along with his invention of the automatic painting technique of *fumage*, endeared him to Breton. When in the spring of 1939 he left Paris for New York in the company of his wife Alice Rahon and their companion Eva Sulzer, he was one of the most respected of the younger generation of Surrealists. The three travelled from New York to Jasper National Park in Alberta and on to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, via the Canadian Pacific Railway. From there they embarked on an ambitious two month study tour of Northwest Coast art sites in southern Alaska, Haida Gwaii, the central B.C. coast, and Vancouver Island, travelling by liner, float plane and small

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boat.² In Victoria Paalen consulted with the preeminent authorities on Northwest Coast art, W.A. Newcombe and George T. Emmons.³ Leaving Canada, the trio travelled via San Francisco to Mexico City, where Paalen established a studio, organized the 1940 “Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo” (with César Moro and André Breton), founded the art review *Dyn*, and helped establish a vigorous Mexican branch of Surrealism in exile. A central event in his development as a thinker and painter, Paalen’s trip inspired several important essays, including the piece concerning us here.

An Exemplary Landscape

Paalen’s descriptions of British Columbia’s coniferous forests in “Paysage totémique” exemplify many of the preoccupations of late-thirties Surrealism, while also giving voice and form to his own hypotheses on the origins of artistic vision. Surrealist practices and concepts that influenced him included automatism, objective chance and the surrealist object, mimeticism and dissolution. As the title makes clear, he also relied on and indeed attempted to push forward the important strain of ethnographic thinking within Surrealism. Totemic landscapes implied for him a close connection between landscapes and the people inhabiting them such that cultural forms (especially artistic traditions) emerged as the maximum expression of the rootedness of a particular people in a particular place. This kind of thinking, while essentially ethnographic, seduced a wide spectrum of vanguard artists interested in so-called primitive art including the Surrealists. A related notion from ethnography was also influential—that of documentary, whereby objects were seen as the truest witness to a culture (a notion re-worked by George Bataille in his influential magazine *Documents*). Likewise, Paalen relied strongly on a trope common to 1920s primitivism generally, including the surrealist version, which seeks homologies between the psychic development of the child and “primitive” phases of human prehistory. In “Paysage totémique” Paalen incorporates these theoretical stances into a personal vision of the artistic process whereby modern art regains its role—the role it had in tribal societies—as a vital nexus of human community in order to counterbalance the potent but morally blind forces of science. He foresees a divinatory function for the artist analogous to that of the shaman, and conceives of the work of art as a kind of node fusing psyche, community, and environment (landscape). In this text as well as others he depicts the key moment in the creation of a work of art, the instant of vision or inspiration, as a divinatory moment of automatism in which the artist, through the agency of “surprise,” recognizes in the material of the enviroing world an image, thus giving voice to a culture thoroughly shaped by and interpenetrated with the biological or material substrate. Paalen’s conception of landscape is deeply communitarian and human. The landscapes of “Paysage totémique” coalesce around works of art (totem poles *in situ*) which, in turn, are inconceivable without their enviroing nature. Paalen applied the term

“specific space” to this state of tension between a monumental work of art and its environing nature that for him exemplified totemic landscapes.

“Paysage totémique” is a thickly poetic, allusive piece of travel writing registering the Jasper to Prince Rupert leg only of Paalen’s trip. That is, it registers Paalen’s eager first encounter with the woods of the northern Pacific coast, but nothing of the inlets, islands, small towns, and village sites where the vast majority of totem poles stood. Paalen published it in installments between 1942 and 1945 in his journal *Dyn*, an art review in which he enunciated an off-surrealist or post-surrealist message rejecting certain aspects of the movement though clearly aspiring to continue and amplify Surrealism in many regards. Beautifully published in large format, with full-page color reproductions of artwork and black and white photographs, the journal inherited the fine-book aesthetic of *Minotaure*. Many of the Surrealists or former Surrealists in Paalen’s Mexican circle contributed, as did international artists sympathetic to Surrealism such as Anaïs Nin and Henry Moore. In truth Paalen penned the bulk of the important material himself—including a series of densely argued essays on topics ranging from science, to politics, to artistic vision, and to Northwest Coast art: “The New Image,” “Suggestions for an Objective Morality,” “The Dialectic Gospel,” “Art and Science,” “Farewell to Surrealism,” and most importantly for our purposes, “Surprise and Inspiration” and “Totem Art.” Despite being published contemporaneously in the same organ, “Paysage totémique” precedes these more expository *Dyn* pieces. Paalen based it on extensive travel notes he had taken during his trip where he first worked through some of the ideas he developed fully in the essays. “Paysage totémique” thus acts as a kind of literary performance embodying many of Paalen’s theoretical postures. It is an essay very much in the Bretonian mode: at once autobiographical, lyrical and theoretically rigorous, it ranges digressively, in seemingly organic fashion, from scene to scene through a series of surrealist tropes.

The series was published in four installments in *Dyn* Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 6. A footnote to the first and second segments states that “*plus tard peut-être formeront un livre*”—a project Paalen evidently abandoned. The phrase does, however, reveal the degree to which he thought of “Paysage totémique” as an ambitious, literary project. The disposition of elements confirms this. It has a classical rhetorical structure—the first installment, with its rather wide-ranging introduction of the theme, acting as an *exordium* to the *narratio* of succeeding installments (containing the travel account proper, though with numerous digressions). The fourth installment, entitled “Rencontre totémique,” departs slightly from the pattern set by the first three in that it does not relate episodes of Paalen’s Northwest Coast journey, but rather takes up his boyhood memories. It is related to other “totemic” aspects of Paalen’s work, namely the *fumage*-based paintings of 1937-39 which Gustave Regler, in a monograph ghostwritten by Paalen himself, described as being fuelled by “the storm of memories.”⁴ These paintings feature tree-like, branching forms coalescing

periodically into bones, skulls, biomorphic presences, skeletal avian forms, and so forth. The key double number of *Dyn* 4-5 (the “Amerindian number”) does not contain an installment of “Paysage totémique,” though Northwest Coast material is amply represented by Paalen’s lead article “Totem Art.” Here he lays out, in the context of a rigorously researched and sourced history of Northwest Coast art, important aspects of his understanding of totemism as a system. As Daniel Garza Usabiaga has shown, the article takes positions on debates current in anthropology of the day and can be characterized, among other things, as a strong defense of the diffusionist theories championed by Franz Boas (given form in Paul Rivet’s influential 1943 book *Les Origines de l’Homme Américain*), and as an attempt to push back the date of origins of the Northwest Coast style to before the advent of the Russian fur trade.⁵

At the heart of “Paysage totémique” Paalen places an extended depiction of the B.C. landscape in which he remains faithful to a pattern of surrealist landscape depiction that Breton had inaugurated some years earlier. Landscape modes did not figure prominently in writings by the Surrealists in the twenties, but they had snuck in by the mid-thirties. Breton features landscape in *L’amour fou* (1937), structuring Chapter 5 around a climb from the Orotava Valley up to the heights of the Teide volcano in the tropical mountainscape of the Canary Islands. In his depiction of Tenerife’s famous dragon tree, he creates a landscape that remits to a state of human origins in a way that recalls Paalen’s text:

The immense tree, plunging its roots into prehistory, hurls into the day as yet unsoiled by the apparition of man its irreproachable mast, which suddenly bursts apart in oblique masts, radiating out in a completely regular rhythm. It shoulders with all its strength intact these still living shadows among us which are those of the kings of the Jurassic fauna whose traces you find once more as soon as you scrutinize the human libido.⁶

Jean-Claude Blachère has applied the phrase “*lieux-signaux*” to the ethnographically-informed landscapes in which Breton depicts a kind of primal nature corroborating the lessons of primitive man.⁷

As a pictorial and literary convention or a perceptual habit that carries certain presuppositions, landscape furnishes a suggestive lens through which to read “Paysage totémique.” Paalen’s literary landscapes tend to dissolve the ego or subject, and to question the sovereignty of the creative I/eye. If an artist channels unseen forces outside himself into a divinatory moment of automatism that produces the work, this cannot be said to be a product of his sovereign ego in the normal sense. Then too, Paalen seems keenly aware in “Paysage totémique” of the flimsiness of his own selfhood, which is always threatening to corrode in the immensity of the B.C. forest. He speaks of being deprived of “that minimum of support, a diver’s

bell, which one has the right to expect [*ce minimum d'appui que même d'une cloche de scaphandrier on est en droit d'attendre*],” suggesting a gloomy, perilous space in which fictions of the autonomous ego and western reason begin to break down.⁸ This kind of thinking is very much in keeping with 1930s surrealist thought generally.

The qualities of Paalen’s literary landscapes that tend to weaken the sovereign subject are at odds with landscape as a pictorial and literary convention, which depends entirely on the integral, bourgeois subject. Rather than as a mode of expression, we must understand landscape as a perceptual habit in the processing and arranging of the material of the visual world according to agreed schemes. It is “already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation,” according to W.J.T. Mitchell.⁹ Its unity is always constituted in the privileged observer—the landowner or traveler for whom it functions as a status symbol, marketable commodity, or “object to be purchased, consumed, and even brought home in the form of souvenirs such as postcards and photo albums.”¹⁰ Denis E. Cosgrove, in his history of the western landscape tradition, ties landscape explicitly to the rise of Europe’s bourgeoisie from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. For Cosgrove landscape is defined by the presence of an observer, always classed, and who always promulgates the interests of his/her class in creating or consuming landscapes: “[h]uman subjectivity provides the totality or holism, the synthetic quality, of landscape.”¹¹

The tension between landscape convention and Paalen’s efforts to weaken the integrity of the subject echoes other obvious tensions—namely, between his position as an explorer, cognoscente, and collector, and the decolonizing thrust of some of his philosophical and political postures. Paalen omits from “Paysage totémique” both his collecting activities and the degree to which parts of the route he travelled had a significant tourist infrastructure and long history of tourism by 1939. Just as his surrealist colleagues would do in New York some years later, he collected Northwest Coast art objects avidly during his trip, availing himself of a network of dealers, agents and curio shops up and down the coast, as chronicled in his travel journal.¹² The verb “collect” which he uses, for example, in the photo captions to “Totem Art” (e.g. “Collected by W. Paalen near Sitka, Alaska”) hints at more rigorously ethnographic processes of acquisition. Likewise, Paalen casts his Northwest Coast trip in “Paysage totémique” as a kind of striking out into the wilderness, passing over in silence the network of hotels, steamship routes, travel agents, railways, and package tours that had sold Alaska to wealthy city-dwellers from the 1870s onward, as Robert Campbell has documented.¹³ Totem poles and Alaskan landscapes figured prominently in the photographic albums, magic lantern shows, and other trophies brought back by returning travelers. Their images were also fetishized and endlessly reproduced in the literature and ephemera associated with this tourist trade—postcards, railway brochures, printed steamship timetables, menus, magazine advertisements and so forth (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Tichnor Brothers Inc., “Bear Totem Store, Wrangell, Alaska,” linen postcard, s/f (1930-1945)

Guidebooks to the region had been available since 1893 with the publication of the *Appletons' Guide-book to Alaska and the Northwest Coast*. Paalen himself followed part of what the Canadian National Railway marketed during the thirties as the “Triangle Tour of the Canadian Rockies and the Pacific Coast.” It is easy to think that the tourist infrastructure and the wealthy steamship passengers on summer holiday from New York or Philadelphia irked Paalen as he sought unpolluted cultural remains. What is certain is that institutions such as storefront museums, Indian Towns, municipal displays, and curio shops are absent from “Paysage totémique,” though some do appear in his notebooks. Though always in a surrealist register, Paalen engages in activities of exploration, collecting and mapping, activities which appear to contradict the anti-colonial opinions he expresses elsewhere—for instance, when he condemns the Canadian government’s repression of aboriginal religious and cultural practices, i.e. potlatch. Marie Mauzé has characterized his attitude in this respect as a “straightforward denunciation of colonialism.”¹⁴

Totemic Vision(s)

A titanic struggle between the forces of dissolution or death on the one hand, and generation or life on the other, became visible to Paalen as he travelled through British Columbia’s temperate rainforests. “Paysage totémique” depicts his train journey into these forests as a kind of regression into the swampy, teeming

chaos of biological life. Vegetable structures pile up, superimposed on one another, a turmoil of life emerging from death and vice-versa, which recall the paintings of his “totemic” period. Thus he observes “calcified tree trunks, barbed estuaries of dead branches, debris-dams of wounded stumps silvery, bristling and impassible [*troncs d’arbres calcifiés, estuaires barbelés de ramures mortes, embâcles de souches hérissées argentées et infranchissables*].”¹⁵ He further describes:

colossal dead-falls, leaning trunks tangled and arrested in their fabulous bludgeon-like drops, broken-thighed giants split by lightning, Laocoöns flayed by the thousand serpent arms of a too-tortured bronze, too furiously interlaced not to make one doubt the supposed sweetness of vegetable death-agonies [*des colosses de troncs encroués en des chutes fabuleuses sur des massues monumentales, gigantes écuissées par la foudre, et ces laocoonesques écorchés aux mille bras ophidiens d’un bronze trop torturé, trop furieusement natté pour ne pas faire douter de la prétendue douceur des agonies végétales*].¹⁶

He depicts the forest in a state of biological strife between dissolution and generation—fecund strife with distinctly sexual or copulative aspects: “Further off are battles enacted, couplings in mirage [*Plus loin ce sont des simulacres de combats, des mirages d’accouplements*].”¹⁷ According to Paalen the root-wheels of trees ripped from the ground are given “in wild liberty, in a great spectacle, undulating in gorgonic nests, in absurd flutings, phallic rods, monstrous veins, everything grandiosely sexual [*en liberté sauvage se donent en grand spectacle, ondulent en gorgoniques nids, en tuyautages absurdes, verges, veines monstrueuses, le tout grandiosement sexuel*].”¹⁸ Death coincides with and is inconceivable without Eros, whose luxuriant biological growth covers the landscape down to the blue-green moss, “supremely impartial rust” coating every piece of dead wood.¹⁹ So Paalen evokes:

the tide of ferns rhythmically surging, flamboyantly gusting on the earth’s swelling breast as by the very pulsation of its enormous breath. Beyond every imaginable horizon, wave after wave breaks in always new mountains and hills with seashell towers and crests, massifs of blue smoke far off, the eternal assault of moving bulwarks, armies of a life so victorious that as far as the eye can see its green fire merges with the rumbling of the immense organ of sap which sings the silence and which is inexhaustible! [*la marée des fougères rythmée en flamboyantes bouffées aux enflures du poitrail de la terre comme par la pulsation même de son souffle énorme. Par delà tout horizon imaginable, vague après vague moutonne en toujours nouveaux monts et collines turriculées aux crêtes, massifs de fumée bleue au loin, l’assaut éternel des mouvantes murailles, des armées d’une vie si victorieuse qu’à perte de vue son vert incendie ne fait qu’un avec le grondement de l’immense orgue d’une sève inépuisable et qui chante le silence*].²⁰

Young trees sprout from their nurse logs as from “the emerald dreams of giants like *lost species* gobbled up in the slow lust of swamps [*le sommeil d'émeraude des géants comme des espèces perdues engloutis dans la lente luxure des marécages*].”²¹ The train on which he travels enters a space bathed in muted green light—vegetable green muted by fog—which he describes as a “chrysoprase halo” or “opaline breath of the first days [*l'haleine opaline des jours premiers*].”²² Paalen accords a key significance to this color and quality of light. It became for him a visual shorthand for the forest's generative powers. He mentions it repeatedly in “Paysage totémique” and in other texts, and employs it as the setting for some of his paintings.

Paalen's landscape descriptions telescope back into prehistory in this way. He depicts the train voyage as a regression where, in being carried toward what he calls the “spice shop of memory,” he conflates his personal psychic genesis with the origins of biological life.²³ He underscores the idea of regression in a fantasy of a lost world, the train off of the tracks and swallowed by the forest, perhaps subdued by a netting of vegetation as in the photograph of a locomotive tangled in vines and published in *Minotaure* to accompany Benjamin Péret's essay on nature overcoming and devouring the artifacts of human progress.²⁴ “The whole train with all hands was lost in the forest,” Paalen states, “it can no longer find the way out (as a child I heard tell of a convoy that vanished in this way in some part of Siberia, I have never been able to verify the story) [*corps et biens le train entier s'est perdu dans la forêt, qu'il ne trouve plus la sortie (enfant, j'entendis parler d'un convoi évanoui de la sorte quelque part en Sibérie, je n'ai jamais pu vérifier cette histoire*].”²⁵ A sign of technological mastery over Canada's wilderness, the train has been overtaken and overcome by the land's immeasurably more powerful generative forces.

For Paalen regression toward biological origins implied regression toward cultural origins. The landscapes he describes in his Northwest Coast material thus tend to conflate natural elements with carvings he observed, or with first nations mythological figures he imagines to be part of the scene. Several of the Eva Sulzer photographs Paalen chose to illustrate his text accentuate the quality of interpenetration—notably, her photo of an aged and weathered totem pole standing in close proximity to a living tree, such that the tree's branches appear to emerge from the pole itself.²⁶ The carving mingles with its surroundings to the point of being swallowed by living forest. It is important to note that Paalen went to British Columbia to view monumental carvings *in situ*, following in the footsteps of the painter Kurt Seligmann. Seligmann's article on his B.C. sojourn in the last issue of *Minotaure* was accompanied by a photograph of a woodland scene suffused with sunlight and with a decomposing Haida sculpture at its center which becomes confused with the landscape in its decay (Fig. 2).²⁷

Similar visions of interpenetration between the natural and cultural orders characterize all of Paalen's written accounts of his Northwest Coast experience.

Thus, his travel journal notes “trees so mysteriously deformed that they appear as natural totems (ready-mades) [*arbres singulièrement tordus, totem poles ‘naturels’* (‘ready-mades’)],” and relates looking out the train window to see “in the middle of the forest a totem pole; I find it so beautiful that I want to call the other passengers, but perhaps it is no totem but rather a burnt tree, impossible to know for certain [*en pleine forêt, un poteau totémique qui me semble très beau, je veux appeler les autres, mais je ne suis – un peu plus près – plus sûr si c’est un poteau totémique ou un arbre brûlé. Impossible d’en avoir la certitude*].”²⁸ In “Surprise and Inspiration” he narrates a similar incident while walking in the forest near the Gitksan village of Kispiox, B.C., and discovering a grouping of totem poles:

What was my disillusion when, upon getting closer, I realized that a group of charred skeletons of tall cedars and hemlocks curiously slashed by the fire had suggested the entangled profiles of totem-poles. At this moment something happened that made me stop short: on top of one of the emaciated trunks perched a large crow who, having shaken his wings, sat motionless. Venerable crow! I easily recognized you as Yelx, the promethean crow of the Indian myth...²⁹

This passage mirrors another from his travel journal when he spots “[a] dead tree on which a raven is standing. At a distance it is impossible to distinguish dead trees from poles: totemic [*Arbre mort sur lequel se tient un corbeau. À quelque distance, impossible de distinguer les arbres morts des poteaux: totémiques*].”³⁰ For Paalen, the tree and totem pole are equally totemic, or rather, the totemic qualities of both depend on the degree to which they are conflated.

Such experiences of equivocal or dual perception constitute Paalen’s totemic vision. Several threads of surrealist thought connect in his work through his descriptions, and they are key to the theory of artistic inspiration he summarizes in the term “surprise.” Paalen remarks in his journal that the experience of dual perception resembles the processes of automatism and objective chance. “Is this the solution of the moment,” he asks:

[t]he Altamira buffalos [suggested] by the relief of the cave’s ceiling? The image or appearance—art objectification of desire, visualization of desire. All the beginnings of art in this order of automatism? [*Est-ce la solution du moment? [...] Les buffles d’Altamira [suggéré] par le relief du plafond de la grotte? L’image ou apparition – art objectivation du désir, visualisation du désir. Tout le début de l’art dans cet ordre d’automatisme?*]³¹

Both objective chance and automatism are cornerstones of surrealist theory, and both relate to Paalen’s explanation of artistic inspiration. The practice of



Fig. 2. Harlan Ingersoll Smith, “Two posts carved in the form of men, from which apparently shaman’s grave has fallen northwest of the modern Haida Indian cemetery near the higher lighthouse, Masset; 1919; British Columbia.” Canadian Museum of History, 46686. Reproduced in *Minotaure* 12-13 (1939).

automatism—techniques of writing or drawing designed to circumvent the conscious mind—had been central to the movement since the 1920 publication of *Les champs magnetiques* by Breton and Philippe Soupault. Phrases and images emerging directly from the unconscious were thought to reveal sublimated desire, and thus constituted a crucial part of the creative process for writers and artists in surrealist circles. As I have noted, Paalen himself developed the automatic technique of *fumage* by passing a prepared canvas over a candle flame and subsequently elaborating the resulting soot patterns into the designs of a painting. Objective chance was a more recent formulation within Surrealism. It related to theorizations of the object from the early through the late thirties when, as Haim Finkelstein observed, the object emerged “as a central element in a dialectical process of the subjectification of the objective and objectification of the subjective.”³² Thus unseen linkages between the unconscious

and the physical world could prompt objects to materialize in response to one's desires. "Any piece of flotsam and jetsam within our grasp should be considered a precipitate of our desire," comments Breton in *Surrealism and Painting*.³³ On the other hand, Breton elaborated the idea of *hasard objectif* proper in his 1937 *L'Amour fou* to explain a similar kind of chance encounter, though not with an object but rather with a person—his second wife Jacqueline Lamba.

Paalen's suggestion that the experience of dual perception of trees/totems is an objectification of desire constitutes the earliest statement of his theory of artistic inspiration. The term "surprise" encapsulates the theory, which he elaborates fully in the essay "Surprise and Inspiration" in *Dyn* No. 2. For Paalen the moment of surprise is a moment of confused recognition in which a visual form presses itself urgently upon the startled viewer. He explains this theory with reference to his visit to the Altamira cave some eight years earlier. Due to a failure of the electric lighting, his guide had been forced to show him the paintings with "an exceedingly primitive lamp" whose flickering flame revealed, in a shock of recognition or visionary surprise, what the ancient artist must have experienced when he perceived the form of a bison in the bulge of the cave's ceiling: "He marvels. The shock of surprise has broken the dike of memory."³⁴ Surprise is that moment of psychological short-circuiting triggered by the vision of an external *provocateur optique* which results in the experience of artistic inspiration. Or, expressed another way, "*Inspiration is the liberation of the torrent of imaginative association through the shock of surprise.*"³⁵

We must situate Paalen's use of totemism in the dual quality of vision that leads to the shock of surprise. It is true as Marie Mauzé asserts that "Paalen's landscapes are 'totemic' in the sense that they are inhabited by living creatures that have the capacity to transform themselves: bears, eagles, wolves, ravens are both animals and animal crests."³⁶ But it is important to remember that animals transmogrify and become symbols as a result of a type of vision that constitutes Paalen's idiosyncratic totemism, and, further, that he aspired to make this kind of vision central to postwar artistic practice. Totemism as a system of thought within the evolutionary social sciences of comparative religion, sociology, ethnography, psychiatry was developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century by scholars such as J.F. McLennan, Robertson Smith, James Frazer, Wilhelm Wundt, Marcel Mauss and Sigmund Freud. Paalen discusses in detail some of their texts in "Totem Art," indicating his familiarity with this discourse. All generally agreed that the system of clan identification, with tutelary spirits such as animals, plants, and mythical or hybrid creatures at base, functioned as a mechanism for ensuring exogamy or marriage outside the group. At the most 'primitive' levels of social organization—tribes in which religion with its incest taboos had not yet arisen—another mechanism was needed to guard against intermarriage. These thinkers developed the theory of totemism to supply such a mechanism. The totem did not quite attain the status of a deity, but was seen almost as an intimate familiar that dominated both the psychic life

of the individual and the social life of the clan. It was a mythically objectified form of natural forces. Early Northwest Coast ethnographers such as Franz Boas, who had done extensive field work along the B.C. coast, provided much of the raw data used by these social scientists. Ethnographic theories of totemism lost credibility in the thirties and forties, but Paalen found the notion of the totem useful in defining artistic vision as a vital communion between the artists, environing nature and the human collective.³⁷

Through the surrealist procedure of surprise, Paalen re-institutes totemic vision as the heart of a new, postwar modern art. Magic, for Paalen, rested on an emotional identification with the woods, its flora and fauna, and with the natural forces of the cosmos, obviating barriers between the subjective and the objective, as he explains in “Totem Art”:

All pre-individualistic mentality in whatever race, not distinguishing clearly between the subjective and the objective, identifies itself emotionally with its environing world. And it is this affective identification which creates the *magic climate* in which the totemic world is to be found.³⁸

For Paalen modern art, once again an instrument of magic, should identify itself emotionally with its environing world in a sort of modern totemism. Art would thus once again become a vital medium through which human beings articulated their relationship to one another and the cosmos—envisioned in his “cosmic” paintings as an interplanetary space populated by forces and “cosmogenes” made of waves, rays, and particles. “To a science already universal but by definition incapable of doing justice to our emotional needs,” he clarified in *Dyn* Nos. 4-5, “there must be added as its complement, a universal art: these two will help in the shaping of the new, the indispensable world-consciousness.”³⁹ Paalen’s landscapes in “Paysage totémique” are totemic in the sense that they embody this type of totemic vision.

Ruin-Gazing in the Landscape

If, as Mary Ann Caws observed, ruins attracted the Surrealists to Mexico, the urge to ruin-gaze drew Paalen to the Northwest Coast.⁴⁰ The monumental sculptures stand mature within the landscapes of “Paysage totémique” and “Totem art,” as well as in Paalen’s descriptions and their photographic illustrations. The moment of their production, long past, is insinuated on the first page of “Paysage totémique” through the scent of red cedar—“particular odor of a good pencil”—wafting from the coastal sawmills; or through the sculptural forms “knocked out to the rhythm of uncountable axe blows precise as a wolf’s canines battering its prey [*Profils d’hommes et de bêtes ... jaillis du rythme d’innombrables coups de hache précis comme le battage des canines du loup en proie à sa victime*].”⁴¹ Paalen primarily conceived his totem poles not in their freshly-cut prime but aged, softened, unpainted, and reduced to a sort of minimal

purity like weathered bones. More than once he likened them to vertebral columns, backbones of culture made up of “the myths and landmarks of social life.”⁴² He was not terribly interested in the new poles produced by active workshops of First Nations carvers in the 1930s (which he characterized on one occasion as “dreadful” and “ugly”) nor in the old poles relocated from villages to westernized towns—even when the original family had relocated them and thus, it might be argued, their heraldic functions remained intact.

For Paalen, totem ruins embodied two paradoxical processes. One was the process of distillation or purification; he thought the carvings reached their maximum expressive power when distilled or purified by time and weather. The second was the process of degradation, decay and cultural loss; he mourned the degradation of Northwest Coast art. At the beginning of “Paysage totémique” Paalen highlights the quality of purification by using the metallurgical term “scorify” to characterize the old carvings he found most compelling: “Under the impregnable, ageless, forest vault... hides the scorified wreckage of one of the strangest cultures made by those with copper-moon faces [*Sous les inexpugnables voûtes de sa forêt sans âge... se cachent les épaves scorifiées d'une culture des plus étranges faite par des hommes à face de lune en cuivre*].”⁴³ “Scorify” denotes the process by which impurities are removed from an ore to leave a precious metal. Paalen suggests that time strips away extraneous elements—such as modern paint, whose garish colors marred the carvings for him—revealing their formal excellence, the uniqueness and internal coherence of their sculptural vocabulary. The phrase “copper-moon faces” ties the metallurgic image to the copper, a type of important and valuable ceremonial object made from the metal and that functioned as status symbol or unit of currency in the potlatch economy. Paalen does not develop this aspect of his image, perhaps because the metal began to circulate only with the advent of trading networks in the 1790s; in *Dyn* he was preoccupied with finding and reproducing only objects of the maximum authenticity, and with no western influence. In the face of strong arguments to the contrary he dates the development of monumental carving to pre-contact times in “Totem Art.” It was thought that monumental sculptures required the use of steel axes that were not widely available until western trade goods began circulating through the region. Many experts, including Claude Lévi-Strauss—whose 1943 visit to New York’s American Museum of Natural History spurred Paalen to write on the topic—believed that carving on the scale of fully elaborated tree trunks became possible only with the advent of steel axes. Therefore, the flowering of Northwest Coast artistic traditions would necessarily have been a nineteenth-century phenomenon.⁴⁴ Paalen introduced extensive documentary evidence from sources he found in Mexican archives to disprove this theory and push the date back. In another example, he refused to reproduce hybridized objects such as the slate tobacco pipes carved by the Haida (tobacco was a trade good) in *Dyn*. Westernized or hybridized objects represented for Paalen “only the decadent stage at which a great art loses its

raison d'être and degenerates into trifles.”⁴⁵

Paalen uses the word “wreckage” in the passage above, which alerts us to the decayed or degraded aspect of the ruins in his text. Decaying sculptures point to the disappearance of an entire cultural complex, with its everyday practices, economy, mythology, religion, and aesthetic traditions. The nostalgia of salvage ethnography animates Paalen here. As he suggests in “Totem Art,” he seeks the remnant, the trace—“whatever might *remain* of those famous tribes of warriors and magnificent sculptors [*ce qui pouvait rester de ces fameuses tribus de guerriers et magnifiques sculpteurs*].”⁴⁶ In a caption to the same article he describes a building in the village of Mamalilaculla, Village Island, B.C., as “a half-destroyed old community house” (Fig. 3). Paalen feels that he has achieved his quest for the essence of a disappearing culture when “the door of that great ‘community house’ opened as if by magic [*s’ouvrit comme par enchantement la porte de cette grande ‘maison de communauté’*],” admitting him to what became in retrospect a sort of personal pilgrimage site.⁴⁷ Another caption to a photo showing a decayed funerary monument in the same article notes that “[t]hese graves decay because of moisture, but well preserved funeral objects are sometimes found in grottos.”⁴⁸

For Paalen living First Nations peoples share something of the degraded aspect of ruins. Though they were not his focus, he does evince a clear interest in the coastal tribes he came in contact with during his journey. A brief sketch at the end of the third installment of “Paysage totémique,” for instance, records his initial impression of groups from the Skeena River region. He notes their dwellings, physical appearance, family groups and especially their children:

The first Indian villages. Poor forest hamlets, rudimentary huts and cabins on stilts. And poor people. The annual trek to the coast to fish for salmon and work in the canneries, principal industry of the region, is beginning. Dressed in shapeless woolen clothing with no discernible cut or color, wearing caps or balaclavas, loaded down with children, thin suitcases and bundles.... A few pretty girls in blue braids with complexions that run from ivory to boxwood, pretty chubby children smashing their noses to the windows. [*Premiers villages d’Indiens. Pauvres hameaux lacustres, huttes et cabanes rudimentaires sur pilotis. Et pauvres gens. C’est le départ annuel à la côte pour la pêche au saumon et pour le travail dans les usines de conserves de poisson, principale industrie de la contrée. Vêtue de lainages informes sans coupe ni couleur, coiffée de casquettes, de passe-montagnes, encombrée d’enfants, de maigres valises et baluchons.... Quelques jolies fillettes aux nattes bleues au teint allant de l’ivoire au buis, de jolis enfants tout ronds s’écrasent le nez aux vitres.*]⁴⁹

In the same passage he speaks of a “mob undeniably Asiatic in appearance,” alluding to diffusionist theories of the peopling of the Americas through Asian contact. Paalen’s mourning of what he perceives to be the colonized, degraded state of pres-

ent-day Northwest Coast peoples shines through this passage. They represent, for him, a kind of living ruin: the embodiment of a great, ahistorical, ancestral tradition that has fallen into the trap of colonialism and history.

Here, in the nostalgia of salvage, we note a tension similar to those I've noted above with respect to tourism and collecting.⁵⁰ Despite his anti-colonial sympathies, Paalen downplays First Nations art of the thirties, which is seen today as the beginning of a powerful mid-century revival, even a renaissance of the form, in favor of works by long dead carvers who he perceives to be more legitimate. Tension arises in the fact that, for Paalen, the person best equipped to safeguard this aesthetic inheritance that is on the brink of falling to dust is the cognoscente, the European artist/collector. On a certain level Paalen's project was visionary; he aimed not just to rescue but to reactivate Northwest Coast arts traditions:

I would not, by my way of comprehending *reality*, infringe on any of the 'documentary' rights which everyone holds as inalienable, and which belong to the new face, the unknown exterior. [...] Let the ethnographer fill the herbariums indispensable to understanding, and sum up knowledge. It is for the artist-philosopher to bring to light the sensitive fate of his time, to embrace in every latitude of thought and space that which without him turns to a treasure of dust. [*Au visage nouveau, à l'inconnu extérieur je ne lésrai aucun de ses droits de "documentaire" tenus pour imprescriptibles entre tous par ma façon de comprendre la réalité. [...] Aux ethnographes de remplir les herbiers indispensables à la connaissance, à faire le point du savoir. A l'artiste philosophe de mettre au jour de la fatalité sensible de son époque, d'embrasser dans toute la latitude de la pensée et de l'espace ce qui sans lui se mue en trésor de poussières.*]⁵¹

In using the term "documentary" he references debates of the time within French anthropology, in which the physical objects produced by a culture were seen as the most faithful documents of that culture—more faithful than the reports of researchers.⁵² He aspires not to "document" Northwest Coast art but rather to reactivate its central aspect, the "totemic" relationships it instituted between the artist, the community and the environment. Another facet of the ruin not mentioned previously is discussed by Benjamin Péret in his article on ruins in the last number of *Mino-taure*. Péret conceives ruins as a series of nesting, genetic dispositions in which past forms inhabit present forms: within the castle survives the cave of prehistory, within Versailles and the medieval castle; within the adult who survives the wreckage of the child, just as, within human society generally there survives the wreckage of our collective childhood. He writes, "The tiger becomes a wolf and the wolf becomes a dog. The dog, descended from a dog, recognizes the wolf's ruins; the tiger's are a mere footprints in the sand, this sand whose ruins he has forgotten [*De tigre, il est devenu loup et le loup s'est souvent mué en chien. Le chien issu de chien reconnaît à peine les ruines*



Fig. 3. Eva Sulzer, “Back wall of a half destroyed old community house in the village of Mamalilacoola, Gilford Island, B.C.,” 1939. Published in *Dyn* 4-5 (1943) © Paalen Archiv, Berlin

*du loup, mais celles du tigre ne sont plus pour lui qu’une empreinte dans le sable, ce sable dont il a oublié les ruines].*⁵³ Paalen certainly knew Péret’s text—he contributed to the same number of the magazine—though how influential it was for him is an open question. What I would like to suggest is that Paalen read Northwest Coast art as a ruin in the way Péret read them, as nested dispositions that remain at the heart of modern art waiting to be reactivated. There is irony in the fact that for Paalen the agents of such a reactivation should be not the descendants of the original carvers who he sees as degraded, ruined, colonized, but rather should be European artists.

Mimeticism

Apprehended on the point of their dissolution, the ruins of monumental carvings draw the reader toward a moment when, entirely reabsorbed by the medium, they are gone. Paalen saw this as the instant of their fullest presence, and it held a special attraction for him. He describes it in “Paysage totémique” as the instant when the interdependency of totemic works and totemic landscapes stands out with utmost clarity. Totemic landscapes coalesce around totemic works while

they, in turn, emerge from and are reabsorbed into their landscapes in a sort of *mise en abyme* of reversible forms of the cultural and the natural. Paalen employed the term “specific space” to refer to this quality of interdependency between works and landscapes. Not coincidentally, I believe, he weaves a third image into one of the key passages of “Paysage totémique,” the paragraph where he defines these ideas—that of an “eyed” butterfly whose wings, folding and unfolding, figure a face that alternately resolves and dissolves marvelously. The butterfly thus becomes a visual symbol for the shift in focus that allows for totemic vision as well as a representation of the emergence and decay of a work of totemic art:

Surprise, the flint of the inspiration, for me plays best at the *angle of attack* where the thing that flashes once and is gone grows iridescent with *presence*, bursts desperately visible. Despite everything that has taken shape from the hand and thought of man, this final moment is fascinating to me as the blinking wings of the butterfly whose most beautiful eyes do not see: and so before dissolving in time, the work is adorned finally with all the brilliance of its specific space. [*La surprise, pierre à feu de l'inspiration pour moi ne joue mieux qu'à cet angle d'attaque où devient iridescent de présence éclate désespérément visible ce dont la première apparition ne fait qu'un avec sa perte. Pour tout ce qui de main et de pensée d'homme prit corps, il est ce dernier moment fascinant comme le clignotement des ailes du papillon dont les plus beaux yeux ne voient pas: ainsi avant de fondre dans le temps, l'œuvre se pare une dernière fois de tout le rayonnement de son espace spécifique.*]⁵⁴

In the butterfly creation and decay are simultaneous, a property Paalen underscores in the phrase “*ce dont la première apparition ne fait qu'un avec sa perte.*” This particular butterfly, though, already had a history, both in Paalen’s work and within surrealist thought writ large. It returns to Roger Caillois’ important theorization of mimeticism of 1935.

Two years before his Northwest Coast trip (1937) Paalen completed his painting *Toison d’Or* featuring the Caligo or Owl butterfly (Fig. 4). Two years previously Caillois had published in *Minotaure* his article “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” which also featured the insect. Caillois claims that the butterfly so convincingly mimics an owl—the eye-spots on the underside of the wings its eyes, the variegated coloration surrounding the spots its plumage, the insect’s body its beak—that “the natives of Brazil affix it to the doors of their barns as a replacement for the creature it imitates.”⁵⁵ Paalen’s painting depicts the insect with its wings splayed in the manner of an entomological specimen, head up, “eyes” down, so that it comprises the upper half of a masked face, with its lower half formed by a marble neck and chin resting on a pedestal. According to Amy Winter the hybrid creature that results from the marriage of a work of art and a natural object from the surrealist cabinet of curiosities comprises a mysterious personage reminiscent of

Alice Rahon.⁵⁶ It floats against a sky muted by fog and the uncanny green color of vegetation that so fascinated Paalen in the woods of the Northwest Coast.

Paalen returns to Caillois' insect in this passage from "Paysage totémique" to make the complex nature of totemic vision concretely graspable in a single image. His choice of the Caligo, specifically, complicates this rhetorical task with elements from Caillois's theories on mimeticism. Caillois posits a sort of basic, biological drive toward dissolution, or as he puts it, "temptation by space" resulting in the depersonalization of the individual. He traces this process on the three levels: insect camouflage (detailed examples of which occupy two thirds of his article); sympathetic magic, a category of primitive religious practice theorized by nineteenth century anthropologists; and legendary psychasthenia, a psychological disorder characterized according to Caillois by a disturbance in the relations between personality and space:



Fig. 4. Wolfgang Paalen, *Toison d'Or*, oil on wood, 1937 © Paalen Archiv, Berlin

To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses.⁵⁷

To substantiate a prehuman, biological grounding for certain features of the human psyche, Caillois uses examples from the insect kingdom in which mimicry defies mechanistic explanations such as those offered by evolutionary ecologists. He reads mimicry or camouflage instead as a kind of evolutionary surplus or excess unexplainable by reference to self-preservation and reproduction.⁵⁸ It is a “luxury,” states Caillois,

even a dangerous luxury, for there are cases in which mimicry causes the creature to go from bad to worse: geometer-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears. The case of the *Phyllia* is even sadder: they browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves, in such a way that one might accept the idea of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a provocation to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast.⁵⁹

Both insects and humans thus find themselves in a state where “life takes a step backwards,” and where assimilation to space “is necessarily accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life.”⁶⁰ Joyce Cheng uses the term “passivity” to encapsulate the quality of biological life that Caillois was trying to get at, and which she has identified as a key subterranean tendency of thought in 1930s Surrealism and its allied groups.⁶¹ In the final analysis, insect mimicry for Caillois testifies to an impulse towards passivity or dissolution which might locate creativity at a level somewhere below that of the sovereign ego. As Cheng notes, “not only might there be forms and figures in nature corresponding to the experience of radical passivity, there might be a direct, causal link between the experience of passivity and the most creative, art-like phenomenon in nature.”⁶²

The cyclical, emerging and decaying quality of totemic art within the totemic landscapes of Paalen’s texts shares the quality of passivity evident in Caillois. Both situate creativity on a level below that of the sovereign ego. The act of creation Paalen depicts is limited to a kind of intense “affective identification” with enviroing nature and takes the form of sympathetic magic in societies he characterizes as “pre-individualistic.” Such magic depends on mimetic modes of thought tending toward the erasure of divisions between the subjective and objective. Paalen argues that sympathetic magic works through a combination of two modes of

mimeticism. It combines

an active part: assimilation through a sort of somatic mimeticism (dance movements similar to the movements of animals, all kinds of mimicry of emotions), with a passive part: mimeticism of camouflage (masks, disguises). These two kinds of mimeticism, active and passive, are the two poles which release the great current of rhythm which, going as far as trance, in traversing the individual, effaces his personal memory in order to conjoin it emotionally with the great reservoir of generic memory. Thus magic might be defined as a sort of *affective mimeticism* through which man identifies himself with the universe.⁶³

Modern artists have no direct access to the prelapsarian “magic climate.” Their only recourse is thus to unearth in themselves, in a kind of psychic archeology, the totemic dispositions that might remain as traces of the primitive mentality (to borrow a phrase from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl). Here the experience of dual perception discussed above evidences a preconscious tendency toward affective mimeticism or affective identification. Other, varied instances of resemblance or mimicry also shoot through *Dyn*: the fluted cedar timbers of Northwest Coast community houses mirror Doric columns; the features of a “totonac woman of Papantla” exactly replicate those of a stone Olmec head; imaginary scenes or landscapes from Paalen’s paintings mimetically duplicate real-life landscapes observed later—a coincidence to which he gave the name “pre-figurative image.”⁶⁴ It is worth noting that other Surrealists, Max Ernst for example, also recognized uncanny similarities between American landscapes and scenes they had previously painted.⁶⁵

I do not wish to stretch the comparison between Paalen and Caillois too far, though certainly Paalen would have been aware of Caillois’ work and of the importance of mimeticism as a touchstone.⁶⁶ The two texts are very different, and Paalen used mimeticism in a much more diffuse way than Caillois. However, the sculptures and landscapes of “Paysage totémique” exemplify processes by which a magic worldview—one characterized by the mimeticism of sympathetic magic—is concretely materialized in objects. These works incarnate the totemic vision with which the artist (either “primitive” or vanguard) channels unseen forces of the environment—the myths arising from a dialectical development of a culture in a landscape, informing a landscape which is itself informed by culture. Through moments of dual perception, Paalen underscores the ways totem poles acquire a characteristic of interpenetration with the landscape, are animated by the spiritual forces of the landscape, and return to the landscape through irresistible decay. As they vanish at their moment of maximum intensity, in the “specific space” that constitutes the totemic landscape, they call into question distinctions between culture and its medium, between the subject and the object.

- 1 Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 247.
- 2 The trip began in June, and by August 21 the trio was already in Vancouver preparing to depart Canada. In summarizing the fragmentary documentary sources, Andreas Neufert has argued that it is ultimately impossible to determine their exact itinerary. However, based on places Paalen himself mentions, they certainly visited the following cities and sites: Juneau, Ketchikan, Sitka and Wrangell, Alaska; Masset and other locales on the Queen Charlotte Islands; on the B.C. mainland, the Skeena River region and Bella Bella; the northern end of Vancouver Island and the archipelago to its east (Port Hardy, Alert Bay, Gilford Island); and Victoria and vicinity. Andreas Neufert, "Ten Rolls of 8 mm Film Documenting Wolfgang Paalen's Journey through British Columbia in Summer 1939," *The Colour of My Dreams: the Surrealist Revolution in Art*, ed. Dawn Ades (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2011), 230.
- 3 For an account of Paalen's relationship with Newcombe and Emmons, see Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen Artist and Theorist of the Avant-Garde* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2003), 160-66.
- 4 Gustave Regler, *Wolfgang Paalen* (New York: Nierendorf Editions, 1945), 31.
- 5 Daniel Garza Usabiaga, "Anthropology in the Magazines *Dyn* and *El hijo pródigo*. A Comparative Analysis (of Surrealist Inspiration)" (paper presented at the Getty Research Institute symposium *Vivísimo Muerto: Debates on Surrealism in Latin America*, Los Angeles, CA, June 25-26, 2010).
- 6 André Breton, *Mad Love*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1987), 73.
- 7 Jean-Claude Blachère, *Les totems d'André Breton: Surréalisme et primitivisme littéraire* (Paris: Harmattan, 1996), 93.
- 8 Wolfgang Paalen, "Paysage totémique II," *Dyn* 2 (1942): 46.
- 9 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.
- 10 Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 20.
- 11 Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998 [1984]), 14.
- 12 A partial list of the establishments from which he bought is as follows: Max Heilbronner Curios in Prince Rupert; the Alaska Curio Emporium in Ketchikan; in Sitka "une curio-shop éminemment russe" whose equivocating proprietress Paalen and his travelling companions baptized as "la tzarine des grandes circonstances"; also in Sitka Haley, an old gold miner who approached Paalen on the street to sell him objects; in Juneau the Winter & Pond curio shop and Photography Studio; in Wrangell the two shops run by Waters including the Bear Totem Store, as well as the Wrangell market. Wolfgang Paalen, "Voyage sur le côte Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique," *Pleine Marge*, 20 (1994): 8-33.
- 13 Several passages display Paalen's fascination with wilderness. In his travel journal he admits to having been an avid reader of boyhood adventure books about the frozen northland ("Voyage Nord-Ouest," 27-8). In "Paysage totémique" he relates bits of boyhood wood-craft, remarks on the frontier aspects of the Canadian West, and meditates on our modern-day fear of isolation as compared to the old settlers such as the grandfather of his friends the McKinleys, who moved to a more isolated homestead when, a days walk from him, others began building cabins ("Paysage totémique II," 42, 45). For a wonderful cultural history of tourism on the Northwest Coast, see Robert Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska: Travel and Empire Along the Inside Passage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- 14 Marie Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes and Vanishing Cultures Through the Eyes of Wolfgang Paalen and Kurt Seligmann," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 2:1 (2008): 20.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 45.

- 18 Ibid., 45.
- 19 Ibid., 45-6.
- 20 Ibid., 45.
- 21 Ibid., 46.
- 22 Ibid., 46.
- 23 Ibid., 46.
- 24 Benjamin Péret, "La Nature dévore le progrès et le dépasse," *Minotaure* 10 (1937): 20.
- 25 Paalen, "Paysage totémique II," 46.
- 26 The photo has been reproduced in a previous number of *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*. See Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes," 19.
- 27 For accounts of Seligmann's activities in B.C. see Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*, 23-26, and Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 164-69.
- 28 Paalen, "Voyage Nord-Ouest," 16.
- 29 Wolfgang Paalen, "Surprise and Inspiration," *Dyn* 2 (1942): 6.
- 30 Paalen, "Voyage Nord-Ouest," 17.
- 31 Paalen, "Voyage Nord-Ouest," 17.
- 32 Haim N. Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 6.
- 33 André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, Trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1972), 283.
- 34 Paalen, "Surprise and Inspiration," 6.
- 35 Ibid., 8.
- 36 Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes," 18.
- 37 For a history of the totemic idea, see Robert Alun Jones, *The Secret of the Totem: Religion and Society from McLennan to Freud* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- 38 Wolfgang Paalen, "Totem Art," *Dyn* 4-5 (1942): 19-20.
- 39 Wolfgang Paalen, "Untitled Editorial Statement," *Dyn* 4-5 (1943).
- 40 Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 178-79.
- 41 Wolfgang Paalen, "Paysage totémique," *Dyn* 1 (1942): 48.
- 42 Paalen, "Paysage totémique," 50; "Totem Art," 12.
- 43 Paalen, "Paysage totémique," 46.
- 44 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Art of the Northwest Coast at the American Museum of Natural History," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 24 (1943): 175-82, cited in Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen*, 165.
- 45 Paalen, "Totem Art," 18.
- 46 Paalen, Ibid., 34, my emphasis.
- 47 Paalen, Ibid., 34.
- 48 Paalen, Ibid., 20. The photo referenced appears in another issue of *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*. See Mauzé, "Totemic Landscapes," 18.
- 49 Wolfgang Paalen, "Paysage totémique III," *Dyn* 3 (1942): 28-31.
- 50 On salvage ethnography, see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 112.
- 51 Paalen, "Paysage totémique," 48.
- 52 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 62-67.
- 53 Benjamin Péret, "Ruines: ruines des ruines," *Minotaure* 12-13 (1939): 57.
- 54 Paalen, "Paysage totémique," 49.
- 55 Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 91.
- 56 Winter has previously noted the Caillois connection with respect to Paalen's painting *Toison d'Or*,

though she draws out different threads than I do here. Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen*, 62.

57 Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 99.

58 Joyce Cheng argues that Caillois's publication in *Minotaure* of both "Mimétisme et la psychasthénie légendaire" and his explanations for insect cannibalism in "La mante religieuse. De la biologie à la psychanalyse" (1934) should be seen as "the search for figures that evidence the possibility of intelligence without thought, creativity without art, and agency in the absence of the (human) agent." Joyce Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin and Surrealism in the 1930s," *Modernism/modernity* 16.1 (2009): 72.

59 Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 97.

60 Caillois, *Ibid.*, 101.

61 Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis," 65.

62 Cheng, *Ibid.*, 74.

63 Paalen, "Totem Art," 20.

64 *Dyn* 2, 14 and *Dyn* 6, 27 respectively for the first two examples. With regard to the third, Paalen's earlier paintings appeared to him as premonitions of the forest landscapes he observed during Northwest Coast journey: «the landscape more and more astonishingly resembles that of my paintings [le paysage ressemble de plus en plus étonnamment à celui de mes tableaux]." Paalen, "Voyage Nord-Ouest."

65 An anecdote about Max Ernst encountering a previously-painted landscape appears in Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life* (New York: St Martin's/Marek, 1984), 216, cited in Samantha Kavky, "Max Ernst in Arizona. Myth, mimesis, and the hysterical landscape," *RES-Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58 (2010): 15.

66 Scholars like Taussig, Cheng, Potolsky and others have argued that mimeticism was in the air in the thirties and forties, with thinkers as distinct as Marcel Mauss, Walter Benjamin, Roger Caillois and Theodor Adorno appealing to different formulations of the concept in very different kinds of arguments. Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).